

## An Approach to Psychotherapy<sup>2009</sup>, Part II

by

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In this paper, the male gender will apply to male and female.  
The nominal pronoun will refer to the first author.  
The plural pronoun will apply to either.

We ended Part I of this paper in this somewhat unusual way:

**It is now with you and my world and everything in front of me, that a very interesting thing happens next. We believe that to understand what we are intimating here, is critical to a Psychotherapist in his professional work.**

What is this “a very interesting thing happens next?”

It is a very critical *change* to your reality.

This is a *change* that takes place because:

**We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language. The categories and types that 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 a 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 nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way - an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, BUT ITS TERMS ARE ABSOLUTELY OBLIGATORY; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees.**

**This fact is very significant for modern science, for it means no individual is free to describe nature with absolutely impartiality but is constrained to certain modes of interpretation even while he thinks himself most free.**

**John B. Carroll:** *Language, Thought and Reality* Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf MIT Press 1979 page 213.

**We are inclined to think of language simply as a technique of expression, and not to realize that language first of all is a classification and arrangement of the stream of sensory experience which results in a certain world-order, a certain segment of the world that is easily expressible by the type of symbolic means that language employs.**

**John B. Carroll:** *Language, Thought and Reality* Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf MIT Press 1979 page 55.

If we accept the above, that language acts as a “classification and arrangement of the stream of sensory experience” and it determines that “**We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language**” it logically follows that it is language that is configuring and re-forming our reality according to its fashion. This is a process over which we have no say.

The result of this is:

**Whorf as I read him makes two cardinal hypotheses.**

**First, that all higher levels of thinking are dependent on language.**

**Second, the structure of the language one habitually uses influences the manner in which one understands his environment. The picture of the universe shifts from tongue to tongue.**

**Stuart Chase:** *Language, Thought and Reality* Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf MIT Press 1979 page v.

This above statement is a powerful challenge to the witness of common sense that it is we ourselves who determine how we understand things. However, the quote is very clear. It is that “the **structure of language one habitually uses influences the manner in which one understands his environment.**” It is therefore saying that our semantics or understanding of any thing is a function of our language structures.

For me, it is as if I was at that time in human history when everyone believed that the earth is flat and then to be told:

No, the world is not flat.

It is round.

This brings me to the time when I drove out of the city of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan to drive to the town of Swift Current. I was now driving in the Canadian prairies. After an hour across the cornfields, it seemed I had not moved at all. Trust me, as I looked out of my car, **THE WORLD IS FLAT!**

Then, we have all too many cases of people who smoke when they do not want to, nail bite when they wish to stop, are insomniac when they wish to sleep or rage when they do not want to and so forth. Given that they clearly are not in charge, then who or what is? This is the paradox of our being. We live in the delusion that we are in charge but the world is resplendent with the evidence that we are not. We think that by our thoughts we can change our lives, yet the evidence before us seems to be the contrary.

So, it would seem true, that:

**Speakers of Chinese dissect nature and the universe differently from Western speakers.**

**Stuart Chase:** *Language, Thought and Reality* Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf MIT Press 1979 page v.

To compound the above:

**Whether one likes it or not, one *must* interpret other people, who in turn interpret other people (often) interpreting still other people, and**

**so on. Interpreting of others interpreting still others are not a matter of choice or chance because one so frequently and spontaneously interprets other people in multiple embedded and iterated sequences of attitudes that one comes to think of explicit metathoughts in similar sequences.**

Radu J. Bogdan: *Minding Minds* The MIT Press 2000 page 153.

**Without interpretation we don't understand anything.**

**Uta Ranke-Heinemann:** *Putting Away Childish Things* HarperSanFrancisco 1998 page 99.

**We never see a naked objective fact, only interpreted facts, and in every act of perception we never stop interpreting**

Uta Ranke-Heinemann: *Putting Away Childish Things* HarperSanFrancisco 1971 page 100.

