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The Legacy of Postmodernism: The Heightened Power of Lexicon over Syntax

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Abstract

This paper is composed of three parts: part one deals with the trends of language study, the interest of philosophers in determining the meanings of ‘ meaning ’, sentential meaning versus pragmatic meaning, and the powerful role of words in conducting social affairs, wielding political leverage, and expressing imagistic fancies in poetry. The second part, drawing on Vygotsky’s (1973) views, seeks the genetic roots of thought and speech. The third part focuses on discussion regarding external speech, egocentric speech, and inner speech. This part also highlights differences between Vygotsky’s view and Piaget’s view regarding the nature and functions of these parts of speech.

Keywords: Meaning; Postmodernism; Vygotsky; Piaget

1. Introduction

Those who are interested in language study and language teaching cannot help wondering at oft-repeated swings of the pendulum of research and pragmatics of language teaching during the past decades, leaving them scratching their heads at the sharp contrasts in the interests and methods of study adopted by linguistics, psychologists and pedagogues. Very briefly, some language scholars have focused on the structures of language at the negligence of meaning, some have tilted towards the significance of meaning over syntax. Some have argued against the separation of meaning and form, positing the view that the content and form are inseparably intertwined. Those who have stood up for the significance of meaning in

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language study have bickered over the question what aspects of meaning should be addressed and which ones should be ignored. The position adopted by Chomsky towards propositional meaning of the sentence gave rise to a controversy which was later captured by the term ‘ psychological reality of linguistic rules, ’: is the meaning residing in the sentence real, or is the meaning in the mind of the speaker who is considerate of the exigencies of the context of the interaction real? Which of these two – semantics or pragmatics – is psychologically real? It depends upon one’s theoretical position to come up with an answer to the question posed. Chomsky, committed to finding out the working of man’s brain, has been interested in linguistic competence, the meaning of isolated, de-contextualized sentence. On the other hand, the advocates of functional linguistics have been engaged with performance, the meaning of utterance which is affected by contextual variables. No matter in which camp of thought one belongs, in either case it is the word that is conductor of the verbal orchestra.

Almost a hundred years ago, Vygotsky (1973) proclaimed that the word is ‘ the unit of thought, ’ investing the word with power that transcends the linguistic border and enter into a great many other domains of politics, sociology, psychology, literature, etc. where language serves as the most important artifact in the relations between human beings. However, for the word, the counterpart of syntax, to ascend the high position of significance in language studies and social interactions several decades had to elapse. Why is the word attributed great weight in language studies in postmodernist era? What are the casual factors of the heightened value of the word over syntax in the beginning of the third millennium? Is it a matter of fashion, an example of pendulum swing in linguistic speculations; that is, the attention paid to the word is an act of redemption, redressing the negligence that had beset lexical knowledge during the heyday of structuralism? Is it because of the exigencies of technological advancement in verbal communication in our modern time? We will take up this question in the following sections of the paper:

2. Meaning the Concern of Philosophers and Linguists

The study of meaning has long been in the precinct of philosophers who have proved influential in the thinking of linguists. Philosophers, however, have had their own set positions regarding the nature of meaning, each dancing to a different drummer. For example, to Carnap, Firth, and Quine, meaning is ‘ the position of word in the conceptual pattern ’ of the speaker (Lyons, 1987, p.156). The second group (including Morris, Stevenson, Grice, Katz) thinks of meaning as an idea, feeling, or motion conveyed by

the word. The third group, like Wittgenstein, Austin, and Searle regards meaning as special acts, focusing on the function of the word. With the shift of attention from structure to meaning in language studies, we find words gaining added weight in man's verbal interaction. Indeed, the scene was set with Chomsky's generative transformational grammar, in which a distinction was made between deep structure and surface structure, the former carrying the meaning of the sentence. However, note should be taken that semantics, concerned with the meaning of the sentence, is different from pragmatics, dealing with the meaning of utterance (cf. Smith & Wilson, 1979, p. 172; Lyons, 1981, p.30; Palmer, 1981, p.8). Whereas in the first case, the meaning resides within the sentence, the pragmatic meaning is contingent on the situational context. Many of the propositions to which some of the theorists and practitioners of linguistic semantics and pragmatics are committed are mutually inconsistent. Levinson (1983, pp. 1-34) lists some of them:

