Krzysztof Rymarek

COGNITIVE LABELS IN PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE

Take a popular slapstick plot: someone shouts "Catch the thief!" and all characters in the scene rush after an innocent man who is unaware of being taken for a villain. Once he realizes what has happened, it is too late for explanation and his only hope is to try to outrun his oppressors, whereby he confirms their understanding of the situation. The propositional truth value is clearly of no importance. On heraing the "catch"-phrase people pressupose an apprehended act of theft, a legal system which requires one to cooperate in punishment of criminals, a sense of solidarity with the victim of theft etc., but this conceptual content rarely surfaces in the minds of the chasing party. The phrase clearly has a perlocutionary power to originate the chase. The presuppositions which it entails have some value in *ex post* rationalizing of one's participation in the unfortunate event, rather than being consciously pondered reasons for taking part in it. If we were asked to describe the immediate cause of the crowd reaction we would probably say it was driven by emotion derived from some previous first hand experience (e.g. having been robbed themselves) or from a vicarious experience of some kind (folk stories, literature etc.).

The imaginary slapstick script is based on actual patterns of crowd behavior. In fact, in more hot tempered societies, the police have to rush along not so much to cooperate in the chase, but to save the alleged thief from getting lynched. Their understanding of the exclamation is based on a broader set of presuppositions, which include a possible outcome of events, a likelihood of false accusation, a duty to protect human life, the sole responsibility of the police to maintain the law etc. For want of time, just like in the case of the crowd reaction, these presuppositions do not play an overt

[39]

part in the decision to follow the party. The action is clearly triggered off by the same exclamation but from the police point of view the conceptual content of the expression has a different scope, and, consequently, the nature of their action is different from that of the crowd.

Imagine now that in his search for shelter our fugitive happens to pass by a den of thieves who, upon hearing the crowd shouting the phrase in question, escort him to a safe place and offer far-going help making it clear, however, that a share in the loot is expected.

One linguistic expression clearly has different senses for the different groups of people who hear it under the same circumstances and these differences shape their attitudes and active behavior in accordingly different ways. We may ask if we are justified in regarding the issue as proper material for linguistic investigation. We may expect, though, that as soon as we put forward this question a large part of the linguistic community will come up with a ready answer: the issue is not linguistic but sociological or psychological in nature. It refers to the context of the expression and has nothing to do with linguistic meaning. The three groups in question acted according to their systems of values which is external to language. Although their attitudes towards the thief were in each case different they were obviously per-forming the same semantic operation on the expression "Catch the thief!" since the semantic features of its elements are easily accessible and since, despite the ethical differences, people share the common knowledge of the referents of its lexical elements. All of this might be a plausible line of argumentation ...if truth-value semantics applied to our case of the innocent "thief". Thus, unless we are ready to abandon him at the hands of his opressors, we ought to look into the reasons for his mal--treatment.

From the linguistic (and the psychological) point of view there is, apparently, not a lot to look into. All the pre-suppositions which seemed to be instrumental in generating the peo-ple's attitudes were derived from a single linguistic expression. What we are asking about then, is the relation between human at-titudes and the conceptual content of linguistic expressions. We are also asking whether language can be regarded as an instrument of influence or even of shaping human attitudes. In other words,

our inquiry ought to be placed within the scope of interest of some version of the linguistic relativity hypothesis. The questions we are asking have been repeatedly asked over the last few dozen years but no answer as yet has been accepted as plausible by the linguistic community. In fact, for the most part, the community refused to deal with the problem at all.

