

Language And Culture With Special Reference To Japanese

Karl Jurgen Kampmark
Pusat Bahasa
Universiti Malaya

I. In this article I will deal with some of the issues which come up whenever we try to understand the position of man in relation to himself, language and society. The focus will be on speech and whether or not the speech-act is determined by factors external to the individual speaker.

I regard it as a truism that language is what primarily distinguishes man from other life-forms and that 'between the clearest animal call of love or warning or anger, and man's least trivial *word*, there lies a whole day of Creation' (S. Langer, 1967: 109). My sole concern here will then be with homo loquens and his ambience.

I cannot hope to settle once and for all the vexed problem of man and language, but I can at least make my own position clear on some of the very conflicting theories which attempt to illuminate the interrelationship between man and language. If in the process I should manage to clarify a murky point or two in this context, I will be satisfied. It is impossible to follow to the end the multitude of ramifications of the heuristic attempts that endeavour to tell us who we are and why we behave and speak as we do. But one point, albeit an important one, should always be kept in mind, even if I only can mention it in passing: much of what is being said about man and language can only be fully appreciated if we realize that the issue to be decided is fundamentally the old question of freedom (or free will) versus determinism. Is man born free, only to put in linguistic chains that make his thoughts prisoners of the language he happens to become a speaker of? Is his future way of thinking and outlook on life preordained through some given structure of syntax and vocabulary, or is he a free agent, using language as a personal instrument to express his uniqueness, where the only constraint placed on his freedom to self-expression is the skill or clumsiness with which he handles the linguistic medium? There will be no other occasion to mention this point, yet I believe it to be the implicit leitmotif of any discussion which tries to shed light on man in his contextual relation with culture. My personal standpoint will become evident in the course of the discussion to follow.

There is another point that I would like to make clear from the outset. When I speak about the influence of language, I use it in the sense of the so-called inherent potency to determine our conceptual understanding. I do not for a moment doubt the effective force of words themselves or that 'Time that is intolerant. worships language and forgives/Everyone by whom it lives' (W.H. Auden). We are, to be sure, all swayed by words in one way or another: terms of endearment from a loved one raise our spirits, and value-oriented words such as god, country, liberty, etc. all produce a certain state of mind in a listener, whether favourable or otherwise. At issue is not, then, affective response to words as such, but the extent to which language subjugates us to its structure, decreeing which shape our outlook on life will take.

II. When we talk about language, everyone feels that this is a subject that he or she is entitled to have an opinion about, a subject on which we all can speak, because speech is so much part of ourselves and our world. Through language we communicate with one another, with symbols for speech we manage to express ourselves or get to know what other people say or think when direct verbal encounters are impossible.¹ Language is so intricably linked with the human species that many thinkers do not hesitate to define man in terms of his language

Man becomes conscious of himself in that moment he says 'I' for the first time. To understand man through an understanding of his origin then means to understand the origin of the revealed 'I' through the word (A. Kojève, 1975:20).

Language is the principle means through which man is humanized. The reason is that as a product of the intellect, language has an intelligible and fundamentally general character. Through the intellect language ultimately obtains also that external form of abstract generality which the communicable character of that which man conceives and thinks may appear to be something that is taken for granted (Seeberger, 1961:335)

If the concepts of 'man' and of 'language' are interdependent for their existence, 'pre-language man' is a meaningless chimera. Man becomes man as he enters on a linguistic state (Steiner, 1975:73).

And in this vein one could go on forever. Yet the principal tenor always seems to be that man *is* language. There have been valiant experiments to show that animals 'speak' as well, but I doubt that one seriously can equate man's verbal process of communication with the grunts and snorts of animals.

But although language sets us apart from other living creatures as *zoon phonanta* (language-animal), it also acts as a divisive factor among men because we do not all speak the same tongue. Who cannot but sympathize with the banished Ovid when he from the distant shores of the Black Sea laments. *Barbarus hic ego sum, quia non intelligor ulli* (I am a barbarian here, for no one understands what I say).

It is perhaps futile to speculate about the cause for the Babel of languages, for although it would be a much easier world to live in if we all spoke the same tongue, it is known for a fact that we do not. This difference in language together with the intrinsic properties of language *per se* have from early times fascinated man and led him to speculate about the relationship between himself and language. In that sense this article is only following the path laid out by a long tradition.

III. The banana-fly has a very short lifespan. It matures, ages and dies rather quickly thus making it the ideal object for genetic studies as one can observe and record genetic processes and changes over several generations within a brief period.

If we could do the same with language, we would no doubt have solved many of the linguistic riddles which we have on our hands today. At one time it was believed that once we understood how language came into existence we would know a lot more about subsequent developments. From its origin we could follow it through its various stages of change, learning about particular characteristics manifested during its different phases of evolution. But

unfortunately language does not fall into the same category as the banana-fly. We cannot observe the birth of a language since any one language presents itself to us in an already fully developed form, which means that we cannot follow any step by step development as we can in the rapid life-cycle of the banana-fly.