i) that semantics has to do with meaning and pragmatics with use (Carnap, 1955);

ii) that semantics has to do with competence, and pragmatics with performance (cf. Kempson, 1975, pp. 206-310, and 1977, p.73; Smith & Wilson, 1979, p. 148);

iii) that semantics has to do with the conventional, and pragmatics with the non-conventional, aspects of meaning (cf. Wilson, 1975);

iv) that semantics is a matter of rules, and pragmatics of tendencies, principles, maxims or strategies (cf. Leech, 1983, p. 5);

v) that semantics deals with truth-conditional, and pragmatics with non-truth conditional, meaning;

vi) that semantics deal with literal, and pragmatics with non-literal meaning;

vii) that semantics deal with context-independent, and pragmatics with context-dependent, meaning.

The list is far from being complete, but it is sufficiently representative to drive home that meaning is a fuzzy notion, and that words are entrusted with a grave task to perform in the process of verbal transactions between interlocutors. In linguistic parlance, words in themselves are tags to identify objects, ideas, actions or characteristics. We look them up in a dictionary to find out the meaning(s) they have. But once we intend to express our thoughts, intentions, feelings, tendencies, we put them to uses not warranted by truth-conditional semantics. We invest our words with added power of expression, enliven them with rhetorical tropes and energize them with sensual tones, hence creating new realms of communication with our fellow human beings.

Language, a very important artifact in genesis of human mind, is composed of two major components: syntax and words. Syntax, except for few cases such as cleft sentences, embedding, or fronting has little maneuvering latitude in the transition of verbal subtleties. It is the lexical component of the speaker's grammar that rules the roost. To this effect, Bakhtin (1987) has observed in *The Dialogic Imagination*: "All words have the 'taste' of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context in which it has lived its socially charged life". The notion is blatantly obvious to belabor the case. Each word, for instance, *friend*, *comrade*, *crony*, *pal*, *mate*, *fellow*, *chap*, to mention a few, has a halo of affective domain surrounding it. One can easily ruffle or smooth the features of verbal partner by using apparently synonymous words in different situations and under different conditions. Joseph Addison (*The Spectator* No. 416) has aptly observed that "words, when well chosen, have so great force in them that a description often gives us more lively than the sight of things themselves". Indeed, it is through words that we flex our linguistic muscles; at the same time, it often happens that words exercise authority on us.

Psychologically speaking, the words used in communication between interlocutors speak for their educational level, ethnic group, rational stereotype, religious orientation, social rank and so forth. The language denotes the man; coarse or refined character finds its expression naturally in coarse or refined phraseology. We cannot think unless we have words; words are the links that connect us with people and phenomena around us. Thought and word, like content and form, are inextricably interwoven. It is wrong to assume that we first have ideas and feelings and then put them into a verbal framework. The fact is that we think in words and by means of words. Words spur on thought, and thought are enlivened by the types of words we use. Confucius's remark is so telling – for one word, a man is often deemed to be wise, and for one word he is often considered to be foolish. I can throw the concept at a higher pitch and say that for one word a man is spared his life, for another, he is sent to the gallows. Many a time the history remembers a leader not for what he did, but for what he said. Joseph Conrad once said: "Give me the right word and the right accent and I will move the world".

It is worth nothing that no one uses all the lexical items in his life time. Every speaker, depending on his profession, level of education and social caste, appropriates a certain group of words and manages his social and personal affairs through them. The origin of commonly used words is forgotten, but each word was at first a stroke of genius, and obtained

