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## COGNITIVE LABELS IN PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE

Take a popular slapstick plot: someone shouts "Catch the thief!" and all characters in the scene rush after an innocent man who is unaware of being taken for a villain. Once he realizes what has happened, it is too late for explanation and his only hope is to try to outrun his oppressors, whereby he confirms their understanding of the situation. The propositional truth value is clearly of no importance. On hearing the "catch"-phrase people presuppose an apprehended act of theft, a legal system which requires one to cooperate in punishment of criminals, a sense of solidarity with the victim of theft etc., but this conceptual content rarely surfaces in the minds of the chasing party. The phrase clearly has a perlocutionary power to originate the chase. The presuppositions which it entails have some value in *ex post* rationalizing of one's participation in the unfortunate event, rather than being consciously pondered reasons for taking part in it. If we were asked to describe the immediate cause of the crowd reaction we would probably say it was driven by emotion derived from some previous first hand experience (e.g. having been robbed themselves) or from a vicarious experience of some kind (folk stories, literature etc.).

The imaginary slapstick script is based on actual patterns of crowd behavior. In fact, in more hot tempered societies, the police have to rush along not so much to cooperate in the chase, but to save the alleged thief from getting lynched. Their understanding of the exclamation is based on a broader set of presuppositions, which include a possible outcome of events, a likelihood of false accusation, a duty to protect human life, the sole responsibility of the police to maintain the law etc. For want of time, just like in the case of the crowd reaction, these presuppositions do not play an overt

part in the decision to follow the party. The action is clearly triggered off by the same exclamation but from the police point of view the conceptual content of the expression has a different scope, and, consequently, the nature of their action is different from that of the crowd.

Imagine now that in his search for shelter our fugitive happens to pass by a den of thieves who, upon hearing the crowd shouting the phrase in question, escort him to a safe place and offer far-going help making it clear, however, that a share in the loot is expected.

One linguistic expression clearly has different senses for the different groups of people who hear it under the same circumstances and these differences shape their attitudes and active behavior in accordingly different ways. We may ask if we are justified in regarding the issue as proper material for linguistic investigation. We may expect, though, that as soon as we put forward this question a large part of the linguistic community will come up with a ready answer: the issue is not linguistic but sociological or psychological in nature. It refers to the context of the expression and has nothing to do with linguistic meaning. The three groups in question acted according to their systems of values which is external to language. Although their attitudes towards the thief were in each case different they were obviously performing the same semantic operation on the expression "Catch the thief!" since the semantic features of its elements are easily accessible and since, despite the ethical differences, people share the common knowledge of the referents of its lexical elements. All of this might be a plausible line of argumentation ...if truth-value semantics applied to our case of the innocent "thief". Thus, unless we are ready to abandon him at the hands of his oppressors, we ought to look into the reasons for his mal-treatment.

From the linguistic (and the psychological) point of view there is, apparently, not a lot to look into. All the pre-suppositions which seemed to be instrumental in generating the people's attitudes were derived from a single linguistic expression. What we are asking about then, is the relation between human attitudes and the conceptual content of linguistic expressions. We are also asking whether language can be regarded as an instrument of influence or even of shaping human attitudes. In other words,

our inquiry ought to be placed within the scope of interest of some version of the linguistic relativity hypothesis. The questions we are asking have been repeatedly asked over the last few dozen years but no answer as yet has been accepted as plausible by the linguistic community. In fact, for the most part, the community refused to deal with the problem at all.

### 1. THE THEORETICAL SETTING

Numerous theoretical reasons were given for this refusal. Some of them emerged from the ontological status given to thought in the Behaviorist tradition (thought and language are merely responses to behavioral stimuli). Others were related to the epistemological status assigned to language in the Philosophy of Language tradition or in Logical Positivism (identification of language with logical forms). However, most of the opposition cumulated in the Structuralist approach which can be described as the "mapping view" of language [cf. Grace 1987]. The mapping view is essentially universalistic. It postulates total intertranslability, based on the assumption that language is "an empty code, entirely uncommitted as to the content". The postulate leads to the pursuit of syntactic autonomy and the resulting neglect and uncertain position of an unspecified semantic component in the linguistic investigation. The above entailed the assumption that language and culture are separate, distinct entities, that thought processes are independent of language, and that there exists in the "objective" world a fixed set of "sayable things". These claims have been used by adherents of the Structuralist position to reject the strong, moderate and weak versions of linguistic relativity alike (the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, the Incommensurability Thesis etc.).

The strong position taken by Structural Linguistics was first undermined from within. The postulate of creativity (essential for the notion of linguistic competence) proved incompatible with the notion of a "sayable" extra-linguistic universe. Linguistic "field-work" showed basic semantic-grammatical differences between languages, thus putting into question the postulate of intertranslability, while the recent sociolinguistic research strongly questioned the claim that cultural base (in the anthropological sense) can be separated from language.