Herodotus recounts how the Egyptian King Psammetichus devised an experiment to reveal the origin of human speech. He had two new-born children reared in solitude by a shepherd who was instructed never to speak to them. At the end of two years the children began to repeat something that sounded like 'Bekos', and this upon inquiry turned out to be the Phrygian word for bread. Psammetichus then concluded that Phrygian was the oldest language. (Herodotus, 1975:129-30). In Europe the quest for the original language of man was of a more speculative nature. I am personally partial to the odd theories proffered by respectively the Swede, Andreas Kemke, and the German, Becanus (1518-72). The former was of the opinion that 'in Paradise Adam spoke Danish, the Serpent French, and God Swedish', while the latter asserted that 'the first language must have been the most perfect. and since German was superior to other languages, then it must have been the first' (Crystal, 1972:48). Others have tried a different approach, less tainted by nationalistic prejudice. The ding-dong and bow-wow theory, which was another attempt to explain the origin of speech, enjoyed a certain vogue in the last century, but few people would subscribe to it today. Jespersen (1960:154-60) has argued in favour of the babbling instinct in children to account for the emergence of speech, yet others again have felt a sense of futility with the whole quest for primeval speech and consider the search very much as a pseudo-problem.

Many attempts have been made to unravel the origin of languages but most of these are hardly more than exercises of the speculative imagination. Linguistics as a whole has lost interest in the problem and this for two reasons. in the first place, it has come to be realized that there exist no truly primitive languages in the psychological sense. in the second place, our knowledge of psychology, particularly the symbolic process in general, is not felt to be sound enough to help materially with the problem of the emergence of speech. (Sapir, 1967:109)

The first point made by Sapir was already commented upon by Montaigne who said that primitive languages only appear to us to be so because they are spoken by primitives. (Bally, 1950:35). A person who to us lives on the lowest level of materialistic culture in evolutionary terms is still capable of conversing in a tongue which in complexity leaves nothing to be desired. This fact in itself should preclude any temptation to see social and material culture as the mirror image of a given language structure. But perhaps the whole issue of origin, as Nietzsche argues, is trivial for 'we always assume that the salvation of man depends on an insight into the origin of things. (whereas) an insight into the origin only increases the meaninglessness of origin.' (Aurora I, 44).

IV The mind of man objectifies itself through phonetic units that give form and meaning to whatever image there might be in his brain. The word, then, stands between consciousness and the object evoked by the word itself

Through this mediating function, the word partakes of both mind and meaning — yet is in itself neither — and for this reason it can be used to make thinking the object of its own existence. In other words, the instrument with which we analyse and dissect is at the same time the analysed and dissected. It is very much like being treated to the spectacle of a cannibal eating himself.²

If we for a moment accept that 'word' is the medium through which mind manifests itself, we are then faced with the question of its many different phonetic manifestations. Is the mind of man identical and mental images alike in spite of the dissimilar sounds with which they are expressed and do they stand for the same thing or concept? Or do the different sets of phonemes available to the speaker of a given language set him apart from speakers of other languages in more than one sense? Are different languages a reflection of a different mentality (which would mean that, if we take the number of languages in the world to be around 5000, we for about 14 years in a row could be exposed to a different mentality and way of structuring reality every day)?

V. It does not take long to discover that the world somehow looks different when we speak a foreign language. An unreflecting user of language will seldom think that words or concepts are wholly arbitrary but rather that they point to something within a fixed reality, even if it's not said in so many words. It therefore jolts one's linguistic sense to realize that speakers of other languages use familiar words in different contexts and that one often cannot find a translation for words or terms which, it is felt, are absolutely necessary for normal discourse. Even such a simple thing as greetings within the closely related European languages show great variety in usage. In British English one says 'good-morning' until noon, in German and the Scandinavian languages this greeting is limited to the morning hours, whereas the French seem quite content with 'bonjour' from early morning to evening.

A reasonable person is bound to accept the variations in the greeting customs — one could also in this connexion mention the languages which invoke a praise of god — but what is he to think when being told that there is no word for 'thank you' in vernacular Bengali? It requires a very sympathetic effort of the mind to avoid the conclusion that speakers of a language which cannot give expression to the most basic word of gratitude, namely 'thanks', must be sorely lacking in politeness.

Yet this is trilling stuff when compared to Gaelic which has no word for 'no', or even stranger still, the Basque language which can only render its sentences in the passive voice. So the further we move away from our native tongue in linguistic terms, the more conspicuous the differences will appear to be. Not only does the lexical choice undergo a change, but the whole structure of sentences very often become unrecognizable and direct translations an impossibility.

People have for centuries been aware of this and the search for a reason and cause goes far back in history. That no satisfactory and universally accepted explanation has been found so far is a good indication of the problem's complex nature. But to achieve a theoretical understanding of language, we cannot allow the question to rest because of its implication for the whole process of thinking.

