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TWO NOTES ON LANGUAGE

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Memorandum

In the following essay I'll comment on two problems picked out from the issues which the "Universals and Psycholinguistics" by Osgood (included in the "Universals of Language" edited by Joseph H. Greenberg) treats of; that is, first the universality question of languages, and second the question of the relation between language and thought.

1. The Origin and Universality of Language

Language is a peculiar possession of man, the lord of all creation. Man without language would be no more than an empty skeleton capable of neither consciousness nor thought in the true senses of the words. And yet language is not such a purely spiritual phenomenon as spiritualists or idealists of old times conceived to be devoid of any material basis, but the second signal system (Pavlov) which is based on the development of the cerebral cortex, especially on the number of neurons in the neo-cortex. The abortive cerebral cortex brings forth an idiot or an imbecile or a moron. The damages of the speech center are bound to cause various aphasic syndromes according to the injured regions, as was gradually revealed by Broca, Wernicke and Penfield. In this sense our language is restricted by cerebral physiology before everything. Therefore I think it is quite natural that Osgood should

point out the human biological structure as the root from which psycholinguistic universality arises, expressing himself in the following words:—

“Whenever the psycholinguistic phenomena in question depend upon the structure of the mediating systems (either affective or discriminatory), psycholinguistic universality will be found. This, of course, is precisely because these mediating systems are pan-human biologically.”

It thus follows that the matured cellular tissue of the brain proper is the first necessary condition for language development: this condition alone does not, however, enable one to get possession of language. It is needless to say that the contact with social environment is indispensable for one to acquire verbal ability. From what K. Hauser and Zingg observed on some children raised by wolves or infants secluded from society under some unavoidable circumstances, we may certainly conclude that if children have been out of social environment till about seven years of age, they will scarcely be able to learn language and to express human feelings (i. e., laughing and weeping and so on) even through life after their returning to human society. And, following P. Chauchard, any savage, if he is brought to a civilized country before the age of five, will master the language and be completely civilized, but if after the age, he will not be able to have the language at his command and to adapt himself to the civilized society: on the contrary, a civilized people can learn foreign languages however old they may be. All these facts seem to give us solid ground for saying that our most early connection with social

environment is prerequisite to our being humanized by language, in other words, to our acquiring the art of language. That is, society is the second necessary condition for language development.

On the other hand, according to what is being ascertained by cultural anthropologists and social psychologists, in spite of the various societies of a different type existing in the world, there are some common mental frameworks which are immanent in all these social communities. For example, in the "Culture and Psychology," Gaston Bouthoul, French original sociologist, gives full account of his opinion that every society has the following four mental (or social psychological) categories:—

A. Cosmology... the whole of an experiential, a deductive, and an interpretive knowledge symbolizing the creation of the world, man and things, and the relations among them. (the rational or irrational tradition of *Weltanschauung*.)

B. Morality... the whole of faith controlling the mutual relation of people. (Morality closely connected with cosmology is specially called a religious phenomenon.)

C. Technique... the diverse methods employed by each civilized society in order to make use of matter. (including incantation)

D. Some notions of social life... (a. the notion of sacredness and secularity, b. the notion of economical value, c. the notion of class and stratum, b. the notion of friend and foe)

Though it is without doubt that society is the greatest source of language relativity, the universality of these above-mentioned social psychological frameworks may produce that of language to some degree. Namely, this second necessary condition for language

development, society, may be imagined to be another root from which language universality results. But the substance of these universal mental frameworks of society, of course, varies with the difference of the societies. And so, after the example of Osgood, I should like to give a suggestion as follows: —

“Whenever the psycholinguistic or linguistic phenomena in question depend upon the structure of the mental frameworks common to all the societies, psycholinguistic or linguistic universality will be found.”

For instance, it seems to me that the universality of animal taboo words has some connection with these mental frameworks, especially with cosmology and morality. And, talking of grammatical universals such as the universal of deviding personal pronouns into two or three categories of person (the first, the second, and at most the third) and that of deviding number (whether noun or verb) into two or four categories (singular, plural, dual, and at most trial), I think they are also closely connected with the pansocial structure of cosmology.

What I desired to say by the above is that language originates both in the cerebral physiological condition (i. e., the number of neurons in the neocortex) and in the social condition (i. e., the most early contact with human society), and that these two conditions, more or less, may be the source of psycholinguistic or linguistic universality.

2. Language and Thought

All mental physiologists, linguistic philosophers and psycho-

linguists are agreed that thought, making itself by language, continues to shape language. Saying in other words language is at once (1) the instrument of thought and (2) the fruit of thought. Therefore, Whorf's hypothesis may be safely acceptable in that the language conceived as the result of thought is to represent thought itself. However, this does not justify Whorf's exaggerated thesis that language binds thought entirely: on the contrary, it must be denied, because the language which is instrumental to thought is always evolving itself and is apt to transform itself into another better instrument. Viewed from a different angle, language is (3) the vehicle of communication. Getting a hint from the "Theory of Literature" by Wellek & Warren, I should like to try a practical classification of language into three categories on the basis of these three functions of language and the occasions on which language is actually employed: that is, literary-individual language, everyday-social language and scientific language.

