THE SOCIAL BASIS OF LINGUISTICS

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> Philologia autem quod etiam ipsa doctissima est, licet femineis numeris aestimetur, absoluta tamen ratione perficitur.
> Martianus Capella, *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (ed. A. Dick), II, 106.
> But philology is herself most learned; granted that she is reckoned among the feminine numbers, yet she is accomplished by abstract reason.

I. LINGUISTICS AND POLITICS

THE scientific study of language has been popularly regarded with a certain humorous tolerance not unmixed with contempt. It has been looked upon as a discipline preeminently innocuous and safe; and the quality of "safeness," in these days of turmoil, is quite naturally assumed to exist in direct proportion to its distance from the social sciences and the problems which they pose. Probably the typical linguist is conceived of in the image of Browning's Renaissance grammarian, who is described (with doubtful rhymes) in the quatrain:

> He settled *Hoti's* business—let it be!—
> Properly based *Oun*—
> Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic *De,*
> Dead from the waist down.

It is today assumed, not unjustly, that a man must needs be dead from a higher point than his waist down, if he can shut himself off from the conflicts of the present and find any measure of happiness in the investigation and rapt contemplation of Greek particles. To be sure, a grammarian is not a linguist; but from the point of view indicated, it makes little difference whether a man is immersed in the study of *oun* and *de* to determine their use in sentences, or to establish their comparative vocalism in the system of Indo-European cognates. It is the aloofness which is condemned, not the precise subject matter studied.

Yet linguistic science is by no means aloof from the affairs of the

market place. A moment's reflection serves to convince even the untrained observer of the fundamental importance of language in promoting social life among men. This has been realized ever since Aristotle first pointed out that man is essentially a social animal. And since speech is by far the most rapid, efficient, and generally satisfactory means of communication devised by human beings living together socially, it must be very intimately connected with other aspects of their social life. It is perhaps the closeness and immediacy of this connection which has led to its being ignored. A factor which contributes so directly to the possibility of social living is accepted unanalytically as a self-understood *datum,* a part of the condition which it promotes, which has only been studied in relation to that condition at a comparatively late date.

Considering the very function of language as a means of communication among men, it is no wonder that it is being approached in more recent times as a social phenomenon primarily. There is a double consequence of the newer approach. Not only are we in a position to make some correlation between types of speech and the cultures from which they spring (though this aspect of the study is still in its initial stages); but it is also increasingly clear that the work of any specialist on the general problems of language will be colored by his theories and attitudes—consciously or unconsciously held—concerning the nature of society. Specialists in any branch of human knowledge, including philology (that shy nymph of whom Martianus Capella said: *absoluta tamen ratione perficitur*), are themselves single human beings, each with his own world-view. And the judgment of each concerning the rise and change of linguistic phenomena, in fact even his presentation of the facts of such change, will be colored by his basic attitude to questions like the nature of social change, the desiderata of social organization, the relation of institutions (such as the church) to the group; and, above all, by a preference for one form of ownership of the means of economic production over another. In short, it is not a matter of indifference to know, in approaching the work of a given linguist, what his philosophy of society may be, and whether his thinking is turned to fascism, liberal democracy, or communism.

A few examples will make this latter point clear. In modern times the study of specific languages is connected with problems of political nationalism; the question of the language to be used in schools and

official documents becomes a contributory cause of war. Fichte may have had small claim to the title of linguist; nevertheless his nationalism expressed itself with dogmatic certainty in linguistic terms when he said, speaking of such Romance words as *humanity, popularity,* and the like:

> Within the compass of German speech, such a cloak of unintelligibility is used either because of awkwardness or malicious knavery; it is to be avoided, and the best and readiest means of doing this is a translation into true and correct German. But in the neo-Latin languages this unintelligibility is both natural and original, and can be avoided by no means, since the speakers of these languages do not really possess a living language by which they can make test of the dead one; actually, they do not even have a mother tongue! [1]