It would be far beyond the scope of an article of this kind to even briefly mention the various theories which at one time or other have been brought to bear on the interpretation of the nature of language. Suffice it to say that from identifications between a word and things designated by the word, the debate moved through etymological speculations towards theories where metaphysical elements came to play a larger role. Supernatural agents, be they the Platonic primacy of ideal forms, or the genius, spirit or Geist, so beloved by the romanticists, were thought to infuse language with some substance which most perfectly revealed itself in those who were able to master language. Here the poet was an obvious choice because of his ability to manipulate linguistic forms and thus bring to light the hidden essence. This does not mean, however, that these theories were greeted with universal approval. There have always been eminent personalities who based their theories on empiricist-psychological conceptions, such as Locke who believed in 'The same freedom which Adam possessed when he created the first names for complex perceptions according to no model other than his own thoughts' (Cassirer, 1955: 141).

Basically the positions have not changed very much. There has only been a movement away from the word 'genius', which was probably felt to be too tinged with metaphysics, to the more scientific sounding 'structure', which nevertheless is credited with the same potency as the old-fashioned spirit. But statements such as 'The linguists have clearly demonstrated that different grammatical structures of different languages reflect different ideas, that is, different ways of categorizing and inter-relating experiences' (Bagby 1956:194) are simply not true. One is still in distinguished company if a belief in some mysterious power residing in the language structure is rejected (Black, 1972:98-99).

VI. Whether we can arrive at an acceptable synthesis of the dialectic triad of man — language — culture is ultimately dependent on the methodological principles we adopt. The thing to be proven — or rejected — is the postulate that language is more than just a vehicle for communication but, as claimed by many outstanding thinkers, is actually the shaper of our mould of thinking. It somehow compels a speaker to structure his understanding of the world according to the grammatical pattern inherent in his language. Out of an undifferentiated continuum of reality the speaker of a given language is predestined to arrange his experiences so that these experiences, in a manner peculiar to his particular language, reflect the background framework of the grammar, or so it is maintained. Yet how can we meaningfully go beyond this assertion which is put forward with so much conviction by so many? Conviction, regardless of the intensity with which it is felt, can never be accepted as proof on its own merits. To me the keyword must be proof and our problem here is how to obtain it since the truth content of any theory must be dependent on its empirical verifiability.

To my mind the most profitable way to carry out the task is by way of analogy and comparison, even if we by this method are unable to establish rigid proofs in a strictly scientific sense. Yet the persuasive power of a well chosen analogy can at least show the flaws or merits of a particular claim. By the very nature of our problem, we cannot conduct empirical experiments

but are forced to stick to theoretical principles. I know only of one instance where the relationships we are looking for between man and language have been tested in clinical surroundings, but the findings were subsequently criticized so severely that we can leave them out of consideration. I am thinking of Dr Tsunoda's *Nihonjin no nō* (the brain of the Japanese)³ where it is claimed that the sound perception of the Japanese is not limited to the right hemisphere of the brain, but extends to the left as well, thereby making him 'mentally' different from an occidental. What our method cannot do is to establish any criterion for dicta of the following kind. 'Estimable as the speakers of the agglutinative languages might be, it is nevertheless a crime for an inflecting woman to marry an agglutinative man' (Sapir, 1921:124). But what we can do is to imply whether it makes sense or not to say that a certain vocabulary or grammatical structure will influence the cultural and mental outlook of a given speaker in a significant way. For instance, is one justified in making any assumptions about the Japanese thinking pattern from the word *hara* (stomach) which in Japanese is used in numerous expressions, *hara-kiri* being only one among many, when we know that *phren* (diaphragm) in Greek is also the 'seat of passions and affections', or that *rahmin* in Hebrew, meaning the intestinal part of the body, is used when an Englishman would speak about 'heart' in an emotional sense? And let us not forget that there are also yellow-bellies in English or that a ruthless man in French is *un homme sans entrailles* (lit. a man without entrails)' (Seward, 1968:30). This is briefly the way in which my arguments will take shape.

VII. Before we go any further, it might be instructive to see what other people have thought about the enigma of languages.

There is an undeniable connexion between linguistic structure and the successful achievement of various intellectual activities. Language is the external manifestation of a people's spirit, their language is their spirit and their spirit is their language (Humboldt, 1836).

...the background linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual's mental activity, for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of his mental stock in trade (Whorf, 1973:212).

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 (Sapir, 1967:12).

...language becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts (Orwell, 1972:143).

...let us keep one fact clearly in mind, the German language was not innocent of the horrors of Nazism. Hitler heard inside his native tongue the latent hysteria, the confusion, the quality of hypnotic trance. Gunther Grass knows how much damage the arrogant obscurities of German philosophic speech have

done to the German mind, to its ability to think and speak clearly (Steiner, 1975:140, 187).

The German language, like any other language, has always been morally neutral, with no greater propensity for corruption than its neighbour languages of the pogroms (Burgess, 1973:209)

These quotations should suffice as an indication of what many reasonable men think and have thought about language. Let us now turn our attention towards a particular language and see how far these theories apply. I have chosen Japanese as the language to base my comparisons on because of the sharply demarcated geographical ambience of its speakers and their racial and cultural homogeneity.

