



The Child's Word Sense and Thinking Sense

by

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Never before has it been so important to learn a foreign language. If one's mother tongue is one of the world languages, it is easy to assume that this language is good enough. And this very assumption can lead to large-scale international tension and conflicts.

When the Hellenistic culture had unfolded to its broadest extent, the Hellenic people were sure they were the "right" people with the "right" language. Everyone else spoke the "wrong" language; they were barbarians or people who spoke words that could not be understood. At that time the Hellenic people had a folk-egoistic attitude and a language-egoistic attitude. Despite both of these they were able to create a noble culture. But the same folk-egoistic and language-egoistic attitudes today could lead to catastrophic conflicts that could destroy the culture involved.

Where have the different languages come from? Is there a common origin? Linguist and language historian Dr. Arnold Wadler worked relentlessly to find the common primeval tongue of the origin of humanity. We will look at two of his comparisons. The first one concerns the word for *fire* in six languages:

Latin: IGNIS

Sanskrit: AGNI

Slavic: OGONI

Eskimo: IGNEK

African: UGONI

Tasmanian: NGUNE

These words come from all five continents. The North American IGNEK resembles the Southern European IGNIS while the African UGONI and the Australian NGUNE seems closest to the Eastern European OGONI. These word relationships must have evolved from a common origin, for it is impossible that they were transferred at a later date from one to another language.

How strong the original experience of the word for fire must have been for human beings! To what extent the entire human existence was connected with fire. And what deep devotion people had for the flames of the sacrificial fires. The word that expressed the original experience and thereby pointed towards the sacrificial flames had a powerful, expressive movement that has continued for thousands of years. In all six examples we find a resemblance to the original word for fire, GN. Even in Norwegian the word for *spark* is *gnist*!

Let us follow the word *star* in the following languages:

Norwegian: STJERNE

German: STERN

English: STAR

Italian: ASTRO

Also Italian: STELLA (from the original word group:
STERLA

Greek: ASTRON, ASTER

Persian: STAREM

Armenien: ASTL

Bretagne: STERN

So far we have dealt with the Indo-Germanic language community. But Dr. Wadler discovered the same consonant group, S-T-R in the word for *star* also in a South American Indian dialect:

Patagonian: SETERE

In this word we can hear a sound that stems from the power of the original word. And the Norwegian word today “stjerne” also sounds like the original sound that prehistoric people spoke when they pointed to the stars in the sky.

Within the word groups of “fire” and “star” we can imagine some of the qualities of the original human language. In ancient times language worked so deeply and had such a magical power in human beings that it could unite them within one group soul. Independent people with personal “I” consciousness had not yet been developed.

Over time “language confusion” appeared. Language became less and less magical, more and more superficial. The movement or gesture in each word no longer pointed in the direction of what lived in the object or what worked in the object. As it is today, the movement of the word pointed more and more to something practical. The rich sound of words is increasingly removed and we end up with the flat, business words in large cities or dried out words from beaurocracy. The development of languages through the millennia has resulted in countless languages, with each language pointing to a certain sector on the surface of our consciousness. This is the real situation we face today. We must take it seriously. It is our starting point.

Today the basic quality of words remains “to point” in a direction. Words are mostly expressive movements or gestures that are heard. The fundamental structure of a language lives in the consonants. They provide the gesture of the specific object. In both of our word comparisons of *fire* and *star*, it is easy to see that the groups of consonants provide the fundamental structure with which we identify the words.

In the vowels of a word we find the soul experience that weaves in the atmosphere surrounding the structure. Interjections are usually pure vowels or diphthongs. In these words the emphasis is placed on the soul experience so that the object of the experience is not pointed to by the gesture of the word.

In every other part of speech the object appears more predominantly. It may be the action, will-sphere of the verb. It may be in the direction of the mental image or picture quality of the nouns. It may be in the feeling experience of the adjective or adverb.

Words may be specific commands, for example, “Out!” They may be replaced with a physical gesture, for example pointing to the door. They can also be inner, soul-like gestures. Or they can point nowhere and remain empty phrases.

With what do we comprehend words? We can say that we experience words with our entire being. The entire human organism is where we

comprehend words. This also includes comprehending light and colors, sounds and noise. Yet we should differentiate between the sense of sight and the sense of hearing because of their organs: the eye and the ear.

Do we comprehend the word with our sense of hearing? In each word there is a moment of tones and noise and that is comprehended with the help of the ear. Someone who is deaf understands only a small part of the tones and the noise. But he still understands the word. For what makes a word become a word is not the word's sound or the pattern of its noise but rather its pointing gesture. Deaf people can understand words by reading someone's lips or the gestures of sign language. Those who are both deaf and blind can understand language from the printed impressions on their hands. Of course, when it comes to understanding words, the deaf and blind are very restricted compared with those who can see and hear. By using a comparison we can understand how the distinctive, sensory activity we call the "word sense" takes place spontaneously as the understanding of tones and colors. It is the sense for that which makes words become words, the gesture of the words within our human, social dynamics.

