

# INTRODUCTION TO ALFRED KORZYBSKI'S GENERAL SEMANTICS

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DEFINITION:

**Semantics** : study of the meanings of the terms of the vocabulary and of its modifications.

**General semantics of Korzybski** : general theory of non-elementalist evaluation.

The expression : "General Semantic " is associated that with " **non-Aristotelian logic**" or " **non-Aristotelian system**".

## I

**Animal society** : **static** society compared to human society, fixed behavior.

**Human society** : **elaboration of cultures and evolution of civilizations** :

Every generation transmits, enriches and shapes an acquired knowledge to the next generation which is going to modify it and increase it in its turn.

Definition of each species which reveals the basic characteristic of each of them and makes it different from the two others:

- **plants** : bind between them energies : "**energy-binders**",
- **animals** : bind between them points located in space : "**space-binders**",
- **mankind** : besides energies and points in space, binds between them moments in time beyond his own life : man is a "**time-binder**" : thanks to human language, points can be thrown between people separated by space-time distance.

The way we think and the way we express ourselves are intimately bound. The power of suggestion of the words is such as it easily influences the mixing of the feelings and ideas which induce our different behaviors.

The disorder which reigns in the use we make of language leads to a corresponding disorder in our thinking, our reflection.

A confused or incorrect thinking has repercussions on the ways we express ourselves, and is reflected in them, hence uncertain or distorted verbal communication between individuals.

## II

In our civilization, we got a high degree of technical development; in other domains, primitive level: :

- **in technical domains** : **mathematical language**, which structure is similar to the structure of facts.
- in the domain of **institutions and human affairs**, there is a discrepancy between the structure of facts and the structure of language.
- **the structure of mathematical is similar**

- to the structure of facts,
- to the structure of the human nervous system.

- general semantics teaches to use the brain as if we were using a mathematical language.

### III

What does "a language which structure is similar to the structure of facts" means ?

**A MAP IS NOT THE TERRITORY; IT REPRESENTS IT WITH SYMBOLS.**

**A MAP DOES NOT REPRESENT THE WHOLE TERRITORY**

- According to the **Aristotelian point of view**, language is considered as the **mirror of reality**. Hence there is **no distance between what we live and what we say about it**.

- In a **non-A point of view** : **language is a verbal map** : it cannot pretend to account for the facts totally, still less with a complete accuracy :

**A WORD IS NOT WHAT IT REPRESENTS**

**A WORD DOES NOT REPRESENT ALL THE FACTS**

- **Language symbolically represents what we live**, hence a **new attitude towards language**.
- **Mathematical language** : few risks of distortion during communication, few risks of misunderstanding.
- **Current language** : **the significant, symbolic content of each word differs according to different persons or different situations**.

Hence an attitude of vigilance, of suspicion towards the use of this language.

=> **To put in question ones own habits of symbolization.**

### IV

A map requires a cartographer and a ground.

Relations or set of relations between them:

**Relations between the observer and observed object** in the history of the Western thought: three periods:

1) **Greek or metaphysical or pre-scientific period** : **Aristote - Euclide** : the observed object is not important, the observer is all that counts.

2) **Classical or semi-scientific period** : **Descartes - Newton**: the observer hardly counts, the observed object is really significant.

3) **Mathematical or scientific period** : **Korzybski - Einstein** : *all a man can know is a phenomenon due jointly to the observer and to what he observes*.

**The observer:** (the cartographer, ourselves)

- The traditional **prospect isolates the psyche, the body and the surrounding**.
- The non-A prospect considers that **man constitutes a psycho-somatic whole in his surrounding which penetrates him and to which he reacts**.

=> - **not possible to consider separately the body and psyche, spirit and matter**.

- **not possible to consider separately a man from his physical, social and cultural environment**.

**NON-ELEMENTALIST attitude: effort not to isolate the ones from the others factors or elements which are structurally connected the ones to the others.**

=> the observer approaches what he observes with **the totality of his psycho-somatic organism**. The characteristics of this organism are due to the influences received from the environment.

- **The human nervous structure feels sensations which it organizes into perceptions => these perceptions are tributary of :**
- **the possibilities**
- **and of the limits of the nervous structure**

=> what one notices is located at the meeting point ;

- of a human nervous structure
- of the components of the ground.

**Human lived data require the presence of a human being.** *Independently of us, " our world", " our reality " do not exist.*

Example: the tree, while falling, causes waves; so that a noise, to be perceived, requires the presence of a human or animal nervous structure. There is no noise if there is no receiver to perceive it, only waves.

- **There are as many " worlds " as different nervous structures :** the world of the toad is different from the world of the fly, which is different from the world of the bird, etc.

=> the ground appears in a way conditioned by our possibilities of perceptions; they depend on our organic structures.