One of the first things a cultural anthropologist takes care to notice in a foreign culture is its kinship terms, personal pronouns and ways of addressing others. A paradigm of these terms will give, so it is believed, an idea of the social stratification in the culture investigated.

In Japanese the lexical repertoire is rich in forms for the personal pronouns. In modern Japanese there are about 11 first person pronouns, more or less the same number for the second person, and approximately 8 for the third person. (Because of dialectical differences and the survival of older forms, one cannot give exact figures). There are further several levels of speech to express extreme politeness, familiarity and a written impersonal style.

The many forms of 'I' is taken by many to indicate a weak development of the ego. According to this view the individual is defined in a sociological context in terms of superior/subordinate positions and not as an impermutable personality with a fixed sense of 'I', regardless of the situation. But can anyone truthfully say that he is constantly the same person in all situations, that he speaks and behaves in the same manner with no regard for person or place? Is it not more in accordance with reality to say that the 'I' is different, depending on whether it is revealed to family or friends, strangers or superiors, colleagues or subordinates? I think it is more reasonable to think that an 'I' is an entity with many facets and that only one of these will come out in a given situation because the other sides would be irrelevant or pointless. The Japanese have lexical forms for each of these social metamorphoses, but it is by no means evident from this that their ego-development is different from someone whose language has just a single word as its disposal for 'I'. The same 'I' which is being used by a so-called individualistic Westerner is not formally different from the 'I' used by the collectively-minded man of the European Middle Ages. The form itself, no matter how little or much it has been subdivided, can by itself give no indication of the consciousness supporting the ego. The concept of 'I' is more dependent on the historical and sociological evolution of man. An 'I' is still an 'I', whether our language permits us to use a generic term or not.

Since social classes and class differences do exist in countries with languages that do not differentiate between subordinate/superior in terms of address — the English 'you', the Latin 'tu', etc. — personal pronouns cannot help us much in evaluating the linguistic determinant on thought in this respect since we know that a language may or may not have many personal pronouns to indicate social stratification. It is doubtlessly closer to the truth to say that,

for reasons unknown, a need is felt in some cultures to indicate hierarchic positions through the usage of different pronouns. It cannot be better demonstrated than in the Japanese example where the 'first and second personal pronouns viewed diachronically show an amazing variation which is connected to the condition and change of the feudal social order and social rank, for which reason these pronouns reached their greatest diversity during the Muromachi and Edo Period, the most feudalistic periods in Japan' (Lewin, 1959:55).

VIII. Some people seem to think that man's apperception is related to the place a preposition or postposition occupies in a sentence. According to a well-known writer on philosophy, emotive values are easily grasped by the Japanese because of the postpositions of their language.

This part of speech. has the characteristic not only of expressing cognitive and logical relations, but also of expressing various delicate nuances of emotions. Thus this auxiliary part of speech, making its appearance amidst all kinds of words and sentences, plays the role of emphasizing some specific meanings, evoking attention to certain subjective aspects of things, distinguishing delicate variations of emotion, and leaves rich overtones of meaning just because of this ambiguity (Nakamura, 1968:531).

But since some believe that the same can be said for the influence of prepositions it is doubtful if much clarity can result from this kind of speculation. 'The English prepositions from being used in so many different ways and in combination with so many verbs, have acquired not so much a number of meaning as a body of meanings continuous in several dimensions' (Empson, 1931.5).

It is worth noting that neither writer gives examples, but leaves the reader to apply these speculations as best as he can although it is not easy to discover how

XI. Can we subscribe to Oscar Wilde when he says that 'If one doesn't talk about a thing it has never happened It is simply expression. .that gives reality to things' (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*). The real issue here is whether we can have a concept of something without definite words to describe it. Less stringently, others ask whether a concept has been truly understood if no word exists to express it directly but recourse has to be taken to periphrastic means The question is old and can be traced as far back as to Parmenides but let us see how it can be put to practical use.

According to a Japanese linguist, the Koreans used to be ignorant of expressing the needs of the heart. We are told that in affairs of love the Koreans are unable to communicate their emotions in their native language so that lovers in that country must speak Japanese, and they apparently do not do it well at that, when they whisper sweet nothings in the ears of a lover. We are not told what those Koreans who do not master Japanese say when they are in love, but based on this piece of information they probably enroll in a Japanese language class if they need to verbalize their feelings (Kindaichi, 1974:29).

The same writer has some reservations about another item, but he never-

theless feels that it is important enough to quote. There is a word in Japanese, *waki-ga* he says, which translates as 'smell or sweat of the armpit'. This is taken to mean that the Japanese are particularly sensitive to body odours. On the other hand, Westerners do not have a word for this phenomenon so they supposedly find nothing offensive about it. It is difficult to know what to think when words are employed in this way to show that they are vehicles for a particular culture's cognitive relations. Yet it should be pointed out that a direct translation into Danish is possible where the word *armsved* (lit. 'arm-sweat') admirably expresses the same thing.