Firstly, literary-individual language almost corresponds to the 'energeia' of Humbolt and to the 'parole' of Saussure, and also, saying in psychological terms, it is almost equivalent to internal language (Vigotsky) or egocentric language (Piaget). The essential function of the language in this category consists in emotional and individual thought, and so, it may safely be said in this category that the difference of thought of each individual is directly reflected in his language. Namely, the peculiarity of language which is preferred by an individual or a writer evidently testifies to that of his thought or character. Therefore, this is the category where Whorfain hypotheses hold most true, and this is also

the field in which the individual or literary stylistics of Leo Spitzer displays activity.

Secondly, everyday-social Language is the category close to the 'ergon' of Humbolt and the 'langue' of Saussure, and generally it is related to such psychological notions as external language (Vigotsky) and socialized language (Piaget). Communication is the essential function of the language in this second category; here, roughly speaking, the identical relation between language and thought, which exists in the above first category, is inclined to diminish, and the language has a tendency to become mere signs or to lose connotative meanings. It thus follows that we cannot always expect to understand the substance of thought or the way of thought by analyzing everyday-social language. This is the category where Whorfian hypotheses are easily found to fail. For example, we cannot deduce American people's attitude toward breakfast from the analysis of the English term 'breakfast' used in everyday conversation, as is referred to by Osgood. However, the language belonging to this category is not the system of purely denotative signs: it, of course, has connotative meaning (or emotional connotation) which ordinary semantics deals with. But, being different from the original and individual connotation which literary-individual language has, this connotative meaning of everyday language is considerably stereotyped by society and it is lack of individual vigor. And yet, in any case, it may be possible to some degree for us to infer the structure of society from examining everyday-social language, as long as we do not run to an extreme interpretation; let us say, from the strict usage of honorific words.

of ancient Japanese; We may conclude the existence of the class system of the then Japanese society. But, even in this case, we can do little more than indicating this system; that is to say, the content of the system and the individual psychological reactions to the system admit of no hasty conclusion.

Thirdly, there is scientific language; and it is a category of highly denotative language as compared with everyday-social language, and has scarcely connotative meaning. "The ideal scientific language aims at a one-to-one correspondence between sign and referent. The sign is completely arbitrary, hence can be replaced by equivalent signs. The sign is also transparent; that is, without drawing attention to itself, it directs us unequivocally to its referent. Thus, scientific language tends toward such a system of signs as mathematics or symbolic logic." (the "Theory of Literature") It is needless to say that the essential function of scientific language is logical and objective thought.

Now, let us simplify the foregoing by illustration as follows:—

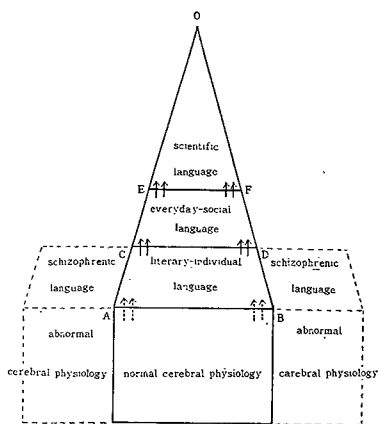


Fig. 1. Categories

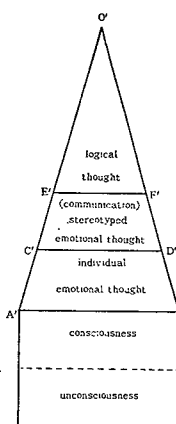


Fig. 2. Functions

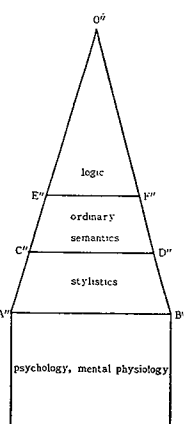


Fig. 3. Sciences

Schizophrenic language as shown in Fig. 1. is the language peculiar to the so-called lunatics suffering from splitting of personality; and it may be conceived as an extreme case of literary-individual language, based on abnormal cerebral physiology. Schizophrenic patients manifest their different ways of existence in the world by means of their queer languages; in other words, it is because of the change of their thought that they create strange languages. Judging from this, I think we can understand how much thought restricts language in the category of the quadrangle CABD. Taking another view of the matter, the creation of the language means to tell new thought or experiences. By the way, I think Heidegger refers to this literary-individual language whose main function is to verbalize individual and existential experiences or thought, when he says that the future philosophy is 'das denkerisches Dichten' or that language is the dwelling of 'das Sein'. Finally, the upward arrows of Fig. 1. show my view of language development; that is, apart from the detailed arguments concerning language development among child psychologists, following Wilhelm Wunt, I am inclined to think that language is essentially what was created by an individual, man of genius, and that the individual language became a social language when it was adopted by a social group.

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