In many cases a word for a certain situation can be replaced by a facial mimic, hand movements or a more complicated action. When an eyebrow is raised or the upper lip curls slightly, a language is spoken that is as clear as many words. A handshake, not to mention a kiss, can express something in the moment for which we cannot find the words.

Mimic and gestures are understood with the same sense that words are understood with, the word sense. It is natural to use the expression word sense because the words that resound in the air are the dominating field for this sense. This is an important area to be aware of because it is so easy to mix the *word sense* with the *sense of hearing* on one side or the *thinking sense* on the other side. In order to have a complete description of our senses we must include a separate thinking sense.

With thinking sense we mean the understanding of another person's thoughts, not my own thinking activity. When we comprehend another person's thought or what he means, the content appears that relates to his words and the gestures of his words. Within the thought, mental image or message that we understand from the other person, we become conscious in a way that is independent of the gestures of the words even though the word had provided the opportunity for understanding.

Let us look at the difference between the *word sense* and the *thinking sense* by making a simple comparison. We take all three senses—the sense of sight, the word sense and the thinking sense—and observe all three from the same perspective, namely: clarity or lack of clarity in understanding.

1. The Sense of Sight

A. We sit in an almost completely dark room. Barely able to see the glimmer of objects in the room, we stare and try to identify what we see. Now we use our sense of sight to its utmost. Because there is so little light even with excellent eyes we merely see unclear objects we cannot identify properly.

B. We are outside in a landscape with the sun shining brightly in the dry, clear air. Yet we are very near-sighted and have forgotten our glasses at home. Everything is blurred.

C. Or we walk in other “thoughts” and ignore the colorful world surrounding us. In this case we merely comprehend unclear sensory impressions despite the light conditions.

For the sense of sight impressions to be clear, we need the right light conditions, an organ for the sense of sight and the proper use of that sensory organ. If one or another is missing, the sensory impression becomes unclear or it disappears completely.

2. The Word Sense

A. We are together with a friend who speaks our mother tongue and we are very excited about what he will say. Yet there is a very short time for us to exchange words and our friend speaks so unclearly and quickly that we understand only a couple of words and are therefore in doubt concerning what he really said. Did he say something else?

B. We are together with a guest who speaks a foreign language that we barely understand. He speaks slowly and clearly. Every sound is completely clear, yet we understand nothing though we try to our limits. That they are clear words is not hard to accept. Our word sense is that well developed. But it is not developed well enough to understand more than: *abracadabra*.

C. We sit with two friends who speak our mother tongue. But we sit in “other thoughts” because what they are talking about does not interest

us very much. We cannot avoid hearing that they speak. A word here and there is understood by accident. For the most part it is babble babble.

In order for our word sense to comprehend clear expressions, three conditions must be present: clearly spoken words, the correspondingly developed sense of words and attention to use the sense of word.

3. The Sense of Thinking

A. We are together with a friend. He defines the meaning of something. He speaks slowly and clearly. We understand every word he says. His word sense works perfectly, but we still do not understand what he means. He says one thing and then he says the opposite, then he says something a little bit differently, only to repeat the first. What in the world does he really mean? What he says is clear enough. But what is the thought in it? It disappears in a grey cloud. Where there is no clear thought, a very well developed sense of thought with heightened attention can still not understand anything.

B. Two friends have worked for years on Hegel's logic. A third person enters who has never worked with Hegel or any other philosophy. He listens to their conversation in total amazement. Every word may be clearly and slowly spoken, every thought may be well reflected, well defined and in every way perfectly clear, and still the third person comprehends nothing other than words, clear words, but merely words. The third person's sense of thinking is not developed sufficiently.

C. The last case entails a lack of interest and attention that results in our not understanding the other's thoughts, mental images and meaning although his thoughts are sufficiently clear and well expressed. And we have no understanding despite the fact that our sense of thinking is sufficiently developed and we can understand his thoughts if we want to. This case is so common that we all recognize it from painful experiences when others have not understood our thoughts. Yet we are usually not aware of the times we do not understand other people's thoughts, for the very same reasons. In order to understand the theory completely we must assume the relationship is mutual.

In order to comprehend clear impressions with our thinking sense, it is necessary that all three conditions are present: clear thoughts on the part of the other person, an adequately developed thinking sense of one's own, and an interest for and attentiveness to another's thoughts.