Another linguist tackles the same problem with an example taken from the formal greetings of the Japanese. He says that if two or more Japanese have been out drinking together the previous night, they will invariably greet one another the following day with a *sakunya shitsurei shimashita*, i.e. 'I was rude last night'. He then continues, ' . . . because the culture and language are different, the rules of etiquette are different as well. . . . so we Japanese are at a disadvantage with our polite language. . . . I don't know how it is in England, but in Europe on the whole, happenings of the previous day are not brought up as a topic of conversation' (Shibata, 1976:10-11). If we are to take this literally, it can only mean that the past hardly exists for a Continental European, a conclusion which is difficult to accept. But he is wrong on another account as well. With the risk of appearing facetious, I am compelled to mention Danish again where it so happens that there is a formalized greeting for kindness shown in the past, in which the words of thanks are followed by a time-word or a like expression. For instance, *tak for sidst* (lit. 'thanks for last') and *tak for igaar* (lit. 'thanks for yesterday').

These exercises could have been dismissed were it not for the unpleasant turn they can take if mixed with too much cultural relativism.

In a book about language and culture the linguist Suzuki (1973 105-122) cites various examples of how many words defy a direct cross-lingual translation. For instance, the verb 'to wear' can be rendered in five different ways in Japanese, depending on which part of the body a particular item of clothing is worn. From a lexical point of view, this is very interesting but what cultural significance can one squeeze out of this? I am afraid I cannot tell. The author then goes on to relate that in the immediate postwar period he used to listen to the English language broadcasts which, needless to say, were controlled by the occupying American army. During this period he learned the words 'atrocious' and 'cruelty', which were frequently used when the media reported war-crimes committed by the Imperial Army, be it in Nanking or the death-marches in the Philippines. He then proceeds by showing how an Englishman who lived across the road to his house in those days was mistaken when he scolded the author for not treating a dog well, because he was actually quite fond of the animal. He then in detail compares the treatment of dogs by Englishmen and Japanese and then summarizes war-crimes and the treatment of animals as follows, 'Just because one has a dictionary and a book of grammar it is a great mistake to think that foreign words can be understood (with these aids). It is no exaggeration to say that the kind of belief that takes 'cruelty' to mean *zangyaku* (cruelty) causes far more harm than good'. The only interpretation of this passage is that cruelty, or what a foreigner thinks as such, can only be 'so-called cruelty' in Japanese. It must be admitted that

words of evaluation, of which 'cruelty' certainly is one, have different adumbrations depending on the language in which they are used, but somehow it is difficult to remain passive, when in a context like the above cultural relativity has to serve as an epitaph to the victims of wanton slaughter. The golden rule of semantics, that the word is not the thing and that the symbol is not the thing symbolized, appears to have been stood on its head, for here the word is made to mean what the writer wants it to mean.

X. The extrapolation of words in isolation has not brought any tangible results and our search for a component within the vocabulary that was capable of the much vaunted influence on thought has not been successful. But perhaps a look at concepts instead of isolated words, word classes and polite exchanges of habitual greeting could bring us a little further.

Since time plays an inordinately large role in our daily lives, it could be interesting to see how different linguistic groups have handled this concept. My purpose is not to talk about the nature of time as such, whether time exists per se or whether we perceive it a priori, but rather the extent to which the tense structure within a given system of grammar has been a formative factor in shaping the way in which people have been ordering temporal sequences.

When we go through history, we are bound to notice that the built-in tense structure of a given language always appears to have been subservient to religious or supernatural beliefs which gave the primary impetus to calendar-making. One would instinctively think that a person with extensive tense forms in his language would somehow order his reckoning of time accordingly, but the facts point in a different direction. The Chinese, some of the greatest chroniclers of history, have, compared to many other languages, only rather scanty means of indicating the flow of time. Time-words such as 'yesterday' serve to place an action within a temporal unit the context of which is not revealed by other means. Yet this apparent lack of tense has not prevented them from going far into the distant past without any outside influence. To the Indians, on the other hand, the whole idea of asking 'when' does not seem to have had any interest. As one historian has once said, 'The Indian culture whose idea of a bramanic nirvana is the most decisive expression of a completely ahistoric spirit never had the slightest feeling for the 'when' in any sense' (Spengler, 1972:15). And this in spite of a richness in tense forms. Now, this does not mean that there were no calendars in India, quite the contrary. But these were primarily used to still an astrological addiction — that is, a supernatural factor external to language, and not some compelling creation which had to be reasoned out because of a past perfect or imperfect tense. This linguistically exterior nature of calendars is a fact which can be observed over and over again in the most diversive cultures, regardless of the presence of a distinct tense structure. An authority on the subject explains it like this,

Calendars originally tended to be primarily associated with religion because it was important for feasts and sacrifices to be celebrated on fixed dates. Why should god mind exactly when Easter was celebrated? As we have seen in Babylon, the king-priest was the incarnation of the invisible god in the sky and the rituals performed were the repetition of divine actions and had to correspond exactly in time as well as in character with the rituals on high (Whitrow, 1975.15).