If Fichte may be forgiven such an egregious statement on the plea of exceptionally trying circumstances and the lack of sound linguistic information to check his fervor, the same pleas can not be urged in defense of Gustav Neckel, who quotes Fichte with general approval,[2] but complains of what he considers to be a similar example of linguistic chauvinism in Antoine Meillet's *Caractères généraux des langues germaniques.* Among other things, Neckel says that Meillet had denied to Primitive Germanic the character of an original Indo-European *Ursprache* and had exaggerated the differences which distinguish Germanic from Indo-Iranian, Hellenic, Italic, Slavic, Celtic, and the like. This is supposed to be due to the state of war then existing between France and Germany. Neckel is deeply hurt because Meillet had denied to Germanic the characteristic formation of compound nouns on the model of *akro-polis* or *Nea-polis.* It may be, as Neckel claims, that Meillet regarded the compound *Jung-frau* (without stem vowel) as more characteristic of Germanic because his book was written in 1916; but what, asks Neckel indignantly, of such compounds as Gothic *hrainja-hairts,* which is parallel in formation to Latin *quadrupes,* or Old High German *urherz,* analogous in structure to Latin *extorris?* The detached

[1] *Fichtes Reden an die deutsche Nation. IV Rede.* Ed. Rudolf Eucken (Leipzig, 1909), p. 70: "Im Umfange deutscher Rede entsteht eine solche Einhüllung in Unverständlichkeit und Dunkel entweder aus Ungeschicktheit oder aus böser Tücke; sie ist zu vermeiden, und die Übersetzung in rechtes wahres Deutsch liegt als stets fertiges Hülfemittel bereit. In den neulateinischen Sprachen aber ist diese Unverständlichkeit natürlich and ursprünglich, und sie ist durch gar kein Mittel zu vermeiden, indem diese überhaupt nicht im Besitze irgendeiner lebendigen Sprache, woran sie die tote prüfen könnten, sich befinden, und, die Sprache genau genommen, eine Muttersprache gar nicht haben."

[2] *Germanen und Kelten; Historisch-linguistisch-rassenkundliche Forschungen und Gedanken zur Geisteskrisis* (Heidelberg, 1929), p. 130 ff.: "Berlin 1807/8—Paris 1915/6."

observer may wonder why so much indignation is evoked by these differences; and why indeed the form *Jung-frau* is tacitly assumed to be an inferior one because divergent from *Neapolis*. But there is reason for Neckel's concern over the question whether Primitive Germanic was inherited by his ancestors or learned by them as an alien tongue from conquerors. In the latter case, his ancestors are denied the possession of an Indo-European language by right of descent; and since in popular speech Indo-European is the same as "Aryan," such a proposition has definite political implications today.

It is not alone the cruder aspects of nationalism which one finds reflected in the work of eminent linguists. Curiously enough, a faith in liberal democracy and the system of the League of Nations is clearly apparent in the work of Antoine Meillet, particularly his *Langues dans l'Europe nouvelle*,[3] written at the close of the war. Being dominated by the ideas of *France, Germany,* and *Italy* as single entities, and ignoring completely the internal class divisions within each country, Professor Meillet was able to write:

> Events have demonstrated that the moral unity of civilization did not completely correspond to material unity. Germans have different social concepts from those of the French, the Italians, and the British and American peoples. [Yes, one may well say; but Germans *of what class* compared to French *of what class?*] The world is not ripe for a true international unity which, reposing on the elements common to all of civilized Europe, would serve the practical relations of the entire world. [But] when the democracies [of the world] dominate, they will see more clearly the international necessity now hidden from them by the effort to achieve power. . . . The small democracies of today delight in minor national languages; the universal democracy now being founded will freely discover universal means of expression.

Alas for the prophecies of M. Meillet, the believer in democracy! The supposed triumph of democracy and the institution of that League of Nations so ardently desired by him in 1918, have had no such beneficent effect on the linguistic situation in Europe as he envisaged. It is not by the path of Versailles that unity of communication can be achieved. And events in Germany, resulting from Versailles, have turned into bitter irony the words of Karl Vossler:

> The concept of tolerance for national languages is an achievement of German scholarship, born of love and pride of one's own and understand-

[3] First edition (Paris, 1918).

ing of the other's strange and yet related spirit. If *we* do not defend this ideal and strive for its practical realization, if we allow ourselves to become Romance in the West and South, Danish in the North, and Slav in the East, it is lost. No other nation will honor this ideal from inner necessity.[4]