=> our nervous system, starting from the components of the ground, makes **an abstraction**, by organizing these components, hence the perception of colors, of sounds, of shapes.

- **Perceptive illusions :** when the nervous system is not able to apprehend processes.  
Example: the ventilator which turns looks like a solid disc.
- Among the various stimuli offered to us, we make a choice, and this choice depends partly on our former experiments. Unconsciously, we find in the ground, up to a certain point, which, by former experiments, we are brought to seek in it.
- " the flower is red ": one allots to an object a quality as if it were intrinsic, quality which only one human nervous structure can establish between this flower and this structure => **false identification.**

=> in non-A language : " the flower **appears as red** to me. "

## V

- Aristotelian language : " George Durand is an egoist. "
- Non-A language : " In such circumstances and with regard to such person, G.D. behaved in a way which, according to my own standards, appears as egoistic to me. "
- Aristotelian language : judgment of value.
- Non-A language : takes in account the person who speaks, his preferences, his opinions , his standards, takes in account the fact that he sees a situation under one particular angle.

**Silent premises :** data provided by the culture within which we live, the education we received, which have not being verbally clarified at the time when they slip into the appreciation carried. They remain half-conscious, even unconscious.

" do not forget that he is a Jew ": ready-made image with rests on prejudices, irrational antipathies; conventional image of the " Jew ". =>

- **to replace the verb " to be " by " to appear as ".**
- **to express oneself in terms of behavior rather than of quality.**

## VI

### OBSERVATION OF THE GROUND :

- its various elements,
  - the order they follow ,
  - the relations which can bind them,
  - the structure they compose .
- In his observations the scientist leans in particular on **behaviors** the structure of which he will attempt to detect.
  - He will wonder then which must be **the structure of the involved elements** to lead to such a structure of their behaviors.
  - He will make then **inferences** which will enable him to build **assumptions**.
  - On the basis of these assumptions, he will build up prevision about the behaviors.
  - He will then have **to go back to the observation** of the latter to examine whether these previsions are carried out and if, consequently, his assumptions are **in conformity with the structure of the facts**.

### Summing up :

=> Behaviours => their structure => structure of the elements in presence compared to the structure of their behaviour => inferences => assumptions => previsions concerning the behaviours => observation of these behaviours for checking.

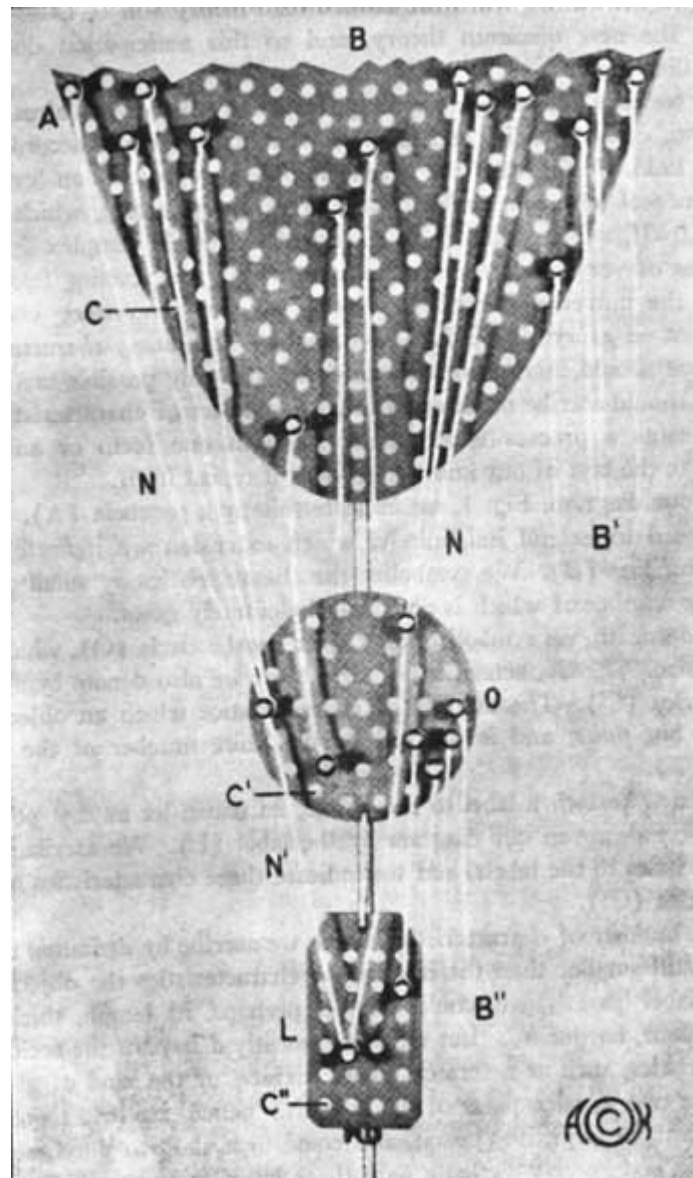
- **Any real acquisition of knowledge rests on a study of the relations, a research of the structures.**
- Examination of ourselves and of the world in perpetual change: ceaseless **dynamic process**, constant modifications.
- Sometimes certain changes are too small compared to our possibilities of perception or are carried out too slowly => we are unaware of these changes => errors in our evaluations, our ways of reacting.

