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Universalism versus Relativism in Language and Thought: Proceedings of a Colloquium on the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis by Rik Pinxten

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titudes of Greek speakers in Quebec toward language planning (P. N. Smith, G. R. Tucker and D. M. Taylor), and the reactions of Welsh children to ethnic humor (A. Chapman, J. Smith and H. Foot). Many of these are important topics. All the more reason to wish that they had been investigated in more fruitful, contextually sensitive ways, better informed by the whole range of current research.

Universalism versus Relativism in Language and Thought: Proceedings of a Colloquium on the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. *Rik Pinxten*, ed. Contributions to the Sociology of Language, 11. Joshua A. Fishman, gen. ed. The Hague: Mouton, 1977. xiii + 310 pp. Dfl. 63.00 (cloth).

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Is man, the talker, the master or the slave of his language? Is humanity whole and compatible or fragmented into incompatible societies and cultures? Freedom and constraint, universalism and relativism—these are perennial and ubiquitous concerns wherever and whenever reflective beings realize their nature-as-nurture within an ongoing speech community.

Broad-ranging thought on those issues is presented in this volume, which contains all the 17 papers prepared for a 1973 international colloquium on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, at the University of Ghent.

Classic problems, of course, don't get solved—they lead to interesting vistas. That is the case with this multidisciplinary collection, which includes scholars from linguistics, anthropology, psychiatry, sociology, psychology, and philosophy.

Part I (Linguistic and Logical Approaches) begins with the volume's *pièce de résistance*, by Adam Schaff, entitled "Generative Grammar and the Concept of Innate Ideas." After an excellent review and careful analysis of the relativism versus universalism debate, Schaff proceeds to a precise engagement with the logic and evidence for Chomsky's claim of: (1) a deep structure common to all languages, i.e., a universal grammar; and (2) innate ideas or linguistic structures, i.e., an innate language acquisition device. This is the base of the hypothetical deductive system of generative

grammar. Neither has been tested. Schaff proposes a type of computer program that might test the hypothesis (1) of a universal grammar (p. 46). However, he shows that the controversy concerning (2) the existence or not of an innate acquisition device can be settled only by future evidence from natural science, particularly molecular biology. Finally, he discusses how both hypotheses ignore "all problems of language in the context of social actions" and "the problems of the relationship between language and thinking" (pp. 54-55).

In the other three papers in this section, Droste addresses the question of the extent to which presupposition, truth, grammaticality, and their possible interrelations having a bearing upon the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis; Vandamme develops the notion of "resonance" in attempting to explain in which sense and to what extent language and mind each influences the other; and Káa seeks to demonstrate the relativity of language, thought, and culture by an analysis of the logic of Algonkian gender.

In Part II (Psychological and Anthropological Approaches), Robins places the Humboldt-Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in historical context and calls for its reexamination in the light of transformational grammar. Walz compares and speculates on the differential brain-wave responses of one bilingual subject to "equivalent" sentences with "complicated" German and "less complicated" English syntax. Pinxten asks to what extent the most fundamental cognitive (epistemic) concepts are universal and proceeds to check by taking the Piagetian model of space and searching for these concepts in a set of studies on the thinking of Chinese, Africans, American Indians, pre-Socratic Egyptians, and Greeks. Brughgraeve asks whether thinking can exist without language (is the distinction between man and the other animals qualitatively disjunctive or rather a continuum?), criticizes Schaff's equation of thinking and language, and reviews experiments with animals on discrimination and generalization. Drawing on the parable of 'The Elephant and the Blind Men,' Van Geert sees the Whorfian hypothesis as a false problem and offers experimental evidence that much of what has been described as linguistic relativism may actually be "teaching relativism" imposed by sociopolitical processes of control over an "official image of reality."

In Part III (Epistemological and Methodological Aspects of Relativism), Gipper offers

evidence that Whorf was wrong in claiming that the Hopi conception of time differs radically from Standard Average European. Vermeersch, as a logical empiricist, seeks to formulate an approach to the question of how much any particular language is a constraint upon human perception, and vice versa. Beluffi notes that psychiatry has been composed of a series of metalanguages imposed on the differences between everyday language and the language of afflicted persons—often imposed repressively as justificatory schemes for social intervention and control—yet traditional psychiatric theories have not dealt effectively with language-use, the heart of which is conversation (*das Gespräch*). He proposes Binswanger's *Daseinsanalyse*, inspired by the role of language-use in the creation of shared social realities (*Weltlichkeiten*), as a humanistic alternative. Laszlo's concern is with the Whorfian relativity evidenced by the fragmentation of contemporary science and the difficulties in communicating across specialty boundaries at interdisciplinary meetings. His personal experience suggests that those difficulties can be mitigated when persons have familiarity with general-systems theory as a metalanguage. Sharing Laszlo's concern, De Mey brings Whorf and Kuhn together to reveal how the incommensurability of paradigms and the untranslatability of languages presents a specific threat to the public nature of science. Boullart asks to what extent different linguistic and cultural systems may be incompatible and, in order to assess the possible range of relativism involved, develops a general theory of incompatibility and incomparability in which three distinct forms of relativism are differentiated. Stemmer is concerned with early-childhood language acquisition, particularly ostensive definition and the processes of generalization, which, he finds, offer tentative support for the weak version of the Whorfian hypothesis. And finally, Cipolla analyzes the qualities of TV in relation to primary and secondary socialization and diglossia in order to weigh the possible effects of viewer competence upon other forms of language competence and our perceptions of ourselves (roles) and our environment (commitment and authority).

In summary, these papers bring much suggestive thought, considerable debate, some conceptual clarifications, a little evidence, and a bit of social action into the human drama that it is all about. The issues of freedom and constraint, universalism and relativism, of course, remain.

Aboriginal Cognition: Retrospect and Prospect. G. E. Kearney and D. W. McElwain, eds. Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Psychology Series, 1. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities, 1977. 418 pp. \$23.00 (cloth), \$13.00 (paper).

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In May of 1974 a "cognition symposium" held at the Biennial Meeting of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies brought together researchers to discuss issues in cross-cultural psychology as well as particular studies involving Australian aboriginal groups. The volume reviewed here contains 28 revised papers prepared originally for that symposium by some 35 participants. The bulk of contributions present methods and findings from field studies, although six participants invited from outside Australia (Richard Brislin, Tom Ciborowski, Leonard Doob, Jacqueline Goodnow, Udai Pareek, and Harry Triandis) deal with general methodological, theoretical, and ethical topics.

The background and purposes of the symposium are outlined briefly in an introduction by the editors. As they indicate, the choice of a title is somewhat arbitrary, indicating more a preference for vocabulary than a uniform focus on distinctively cognitive problems. The aboriginal focus is taken to include mainland populations who so define themselves. Of 17 field studies, six are located in the Northern Territory, four in Queensland, four in South Australia, and two in the western desert. The book provides a useful index organized according to authors, subjects, places, and psychological tests.

All of the papers are concerned with questions that arise from the application of psychological methods to societal problems afflicting Aborigines (a revealing index of the severity of these problems is given by an estimated decline in the Aboriginal population by a factor of six over the last 130 years). Keywords here are 'intervention' and 'evaluation'—words surrounded by a host of methodological and ethical quandries. The discussion of these issues in this volume is edifying for researchers who consider their work to have potential benefit for people with whom they have done fieldwork.

Most of these papers address issues related to education. The underlying assumption is that schooling is a primary avenue to desired socio-cultural change. Many of the studies reported