Among the experimental findings are the cross-cultural studies of the influence of grammatical categories on thought like the study by Bloom [1981] on the use of the counterfactual in English and Chinese and on the process of conceptual entification in these two languages, or the study by Mokáa [1976] on gender categorization in English and the Algonqian languages, the study of Kay and McDaniel on the linguistic significance of basic color terms [1978] or the thought-provoking study by Casad & Langacker on the semantic aspects of Cora grammar [1985].

As a result, linguistic universalism has been repeatedly challenged in the recent years. There seems to be a growing awareness among linguists of the need to review the relativity hypothesis: "The evaluation of the hypothesis has to be suspended, since a number of experimental findings indicate that the categorization of concepts and objects as performed by speakers of different languages is influenced by grammatical categories present in those languages" [Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 1983].

For all it says in support of linguistic universals cognitive structuralism contains a most welcome trait for proponents of linguistic relativity. Language users impose meaningful organization on the infinitely variable world of sense experience, by means of highly complex, multi-level repertory of cognitive schemata which permit to segment it cognitively into the types of categories objects, actions and relations they perceive to exist in it [Schank 1982]. This is primarily done in view of storing information. But the schemata serve also as cognitive building blocks of the representations we construct of our experience. If language is to be shown to influence our cognitive capacity then it must be proved to do so either by influencing the development or the functioning of these schematic building blocks.

## 2. THE DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

Piaget [1957, 1969] has shown that during the child's first year and a half language plays a very limited role in the ways in which he models reality. The first few lexical items he acquires constitute mere additional elements in his cognitive world, on a par with other elements, linked to them by functional or associative bonds. We may treat them as functional means of eliciting some desired states but not as symbols for cognitive

categorizations. They are certainly not capable of exerting relativizing influence over the child's development of the schematic mapping of the world.

At a certain point his speech and thought converge. As V y g o t s k y [1962] shows at the age of ca. 18 months he begins to link his first lexicalizations like "mommy", "red" or "sleep" to the cognitive ones into which he has coconceptually divided his world: his MOTHER, RED THINGS, and the ACT OF SLEEPING. Utilizing his basic level categories [R o s c h 1976] he then proceeds to construct schemata for handling the word classes given in the language - nouns, verbs, adjectives etc. This marks the stage of rapid development of *recall* (as opposed to previously dominating *recognition*) memory [S c h a n k 1982]. Once he has done this he begins to understand the distinct sequences of word classes he constructs in terms of generic scripts, plans and goals. R o s c h [1977] has shown that at some point in time the child discovers, not to his dissatisfaction, that language contains labels which facilitate conceptual processing of experience, and that, in the sphere of basic level experience he has been building up, these labels coincide with his own. Rosch shows this process on the example of the English labeled schema for RED and describes how its coincidence with the equivalent, subjectively constructed cognitive category reinforces the child's self-assurance as to his cognitive competence. In other words the child develops a subjective conceptual structure which is both experientially and linguistically grounded. In time he creates the more complex "grammatical" schemata for recognizing and manipulating functor words, inflections, the passive, the negative, the counterfactual etc. Although they are increasingly language-based, he does not cease to build many of the cognitive schemata on his own. Many of these remain a linguistically uncoded, non-labeled content of his thoughts [B l o o m 1981]. Both types of schemata, the independently constructed, and the linguistically derived ones help the child organize his attitudes. Some experiences are pleasant, some are frightening. The first are desired, they become *good* things; the latter are to be avoided, they are *bad* things from then on. When the child burns his hand on a kitchen range he is likely to associate negative emotions with the cognitive schema of RANGE. When he is bitten by a dog, DOGS become generically bad. Thus, simultaneously with the development of lexical schemata the child develops his own

"semantic differential" scales [cf. Krzeszowski 1987]. This is not to say, however, that the axiological charge of the first lexicalizations remains stable and fixed throughout his life. We shall return to this issue in the last section of this paper.