II. LINGUISTICS AND RELIGION

It is not only in matters of national and political import that our human, all-too human scholars reveal their social philosophies. A certain attitude to religion, or to the church as an institution, or to the general philosophy of Christianity, will determine even a technical discussion of linguistic phenomena. Consider, for instance, the matter of accent in the Romance languages. We know that at a certain period of the latter Roman Empire, a strong stress accent of the sort familiar today in Germanic languages, replaced the musical accent typical of classical Latin. This is one of the outstanding characteristics of late popular Latin—technically known as Vulgar Latin—which later developed into the several Romance languages of modern times. Even so special a subject as this may serve as a touchstone to reveal the philosophical slant of a scholar. Professor Henri-François Muller, whose pioneer work on the chronology of Vulgar Latin texts constitutes an admirable achievement in factual clarification, is betrayed into an amazing piece of vitalistic mysticism when he attempts to explain this change in the nature of Latin accent. According to him, it is the mystic force of Christianity, the newly ennobled human soul, which caused people to enunciate *cál'dus* with increased intensity when formerly they had been saying the trisyllable *calidus* with an easy pagan grace. He puts the suggestion with a certain eloquence:

[4] *The Spirit of Civilization in Language* (New York, 1932), p. 133. Is it possible that Professor Vossler had never heard of the defense of and striving for this ideal of "tolerance for national languages" in the Soviet Union? Or did he think it irrelevant to his thesis? Here if anywhere the ideal is honored "from inner necessity," since it springs from a comprehension of the social significance of minor languages and cultures *within the frame of a given economic system.* When that economic system is collectivist, there is a genuine basis—never to be found in the rival capitalist "democracies" of Europe—for the development of unified communication. For one thing, the absence of embittered nationalism produced by economic competition makes this possible. More important still, the conscious direction of events in the light of a knowledge of dialectical materialism provides a sound theoretical approach to the achievement of the desired end. It is precisely through the greatest possible encouragement and tolerance for the diversified minor nationalities and their languages at present, that the opposite state of unity may be best approximated. It is a pity that Professor Meillet, who is one of the world's greatest linguists, might not have based his attitude on such theoretical principles as these, rather than the vague faith in a *Société des Nations* which has so tragically betrayed his sincere hopes of the year 1918.

May we not, then, look upon the growing intensity of religious feeling, of mystic fervor (cf. the deep devotion with which the people of Tours and its environs carried the columns destined for the new basilica of St. Martin at the end of the sixth century) as irresistibly increasing the force of the stress accent in creative linguistic monuments? . . . Thus is the Latin language remodeled according to an intuitive force which gives organic direction to the movement and which may perhaps be defined as follows: the niceties of thought and expression obtained by means of the fine Latin morphology depending on quantity and the careful pronunciation of endings gives way to a forcible phonetic utterance more suited to the impulse for direct expression.[5]

To a humble materialist—whether vulgar, dialectic, or other—these statements contain a number of unwarranted or at least unsupported assumptions. One would like to know more of the "intuitive force" which directed the change, for instance. Is it a creation of M. Bergson? And why is it that the church alone is considered as a possible source of the change, to the neglect of other institutions and influences?[6] The choice may be assumed to have some significance.

Another instance—less concrete, perhaps, but more broadly significant. At various times scholars have raised the question of monogenesis as opposed to polygenesis of human speech: whether it had a single origin at a given time and place, whence it spread over the rest of the earth, or whether it was independently evolved by different branches of the human family. At this late date it would seem to make little difference to us which event actually took place, since in either case there were similar causes and results, whether they were repeated or not. Nevertheless, the history of the controversy reveals much concerning the fundamental postulates of those who took part in it. Since linguistic science, like other disciplines, was originally under the

[5] Henri F. Muller, Introduction to *A Chrestomathy of Vulgar Latin* (New York, 1932), p. 15 f.

[6] Karl Vossler suggests several possibilities in discussing the development of Vulgar Latin (*The Spirit of Civilization in Language*). Not being a specialist, I hesitate to propound substitute explanations; but I have wondered why Professor Muller has not mentioned, along with the mystic fervor of the Christian soul, the presence of fairly large groups of people speaking with the strong stress of the Germanic dialects. The Roman poet who complained of the ubiquity and insistence of Gothic speech in the *De Conviviis barbaris* of the Latin Anthology:

> Inter *"eils"* Goticum *"scapiamatziaia drincan"*
> Non audet quisquam dignos educere versus—

must have had the stress accent constantly present in his ears. And this too would tend to change *calidus* into *cál'dus.*

shadow of theology, the first attitude was *a priori* in favor of monogenesis; specifically, of divine origin. As early as Herder, however, there was an opposition to this explanation, and an attempt to trace language to "nature" and "the speech of animals," [7] although Herder himself returned to a modified form of the theory of single divine origin in his *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts.*