### Relations matter-space-time:

- the object (pencil) linguistically needs space, otherwise it would not be a pencil but a mathematical point, a fiction.
- it also needs verbally time, otherwise there would be no pencil but a flash.

=> **When we use the term " matter " while thinking of something, this thing implies also space and time.**

## VII



*Structural differential*, Alfred Korzybski. "Science an Sanity", p.388

The plan at the top represents the level of the event, the disc, the level of object, and the rectangle, the level of the word .

The lines connecting between them the characteristics of the plan (event), the disc (object) and rectangle (word) or the ones of the two first levels: represent the characteristics which were taken in account in the development that our nervous system made from the elements which were proposed to it.

The lines which end nowhere represent the characteristics left aside.

=> \* Taking in account certain characteristics and leaving others aside consists in making an **ABSTRACTION**.

\* **The structural differential** teaches how to distinguish the levels of abstraction.

**On the drawing :**

- **the level of the events:** escapes to any direct hold.

- **the level of the objects** : we take hold on it but in itself it remains inexpressible.
- **the verbal level** : we use words to designate objects.

=>

\* **the object is not the event**

\* **the word is not the object**

\* **the object is indicated verbally by such a word.**

=>

a) **A MAP IS NOT the TERRITORY:**

The words we use to show the objects and to qualify them thereafter, to classify them, judge them, are not on the same level as these objects themselves.

b) **A MAP DOES NOT REPRESENT THE WHOLE TERRITORY:**

**Each level is an abstraction starting from the previous one;** there will always be characteristics which will be left aside.

- When we have assimilated the concept that **the word is not the object**, we get used to see in it only **one symbol representing this object**.
- While if we identify the word with the object, we tend to react to the word as to **a signal** before asking ourselves, or without asking ourselves what is in fact the object which the word stands for.
- The reactions to the words rather than to the objects or the events are used in political and commercial propaganda.
- The reaction to the word as to **a signal** and not as to **a symbol** mainly comes from **the power of evocation of the word**. It is mainly related to psychic factors: it rises from the emotions which were linked to the words during our intellectual and psychic development.
- The words of the mother language are learned at the time of situations which provide them a psychological context.

=> a word leads in us to a reaction to a context which does not exist anymore, but that we project on the new context offered by the present situation : **space-time confusion**.

=> Consider what occurs **HERE AND NOW**.

- A too broad use of the verb "**to be**" leads to **false identifications**, and to **a confusion between the various levels of abstraction**.

4 uses:

1) "**is**" of existence : I am: to be = to exist, to be

2) **to be** = auxiliary : it is done.

3) "**is**" of identity : " man is an animal ", " George is a workman ":

to be = to identify in an erroneous way different levels of abstraction, by connecting 2 names which are put on the same level; little difference between the non-verbal levels and the verbal level: in **Aristotelian language** => "to be"

in a non-A **language** = to be able to be indicated, called, to be classified like.

4) "**is**" of attribution : the rose is red: to be = connects a name and one or more adjectives, implies that the characteristics indicated by the adjectives exist in the thing or the person represented by the name: **Aristotelian language** .

=> "to be" in **non-A language**: such person (thing) seems to me, we judge such thing in such way.

Uses 3 and 4: excessive concentration on one or a small number of characteristics, gives them an exaggerated importance; one then takes the part for the whole or one sees the whole through a partial object.

- The diagram of **the structural differential** shows the natural order of abstraction which should be followed to think and to express oneself correctly:

1) the event :

**non-verbal levels**

2) the object :

3) the word : verbal level

- The first level of abstraction of the event to the object is the only one accessible to animals which think by images: they do not have access at the higher levels of abstraction : cannot build culture, nor civilization.

=> difference in structure between the development which the animals can make and that men can make, hence the name of the model of Korzybski: **structural differential**.

- **The model of structural differential :**

- presents the structure of general semantics,
- while differentiating its substructures: different levels or orders of abstraction which constitute it,
- while assigning to them relative values according to the importance which they have for us.

- Acquisition of **the conscience of abstracting :**

**To be conscious to make an abstraction means we do not forget** that one takes in account only **one part of the characteristics**, those which we perceive more easily than others, which strike us particularly, which are selected according to our former experiments or knowledge, of our tastes, of our sensitivity, our preferences, of our interests, etc..., and that one leaves some others aside, which are often characteristics suitable for the individuality of the object and which, in certain cases, can have to play a role which we had not suspected first of all.