1. THE THEORETICAL SETTING

Numerous theoretical reasons were given for this refusal. Some of them emerged from the ontological status given to thought in the Behaviorist tradition (thought and language are merely responses to behavioral stimuli). Others were related to the epistemological status assigned to language in the Philosophy of Language tradition or in Logical Positivism (identification of language with logical forms). However, most of the opposition cumulated in the Structuralist approach which can be described as the "mapping view" of language [cf. G r a c e 1987]. The mapping view is essentially universalistic. It postulates total inter-translability, based on the assumption that language is "an empty code, entirely uncommitted as to the content". The postulate leads to the pursuit of syntactic autonomy and the resulting neglect and uncertain position of an unspecified semantic component in the linguistic investigation. The above entailed the assumption that language and culture are separate, distinct entities, that thought processes are independent of language, and that there exists in the "objective" world a fixed set of "sayable things". These claims have been used by adherents of the Structuralist position to reject the strong, moderate and weak versions of linguistic relativity alike (the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, the Incommensurability Thesis etc.).

The strong position taken by Structural Linguistics was first undermined from within. The postulate of creativity (essential for the notion of linguistic competence) proved incompatible with the notion of a "sayable" extra-linguistic universe. Linguistic "field-work" showed basic semantic-grammatical differences between languages, thus putting into question the postulate of intertranslability, while the recent sociolinguistic research strongly questioned the claim that cultural base (in the anthropological sense) can be separated from language.

Among the experimental findings are the cross-cultural studies of the influence of grammatical categories on thought like the study by B l o o m [1981] on the use of the counterfactual in English and Chinese and on the process of conceptual entification in these two languages, or the study by M o K á a [1976] on gender categorization in English and the Algonqian languages, the study of K a y and M c D a n i e l on the linguistic signi-ficance of basic color terms [1978] or the thought-provoking study by C a s a d & L a n g a c k e r on the semantic aspects of Cora grammar [1985].

As a result, linguistic universalism has been repeatedly challenged in the recent years. There seems to be a growing awareness among linguists of the need to review the relativity hypothesis: "The evaluation of the hypothesis has to be suspended, since a number of experimental findings indicate that the cate-gorization of concepts and objects as performed by speakers of dif-ferent languages is influenced by grammatical categories present in those languages" [L e w a n d o w s k a-T o m a s z c z y k 1983].

For all it says in support of linguistic universals cognitive structuralism contains a most welcome trait for proponents of lin-guistic relativity. Language users impose meaningful organization on the infinitely variable world of sense experience, by means of highly complex, multi-level repertory of cognitive schemata which permit to segment it cognitively into the types of categories objects, actions and relations they perceive to exist in it [S c h a n k 1982]. This is primarily done in view of storing information. But the schemata serve also as cognitive building blocks of the representations we construct of our experience. If language is to be shown to influence our cognitive capacity then it must be proved to do so either by influencing the development or the functioning of these schematic building blocks.

2. THE DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

P i a g e t [1957, 1969] has shown that during the child's first year and a half language plays a very limited role in the ways in which he models reality. The first few lexical items he acquires constitute mere additional elements in his cognitive world, on a par with other elements, linked to them by functional or associative bonds. We may treat them as functional means of eliciting some desired states but not as symbols for cognitive

categorizations. They are certainly not capable of exerting re-
lativizing influence over the child's development of the schematic
mapping of the world.

