

Language and Beyond. A Cognitive-Semiotic Theory of Human Communication.

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Rationale

The book aims to demonstrate that linguists and others concerned with language, cognition and communication have been working on wrong premises and with fewer ambitions than necessary. It appears that from a static point of view the mental representations of reality can be said to be a one level phenomenon, whereas from a dynamic point of view it can be argued to be a three level phenomenon, first identification by means of stable and unstable pictures, then assimilation by mental models of events and processes and finally accommodation to the human mind in the shape of past and present world stores of concrete experiences, abstract knowledge, general opinions and concrete beliefs. If languages just verbalized the mental results of the processing of visual data, all languages would probably possess the same underlying structure, but languages seem to mirror the dynamic processing of visual data consisting of the three levels mentioned above. The consequence is that a language has to make a choice between three levels.

The very choice gives a given language a certain voice – either the voice of reality, the speaker's voice or the hearer's voice. This view of grammar makes the code a prime index that points to the voice chosen by the given language. This means that grammatical expressions are indexical in nature and also involve crucial iconic relation. It is now possible to answer the question: "Why do languages differ with respect to expression units?" – They differ because languages differ with respect to content (the only way in which languages can show differences in content is by having different structures of expression). The creation of three linguistic supertypes, viz. reality-oriented, speaker-oriented and hearer-oriented languages, gives a completely new view on language as such and on specific languages as well. The theory to be presented in the book will be an eye-opener for people working with language, cognition, reality and communication, be it from a purely linguistic, semiotic, rhetorical, philosophical, pragmatic or psychological point of view. Moreover, it has a big potential for second language and foreign language teaching.

General background

Although the last fifty years have witnessed a great interest in language, mind and reality from various disciplines and have seen the creation of many different schools/directions with their own journals, there is, nevertheless, a consensus about several important matters. All things being equal, researchers believe that

- a kind of universal grammar exists,
- there is no need to distinguish sharply between the language of mind and language as such (their nature and their processes are taken to be identical),
- grammatical categories are more or less universal and therefore found in all languages (with or without concrete regular expression units carrying the specific content),
- important rules found in, for instance, English or Latin, can be applied to other languages as well,
- languages are governed by the principle of variance,
- the linguistic sign is made up of a signifier and a signified
- all linguistic expression units are more or less symbolic,
- there is no such thing as harmony or hierarchical structuring in a specific language (this means that tense, aspect and mood are described in isolation), and that

- there is no connection between naming strategies and syntax, and no clear connection between grammar and pragmatics.

Formal, functional and cognitive schools differ from one another with respect to focus and interests, and have developed different terminologies for exactly the same things. The main findings of Saussure and Bühler are taken for granted, Peirce and Bachtin have never been seriously used, and Jakobson has been forgotten. Moreover, they have not been talking to one another for several years. It is my conclusion that linguistics in the broadest sense of the term has stopped growing. The cause of this can be traced back to the common foundations outlined above, the lack of communication between people from different schools, and the complete lack of interest for earlier works in linguistics, semiotics and communication theory.

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Synopsis

The book will present a holistic and coherent theory of language, reality and mind. It will give new important insight into the system and structure of human world knowledge and the structure of the human mind, will develop a theory of three linguistic supertypes based on a revision of Bühler's Organon model and a systematic application of Peirce's trichotomic way of thinking, and will describe several languages in their totality, i.e. their naming strategy, their lexicalization patterns, their different grammatical categories, be they verbal or nominal categories, their syntactic structures and the way in which they function in oral as well as in written communication – pragmatics will be described as structure-driven more than rule-driven. Data will be taken from several languages, primarily from Russian, Bulgarian, Danish and English, but also from French, Georgian, Turkish, Hindi, Korean, Chinese, various Indian and Siberian languages, and from creole languages. Data from first and second language acquisition will also be included.

Chapter by chapter

Ch. 1 will deal with situation types, i.e. states and activities (simple situations), and events and processes (complex situations). Three important distinctions will be presented, viz. the state vs. activity distinction, the event vs. process distinction and the simple vs. complex distinction which play a crucial role for the structure of individual languages at several levels.

Ch. 2 will examine the system of human world knowledge and the structure of the human mind. It will be demonstrated on concrete material how visual data are processed by the human mind, i.e. from their identification in the terms of the stability vs. instability of the picture received via their assimilation by mental models of events and processes to their accommodation to the human brain in the form of still pictures and motion pictures located in the present and past world stores respectively. It will be argued that the human mind is divided into four worlds, i.e. the world of experiences and the world of knowledge (together the objective world), and the world of opinions and the world of beliefs (together the subjective world).

Ch. 3 will be used to develop three important models, namely The Grammatical Triangle (the speaker's model) that demonstrates the indexical role of the code itself, The Semiotic Wheel (the hearer's model) that accounts for the dynamicity of human communication, and The Typological Circle that describes the input and output structures of the three linguistic supertypes.

Ch. 4 will describe reality-oriented, speaker-oriented and hearer-oriented languages in detail and discusses the crucial notions of determinant category, categorial harmony and linguistic expansion.

Ch. 5 will show that each supertype is divided into two types of voices, i.e. into a principal voice which constitutes the first choice, and a secondary voice that is used whenever the use of the principal voice is blocked. It will be shown that what is marked speaks with one voice, while what is unmarked speaks with two voices.

Ch. 6 will attempt to extract what unites different categories in different languages by separating the supertype content from the categorial content. In that way we will arrive at three logical argumentation forms (deduction, abduction and induction) and three percepts (the extrovertive, the introvertive and the correlative), which are the perceptual correspondents to the logical argumentation forms.

Ch. 7 will demonstrate that it makes sense to argue that grammatical morphemes are indexical in nature and that sequences of verbal and nominal morphemes mirror a certain hierarchy. It will be shown that isomorphic relations exist between verbal and nominal categories. This is the reason why languages are characterized by harmony and why language being genetically close to one another may have different drives that distinguish them from one another.

Ch. 8 will deal with the new notion of naming strategy. Three different types of strategies will be separated, viz. “from-figure-to-ground”, “from-ground-to-figure” and “between-figure-and-ground”. It will be shown that there is a neat connection between choice of naming strategy, choice of lexicalization pattern, choice of position focus vs. existence focus, choice between using a be-construction for possession vs. using a have-construction, and having sentences without subject vs. having sentences with an obligatory subject, e.g., in the shape of there- and it-sentences.

Ch. 9 will present various types of evidence for the hypothesis that the three distinctions developed in Ch. 1 are responsible for active, ergative and accusative languages. Moreover, it is shown that the two subtypes that are normally distinguished within each type go back to two syntactization mechanisms, called situational and propositional syntax.

Ch. 10 will be concerned with direct vs. indirect speech acts in communication. A new theory of the imperative is constructed and seven so-called Imperative Frames are formed. The five components of each frame are used to explain indirect speech acts in speaker- and hearer-oriented languages where this strategy is used extensively.