The linear conception of time in Christianity, for instance, is not born from internal linguistic exigencies, but rather because its central doctrine of the crucifixion was regarded as a unique event in time not subject to repetition, and so implied that time must be linear and not cyclic (Ibid. 16). One can safely say that our whole concept of time has been formed through centuries of evolutionary happenings, of which the invention of the mechanical clock has most probably been the greatest decisive factor, and few people realise that 'The picture of the natural world we all take for granted today is historical' (Toulmin & Goodfield, 1975 17)

This does not mean, of course, that people were oblivious of time in very general terms. In both agricultural and pastoral societies, albeit for different reasons, the seasonal changes were of utmost importance for either moving herds to different pastures or calculating the right time for growing crops. But this once again has little to do with grammatical structures and cannot be regarded as an extension thereof.

In a Japanese context the gods appeared out of the haze of a mythological past, but this was to explain the origin of the race — like in other cultures — not because of a particular fascination with time as such. This interest came much later when ultra-nationalists tried to place the emperor-worship on a historical foundation. Previous to the adoption of the Western calendar, the Japanese used the Chinese concept of sixty-year cycles and astronomical calculations were also used here for astrological purposes to divine auspicious days for marriages, journeys and so on. In spite of the well-developed tense structure in Japanese, they shared the attitudes of the ancient Greeks for whom events were not thought of as a continuous succession in a temporal continuum 'For they merely involved the repetition of a concrete phenomenon occurring within a unit. as in. "this is the twelfth dawn since I came to Ilion"' (Whitrow, 1975:22). And just like the Romans who spoke of something having taken place when Mister so-and-so was consul, temporal units were pinpointed to a memorable event such as the building of a temple, etc.

If the very important grammatical phenomenon of tense appears to have had so little influence on man's general concept of time and when we see that he mostly has taken his cues from non-linguistic sources, then one slowly begins to develop a sceptical attitude towards other claims about the influence of the 'background linguistic system'

XI Up to this point we have been looking at words in isolation, prepositions, postpositions, greetings and tense. In this penultimate paragraph I will propose to investigate our problem from a syntactic point of view. A few general remarks, however, before the analysis would seem in place.

These days it is a popular exercise to compare languages. Yet a comparison of non-related languages is, to my mind at least, only justified in a few instances, say, when one attempts to understand why learners of a particular language have problems in acquiring syntactical patterns or vocabulary choice of the languages to be learnt. But to make a cross-linguistic comparison between languages not genetically related is to look for the obvious. The approach is bound to offer a foregone conclusion. one can point out the differences and then note that the languages compared are different, yet this tautology does not deter the practitioners of comparisons.

Since English is the foreign language with which the Japanese are most familiar, one learned book after another is listing scores of English sentences compared to their Japanese counterparts. The perennial conclusion, which hardly can come as a great surprise to anyone, is that the two languages are obviously very different. This point should be borne in mind during the following discussion.

In an article of recent date, Professor Kumon notes that the Japanese have often been accused of having a holist outlook on the world (Kumon, 1982: 5-28). This outlook is believed to be correlative with the particular structure of their language, so when Professor Kumon attempts to prove this to be so we have a good example on our hands on which to see whether theory fits practice.

One particular linguistic structure is taken to be important in the conceptual formation of the Japanese, which is claimed to be considerably different from that of a Westerner. When faced with a certain problem, an occidental is said to proceed from separate elements and then arrive at a larger whole through a process of comprehending the relationship between individual parts. A Japanese would, and this is where the grammar underlying his thought processes should play a role, start, from the opposite direction, i.e. beginning from the whole and then analyse it into its parts. The assembly of a jigsaw puzzle is used to illustrate the procedure. A Japanese would try to understand the finished picture before he attempts to fit the parts together, but a Westerner is primarily concerned about how the parts can be assembled before he speculates about the end-product. Even if the writer admits that the illustration is a little exaggerated and simplified, I find it difficult to understand how one can start with a hypothesis, i.e. how do these parts fit together, before you state the problem, i.e. this is a jigsaw puzzle. The lack of clarity could have been caused by the illustration, but the implication is that a Westerner is not at ease with deductive reasoning, a conclusion rather difficult to accept for anyone with even the faintest knowledge of mathematics and modern science, arguably the greatest achievement of the West. There is another flaw in the Japanese/Western dichotomy; although the writer acknowledges that Hungarian has a similar structure as Japanese, the possibility that Hungarians might think like the Japanese is not brought up at all. Let us now take up the specific grammatical examples, advanced to substantiate the alleged difference in conceptualization.