At a certain point his speech and thought converge. As
V y g o t s k y [1962] shows at the age of ca. 18 months he begins
to link his first lexicalizations like "mommy", "red" or "sleep"
to the cognitive ones into which he has coonceptually divided
his world: his MOTHER, RED THINGS, and the ACT OF SLEEPING.
Utilizing his basic level categories [R o s c h 1976] he then
proceeds to construct schemata for handling the word classes
given in the language - nouns, verbs, adjectives etc. This marks
the stage of rapid development of *recall* (as opposed to pre-
viously dominating *recognition*) memory [S c h a n k 1982]. Once he
has done this he begins to understand the distinct sequences of
word classes he constructs in terms of generic scripts, plans and
goals. R o s c h [1977] has shown that at some point in time the
child discovers, not to his dissatisfaction, that language contains
labels which facilitate conceptual processing of experience, and
that, in the sphere of basic level experience he has been buil-
ding up, these labels coincide with his own. Rosch shows this pro-
cess on the example of the English labeled schema for RED and
describes how its coincidence with the equivalent, subjectively
constructed cognitive category reinforces the child's self-assuran-
ce as to his cognitive competence. In other words the child de-
velops a subjective conceptual structure which is both experien-
tially and linguistically grounded. In time he creates the more
complex "grammatical" schemata for recognizing and manipulating
functor words, inflections, the passive, the negative, the coun-
terfactual etc. Although they are increasingly language-based, he
does not cease to build many of the cognitive schemata on his own.
Many of these remain a linguistically uncoded, non-labeled con-
tent of his thoughts [B l o o m 1981]. Both types of schemata,
the independently constructed, and the linguistically derived
ones help the child organize his attitudes. Some experiences
are pleasant, some are frightening. The first are desired,
they become *good* things; the latter are to be avoided, they
are *bad* things from then on. When the child burns his hand on
a kitchen range he is likely to associate negative emotions
with the cognitive schema of RANGE. When he is bitten by a
dog, DOGs become generically bad. Thus, simultaneously with
the development of lexical schemata the child develops his own

"semantic differential" scales [cf. K r z e s z o w s k i   1987].
This is not to say, however, that the axiological charge of the
first lexicalizations remains stable and fixed throughout his
life. We shall return to this issue in the last section of
this paper.

3. THE FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The child's cognitive schemata frequently need some readjust-
ment. For instance, he may have developed a schema in which "red"
is slightly displaced on the color spectrum in relation to the
sanctioned, labeled RED in his language. At the very earliest stage
of conceptual development he will have no such schema at all, but
in the process of establishing the "intersubjectivity" of sche-
matic representation he will feel compelled to create, or to read-
just, his schema of RED to the linguistic label. S c h a n k [1982]
provides a detailed description of the process in which schemata
(from simple categories to complex conceptual models of events) are
adopted by children as a "side effect" of the acquisition of basic
reading skills at a later age. As we have seen, this readjustment
of subjective schemata to the ones imposed by language covers also
their axiological aspects. In fact, we shall argue further on that
these aspects are far from being marginal in conceptual processing.
Since cognitive schemata come in systems [L a n g a c k e r 1988],
our child will probably readjust his initial axiological schema of
RANGE when he acquires the label "roast beef" or "cuisine gourmet".
Likewise, the axiological charge of his schema of DOG will be
reformulated under the positive axiological charge of the la-
bels "brave San Bernard's shepard", "lovely puppy" etc. Thus, "in
addition to developing a large number of schemata free of the
influence of language, which in time get labeled, but whose
semantic input remains unaffected, the child will construct and
reconstruct a very large number of schemata expressly to meet the
requirements of linguistic labels" [B l o o m 1981]. This process
of schema convergence is thus based on "intersubjective" rather
than "subjective" experience of cognitive categories formulated
around semantic representations of prototypical instances and it
results in establishment of ICM's [Idealized Cognitive Models -
L a k o f f 1982] of reality.

As we said above, in the process of ICM-convergence the
child learns to trust the labels available in his language and

more and more frequently adopts these labels, even when he has
little or no access to the experiential basis of the ICM's
within which they function. Since, however, lexical labels always
function relative to an ICM he frequently adopts the ready-
-made ICM [cf. S c h a n k 1982] which goes with the label,
thereby accepting vicarious experiential grounding. For instance,
while everyone may have subjective experiential grounding for the
ICM of MONEY, the subjectivity of our experiential grounding for
the ICM of CAPITAL is most likely only partial, while for most
Poles, or Chinese, the experiential grounding for the ICM of CAPI-
TALISM is only vicarious. S c h a n k [1982] has shown that any en-
counter of a linguistic token of some conceptual event forces the
reader to recover the plan even if other elements of the event are
absent in his conceptual system, though a number of complex
learning strategies have to be employed in the acomplishment
of this task. Along the same lines, we are inclined to believe
that linguistic labels (especially the last type) function as
points of condensation around which the acquisition of world
knowledge (of predominantly vicarious nature) proceeds. As
B l o o m [1981] puts it: "the word can be said to act (1) as a
directive force in leading (one) to think about the world in
certain novel ways and (2) as a locus around which the results
of that thinking come to coalesce".