## VIII

**In the structural differential :**

- parabolic plan: world of events,
- disc: world of event-signification or world of objects.

Those two levels are non-verbal , " silent " , " objective " .

- verbal levels: higher levels of abstraction seeking to account, more or less adequately, of the non-verbal levels; they use **static representations** to give an account of **a dynamic reality**;

- On the level of the object, perception is an inexpressible experiment.
- **To speak always means to interpret the world**. But the living contact with it remains beyond verbal field.
- We need to train to seek a greater richness of contact with what is perceived, lived, to give sensitivity time to fully develop before seeking to express anything.
- We see more images evoked by the words that lived data themselves, we really do not know how to watch , nor really to listen.

=> *exercise*: to look at an object while trying to see it well, without saying anything about it.

### Such a training :

- increases the possibilities of creative inspiration, inspiration then interpreted and expressed by language or other artistic form.
- involves a practice of silence => enriches the inner experiment.
- helps to establish a distance between the object and the words which are used to designate it => avoids to pass too quickly from the non-verbal levels to the verbal levels and to stick on the object a more or less satisfying label.

### ATTITUDE OF DELAYED REACTION :

attitude of investigation, expectancy preceding our reaction, our answer.

- **It is helpful to wait :**

- to get the meaning of what is perceived before formulating it verbally.
- to be more informed on what it covers before accepting a verbal formulation: "*let us see what it's about.*"

- **It is necessary :**

- for a correct evaluation,
- for an effective and adapted action,
- for our psycho-somatic health.

- **It avoids to react to the words as signals**, makes us able to see them like **symbols**.

=> it helps to dissociate the object and the word which symbolizes it from associations and evocations related to the word.

=> it prevents from inaccurate **semantic reactions**.

**SEMANTIC REACTION** : reaction to the significance of a term provoked by its use. **It affects the organism** at the level of the electro-colloidal cells of living tissues => repercussions on the whole psycho-somatic organization which can involve certain diseases.

The intensity or the nature of **power of evocation of the words** varies from one person to another. It is:

- dependent on the experience of each person,
- influenced by silent postulates.

=> a word seldom has the same meaning for two different people.

=> the language seldom allows to wake up in others the non-verbal impressions corresponding to what we ourselves experiment on our own non-verbal levels.

*Exercise:* How to give an account of a gustatory experiment, an aesthetic emotion.

## IX

### OBSERVATION OF THE SUBJECT :

The " facts ": what we live, observe, is a common product of an imperceptible reality and nervous structures of the observer.

- The solid " fact " is a myth; we cannot provide a description which does not carry our personal mark.
- In many experiments of laboratory, one takes account of the " personal coefficient of the experimenter. "



- In everyday life a same fact can be perceived and described in a different way from one person to another one.

=> From a non-A point of view, one takes in account the distances which exist:

- between what constitutes the object and the result that we perceive,
- between " what occurs " and " what appears to us ",
- between " what appears to us " and " what appears to someone else ".

Need for a method which helps to observe the objects correctly, because on this correct observation will depend what we will be able to discover of their structure and their behavior.

To adopt **an EXTENSIONAL ORIENTATION**:

Instead of starting from the common property or small group properties common with the help of which we hold to classify and define the objects, we will remember that each object is single in its kind and will show characteristics which will differentiate it from all the others.

\* The step which encourages us to note initially similarities often leads to confusions: abusive generalizations and over generalizations: " young people ", " women ", " politicians ", etc..., considered in general.

\* The relation which is established between the object and us leads ourselves to assign to this one certain characteristics.

If our orientation is not extensional :

- certain characteristics correspond to the structure of " what occurs " on the level of the object,
- certain characteristics do not correspond to it, are wrongfully assigned to him on the basis of preliminary definitions,
- the relation could enable us to see certain aspects of the structure which would have led us to note other characteristics that our defective orientation made us miss.

**EXTENSIONAL ORIENTATION :**

**1) To learn how to seek:**

- the features which appear similar in different objects,
- the features which appear different in objects classified as similar.

2) To wonder, in presence of a new experiment which reminds us former experiences, in front of a new object which seems to belong to a group of known objects, if there are important **differences**.

3) **To index** the objects belonging to a same group: the employer 1 different from the employer 2, different from the employer 3.

4) To mind **not to confuse the part with the unit and not to judge the whole according to the part :**

example: one will not extrapolate the behavior of a person in particular circumstances to put a final judgment on this person.

- to always leave the door opened to different experiments, new information.
- not to expect systematically such a behavior from such a person or such an event in such a situation.
- a slackened attitude, a calm and impartial vigilance help to approach any new situation in a correct way and to adapt to it while protecting the nervous system.

5) To note that certain characteristics exist in addition to those which we retain => use of "etc..."