As was to be expected, the drastic reorientation caused in all such speculation by the doctrine of evolution resulted in a strong predisposition towards polygenesis. Just because the Garden of Eden had been a haunting specter so long, it had to be exorcised by a dogmatic assumption of its opposite. To this reaction can be attributed the affirmations of polygenesis by Haeckel, Schleicher, and Friedrich Müller. The last, in his *Grundriss der Sprachwissenschaft* [8] argued as follows: language is not correlated with race; at a period when there were only races, not yet peoples or nations, man was "a speechless creature, entirely lacking the intellectual development based on speech-activity" (*ein sprachloses—der geistigen, auf der Sprachtätigkeit beruhenden Entwicklung noch völlig ermanglendes Wesen*); language must have developed after the differentiation into races. The "speech" of animals developed gradually into human speech—so gradually, that man must have been a diversified type long before the evolution was completed; "and herewith we may be said to have an *a priori* postulation, from the point of view of the history of evolution, of the derivation of human speech (as an ideational and conceptional language based on sounds) from several mutually independent sources." [9] As complementary inductive proof, Müller cites the great divergence in the existing families of human speech, such as Indo-European, Semitic, Hamitic, Caucasian, and the like. Their dissimilarities are too great to permit of a common origin. Moreover, the period of time when the human race was a unit (if ever it was!) must have been too short for the development of so complex an accomplishment as language.

[7] *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache,* ed. Theodor Matthias (Leipzig, 1901), p. 21: "Schon als Thier, hatte der Mensch Sprache"; also p. 32: "Er [der Ursprung] ist nicht bloss nicht übermenschlich: sondern offenbar Thierisch: das Naturgesetz einer empfindsamen Maschiene."

[8] 1 (Wien, 1876), p. 50 ff.

[9] "Und somit hätten wir vom Standpunkte der Entwicklungsgeschichte a priori ein Zurückgehen der menschlichen Sprache als einer auf articulirten Lauten basirenden Vorstellungs- und Begriffs-Sprache auf mehrere von einander unabhängige Ursprünge postulirt," p. 55.

Hence Müller is led to the postulate of Haeckel "who derives the various races from one *genus,* speechless primeval man (insofar as he had only an affective language—*Gefühlssprache*), or the *Homo primigenius alalus.*" [10]

More recently, there has been an increasing scepticism of such scepticism concerning monogenesis. There is a return to a more hospitable attitude towards the theory of monogenesis; but needless to say, this is something quite different from the eighteenth century theological or ideal monogenesis of language. A cautious statement concerning the possibility of such origin is contained in the work of Antoine Meillet and Marcel Cohen: [11] since certain facts have been adduced which indicate the ultimate relationship of Semitic and Indo-European and of Finno-Ugric and Indo-European, and even of remoter groups, there is fresh ground for postulating a single origin of all speech. "But the traits of this common language are so faintly indicated that it would be premature to make any definite affirmation in the matter. . . . It is more appropriate to leave in suspense the question of the monogenesis of human language and, indeed, any form of the question of origins." Reverting to the same problem with less cautious reserve, Alfredo Trombetti commits himself to a complete denial of Müller's evolutionary scepticism. He argues definitely for monogenesis in his ambitious work on language.[12] He calls Haeckel's theory *mitologia,* and deplores the fact that his followers judged and condemned in advance, without evidence, "the honest attempts to connect one primitive group with another; for which reason many scholars drew back from fruitful research, with serious loss to science." [13] On the basis of extremely wide and detailed study, Trombetti builds up a scheme including wider and wider groups and families of languages, on the basis of surviving similarities in numerals, pronominal forms, and the like. For instance, he records similarities between numerals in African languages and Munda-Khmer (in northeast India); between pronouns in Hamitic-Semitic, Dravidian, and Munda-Polinesian; between numerals in Indo-Chinese and Ural-Altaic; and between verbs in Dakota (American Indian) and Georgian (in

[10] *Op. cit.,* p. 73.

[11] *Les Langues du monde* (Paris, 1924), Introduction.

[12] *Elementi di Glottologia* (Bologna, 1922-1923).