currency because for the moment it symbolized the word for the first speaker and to the hearer. This notion is proposed by Emerson, the American poet, who I think, hit the nail on the head when he observed that ‘language is fossilized poetry’ as idioms are dead metaphors. Men of letters, especially poets, have had to coin new words in order to capture their fleeting fancies. I assume that they have thrilled at the birth of new words, the child brain of their genius; the new expression serve to render their names eternal because they mean new thoughts, new version of life, and new patterns of living. Poets are credited with their willingness to come up with new expressions; they are lauded for ripping the tight strictures of the language in a bid to express their ideas and feelings freely. They are the forerunners for the campaign of freedom of speech and a source of intimidation for the leaders of closed societies. To be able to think freely is to call in question a great many acts of atrocity ravaging the social structures with the consequence of divesting the interest groups of all that they have unjustly usurped. Nathaniel Hawthorne has observed that “words so innocent and powerless as they are, as standing in a dictionary, how potent or good and evil they become in the hands of one who knows how to combine them (*American Notebooks*). To this effect, Oliver Wendell Holmes says “A word is the skin of a living thought and may vary greatly in color and content according to the circumstances and time in which it is used. Language is a solemn thing: it grows out of life, out of its agonies and ecstasies, its wants and weariness. Every language is a temple in which the soul of those who speak it is enshrined (*Personal Notes*). Many a time, we are told that words are tools which carve concepts out of experience and then we use words to express them. I think we have made a full circle by making links between philosophy and ontology, between the exterior and interior, between ‘you’ and ‘me’, directionally being from inter-organism to intra-organism. According to Lakoff and Thompson (1975), our conceptual system determines the ways we think and act; it is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. To explain the authors’ statement, I may say that the way we conceive ideas is individualistic as the way of one understands and interprets the phenomenon is unique to him. Each man, therefore, has a measure of his own for the realities daily life, and the words he uses represent his perspectives, viewpoints in the states and activities he is engrossed in. The apt remark by Montaigne is noteworthy “The word is half his that speaks and half his that hears it” (*Personal Notes*). In the face of it, one may wonder how then it becomes possible for the communication to hold on between people involved in verbal transactions, especially when they are alien to each other. May answer, drawing on the studies on child language acquisition, is that we compensate for linguistic shortfalls by

making use of some contextual hunches, particularly linguistic and partially situational in nature, such as paralinguistic aspects of voice quality, the speed, loudness and overall pitch of speech, proxemics (social distance), kinesics (body movements), facial expressions, deictic, pauses, murmuring all these help for communication to hold on between interactionists when the right word remains unavailable. The more the word is potent, the more catching it is. A loaded word spreads not by force and the sword but by its own richness and expressiveness. It happens that a word makes a dent in the memory because of euphemism, e. g. ‘indisposed’ instead of ‘sick,’ ‘pass away’ instead of ‘die,’ ‘the garden of the deceased,’ instead of ‘grave yard,’ ‘sanitation workers,’ instead of ‘street sweepers’ , or because of the collection of words, for example, ‘spick and span,’ ‘tone and toner,’ ‘first and foremost,’ ‘fish and chips,’ ‘every nook and cranny,’ ‘flesh and blood,’ ‘hanky-panky,’ ‘hit or miss,’ ‘hide and seek’. Idiomatic expressions, too, have been seen to hit big in verbal habits: ‘ a flash in the pan,’ ‘to bury the hatchet,’ ‘to fix somebody’s wagon,’ ‘to add insult to injury,’ ‘to beard the lion in his den,’ ‘to have too many irons in the fire,’ ‘to spread oneself too thin,’ ‘to hide one’s light under a bushel. Rousseau in his *Origin of Inequality* has put forth an intriguing question, namely, which was most necessary: the existence of society to the invention of language, or the invention of language to the establishment of society? The question is not unlike the puzzling question: Was it first the hen that laid an egg, or was it the egg that was hatched and a hen broke out of the shell? I do not pretend that I have the answer at my finger’s tip, but I would like to take a crack at the question posed by Rousseau (*Personal Notes*).

Informed by Vygotsky’s approach to the genesis of human’s mind, I venture to say that the existence of society was necessary for the invention of language. The rationale behind my position lies in the fact that you first need to have a company to use language to connect to him. In the light of this argument it is reasonable to assume that the versatility of modes of communication through language is a reflection of the versatility of social contexts. It is the social/situational context that requires a particular register, a particular discourse, a particular rhetorical pattern. Interestingly enough, a person in his private seclusion absorbed in his reflective thought, interacts with imagined persons, in different situations, on different topics, with different moods. What I am driving at is that the imaginative settings of interaction by oneself give rise to a multitude of utterances incommensurate with the particular social context in which he is involved. It is not difficult to understand the onus task words perform at revealing the whys and wherefores of the social systems operative at different eras within different ethnic groups. To illustrate the point in case would require a plenty of space,

but I may quote Sapir (1949) in a summary fashion, saying that human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation. A warning is in order here: historically speaking, language changes imperceptibly during the life span of an individual; many a decade has to pass before the speakers of a language wise up to some subtle changes occurring in the structures of a language. Sapir’s (1949) remark will be enlightening when we come to think of language basically in terms of its vocabulary. As the years go by, we witness the birth of new words, expanding and dwindling word meaning, prevailing idiomatic expressions and emergence of new combinations of existing lexical items. Obviously, the changes taking place in the lexical knowledge of the speakers of a language are not haphazard; they indicate the changes in the structures and functions of the society, hence in the conceptual systems of the speakers. Thought and words move along hand in hand.