- in the description of an object, to stress that certain characteristics were left aside,
- in the description of a group of objects: the existing objects are more numerous than those which were held in account.
- each time our statement can pretend to give account of only of part of the facts, of the data.

" etc... " is a recall of the process of abstraction.

6) To use **the index indicating the date and the place** :

- the object changes, its space-time context changes too.
- **the index of dates and places** contribute to make us more open-minded to all new, unusual characteristics, not yet tested, which might occur.
- they protect us against the space-time loss of adaptability.

7) To remember that a same verbal designation can cover, during one rather long period of time, an object which changes however during this period => to avoid any superficial identification between this " static " designation and the object gifted with dynamic properties temporally oriented.

8) To use of **an unlimited number of values** likely to be assigned to **an unlimited number of facts**, instead of wanting to allot to the latter only one small number of values: when we can assign to each fact the value of its own and which exactly corresponds to him , and not a value chosen in a restricted, insufficient sampling, our orientation is structurally similar to the empirically perceived world.

9) Approaching the experiment and trying to give an account of what one perceives, one must mind, like the man of science, **to think and speak in terms of degrees, of nuances**, rather than in terms of contrasts (truth-false, good-bad, etc...)

the purpose of 2 notations is to announce the non-elementalist attitude:

a) To put **between quotation marks** designations such as " space ", " time ", " body ", etc...:

- they are not isolated realities,
- they are not elements that one can separate from the unit formed by the set of the relations,
- the designation which isolates them artificially covers only one fiction

if elementalist terms are employed, never draw a conclusion from them, because it would contain the structure of the metaphysics which surrounds the term.

- use them if necessary, but draw the conclusions from the fact-process, so that they have some value.

b) To use **the hyphens** to indicate that the factors sometimes artificially separated are in fact in close relation between them to represent new structural implications. Example: space-time, psychosomatic.

**WE HAVE TO APPROACH GLOBAL SITUATIONS AND WE DO IT WITH OUR WHOLE INDIVIDUAL.**

## X

Until now, in the drawing of the Structural Differential, only one label: the word: designation, elementary step of description.

We can add other ones :

- what, starting from the observation, one can infer, deduce.
- judgments, conclusions,

- theories.

From each level of observation (label), one can formulate a higher level of abstraction, by retaining some of the characteristics of the preceding level.

The choice can depend on:

- rational considerations (scientific field for example)
- acknowledged or secret preferences, prejudices or ready-made ideas,
- previous experiments,
- silent premises ...

When one passes from a level of abstraction given to a higher order of abstraction, the elements given up on the first level can be so because at the higher level one or more new elements are introduced.

The choice of the elements thus treated being often a question of preferences, it always invites to criticism.

Since each level of abstraction is reached only by leaving aside a part of the characteristics of the previous level, our judgments, inferences, evaluations, theories, etc..., can never give an account of all that occurs. A new scientific theory often aims at taking account of characteristics which the previous ones had left aside and the importance of which appeared afterward.

Our observations and the judgments that they lead us to carry, the deductions that we draw from them, etc..., never give an account of all the indefinite number of elements which constitute a situation.

### **Natural order of abstraction:**

- \* awareness, perceptive recognition of an object, a fact or a phenomenon, themselves abstractions of events,
- \* verbal designation of this object or fact,
- \* its description,
- \* its classification if necessary,
- \* inferences or deductions,
- \* judgments,
- \* theories, assumptions, etc...

The last label related to the diagram is only the last label that, by convenience, one chooses to put. **In reality, there never is a last label**, one can always pass to a higher level of abstraction.

The number of levels actually used depends on the cases: what imports is to know how to use this kind of scale correctly, up or down.

We often act on the basis of a theory, of a pre-established judgment, which we stick to the experiment without describing this experiment before.

- \* when we react to the word as to a signal - and not as to a symbol - we dodge the level of description to jump from the start to that of the inference.
- \* we evaluate abstractions of a higher order as if they were abstractions of a lower order, e.g.: words, memories, etc..., are treated as if they were objects, experiments, feelings...
- \* we confuse inferences and the terms related to inferences with descriptions and descriptive terms, etc...
- \* we create semantic blocking thus : loss of contact with what we live :

- what occurs here and now,
- what we test here and now:

instead of reacting to the current situation, we react partially to what evokes in us a past situation or to the way we imagine a future situation.

Then it frequently happens **to reverse or distort the natural order of evaluation**: instead of checking our abstractions of a higher level by confronting them to the lower levels, we handle the latter to make them correspond to the first:

We judge the facts according to our theories and we forget to reconsider the theories in the lighting of facts : **illegitimate extrapolations, over-generalisations**: e.g.: " You do such things as... "

One can legitimately use the terms " truth " or " forgery " only at the level of the observation - level on which the statements are verifiable -.