[13] "Furono quindi giudicati anti-scientifici e condannati a priori gli onesti tentativi di connettere un gruppo primario all'altro, onde molti si ritrassero da feconde ricerche, con grave danno della scienza," p. 189.

the Caucasus).[14] The greatest similarities, he observes, are to be found between groups most widely separated on the periphery of a rough circle having its center in India. This he explains by raising the hypothesis once more of a single origin, both for all mankind and all human languages, in India, and of successive radiating emigrations which carried the most archaic forms of speech to the farthest circumference (where similarities are preserved to this day). Later emigrations have carried other forms of speech to the circumference of other circles within the greatest one.

Trombetti is convinced that a comparative study of linguistic forms available to us today can give us some picture of the culture of the first men who spoke the first language. He establishes their knowledge of the use of fire and firewood by a series of widely scattered similar words: Bantu-Sudanese *koni,* Nandi *kweni,* Sanscrit *a-gni-,* Latin *i-gni-,* Slavic *o-gni,* Australian *keni, koonni-a, kuni-ka, n-goon,* Tasmanian *n-gune* (equal to Bantu-Sudanese *n-gun*), Duke of York *un-gan* (compared with Lithuanian *un-gni-*), Eskimo *i-gne-k, in-kne-k,* etc., etc. Considering the extreme caution enjoined by Meillet and Cohen, we should beware of permitting ourselves to be dazzled by such a series of forms which, for one thing, entirely disregard chronology. Trombetti's evidence is worth considering; but it is also to be remembered that he presents it as part of an understandable reaction from the dogmatism of Müller and the rigid evolutionists. His espousal of the opposite point of view is caused in part by their own reaction from the Garden of Eden.

But the Garden of Eden is by no means exorcised. Father Wilhelm Schmidt, S.V.D., the learned and versatile founder of the journal *Anthropos* in Vienna, and author of the monumental *Sprachfamilien und Sprachenkreise der Erde,*[15] published by Carl Winter, is very much concerned with it. His book, which is, in his own words, intended to sing *das Hohelied der Linguistik,* is written from the point of view of Christian ideology throughout. It speaks of an unbridgeable chasm which yawns between man and animal; it dismisses the hypothesis of the *homo alalus* (with quite understandable irony) as "this discovery of the imaginative investigator, E. Haeckel . . . now finally relegated to the crowded museum of curiosities with which evolutionism, in the heyday of its sins, so bountifully endowed the history of

[14] For examples, see *op. cit.,* p. 192 ff.
[15] Heidelberg, 1926.

science." [16] He surveys the various "psychological" theories of the origin of language, nicknamed by Max Müller the bow-wow theory (involving imitation), the pooh-pooh theory (involving interjections) and the ding-dong theory (associated reflexes), and with quite apparent satisfaction finds them to be inadequate. And he reaches the conclusion of monogenesis, as we might expect. Considering that "gap, which here yawns between man and animal," and the small number of onomatopoetic and interjectional words ("bow-wow" and "pooh-pooh") in human speech, he finds himself quite readily and easily led back to the Garden of Eden.

> If language is found everywhere and only where there are men, then the origin of language must coincide approximately with the origin of the human race. Thus Genesis recounts with deep significance how God conducted the animals before Adam soon after his creation, so that he might name them; an abbreviated mode of expressing the fact that in his wanderings through nature he saw the animals and formed names for them by means of congenial exclamations. But he was aware that he could find no companion like in nature unto himself among them, for the animals understood not his cries, nor he their sounds, and so they could not be truly associated together in their living. This was only possible with Eve, like him in nature, whom God presented to him; and it was first in association with her—essentially, therefore, in social intercourse—that he could realize the initial steps of the formation of language and develop it further.[17]

Even if this poetic recourse to a discredited myth on the part of an extremely learned philologist is condoned as harmless allegory, as a symbolizing of profound and universal truth (*tiefsinnig* is the Father's word), it must be pointed out that it does not even avoid the dilemmas for which the evolutionary materialists had been satirized. For, with the introduction of "congenial exclamations" (*kongeniale Ausrufe*), we are confronted once more with the question of their origin; are they to be imitations or interjections or evocations of an associated reflex? And by what process did both Adam and Eve, even in *sozialem Zusammensein,* decide to call an apple by that name? (Or, if we are to believe once more with the theologians of the seventeenth century that Hebrew was the original language, how did they find the term, *tapuka,* for an apple?) Materialism, says Father

[16] *Ibid.,* p. 4. Also: "Nirgends auf der Erde gibt es ganz oder halb sprachlose Völker; sprachlos konnten sie nur vorübergehend sein, vor Staunen und Entrüstung nämlich wenn sie hörten, was blühender Evolutionismus ihnen angedichtet hatte."