Words of broad application will require their particular context in order for the reader to arrive at a right interpretation. This is not true with regard to the words used in science, which are restricted in their application. Generally speaking, in scientific texts as well as legal documents there is one-to-one relationship between word and meaning to forestall any misunderstanding. Words in literature, however, because of their devious nature of relationship between word and meaning, usually allow the mind of the reader to take flight and tinker with different interpretations. Words in science lead the reader direct to the meaning; consequently, one can hardly tolerate reading a scientific text twice; books on science become so rapidly obsolete, but words infused with intentional/pragmatic meaning of the writer in literature enjoy longer longevity, yielding fresh enchantment at repeated readings. To this effect, Thorndike has posited a view which is appealing: “Colors fade, temples crumble, empires fall, but words endure” (*Personal Notes*).

To put the finishing touches to the first part of this paper, I may quote Whorf's (1956) view in *Language, Thought, and Reality*, as saying:

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language. The categories and types we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds - and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut up nature, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in the way – an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language (p.125).

It is worth noting that Whorf's position on the issue reeks of innatism of Chomskyan School of thought – Man is endowed with an innate mechanism of language acquisition, and is concerned with the studies of language syntax. The acquisition of words, a socio-cultural phenomenon, is an exogenic matter, related to the speaker's external world. Words have evolved through the ages in lockstep with human kind. In the third millennium we witness the power of words outweighing the significance of syntactical knowledge. Indeed, the words we use are the DNA of our identity.

3. The Genetic Roots of Thought and Word: Vygotskian Perspective

Language is a basic means of communication between human beings; however, the onus of the process is on lexemes. They are expressive of shades of meaning which can foster intimacy or stoke hostility among people. Thought and words are fused into each other; thought, if not embodied in word, vanishes, and word, depleted of thought, is a mere jangling noise.

Vygotsky (1973), addressing the genetic roots of thought and speech, posits the view that the relationship between thought and speech during their development undergoes a great many changes, their two growth curves may go side by side for a time then diverge again. This applies to both phylogeny (throughout history) and ontology (in an individual's life span).

In animals, speech and thought spring from different roots and develop along different lines. With animals, rudimentary thinking in using tools is due to the mechanics of instinct and a matter of 'trial-and-error'. Their phonetic/affective expressions, far from being intellectual, denote only desires. Yerkes (1916) has observed that vocal reactions are very frequent and varied in young chimpanzees. Their vocal apparatus is well developed and functions as well as man's vocal apparatus. What is missing is the

tendency to imitate sounds. Their mimicry is almost entirely dependent on optical stimuli; they copy actions but not words. Yerkes's experiments showed that anthropoids do not have anything like human speech, even in embryo.

Vygotsky (1973) analyzed several studies of ape language and intellect in a bid to elucidate the relationship between thinking and speech in the phylogenetic development of thought and speech and came up with the following findings:

1. Thought and speech have different genetic roots.
2. The two functions develop along different lines, independently of each other.
3. There is no clear-cut and constant correlation between them.
4. Anthropoids display an intellect somewhat like man's in certain respects (the embryonic use of tools) and a language somewhat like man's in totally different respects (the phonetic aspect of their speech, its release function, the beginning of a social function).
5. The close correspondence between thought and speech characteristics of man is absent in anthropoids.
6. In the phylogeny of thought and speech, a pre-linguistic phase in the development of thought and a pre-intellectual phase in the development of speech are clearly discernible (p.41).