### 3. THE FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The child's cognitive schemata frequently need some readjustment. For instance, he may have developed a schema in which "red" is slightly displaced on the color spectrum in relation to the sanctioned, labeled RED in his language. At the very earliest stage of conceptual development he will have no such schema at all, but in the process of establishing the "intersubjectivity" of schematic representation he will feel compelled to create, or to readjust, his schema of RED to the linguistic label. Schank [1982] provides a detailed description of the process in which schemata (from simple categories to complex conceptual models of events) are adopted by children as a "side effect" of the acquisition of basic reading skills at a later age. As we have seen, this readjustment of subjective schemata to the ones imposed by language covers also their axiological aspects. In fact, we shall argue further on that these aspects are far from being marginal in conceptual processing. Since cognitive schemata come in systems [Langacker 1988], our child will probably readjust his initial axiological schema of RANGE when he acquires the label "roast beef" or "cuisine gourmet". Likewise, the axiological charge of his schema of DOG will be reformulated under the positive axiological charge of the labels "brave San Bernard's shepherd", "lovely puppy" etc. Thus, "in addition to developing a large number of schemata free of the influence of language, which in time get labeled, but whose semantic input remains unaffected, the child will construct and reconstruct a very large number of schemata expressly to meet the requirements of linguistic labels" [Blom 1981]. This process of schema convergence is thus based on "intersubjective" rather than "subjective" experience of cognitive categories formulated around semantic representations of prototypical instances and it results in establishment of ICM's [Idealized Cognitive Models - Lakoff 1982] of reality.

As we said above, in the process of ICM-convergence the child learns to trust the labels available in his language and

more and more frequently adopts these labels, even when he has little or no access to the experiential basis of the ICM's within which they function. Since, however, lexical labels always function relative to an ICM he frequently adopts the ready-made ICM [cf. S c h a n k 1982] which goes with the label, thereby accepting vicarious experiential grounding. For instance, while everyone may have subjective experiential grounding for the ICM of MONEY, the subjectivity of our experiential grounding for the ICM of CAPITAL is most likely only partial, while for most Poles, or Chinese, the experiential grounding for the ICM of CAPITALISM is only vicarious. S c h a n k [1982] has shown that any encounter of a linguistic token of some conceptual event forces the reader to recover the plan even if other elements of the event are absent in his conceptual system, though a number of complex learning strategies have to be employed in the accomplishment of this task. Along the same lines, we are inclined to believe that linguistic labels (especially the last type) function as points of condensation around which the acquisition of world knowledge (of predominantly vicarious nature) proceeds. As B l o o m [1981] puts it: "the word can be said to act (1) as a directive force in leading (one) to think about the world in certain novel ways and (2) as a locus around which the results of that thinking come to coalesce".

#### 4. GRADIENCE

Whenever we adopt available linguistic labels we do so relative to some ICM's established in our mind through firsthand experience or by means of other, previously acquired labels. For instance, in order to construct a cognitive schema for BACHELOR we have to make use of already consolidated lexicalizations "man" and "unmarried" which, in L a k o f f's terms [1982, 1987] are ungraded categories, i.e. they are of all-or-none type, mutually exclusive with their complements. This semantic "decomposition" of categories frequently amounts to imposition of non-gradience on otherwise gradable concepts. The linguistic repertoire contains numerous labels, representing usually fairly abstract concepts, which commonly undergo such treatment. "Law", "structuralism", "relativity", "communism" are a few examples of such categories. In every case their semantic representation requires activation of some pre-

semantic pole of a linguistic expression. Linguistic labels, as "objectivized" conventional expressions, may thus be thought to "carve up" portions of the "subjective" conceptual structure into frames activated whenever the labels are used to predicate. The phenomenon is called "profilng", and subsumes such functions as setting of perspective or the level of specificity. The first function may be illustrated by the following examples of different frames imposed on the same conceptual structure:

- a) the lamp above the table
- b) the table below the lamp
- c) the leg of the table below the lamp
- d) the light from the lamp above the table.

The following exemplify varying levels of specificity:

- a) I saw an animal and moved on.
- b) I saw a long snake and ran away.
- c) I saw a rattlesnake about  $6^{1/2}$  feet long and sprinted to safety.

## 7. ANALYZABILITY

Of special importance for the semantic coding of a linguistic expression is the feature of "analyzability", which contributes to the salience of its semantic representations. An "expression" is "analyzable" to the extent that speakers are cognizant of the contributions of component morphemes to the value of the composite whole. [...] Novel expressions are necessarily analyzable, but once a complex expression has the status of a familiar unit, it is conceivable that a speaker might activate its composite structure independently from its components. [...] The analyzability of an expression affects its semantic value. [...] If we assume for the sake of discussion that pork and pig meat have precisely the same composite (semantic) structure, they nonetheless differ in meaning, because the latter expression provides individual symbolization to the conceptual components pig and meat, thereby rendering these notions more salient within the composite whole than they would otherwise be. [Langacker 1988]. In fact then, analyzability is yet another aspect of the relation between the levels of semantic representation and conceptual structure. One can hardly overlook its theoretical importance for the proponents of models of linguistic persuasion. A good example in question is Orwell's analysis of ideological lexicalization:



[...] the practice had been adopted as it were instinctively, but in Newspeak it was used with a conscious purpose. It was perceived that in (...) abbreviating a name one narrowed and subtly altered its meaning, by cutting out most of the associations that would otherwise cling to it. The words *Communist International*, for instance, call up a composite picture of universal human brotherhood, red flags, barricades, Carl Marx and the Paris Commune. The word *Comintern*, on the other hand, suggests merely a tightly-knit organization and a well defined body of doctrine. [...] This accounted not only for the habit of abbreviating whenever possible, but also for the [...] care that was taken to make every word easily pronounceable. [O r w e l l 1981].