4. GRADIENCE

Whenever we adopt available linguistic labels we do so relative
to some ICM's established in our mind through firsthand experience
or by means of other, previously acquired labels. For instance, in
order to construct a cognitive schema for BACHELOR we have to make
use of already consolidated lexicalizations "man" and "unmarried"
which, in L a k o f f's terms [1982, 1987] are ungraded cate-
gories, i.e. they are of all-or-none type, mutually exclusive with
their complements. This semantic "decomposition" of categories
frequently amounts to imposition of non-gradience on otherwise
gradable concepts. The linguistic repertoire contains numerous
labels, representing usually fairly abstract concepts, which com-
monly undergo such treatment. "Law", "structuralism", "relativity",
"communism" are a few examples of such categories. In every case
their semantic representation requires activation of some pre-

semantic pole of a linguistic expression. Linguistic labels, as
"objectivized" conventional expressions, may thus be thought to
"carve up" portions of the "subjective" conceptual structure into
frames activated whenever the labels are used to predicate. The
phenomenon is called "profiling", and subsumes such functions as
setting of perspective or the level of specificity. The first func-
tion may be illustrated by the following examples of different
frames imposed on the same conceptual structure:
    a) the lamp above the table
    b) the table below the lamp
    c) the leg of the table below the lamp
    d) the light from the lamp above the table.

The following exemplify varying levels of specificity:
    a) I saw an animal and moved on.
    b) I saw a long snake and ran away.
    c) I saw a rattlesnake about $6^{1/2}$ feet long and sprinted to
safety.

7. ANALYZABILITY

Of special importance for the semantic coding of a linguistic
expression is the feature of "analyzability", which contributes
to the salience of its semantic representations. An "expression"
is "analyzable" to the extent that speakers are cognizant of the
contributions of component morphemes to the value of the composite
whole. [...] Novel expressions are necessarily analyzable, but once
a complex expression has the status of a familiar unit, it is con-
ceivable that a speaker might activate its composite structure in-
dependently from its components. [...] The analyzability of an
expression affects its semantic value. [...] If we assume for the
sake of discussion that pork and pig meat have precisely the same
composite (semantic) structure, they nonetheless differ in meaning,
because the latter expression provides individual symbolization to
the conceptual components pig and meat, thereby rendering these
notions more salient within the composite whole than they would
otherwise be. [L a n g a c k e r 1988]. In fact then, analyzabi-
lity is yet another aspect of the relation between the levels of
semantic representation and conceptual structure. One can hardly
overlook its theoretical importance for the proponents of models
of linguistic persuasion. A good example in question is Orwell's
analysis of ideological lexicalization:

[...] the practice had been adopted as it were instinctively, but in Newspeak it was used with a conscious purpose. It was perceived that in (...) abbreviating a name one narrowed and subtly altered its meaning, by cutting out most of the associations that would otherwise cling to it. The words *Communist International*, for instance, call up a composite picture of universal human brotherhood, red flags, barricades, Carl Marx and the Paris Commune. The word *Comintern*, on the other hand, suggests merely a tightly-knit organization and a well defined body of doctrine. [...] This accounted not only for the habit of abbreviating whenever possible, but also for the [...] care that was taken to make every word easily pronounceable. [O r w e l l   1981].

The feature of analyzability is a clue to the understanding of the phenomenon of connotative meaning, a frequent tool of linguistic persuasion. Although it has been notoriously slighted by linguists, it is frequently referred to by students of rethoric. For example, "at a political rally, the word Democrat may be enough to elicit cheers all by itself, while a mention of Republican may elicit boos. And I mean the word all by itself, not as a part of an implied utterance" [K e l l i n g   1975]. Other examples can be easily quoted from the field of advertizing ("Have you Mida-sized your brakes lately?"), televangelist soliciting ("Last year's [devotional] guide was a life support to possibility thinkers around the world. The new guide will be equally helpful") or any other sphere of persuasive discourse.