- 1) *Kyoo (today) wa tenki (weather) ga yoi (fine)*
(It is fine weather today)
- 2) *Kare (he) wa tenisu (tennis) ga umai (good)*
(He is good at tennis)

At this stage the argument becomes a little confused because of the insistence of the writer to call this type of sentences 'two-subject sentences', because it is misleading to lean too heavily on traditional European grammatical concepts when analyzing a language which bears no resemblance to the Indo-European linguistic stock. With different terms the inconsistent 'two-subject' idea could have been avoided. But let us return to the examples: the words preceding *wa* and *ga* are nouns modified by a predicate (here an adjective). Before going any further, we should look briefly at what a *topic* is in Japanese.

and present it as if it were a reality capable of acting in some mysterious way in its own right. At times one almost suspects that a personification of language has taken place, investing it with properties as if it were a living organism, or worse, some thinking entity which in ways that have never been satisfactorily explained somehow goads people into thinking along certain lines. This conception is what lies at the base of statements that the Japanese could have avoided the whole misery of World War II if they had only spoken French (Shige Naoya) or that the Japanese have been prevented from philosophical speculations because of some imagined deficiency in the vocabulary and syntax (Nakamura, 1968:564). A statement of the latter nature is particularly difficult to accept when it appears in an eminently philosophical book written in Japanese. Is it not more likely that the Japanese have had their thirst for higher thoughts satisfied with the various philosophical systems that came to their country from either China or India? And since outside influences were passed on through the vehicle of the Chinese language which had already furnished the concepts with a verbal description, intelligible to any Japanese who could read, it is quite plausible that there was no need to coin new words based on pure Japanese. If the idea that it is somehow less refined to operate with borrowed terms in thinking is extended to a European context, it would then mean that the philosophy of an Englishman is on a cruder level than that of a German's, because the former's vocabulary is bristling with borrowed latinisms whereas German terms are coined to a large extent from German word-roots. But this is clearly rubbish. That the Japanese have not invented any distinct schools of thought can hardly be blamed on the language, because this distinction they share with so many other people of the world.

The whole discussion about linguistic influences becomes so very often difficult to follow because many writers fail to make a clear distinction between cultural and linguistic expression and waver back and forth between the two as if they were identical. It is far from the truth, for instance, to insist that it is difficult to say 'no' in Japanese. That the speakers of the language prefer to refuse something in a roundabout manner, does not show any inherent characteristic of the Japanese language as such, but must be understood as a cultural trait manifested via the language. So instead of saying that the Japanese and their ethos find expression in the language, it is, to my mind at least, more correct to say that the Japanese express themselves through the Japanese language, which after all is their only means of linguistic expression

I am of the opinion that many of the seemingly intractable problems related to language and culture will become very much less so if we stop to look for 'the ghost in the machine' of linguistic background structures and shift the emphasis to a social nexus. In this connexion one is bound to bring up Basil Bernstein, whose studies of language emphasize the interaction of man and speech in a sociological context. Ever since Plato's *Cratylus*, linguists have been groping among the various elements of speech, attempting to get hold of a very elusive substance, yet in the words of Black, those 'who share Whorf's general views about the relations between grammar and culture are apt to draw inferences from selected grammatical features, emphasizing some as significant while neglecting others as irrelevant. But no firm criterion has ever been offered for such discrimination' (Black, 1972:98-9). The models

of Bernstein for linguistic investigation clarify a whole range of issue that otherwise would have to be explained in terms of 'national temperament' or murky readings into grammatical structures which seem as far as ever from verification. When, for instance, a Japanese linguist observes that the Japanese like to speak and they don't like to speak, and really does not know what to do with this apparent inconsistency but tries to explain it in terms of 'national character' (Kindaichi, 1975:81-4), there is no problem here for anyone who is familiar with Bernstein's concepts of linguistic codes (Bernstein, 1973:92).

Another flaw, and this a fundamental one, is the inability of the deterministic theory of language to explain change. Why did man ever change and how did he manage to do so if his 'philosophy' is tied to and dependent on grammatical structure — the part of language that takes most time to change? I am convinced that 'The causes of linguistic changes do not lie in language as such but only in the speaking man. The mysterious life of language itself which is allegedly a kind of natural organism simply does not exist' (Kainz, 1962:24). And in line with the earlier objection to the Whorfian theory, I think that it is reasonable to refuse to accept that the whole can be understood on the basis dislocated by analysis. The Whole, the Gestalt, is primary. Analysis can merely disclose aspects of the Gestalt which should be understood in relation to one another and to the whole (Kwant, 1965:24).

I shall conclude with a challenge to those who still believe in the correlation between grammatical structure and the way in which we arrange our thoughts and think. I would like him or her, on the basis of Greek grammar, to explain why Athens was so different from Sparta, why Parmenides could claim that change was non-existent whereas his colleague, Heraclitus, asserted that everything is in a state of flux! They all operated within the same vehicle for thought, namely Greek, yet with diametrically opposed results.

Speculations can be stimulating but at one point we must put an end to them and ask for proof.