The feature of analyzability is a clue to the understanding of the phenomenon of connotative meaning, a frequent tool of linguistic persuasion. Although it has been notoriously slighted by linguists, it is frequently referred to by students of rhetoric. For example, "at a political rally, the word *Democrat* may be enough to elicit cheers all by itself, while a mention of *Republican* may elicit boos. And I mean the word all by itself, not as a part of an implied utterance" [K e l l i n g 1975]. Other examples can be easily quoted from the field of advertizing ("Have you *Midasized* your brakes lately?"), televangelist soliciting ("Last year's [devotional] guide was a life support to *possibility thinkers* around the world. The new guide will be equally helpful") or any other sphere of persuasive discourse.

## 8. THE AXIOLOGICAL FACTOR

In the discussion of the developmental aspects of concept formation we noted that one of the first decisions made by a child when he constructs a labeled schema is to rank it on the good-to-bad scale, depending on the subjective desirability of the conceptual structure profiled by the label. We have also suggested that, due to the lack of first hand experiential grounding, in acquiring more abstract semantic representations we "bring our ICMs into line" with the linguistically tailored cognitive models which "come with" the label. It also seems plausible to assume that thus adopted cognitive models carry with them some conventionalized axiological load.

It has been convincingly argued in K r z e s z o w s k i [1987] that "in addition to the propositional content and mental images ICMs also contain hierarchies of values, relative to which people evaluate situations framed in terms of ICMs", and, elsewhere, that "every lexical item is assessible on the axiological scale"

[K r z e s z o w s k i 1985] which is of paramount importance for lexical semantics. Thus, in view of the assumption that cognitive labels are a powerful tool of linguistic persuasion it is reasonable to posit that, depending on the level of experiential grounding, (related to the level of abstractness of semantic representation, but also profiling and analyzability) the axiological charge which comes part and parcel with every new lexicalization we acquire, plays an important role in all cases of attitude formation. Although it probably always undergoes some degree of subjective reassessment, it is frequently adopted, by default, close to its face value. In such case our initial questions about linguistic relativity gain new importance, and open a very promising field for research in persuasive discourse.

Following K r z e s z o w s k i [1985] we assume that lexical items "show a much higher degree of axiological charge when they are used figuratively". It has also been argued that people conceptualize their experience in terms of metaphorical themes [B o l i n g e r 1979], or complexes rather than individual metaphors. If we accept the basic claim of cognitive linguistics that metaphorical extension is the main instrument in the coding of conceptual structures into semantic representations it follows naturally that lexical labels may acquire their axiological charge from the metaphorical networks relative to which they are semantically coded. Thus generated, the axiological charge becomes an active factor in the profiling of conceptual structures. We have seen such "axiological profiling" in operation in the case of the "innocent thief" in our initial example in which the label "thief" charged axiologically the whole conceptual system which it activated, thereby determining people's attitudes (axiological aspect of ICMs). It is worth noting, that the axiological load [K r z e s z o w s k i 1987] of the label changed depending on the metaphorical networks activated for various groups, although it is highly unlikely that the conceptual content of their ICM for "thief" was different. The same principle was obviously instrumental in the "Democrat-Republican" example of persuasive labeling in political rhetoric and in other examples throughout the paper. Therefore, it seems plausible to assume that besides such factors as gradience, analyzability, or the level of abstraction the axiological charge is a means of persuasive manipulation in the construction of linguistic labels.

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#### ZNACZNIKI KOGNITYWNE W JĘZYKU PERSWAZJI

Elementy systemu leksykalnego wykazują znacznie większy ładunek aksjologiczny kiedy używane są metaforycznie. Użytkownicy języka dokonują konceptualizacji swojego doświadczenia w postaci tematów metaforycznych (metaphorical themes), czy też kompleksów metaforycznych, raczej niż przy pomocy pojedynczych metafor.

Językoznawstwo kognitywne uznaje, że projekcja metaforyczna jest podstawowym instrumentem kodowania struktur konceptualnych na poziomie semantycznym. Należy więc założyć, że znaczniki leksykalne czerpią swój ładunek aksjologiczny z siatek metaforycznych, poprzez które zostały zakodowane.