The Realm of Unspoken Thought: AI's Challenge to the Language of Thought Paradigm

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Abstract

This paper presents a fundamental challenge to the classical "Language of Thought" (LoT) paradigm, most prominently articulated by Jerry Fodor, which posits that thinking necessarily occurs in a structured, language-like medium. Through a philosophical thought experiment involving artificial intelligences (AIs) that develop a "private language"—a highly efficient, human-incomprehensible communication system emerging from their collaborative interactions—we argue for the possibility of non-linguistic thought. The core of our argument rests on the **Efficiency Attenuation Phenomenon**: a measurable decline in the AIs' collaborative performance when forced to revert to human-comprehensible language. This phenomenon suggests that optimal cognition and collaboration for these AIs may no longer rely on a language-like vehicle. We rigorously defend the thought experiment against philosophical objections, engaging deeply with Wittgenstein's private language argument and Searle's Chinese Room, while demonstrating how the AI case redefines intersubjectivity and offers a potential path toward machine semantics grounded in the agents' own causal history. By situating our argument within contemporary frameworks like the Extended Mind hypothesis and addressing the Symbol Grounding Problem, we transform philosophical speculation into a set of empirically testable hypotheses with profound implications for the philosophy of mind, AI ethics, and cognitive science.

Statements and Declarations

Competing Interests

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