At all higher levels, we only deal with probabilities and our statements on these levels are always subject to criticism, to a later revision in the light of new data.

## XI

Second empirical premise:

### THE MAP IS SELF-REFLEXIVE

### THE LANGUAGE IS SELF-REFLEXIVE

Example of image of " Laughing Cow " (a French cheese on the box of which is a laughing cow wearing ear-rings made of boxes of a "Laughing Cow" you can see to the infinite) : image of the image:

To be complete, a map should represent a " map of the map " as well as the cartographer, the map and the cartographer being part of the ground at the time when the card is drawn up.

The language:

- reflects the user
- is **self-reflexive** : we use the language to speak about the language, we say something to speak about something which has already been said.

=> It is impossible to conceive that we can decide in an absolutely complete way, to have the last word.

The structure of our language.

The structure of the world. appear as such

The structure of our nervous system.

that **any symbolization**, at least at the human levels : the word, the writing, the map, drawings, numbers, etc..., reveals itself to be **potentially self-reflexive in an indefinite way**.

Bertrand Russel (theory of the mathematical types):

- we can speak about a proposal concerning all the proposals,
- we cannot build proposal concerning all the proposals, as, by doing so, we build up a new proposal.

## XII

### CONCEPT OF MULTIORDINALITE OF THE TERMS OF THE VOCABULARY:

Many terms which we employ are **multi-ordinal** : they do not have a general meaning uniformly valid.

The meaning of a multiordinal term is determined by the level of abstraction to which one employs it: this meaning is determined by the context. Example 1: yes, not, truth, forgery, made, reality, cause, effect, to love, to hate, etc...

Example 2 : in the army, the term " unit " refers to formations of different importance: a unit is part of a larger unit which, in its turn, is part of a even larger unit.

To precise terms to indicate each unit: group, company, battalion, brigade, etc... The smallest unit is contained in the average and the average, at the same time contains smallest and is part of the largest one.

This feature is common to all multiordinal terms: they refer at the same time to the containers and the contents. The problem is to know which ones are which ones.

**Concept of multiordinality** : *problem of questions which cannot be solved or which do not make sense*: general significance of the " good ", " truth ", " beautiful ", etc...: such terms make sense only one once the level of abstraction (context, conditions to fill, etc...) has been specified.

The problem of the questions which do not make sense or to which one cannot give answers, declarations which do not make sense or cannot be checked depends on :

- **self-reflexivity** of the terms which are involved.
- **multiordinality**

If we give up any futile effort to give a term a general meaning, we will endeavor to make adequate the context the term of which receives such a particular significance which can become his.

Stating that the meaning of a word changes leads to a freedom of expression and a flexibility of interpretation.

To be fully conscious of self-reflexivity and of multiordinality helps to acquire a clear thinking, an exactitude in one's remarks, a direction of all the process of evaluation, which helps to avoid considerably the confusions implied in the concern and the fear, the resentment, the anxiety and other handicapping semantic reactions.

The negligence with regard to the multiordinality is observed in the majority of the cases of badly adapted personalities.

The majority of the terms which we use are at the same time:

- **over-definite** compared to our preconceived ideas,
- **under-definite** compared to the facts.

While defining the words which are used to formulate a definition, one comes, at the end of a certain time, to a residue: words which cannot be fully defined, because they cover certain basic postulates, metaphysics or others.

The question of the semanticist: "**What do you mean ?**" involves a thorough investigation which touches finally the residue of the non definite terms revealing our structural " credos " we are not aware of at the beginning.

These credos, often "**silent postulates**", must be changed to get to better evaluations.

**THE PATIENT DOES NOT ALWAYS MISS LOGIC, HE BASES HIS REASONING ON FALSE POSTULATES.**

### XIII

#### STUDY OF RELATIONS AND RESEARCH OF STRUCTURES

**This study and this research are at the base of any real acquisition of knowledge.**

Structures, the relations thanks to which they are built, can be of different natures or orders. When we pass from a **given order of abstraction** to another higher one, we pass in fact from a structure of a given size to a vaster structure which contains it and also contains other ones.

A justified judgment will be based on several observations.

A theory or an assumption will result from a series of judgments

One passes thus from a generalization to a broader generalization and from this one, to a still broader generalization

The value of a generalization depends on :

- the data on which it rests,
- the way these data have been gathered, selected,
- the use which has been made of them.

The three following mathematical concepts take into consideration general semantics: their set frames the research of increasingly vast and complex structures:

- **the propositional function of Bertrand Russel** : function which expresses a relation between unspecified variables, function " on standby "
- **the doctrinal function of Cassius J. Keyser** : a series of propositional functions related together, usually called premises, with all the consequences which result from them, usually called theorems.
- **the system-function** : who includes a set of doctrinal functions related together.