Ontogenetically, the relation between thought and speech development is much more intricate and obscure, but here, too, are two separate lines of development springing from different genetic roots. With human children there is a pre-speech phase of thought development. During this phase of development which corresponds to the 10th, 11th, and 12th month of child's life, the child's first inventions occur; they are exactly like those of chimpanzees, hence called *chimpanzoid age*. With children before speech appears, there is the thinking involved in the use of tools, similar to the ways chimpanzees handle objects, and actions are purposeful. The early stages of speech development – babbling, crying, even his first words – have nothing to do with the development of thinking. These manifestations are generally regarded as an emotional form of behavior. In the pre-intellectual stage of speech development (the first year of child's life) the social functions of speech (inarticulate sounds, movements, etc.) is apparent. In the children less than one year old, thinking and speech follow two separate lines of development. At about the age of two, the curves of development of thought and speech join to initiate a new form of behavior and the child makes the great discovery of his life – *Everything has a name*. This crucial instant, when speech begins to serve intellect, and thought begins to be spoken, has two hallmarks: 1) the child, being curious about words, asks questions about

every new thing, and 2) there is a rapid increase in his vocabulary. Now we may recapitulate what we said:

- 1) Thought and speech have different roots in their ontogenetic development.
- 2) During the first year of the child life, the two functions of speech, social function and release function of emotions, are observed in phylogenetic development.
- 3) In the speech development of the child there is a pre-intellectual stage, and in his thought development a pre-linguistic stage.
- 4) Up to a certain point of time these two lines of development meet whereupon thought becomes verbal and speech rational.

Regarding the sequence of the kinds of speech development, Vygotsky (1973, p. 46) finds the following three stages: external speech, egocentric speech, and inner speech. This pattern of speech development, according to Vygotsky (1973), follows the same course as the development of all other mental operations involving the use of signs, such as counting or mnemonic memorizing. Vygotsky observes that the mental operations generally develop in four stages:

1. The first is the primitive or natural stage, corresponding to pre-intellectual speech or pre-verbal thought.
2. The next stage is called *naïve physics* – the child's experience with the physical properties of his own body and of objects around him, and application of this experience to use tools.
3. The third stage is distinguished by the use of external signs as aid in the solution of internal problems, e.g. the child counts on his fingers. This phase is characterized by egocentric speech.
4. The fourth stage is called the *ingrowth stage*. The external operation turns inward. The child begins to count in his head and uses logical memory – i.e. operates with inherent relationships. In speech development this is the final stage of inner, soundless speech. There is a constant interaction between outer and inner operation, one form effortlessly changing into other and back again. There is no sharp division between inner and external behavior, and each influences the other.

With completion of inner speech, Vygotsky (1973) considers thought and speech schematically as two interesting circles (Figure 1). In their overlapping parts, thought and speech coincides to produce what is called *verbal thought*. Verbal thought does not include all forms of thought or forms of speech. The thinking manifested in the use of tools, or better to say, 'practical intellect' in general belongs in this area.

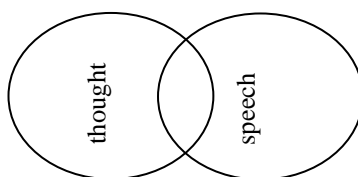


Figure 1. Thought – speech relationship in Vygotsky.

The fusion of thought and speech in adults and in children is limited to a circumscribed area. Non-verbal thought and non-intellectual speech do not participate in this fusion.

By way of concluding the discussion, we say that Vygotsky, in his attempt to trace the genealogy of thought and speech, finds that in the child the roots and the developmental course of intellect differ from those of speech, that is, initially thought is non-verbal and speech non-intellectual. At a certain point of time, the two lines meet – speech becomes rational and thought verbal. At this crucial point, the child discovers that everything has a name, and begins to ask questions about objects around him. Regarding inner speech, Vygotsky maintains that inner speech with particular functions branches off from the child's external speech (which of its nature is social) and egocentric speech (which is used by the child to solve the problem he is faced with). If we compare the early development of speech and thought, which develops along separate lines both in animals and very young children with the development of inner speech and verbal thought, we realize that the nature of development is from biological to socio-historical. It should be borne in mind that the verbal thought is not an innate form of behavior; rather it is determined by historical-cultural processes. This is the crux of Vygotsky's philosophy, the truth of it is acclaimed by the scholars in postmodernist era.