**We are constantly interpreting reality: that is the only way we can process it, make sense of it constructively.**

**Donald Spoto:** *The Hidden Jesus A NEW LIFE* St. Martin's Griffen New York 1998 page 64.

If what Linguistics says here is true, that we are all the time interpreting unconsciously, it will bring with it a very interesting consequence. All interpretation takes place with, by and in language. If this is the case, then our reality and our semantics unfolds out of language.

If I point to an item and ask you what is it you see, you will tell me that you see the item by the name or label you give it, chair, table, chalk, blackboard and so forth. This is what you see, chair, table, chalk, blackboard and so forth.

Now we would like to be specific. Let us take the item, chair. The chair is in front of you. I ask you, "Am I correct that you see a chair?" You answer would be, "Yes." "Do you really see a chair?" "Yes I do."

In our seminars, we then say, "But you do not see a chair" so a discussion now follows. It concludes when we then put to our student, "Is it true that you actually see this word in neon lights right here - **C H A I R**, in front of this?" No, you do not. So then, if you do not see **C H A I R**, then what do you see? And now comes the difficulty to enunciate what the student actually sees.

Language is the veneer over our entire reality. It is this veneer that, paradoxically, is the bedrock of our humanity:

**We human beings are human beings only in language. Because we have language, there is no limit to what we can describe, imagine, and relate. It thus permeates our whole ontogeny as individuals: from walking to politics.**

**Humberto R. Maturana & Francisco J. Varela:** *The Tree of Knowledge* The Biological Roots of Human Understanding Shambhala Publications, Inc. 1987 page 212.

Clearly there is a rider here. It concerns the matter of those of our kith and kin in humankind who, even if they have a normal IQ are limited intellectually, socially and

financially and other ways. Such conditions are functions of other variables. We shall discuss them in a later paper in this series.

Finally, from language unfolds an incredible gift:

**. . . it is in language that the self, the I, arises as the social singularity defined by the operational intersection in the human body of the recursive linguistic distinctions in which it is distinguished. This tells us that in the network of linguistic interactions in which we move, we maintain an ongoing descriptive recursion in which we call the “I.” It enables us to conserve our linguistic operation coherence and our adaptation in the domain of language.**

**Humberto R. Maturana & Francisco J. Varela:** *The Tree of Knowledge* The Biological Roots of Human Understanding Shambhala Publications, Inc. 1987 page 231.

Clearly, we would all be in a very interesting predicament if we do not have our “I.” It follows that because of the I in us, we can recognize it in others. In doing so, this then follows:

**Therefore, the identity of human social systems depends on the conservation of adaptation of human beings not only as organisms (in a general sense) but also as components of their linguistic domain.**

**Humberto R. Maturana & Francisco J. Varela:** *The Tree of Knowledge* The Biological Roots of Human Understanding Shambhala 1987 page 199.

The existence of human social systems is a corollary of the singularity of the I in us. The human social system is a function of “the network of linguistic interactions.” The singularity of I, therefore, has a pre-eminent role.

Alas there is a potential downside to all this:

**Every reflection including one on the foundation of human knowledge, invariably takes place in language, which is our distinctive way of being human and humanly active. For this reason, language is also our starting point, our cognitive instrument and our sticking point.**

**Humberto R. Maturana & Francisco J. Varela:** *The Tree of Knowledge* The Biological Roots of Human Understanding Shambhala 1987 page 26.

**5.6** *The limits of my language means the limits of my world.*

**What we cannot think, that we cannot think: we cannot therefore say what we cannot think.**

**5.62** **That the world is my world, shows itself in the fact that the limits of the language (the language which I understand) mean the limits of my world.**

**Ludwig Wittgenstein:** *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd 1988 page 149 - 151.

So, whilst it is true that because of language “there is no limit to what we can describe, imagine, and relate” it may be better that we always remember our place in the order of things. We are mortal, frail and prone to err. We can never be Gods. Our language paradoxically will see to this as indexed by Maturana, Varela and Wittgenstein.

We have constructed this paper because we can present the evidence that underpins our belief that the arena of Psychotherapy is Language. However, as they say, things are a little bit more complicated than it seems to be. We shall reveal to you how complicated it is in our next paper.