[17] *Ibid.,* p. 16.

Schmidt—lumping together all types of materialism—cannot bridge the gap between isolated speech-gestures and universals, just as it cannot bridge the gap between speaking man and dumb animal; therefore it is necessary to introduce still another gap, he concludes, between the human soul and the rest of the universe:

> Since it [Wundt's psychological theory] declares itself unable to fill the wide, deep gap before the human soul directly by an observation (*eine Beobachtung*), and for philosophical-metaphysical reasons derives the soul from the hand of the divine Creator, therefore it must ultimately derive language also from Him. Since this process is likewise hidden from our observation, it would be scientifically more exact to exclude this whole question from the province of science, than to create the appearance, by means of an illusory theory of evolution, that the problem had indeed been solved by "indirect" means.[18]

Thus the problem is solved by annihilation—by removal from the province of predictable and controllable cause-and-effect relations; and all this in the name of science!

Such a metaphysical approach is not without practical consequences. Bloomfield has well described the temptation to appeal to "purely spiritual standards" instead of reporting the facts, if one works on the basis of an "idealistic" view of psychology.

> A worker who accepts the materialistic hypothesis in psychology is under no such temptation; it may be stated as a principle that in all sciences like linguistics, which observe some specific type of human activity, *the worker must proceed exactly as if he held the materialistic view.* This practical effectiveness is one of the strongest considerations in favor of scientific materialism.[19]

Father Schmidt would no doubt question the cogency of this argument. The practical effects of the opposite view in his own case are a predisposition towards the relating of widely separate linguistic families and, in the editing of *Anthropos,* anti-evolutionism with an implied critique in favor of monogamy and monotheism in discussing primitive cultures.[20]

[18] *Ibid.,* p. 22. To be sure, Schmidt still leaves to man the *Verwirklichung* of the capacity for speech; *die tatsächliche Sprachschöpfung.* As authorities he quotes the Church Fathers Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine; also Thomas Aquinas and Dante (p. 23). This looks suspiciously like a return to the brink of the *Kluft* in another form.

[19] Leonard Bloomfield, *Language* (New York, 1933), p. 38 (italics mine).

[20] *Anthropos,* founded by Father Schmidt, is edited by Father Georg Holtker, S.V.D. In Wilhelm Koppers's "Das Schicksal der Ethnologie unter dem Sowjet-Regime," XXVII, 1932, 501 ff., ethnologists are condemned in proportion to their adherence to "einer

III. THEORIES ON THE ORIGIN OF SPEECH

The discussion of monogenesis as opposed to polygenesis has inevitably led us, by anticipation, to some consideration of the theories of the manner of origin of speech. The problem here is the same no matter which type of genesis we assume; whether it took place once or many times, there is still the question of the *how;* the manner in which conventional sound-symbols come to be used by a whole community for the same object or referent; [21] the manner in which speech achieves universals such as *apple* as opposed to *this sweet apple, that apple yonder,* or *the red apple.* The problem has naturally engaged the attention of idealists from the time of Plato onward. There is a clear parallel to be seen between the doctrine of Platonic ideas, and the existence of unmodified common nouns such as *apple.* Since it is true that many comparatively primitive languages avoid the use of the unmodified noun, so that it is impossible (without violating usage) to speak of *apple* without a modifying characteristic, there is some evidence that human speech did not always have the machinery for expressing universals. Plato, therefore, could not have written his *Cratylos* before the emergence of unmodified common nouns. He compared words to the tools of a trade; just as a shuttle should be used in a weaver-like manner, so words should be used in a teacher-like manner. But instead of tracing the origin or consequences of use, both on speaker and hearer, Plato continued in a half-fanciful and playful speculation on the possible inner necessity that certain objects must be designated by precisely certain sound-symbols and none other. He was searching for an inner connection between the idea of the thing and the word; and that search was fruitlessly continued in the didactic medieval etymologies by way of Isidore of Seville.

Not until the time of the Hegelian school was there a fresh approach to specifically linguistic problems from the idealist point of view. The writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt [22] are concerned with the matters which Plato left undiscussed. He regards polygenesis as quite within the range of possibility, but points out that the problem

evolutionistisch-materialischen Denkrichtung." The attitude, needless to say, is hostile to the U.S.S.R.