4. Thought and Word

Earlier investigations, based on the assumption that thought and word were isolated, proved a misgiving. Also, the method of analysis, seeking to break up verbal thought into component elements (i.e. thought and word) turned out a naïve idea as well. In alignment with Vygotsky's position, we contend that the whole is always different from the combining elements. Vygotsky's example of water, composed of hydrogen and oxygen, drives home the point in case. The approach Vygotsky adopted towards the study of verbal thought was different from the analysis that broke up the verbal thought into component elements- *thought* and *word*. Rather than focusing

on the *elements* of the compound, Vygotsky opted for the *units* in the process of analysis, each of which retains all the properties of the whole. According to Vygotsky, the unit in verbal thought is *word meaning*. To put it simply, word belongs in linguistics and intellect; it represents such a fusion of thought and language that it is hard to tell whether verbal thought is a phenomenon of speech or a phenomenon of thought. Also, we should note that word meanings undergo changes throughout history.

This position flies in the face of the old schools of psychology which regarded the relationship between the word and meaning as an associative bond. The word calls to mind its content as the overcoat of a friend, as Vygotsky puts it, reminds us of that friend. It was argued that the association between mind and meaning may grow stronger and weaker, but it cannot change its psychological nature. In linguistics, semantics treated word meaning as an association between a word's sound and its content. Linguistics did not realize that in the historical evolution of language the very structure of meaning and its psychological nature also change. In Wuerzburg School, the connection between a word and its meaning was also considered a simple associative bond. In Gestalt psychology, the most progressive psychological school, the situation was not very different. Thus, all the psychological schools studied word and meaning without any reference to development.

The discovery that word meaning evolves led to the study of thought and speech out of the blind alley: word meanings are dynamic rather than static formation; word meanings change as the child develops; word meanings change in the various ways as in which thought changes. The relation of thought to word is not a fixed phenomenon, but a process, a continual movement back and forth – from thought to word and from word to thought. According to Vygotsky (1973, p.125), thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them. Both the semantic aspect and the phonetic aspect of speech form a true unity, have their own laws of movement. The external and the semantic aspects of speech develop in opposite direction – one from the particular to whole, word to sentence, and the other from the whole to the particular, from sentence to word. Although the vocal/external and the semantic/meaning aspects of speech move in reverse directions, they are in close union. Nevertheless, the structure of speech does not simply mirror the structure of thought. Thought undergoes many changes as it turns into speech; through the influence of words, thought finds its reality and form. Another interesting point, demonstrated by Piaget (1923), is that the child uses subordinate clause with *because*, *although*, etc. long before he grasps the structure of meaning corresponding to these syntactic forms. The implication is that grammar precedes logic.

However, the discrepancy does not exclude union but is necessary for union.

Vygotsky (1973) argues that the relationship between thought and word cannot be understood without understanding the psychological nature of inner speech. According to Vygotsky, inner speech is for oneself; external speech is for others; with external speech, thought turns into word; with inner speech, the process is reversed – speech turns into thought (Figure 2). Consequently, their structures undergo changes. Inner speech follows a developmental stage of egocentric speech. Both speeches fulfill similar intellectual functions, but egocentric speech disappears at school age when inner speech begins to develop. To put it simply, egocentric speech changes into inner speech.

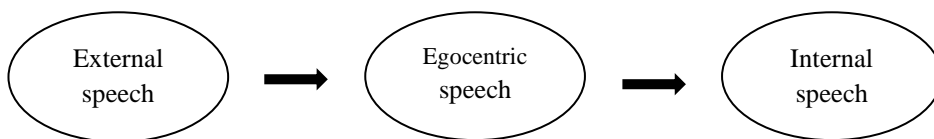


Figure 2. Phases of speech development derived from Vygotsky.

Thus, it is safe to argue that egocentric speech provides the key to the study of inner speech which of its nature is inaccessible to experimentation and observation.

Now it is time we addressed some differences in Piaget’s and Vygotsky’s theory regarding egocentric speech and inner speech:

Piaget’s Position. Egocentric speech or introverted thought is a direct expression of child’s fancies and day dreaming. It is a compromise of autism and socialization. As the child grows, socialization progresses and autism recedes. The child does not adapt himself to the thinking of adults, and this makes his talk incomprehensible to them. Egocentric speech has no function in the child’s realistic thinking or activity; it drops to zero at the threshold of school age. It has no future.