Notes

- (1) Some people think that the communicative aspect is overemphasized. Vide S. Langer (1967:135).
- (2) It must be admitted that this is a hotly debated question in epistemology and that the above is disputed by logical positivists. The approach taken here is Hegelian which, at least to my mind, makes perfect sense. Cf Roland Barthes for ways in which to transcend this dualism. 'pouvons-nous *imaginer* un verbe qui soit à la fois sans sujet, sans attribut, et cependant transitif, comme par exemple un acte de connaissance sans sujet connaissant et sans objet connu? C'est pourtant cette imagination qui nous est demandée devant *dhyana* indou' (Barthes, 1970:13)
- (3) 'Since every scholar must reject such uniformed marshalling of faulty linguistic data, Dr Tsunoda runs the risk of having other aspects of his work dismissed out of hand as well' (Miller, 1979:450)

Reference

- Alfonso, Anthony (1971). *Japanese Language Patterns*. Tokyo: Sophia University L.L. Centre of Applied Linguistics.
- Bagby, Philip (1956). *Culture and History — A Prolegomena To The Comparative Study of Civilisation*. Taiwan Edition.
- Bally, Charles (1952). *Le Langage et La Vie*. Geneva: Societé de Publications Romanes et Françaises XXXIV
- Barthes, Roland (1970). *L'Empire des Signes*. Paris. Flammarion.
- Bernstein, Basil (1973). *Class, Codes And Control*. London: Paladin, Granada Publishing Limited.
- Black, Max (1972). *The Labyrinth of Language*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, Limited.
- Burgess, Anthony (1973). *Urgent Copy* Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Limited.
- Cassirer, Ernest (1955). *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 1, Language*. New Haven. Yale University Press.
- Crystal, David (1972). *Linguistics*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex. Penguin Books Limited.
- Empon, William (1931). *Seven Types of Ambiguity* New York. Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Herodotus (1975). *The Histories. Book II* Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Limited.
- Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1836) *Über die Kawi-Sprache auf der Insel Jawa*. Berlin.
- Jespersen, Otto (1960). *Language, Its Nature, Development and Origin*. London. Allen & Unwin, (14th Impression).
- Kainz, P (1962). *Grundlagen der allgemeinen Sprachpsychologie-Psychologie der Sprachen*. Stuttgart.
- Kindaichi, Haruhiko (1974) *Nihongo*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho.
- Kindaichi, Haruhiko (1975) *Nihonjin no Gengo-Hyoogen*. Tokyo: Koodansha.
- Kojeve, Alexandre (1975). *Kommentar zur Phenomenologie des Geistes*. Frankfurt am Main. Suhkamp Verlag.
- Kumon, Shumpei (1982). *Some Principles Governing The Thought and Behaviour of Japanists (Contextualists)*. Seattle, Washington. Journal of Japanese Studies Vol 8 No. 1
- Kwant, Remy (1965). *Phenomenology of Language* Pittsburgh, Pa. Duquesne University Press.
- Langer, Susan K (1967). *Philosophy In A New Key* Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press.
- Lewin, Bruno (1959). *Abriss der japanischen Grammatik* Wiesbaden. Otto Harrassowitz.
- Miller, Roy Andrew (1979) *Review Nihonjin no noo*. Seattle, Washington Journal of Japanese Studies, Vol. 5 No. 2.
- Nakamura, Hajime (1968). *Ways of Thinking of Eastern People*. Honolulu. University of Hawaii Press.
- Orwell, George (1972). *Inside the Whale and Other Essays*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex. Penguin Books Limited.

- Potter, Simenon (1968). *Language In The Modern World*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Limited.
- Sapir, Edward (1949). *Language*. New York. Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Sapir, Edward (1929). *The Status of Linguistics as a Science*. Baltimore: Language, Vol. 5
- Sapir, Edward. *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*. Quoted in. Susan K. Langer (1967). *Philosophy In A New Key* Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press.
- Seeber, Wilhelm (1961). *Hegel und die Entwicklung des Geistes zur Freiheit*. Stuttgart. Quoted in. Remy Kwant (1965). *Phenomenology of Language*. Pittsburgh. Pa. Duquesne University Press.
- Seward, Jack (1968). *Harakiri*. Rutland, Vermont & Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company
- Shibata, Takeshi (1976). *Nihonjin no keigo to keigo-koodoo*. Tokyo: Chikuma Shoboo.
- Spengler, Oswald (1972) *Untergang des Abendlandes*. Munchen. Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.
- Steiner, George (1968). *Language and Silence*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex. Penguin Books Limited.
- Steiner, George (1975). *Extraterritorial*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Limited.
- Suzuki, Takao (1973) *Kotobo to bunka*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho.
- Toulmin, Stephen & Goodfield, June (1975). *The Discovery of Time*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Limited.
- Whitrow, G.J (1975). *The Nature of Time*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Limited.
- Worf, Benjamin Lee (1973). *Language, Thought and Reality* Cambridge, Mass. The Massachusettes Institute of Technology Press.