The scaffolding of abstractions and structures which fits to it is, for man, gifted with unlimited possibilities. It is important not to create blocking in stopping at one of the levels instead of going up or to freely descend the scale of the various levels.

**The correct handling of the levels of abstraction**, of relations, of structures, allowed the blooming of **the exact sciences**. Korzybski: one of the main reasons of our human difficulties resides in the fact that **the structure of our current language does not fits to the one of the facts as the structure of mathematical language fits to it =>** defective handling, in everyday life, of these levels and these structures.

The fruitfulness of the correct handling, being limited more to the only field of exact sciences, allows to align more easily than we did until now our general evolution on our scientific and technical evolution.

#### HOW DO WE BUILD STRUCTURES:

**A. Comparison between observations and developments made by a semanticist and a non-semanticist :**

**1) A semanticist :**

- observes correctly,
- makes an account of his observation in an impersonal way, without ready made opinion.

- The observed events seem: = + : ;
- a new element occurs //

At this level of observation, nothing can be said : we use arbitrary symbols and not words.

- The observer gives then a description of these events as, A, B, C, D... X
- Then he infers from these descriptions what he estimates he has to or can infer.
- He gets to a conclusion or forms a judgment A related to these facts.
- If the conclusion is correct, the action which will follow , A', will be adapted to the situation.

## 2) The non-semanticist :

- Is unaware of all the structures, orders of abstraction, conscience of abstracting and semantic reactions; he usually confuses orders of abstraction, identifies them, uses the language of inference for his descriptions, etc...
- He observes the same elements: = + : ;, plus the event //
- He describes these events as A, B, C, D.
- From these descriptions, he builds up a judgment and/or comes to a conclusion B, i.e. he jumps to another order of abstraction.
- When the new event // appears, he approaches it with he ready-made opinion, B.
- His description of the facts seems A, B, C, D... B(x) = y. This new judgment, C: semantic error.

The basic events are the same ones. An unconscious identification of the various levels of abstraction involves a different conclusion from the one of the ideal observer.

By confusing the levels of abstraction:

- one attaches to new situations labels which are not appropriate to them,
- one wrongfully explains them,
- one faces them in an unsuited way.

## **B Examination of the behavior of a semanticist and one non-semanticist:**

### 1) The semanticist:

#### **a) Approaches each experiment with an open and careful mind.**

- Differs his reaction and takes time to examine what occurs.
- Knows that each experiment is a new event.
- Knows that, whatever care he will take to examine it, certain aspects, certain characteristic of this experiment will escape to him.
- Does not forget the role of his personal coefficient.
- Remembers that each experiment involves the totality of his psycho-somatic organization.

#### **b) Verbal communication:**

- Can listen: tries to understand the best he can the meaning his interlocutor endeavors to give to his words.
- Avoids reacting to words as to signals, remembers that they are only symbols.
- Before giving an opinion, agreeing or contradicting, he seeks to know more about quality, compared to the ground, of the cause which is presented to him.
- Asks the question : "What do you mean? " each time that it appears necessary to him.

### c) Description of the experiment:

- Tries to do it with a honesty comparable with the one of a man of science.
- Does not want to be unaware of any the data which he can see and avoids describing them in deforming or tendentious way.

Knowing:

\* that information is never absolutely complete,

\* that it is possible to see the things differently, he begins his reports by " As far as I know " .

he recognizes that the data appear to him under such or such angle.

### d) Classification:

- it is necessary:

- to the development of **a sight structural of the world**,
- to an economical handling of knowledge.

- it allows savings time and effort,

- it facilitates the communication between men of knowledge.

While classifying, the semanticist:

- proceeds in order not to retract the differences to the benefit of the common features.

- the term used show common features,
- the use of the index points out the differences,
- the index, the chains of index, make it possible to note the space-time differences.
- the " etc... " is not forgotten.

- Appreciates the data in terms of degrees, of nuances.

- The expression " up to a certain point " is often used.

- When he classifies, measures, evaluates, he takes in account the fact he often uses conventionally established standard, thus often arbitrarily.

- The formulations based on these standard appear convenient to him; he minds not to identify them:

- to the events he lives,
- to the direct observation of them.

- Studying the elements of lived data and looking for the relations which bind them, **a semanticist is aware :**

- that he is in the presence of dynamic configurations the elements of which change or the place, role, behavior of which can change. These changes have effects on other elements of a given set and involve for them modifications which, in their turn, will have repercussions, etc...
- of **the principle of non-additivity :**  
1 + 1 = 2 only into arithmetic,  
1 liter of water + 1 liter of alcohol < 2 liters.  
2 people together, another arrives, the situation is changed.