Is it possible to describe the sense of thinking with even more detail? The eye is the organ for the sense of sight. What is the organ for the sense of thinking? It is not as easy to point at that organ as it is with the eye. A characteristic quality of this organ is that it is just as present as the eye, but it has a different consistency. This how it works:

When we comprehend a new thought for the first time, we add that thought to all of the our earlier thoughts. Our previous thoughts suck in the new thought passionately. From the earliest years of childhood to adulthood, we have a hidden organism in us that continually grows, our thinking organism. It is an organism of hidden possibilities to be able to call certain thoughts into our consciousness. This organism can be strong and grow powerfully. The more thoughts we have comprehended, the greater is our ability to receive new and stranger thoughts, that is, the more developed our sense of thinking becomes. But this organism can be little and weak. The strange thoughts go right over our head. No matter how hard we try we are not able to comprehend them. When the teacher presents something new, he must always try to fold it into what has been presented previously. A teacher can help a pupil only to the same extent that he can think and feel with the pupils, to the same extent that he knows what they know. Otherwise he thinks and speaks over their heads. For new thoughts must be understood with the help of what has been worked on previously.

In psychology this is considered a mass of mental images that are accessible and that make one able to understand an apperception of something new. This long and heavy word is a bad choice. This “mass” we are talking about is not a dead mass that is exposed to pressure and hits. We should speak of growth. Therefore the word organism is much more accurate, a thinking organism as the organ for the sense of thinking. Now we have moved forward in our description of the organ for our sense of thinking. For every little growth in the thinking organism, from the tiniest sprouts in early childhood to the highest expression among adults, change is possible only when something else takes place in the physical body, and here we must consider not only that the brain and the nervous system but also the circulation and the respiration systems are especially active and cooperative in this. For example, if we want to consider the physical organ for the thinking organ, we can look at something as focused as the eye. The organ for the sense of thinking is in continual growth. It has its

purely physical basis in the processes of the physical body, the functional processes where naturally the nervous system and the brain play central roles.

In this way we can also better understand the organ for the word sense. The very first words we comprehend as a child are always those that the gestures of the words appear clearly in what is taking place with the child. The child comprehends with other senses, and the first words form an entity, an organism that is growing continuously. The more words the child learns, the easier he comprehends what comes next. What is new folds into what has been and the ability to understand words grows. The organism of words already mastered acts as an organ for the word sense. In psychology we speak of a word-apperception mass. Just as with the expression “mental image apperception mass,” this expression is very misleading. The expression “word organism” is more accurate and understandable, for it is an entity that grows and in which each little detail exchanges directly with the whole organism.

Now how does this relate to the senses of sight, taste and smell? Do they not grow also as they are cultivated and exercised? All of our senses may be developed further. Yet if we compare these three senses with our word sense and sense of thinking, we find an extreme difference. The word sense and the sense of thinking have much greater developmental possibilities than the other three. This is due to their differentiated physical organs. The physical bases for the sense of thinking and the word sense are much more part of the entire physical constitution and activity. Therefore the sense of thinking and the word sense are more dependent on a person's efforts and especially dependent upon whom we are living with. For every word we learn to comprehend, for every thought, we learn to open ourselves, to take part in something that reaches far beyond our individual person. For every word we comprehend in our mother tongue, we are moved in our inner life by a higher spiritual being that expresses itself in the mother tongue. For every thought we comprehend of another person's thinking, our inner life is influenced by an even higher spiritual being that lives purely within humanity.

In our times especially, that which lives purely within humanity is strongly repressed, barely visible. Thoughts do not appear as pure thoughts

but rather as phrases, and our words remain tied down to hardened, group-egotistical relationships.

The word sense is a prerequisite for the sense of thinking. The mother tongue is a prerequisite for the purely human element in all of humanity. But we must move beyond the word sense into the sense of thinking. We must move beyond the mother tongue to the purely human.

And this gives us a new perspective on learning foreign languages. During the first seven years, it is best for children to live with one language so that their word sense is developed in peace and quiet. But as of grade one it is very important to develop the word sense a little beyond the borders of the mother tongue. For every word that children comprehend of a foreign language, something lives that liberates people from the narrow egotism of their own people.

The larger, practical aspect of knowing a foreign language is another reason for learning as much of a foreign language as possible, but let us exaggerate this for a moment. Imagine we die at an early age before we can use the new practical language. Were the efforts we made to learn the foreign language a waste of time? Absolutely not. The inner human development provided by the foreign language is just as important. The original language, that at one time united all mankind in a purely human group soul, has disappeared. We can barely imagine some of its sounds in our modern languages. But it appears in a new way, within the people who develop themselves in such a way that the purely human aspects of mankind are alive in independent individuals.

These preliminary observations of what the word sense and the sense of thinking entail demonstrate that they are “vulnerable plants” that help us feel the greatest responsibility for children. Every word that is spoken and every thought that is thought in their presence help to form their word organism and thinking organism and become the basis for their word sense and sense of thinking later in life. Educating children is the most responsible meeting between human beings. May we continually become more conscious of this responsibility.