Vygotsky’s position. Egocentric speech is a transition from inter-psychoic to intra-psychoic functions, from the social activity of the child to his more individualized activity – a pattern of development which is common to all the higher psychological functions. The function of egocentric speech is similar to that of inner speech. Egocentric speech does not merely accompany the child’s activity; it serves mental orientation, conscious understanding; it helps in overcoming difficulties; it is a speech for oneself. Its fate is different from that described by Piaget; it develops along a rising,

not a declining, curve. In the end, it becomes inner speech. It is interesting to note that the frequency of egocentric and its structural characteristics develop in reverse direction. While the frequency of egocentric speech keep falls and reaches zero at school age, the structural characteristics of it become more pronounced. The implication of the statement is that egocentric speech, as we said before, provides the key to the understanding of inner speech, i.e. inner speech becomes accessible for experimentation and observation. With the diminishing aspect of vocalization of egocentric speech, we witness the growth of the functional and structural traits of inner speech; inner speech (speech for oneself) cannot find expression in external speech (speech for others).

There is disagreement between Vygotsky and Piaget regarding the social nature of egocentric speech. While Vygotsky maintains that egocentric speech is of its nature social, Piaget holds that the child's egocentric talk is for and with himself. To illustrate the point in case, Vygotsky (1973) gives the following example:

I am sitting at my desk talking to a person who is behind me and whom I cannot see; he leaves the room without my noticing him, and I continue to talk under the illusion that he listens and understands. Outwardly, I am talking with myself and for myself, but psychologically my speech is social (p.138).

Regarding the peculiarities of inner speech, Vygotsky (1973, p. 138-142) posits the following:

- 1) Inner speech must be regarded, not as speech minus sound, but as an entirely speech function.
- 2) Its main distinguishing trait is its peculiar syntax. Compared with external speech, inner speech appears disconnected and incomplete.
- 3) In inner speech the context is clear; therefore, it becomes possible to convey all thoughts, feelings, and even a whole chain of reasoning by one word.
- 4) Inner speech functions as a draft not only in written but also in oral speech.
- 5) Psychologically, inner speech consists of predicates only; we know what we are thinking about, i.e. we always know the subject and the situation.
- 6) With syntax and sound reduced to a minimum, meaning in inner speech is more than ever in the forefront. Inner speech works with semantics, not with phonetics.
- 7) In inner speech there is the predominance of the *sense* of a word over its meaning. The sense of a word is the sum of all psychological events aroused in our consciousness by the word. The

word acquires its sense from the context in which it appears. Meaning remains stable throughout the changes of the sense.

- 8) In inner speech there is the predominance of sentence over word, and of context over sentence.
- 9) The senses of different words combine and unite – a process governed by different laws from those governing combinations of meanings. To say it differently, the senses of different words flow into one another so that the earlier ones are contained in the later ones. For instance, the whole sense of a work in literature is contained in just one name, i.e. the title of the work, like *Hamlet*, *Don Quixote*, and *Anna Karenina*. In inner speech this phenomenon reaches its peak. With people in close psychological context, words acquire special meaning understood only by the initiated.

5. Summary of the Discussion

To recapitulate very briefly what we said in the preceding pages, we may say that to association psychology thought and word were united by external bond. Gestalt psychology introduced the concept of structural bonds. All the other theories grouped themselves around two poles – either the behaviorist concept of thought as speech minus sound or the idealistic view, held by the Wuerzburg school and Bergson, that thought could be ‘pure’ unrelated to language, and that it was distorted by words. All these theories inclined either toward pure naturalism or extreme idealism; they studied thought and speech without any reference to their developmental history. The relation between thought and word is a living process. A word devoid of thought is a dead thing, and a thought not embodied in words remains a shadow. Goethe once remarked “In the beginning was the word”. To this, Faust replied “In the beginning was the deed”. Vygotsky, in a complementary gesture, has posited his view “In the beginning was the deed and the word is the end of development, crowning the deed” (Personal Notes).

Both thought and language are the key to understanding the nature of human consciousness. Words play a central role not only in the development of thought but in the historical growth of consciousness as a whole. Ingenuity is not needed to realize that the child begins with word on his way of acquiring his native language. In treating psychopathic personality, the psychologist attends to the words the patient utters in response to the psychologist’s verbal stimuli. In poetry, the beauty of expressions hinges on the new words and the ways they are combined to voice the poet’s ideas and feeling. Indeed, in everyday verbal translation it the words that serve as a conveyor-belt to transport the intentions of

speakers from one to another. A word is a microcosm of human consciousness.

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