[21] For a discussion of the terms symbol, referent, and reference, see C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* (New York, 1923); summary in Willem L. Graff, *Language and Languages* (New York, 1932), ch. 2.

[22] *Die sprachphilosophischen Werke Wilhelm's von Humboldt,* edited by H. Steinthal (Berlin, 1883).

is the same whether there was single or multiple origin. Since language belongs to a whole people, it constitutes the bridge between subjectivity and objectivity (reminding one of the Schmidtian *Kluft*), and thus becomes a means, not only of presenting truth already recognized, but of discovering truth not yet known. The achievement of speech is, to be sure, described in terms which explain nothing: by a natural *Anlage,* by an inner necessity and ability to speak, by an *innere Kraft* [23]—in other words, by question-begging epithets. The approach to language results in explanations which in appearance at least tend to regard speech as a thing separate from people speaking; as a disembodied Something which roves about the world seeking expression. Thus Humboldt can declare that it is impossible for a language to achieve an excellent grammatical structure "unless it has the good fortune of being spoken at least once by a clever or profoundly reflective nation." [24] He also speaks of a *Selbstthätigkeit* on the part of language, so that language itself becomes "no mere product of activity, but an involuntary emanation of the spirit; not an achievement of the nations, but a gift fallen to their lot by their inner fate." [25]

In justice to Humboldt it must be remembered that in actual history languages are occasionally subject to the good or evil fortune of being spoken by alien peoples superior to—or at least different from—those who imposed it, and in their mouths it may therefore have an accelerated or retarded development. But to speak of a *Selbstthätigkeit* on the part of language, as if it existed apart from those using it, is simply to leave the realm of human experience and enter upon one inhabited by pure ideas, so far unknown to any human being by direct experience. Here linguistics would be left hanging in the air, apart from the conditioning struggles of existence as we know it; and such a concept would have very definite social consequences for the scholar entertaining it. No wonder Marx and Engels complained that German philosophy attempts to descend from heaven (in this case, a paradise of auto-active languages) to earth! It can be

[23] "Der Organismus der Sprachen entspringt aus dem allgemeinen Vermögen und Bedürfniss des Menschen zu reden, und stammt von der ganzen Nation her," *ibid.,* p. 47; "alles geistige Vorrücken kann nur aus innerer Kraftäusserung hervorgehen, und hat insofern immer einen verborgenen, und weil er selbsttätig ist, unerklärlichen Grund," *ibid.,* p. 208.

[24] *Ibid.,* p. 94. In this passage, Humboldt speaks of accent as a matter of spiritual and intellectual portent, in fact the "soul of language," in terms which would please H. F. Muller!

[25] *Ibid.,* p. 189.

said of language as they said of consciousness in *German Ideology*: it "can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process." Which has the salutary effect of bringing consciousness, and language with it, back to earth again.

IV. LINGUISTICS AND HEGELIAN IDEALISM

Nevertheless, Humboldt's linguistic idealism has the great advantage of allowing for movement and change. This advantage (over Plato, for example) arises from the adoption of Hegelian dialectic as applied to linguistic development. Thus by the formula of the identity of opposites we are insured against the fallacy, so loudly proclaimed by imperialists and race chauvinists, that any language is by its very nature—by its *Geist,* if the idealists will!—innately poorer than another. Even rough and barbarous dialects, Humboldt assures us, have all that is necessary for complete use; categories which in time will express all types of ideas.

> Since the joining of the simplest concepts stimulates the whole tissue of the categories of thinking, unity evoking multiplicity, and so on . . . , and every grade of experience summons and evokes those most closely associated with it, therefore, as soon as the expression of the simplest conjunction of ideas has been clearly and definitely achieved, then the entirety of the language is present even in respect to vocabulary. *Everything spoken forms that which is not yet spoken or prepares the way for it.*[26]

An important practical consequence of this theoretical statement would be the attitude adopted by an investigator of one of the less developed languages today. It would be impossible for him to work from the point of view of one speaking a language *intrinsically* superior to the one studied. Even the absence of unmodified common nouns in the latter would not daunt him. Humboldt has stated that any idea you please can be expressed, if necessary by periphrasis, in such a tongue; and more recently we find Franz Boas, from the point of view of a practical anthropologist, affirming the same thing, with the following deduction:

> Thus it would seem that the obstacles to generalized thought inherent in the form of a language are of minor importance only, and that presumably language alone would not prevent a people from advancing to a more generalized form of thinking, if the general state of their culture

[26] *Ibid.,* p. 43; italics mine. See also p. 78 f.

should require expression of such thought; that under these conditions, the language would be moulded rather by the cultural state.[27]

It is quite possible to teach an American Indian to use an abstract noun like *love* or *pity* without modifiers, although native idiom may require modified locutions always, such as *his love for me.* The problem is merely one of accelerating the change in linguistic development, since the condition for such change is always present.