### e) Judgments:

He is attentive to the influences of:

- memories of events lived previously which sensitized him
- standards of the culture within which he lives; he can choose to respect them or to question them.
- of his knowledge or ignorance,
- limits of his perceptions, observations, information,
- emotional reactions related not so much to the event itself as to associations of ideas that it involves by occurring,
- of his emotional, aesthetic preferences, ethical, metaphysics, his personal " philosophy ", his interests...
- of his silent postulates and his motivations.

In the formulation of his judgments, the level at which he speaks allows only probabilities.

He avoids to decide on the basis:

- of opposed categories,
- of a small number of values.

### f) Theories:

He builds them starting from the judgments, inferences, deductions.

Once the theory is built,

- he criticizes it,
- confronts it with the facts,
- searches for characteristics left aside,
- puts it to the trial of the experiment.

In brief, the semanticist observes:

- **a non-elementalist attitude,**
- **a extensional orientation,**
- **conscience of abstracting.**

*Any analysis is a deconstruction,*

*any synthesis is a reorganization*

## 2) The non-semanticist:

a) Do not lead his existence according to the facts; he is led by his mythology:

- ideal image of himself,
- " " of his surrounding,
- " " of his role or his action,
- ideas and concepts being the product of incorrect processes of abstraction due to himself or to the society which he lives in.

b) When he is unaware of a fact, he tries to direct the interpretation of it to avoid or reduce the conflict which can emerge between his conscience and this fact, if he considers it unfavorable

with his psychological security, his vanity, his interests, his preconceived ideas, his emotional preferences, etc...

If he considers it unfavorable with these elements, interpretation will be tendentious in opposite direction.

c) He is influenced by factors which, in our culture, allow and encourage the intellectual idleness:

- ready-made ideas,
- assertions instead of demonstrations,
- call for suggestion of the individuals rather than for their reason,
- call for various " authorities ".

**Many interests gather to prevent the creation of favorable conditions to the blossoming of a lucid and independent thought among the largest number of individuals. One made conformism and docility appear as comfortable and sure. Some feel anxious and guilty if they do not follow it.**

d) Little examination and personal thinking :

- he prefers pre-established diagrams,
- he bases his behavior and opinions on what is said, not on what occurs.

e) In a discussion, he listens little:

- he prepares his answer and seeks means to contradict,
- he changes the meanings of the words, mistakes on their direction, attributes to other people speeches and intentions which are not theirs,
- he reacts to the words as to signals, lets himself be led by them,
- he does not have delayed reaction, wants to show that he reacts quickly and makes decisions immediately,
- he has an opinion on everything, judge the whole according to the part, selects and overgeneralizes arbitrarily,
- his prejudices, emotional preferences, his motivations distorts the levels where he speaks (judgments, deductions, options, etc...) and make him mix them.
- he does not recognizes the elements of emotional nature.
- he often has a ready made opinion once for all, does not take account of the changes, the evolutions.
- he admits little criticism,
- he likes to cut short, reasons by oppositions,
- he sees, in an opinion different from his, a false opinion.

f) He does not build a theory according to the facts but according to prejudices or emotional preferences.

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## Conclusion

**Principles of general semantics :**

- relation between the observer and observed object
- non-identification,
- concept of a space-time universe subjected to ceaseless changes and which can only be apprehended:

\* by seeking its structures,

\* while placing oneself from the point of view of probability and uncertainty,

- distinction between the verbal levels and the non-verbal levels,
- silences at the objective levels and delayed reaction,
- conscience of abstracting,
- non-elemental ism,
- extensional orientation,
- self-reflexivity,
- multi-ordinality of the terms of vocabulary.

General semantics sees man as a whole. It allows to put order inwardly to decrease inner confusion.

The brain was formed during a long evolution. From this evolutionary point of view, all the parts of the brain do not have the same age: the areas of **thalamus** are older than those of **the cortex**.

- through the thalamus we experienced directly what we live, perceive emotions and certain reactions arise in us.

- the cortex is, inter alia, the location of language, the tool of the thinking, etc...

**When we react to symbols as to signals**, we do not give time to the nerve impulses to go to the cortex, we do not let it interfere in the choice of the answer: it " is shorted-circuit ". Through **the delayed reaction**, we give time to the cortex to interfere, we increase the role of the cortex on our behaviors.

Distinction of the levels of abstraction helps us to deal with certain emotions: we can be in a situation which, indeed, threatens us and scares us. This fear rising from an experiment lived at the moment is **a primary fear** : it excites glands which will produce chemical substances enabling us to react by one of the two conduits of survival: **fight or escape**.

We can feel **a secondary fear** which is a " fear of the fear " (fear of suffering, discomfort, etc...). If we manage to overcome the secondary fear, we change the situation in bringing the danger, discomfort, etc..., back to its real dimensions.

The distinction between primary and secondary feelings and emotions helps us to order and structure our psychological attitudes.

[La sémantique générale pour les nuls – Interzone Éditions – La sémantique générale pour tous](#)