8. THE AXIOLOGICAL FACTOR

In the discussion of the developmental aspects of concept formation we noted that one of the first decisions made by a child when he constructs a labeled schema is to rank it on the good-to-bad scale, depending on the subjective desirability of the conceptual structure profiled by the label. We have also suggested that, due to the lack of first hand experiential grounding, in acquiring more abstract semantic representations we "bring our ICMs into line" with the linguistically tailored cognitive models which "come with" the label. It also seems plausible to assume that thus adopted cognitive models carry with them some conventionalized axiological load.

It has been convincingly argued in K r z e s z o w s k i [1987] that "in addition to the propositional content and mental images ICMs also contain hierarchies of values, relative to which people evaluate situations framed in terms of ICMs", and, elsewhere, that "every lexical item is assessible on the axiological scale"

[K r z e s z o w s k i   1985] which is of paramount importance for
lexical semantics. Thus, in view of the assumption that cognitive
labels are a powerful tool of linguistic persuasion it is
reasonable to posit that, depending on the level of experiential
grounding, (related to the level of abstractness of semantic re-
presentation, but also profiling and analyzability) the axiological
charge which comes part and parcel with every new lexicalization we
acquire, plays an important role in all cases of attitude
formation. Although it probably always undergoes some degree
of subjective reassessment, it is frequently adopted, by default,
close to its face value. In such case our initial questions about
linguistic relativity gain bew importance, and open a very pro-
missing field for research in persuasive discourse.

     Following   K r z e s z o w s k i [1985] we assume that lexical
items "show a much higher degree of axiological charge when they
are used figuratively". It has also been argued that people con-
ceptualize their experience in terms of metaphorical themes
[B o l i n g e r   1979], or complexes rather than individual
metaphors. If we accept the basic claim of cognitive linguistics
that metaphorical extension is the main instrument in the coding
of conceptual structures into semantic representations it follows
naturally that lexical labels may acquire their axiological
charge from the metaphorical networks relative to which they are
semantically coded. Thus generated, the axiological charge becomes
an active factor in the profiling of conceptual structures. We
have seen such "axiological profiling" in operation in the case of
the "innocent thief" in our initial example in which the label
"thief" charged axiologically the whole conceptual system which
it activated, thereby determinig people's attitudes (axiological
aspect of ICMs). It is worth noting, that the axiological load
[K r z e s z o w s k i   1987] of the label changed depending on
the metaphorical networks activated for various groups, although it
is highly unlikely that the conceptual content of their ICM for
"thief" was different. The same principle was obviously in-
strumental in the "Democrat-Republican" example of persuasive la-
beling in political rethoric and in other examples throughout the
paper. Therefore, it seems plausible to assume that besides such
factors as gradience, analyzability, or the level of abstraction
the axiological charge is a means of persuasive manipulation in the
construction of linguistic labels.

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ZNACZNIKI KOGNITYWNE W JĘZYKU PERSWAZJI

Elementy systemu leksykalnego wykazują znacznie większy ładunek aksjologicz-
ny kiedy używane są metaforycznie. Użytkownicy języka dokonują konceptualizacji
swojego doświadczenia w postaci tematów metaforycznych (metaphorical themes),
czy też kompleksów metaforycznych, raczej niż przy pomocy pojedynczych metafor.

Językoznawstwo kognitywne uznaje, że projekcja metaforyczna jest podstawowym
instrumentem kodowania struktur konceptualnych na poziomie semantycznym. Należy
więc założyć, że znaczniki leksykalne czerpią swój ładunek aksjologiczny z sia-
tek metaforycznych, poprzez które zostały zakodowane.