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Collaborative meaning-making: the emergence of novel languages in humans, machines, and human-machine interactions

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Collaborative Meaning-Making

The Emergence of Novel Languages in Humans, Machines,
and Human-Machine Interactions

Tom Kouwenhoven

Collaborative Meaning-Making

The Emergence of Novel Languages in Humans, Machines,
and Human-Machine Interactions

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Preface

“Without Practice, No Emergence

‘To know’ and ‘to understand’ are different.

*Even though we know, without putting that knowledge to practice,
we cannot understand.”*

—Daihonzan Eiheiji temple, Japan 2022

One of the benefits of being a scholar is that you get to travel to all kinds of places around the world. It was during my first-ever conference on language evolution that I had the pleasure of visiting the Daihonzan Eiheiji monastery in Japan. A truly unique and memorable experience which is difficult to put into words really. You must have been there to understand the feeling. It was here that this one excerpt out of the 14 teachings exposed in the corridor caught my eye. These teachings were related to the beliefs important in that monastery, but for me, these words encompass almost perfectly what language evolution is, and so I take the liberty of sharing my interpretation before diving into the scientific part.

What it means for me, in light of this thesis, is that interactions (i.e., practice) cannot be underestimated when it comes to the making of new words (i.e., emergence) and understanding language. Languages obtain meaning when we put them into practice; when we interact and use our knowledge of our language to understand the meanings of each other.

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