Humboldt traces movement in languages to the dialectic play of opposites within a society, despite his tendency to remove language as an idea to a realm of its own. Both aspects of his thought are revealed in these words: "Without regard for communication between man and man, speech is a necessary condition for the thought of the individual in isolated solitude." [28] In practice, however, language develops only socially, and man understands himself only insofar as he has tested the intelligibility of his words on others. Since all understanding is, moreover, at the same time non-understanding, the tension due to differing intelligibility between speaker and listener permeates all language and resolves itself in change. The act of speaking has, besides, a double effect; both an *Ein-* and a *Rückwirkung.* This dual consequence is repeatedly expressed by Humboldt. Thus the development of grammatical categories is not only a product of change in languages formerly loosely agglutinating, but also in its turn has a reverse influence (*Rückwirkung*) on the spirit of those speaking. Language is the means by which thought realizes itself as both subject and object. The complete dialectic machinery is here put into operation, but on something which still remains aloof in the realm of ideas.

The aloofness of Humboldt's system was criticized even by those who immediately followed him and were deeply indebted to him. Steinthal analyzed the relation of Humboldt to Hegel; [29] admitting the latter's philosophy to be the "most perfect of all systems thus far," he pointed out that "the ideas of space, of time, of movement, of matter, etc., as they are developed from the logical idea according to the Hegelian method, are not discovered before the philosopher has had experience of these things; and yet these ideas are supposed to be quite independent of this experience, and quite unconditioned by

[27] *The Mind of Primitive Man* (New York, 1911), p. 153.

[28] *Sprachphilosophische Werke,* p. 290.

[29] *Die Sprachwissenschaft Wilh. v. Humboldt's und die Hegel'sche Philosophie* (Berlin, 1848), ch. 1. See also Steinthal's *Der Ursprung der Sprache* (Berlin, 1877), p. 113.

its content." His comment leads to a very concrete deduction: "I do not know how long philosophy can remain in this contradictory relationship to herself and the other languages; but so long as she does, religion is also justified in maintaining her opposition to the world, and the autocrat in maintaining his to the people." Ludwig Noiré tried to avoid Humboldt's frequent recourse to something "mysterious," "inconceivable," and "unexplainable" in discussing the origin of language; but even his theories (as we shall see) turn to an otherwise undefined *Phantasie* and *geniale Inspiration* to explain why certain particular sounds were used to designate certain products of human labor.[30] In his later work, Steinthal carried his criticism of Humboldt still farther, under the influence of Darwinism. He repudiated the entire subjective method of using a hypothetical non-speaking man as point of departure. Curiously enough, the hypothesis of the *homo alalus,* which Father Schmidt criticizes as Haeckel's "sin" in the name of evolution, is here abandoned in the name of the same theory.

> For a Darwinian, this [fiction of a not-yet-speaking man] is not only an unreal, unvalid, unjustified phantasy, but it also leaps over the very question of origin, and instead of evolving man, assumes him as existent. This would be a denial of the theory of the descent of man.[31]

In other words, Steinthal admits that although Haeckel's *homo alalus* may have existed, Steinthal's former method of deriving him, under Hegelian-Humboldtian influence, was false.

Before leaving the indubitable contribution of Hegelian dialectic to the theoretical study of language, it is worth while to point out certain fallacies which arise from a neglect of this method. James Byrne, in attempting to construct a philosophy of language (primarily of grammar), disregards the close dialectic relation of language to those who speak it. He talks of the effect of a people's temperament on the type of speech they produce: thus, the loose grammatical structure and the iteration of demonstratives of African languages presumably reflect the quick mental excitability of the races speaking them; mental slowness, stoicism, and low intensity are presumably revealed by the speech of American Indians. An "undeliberative" race will not distinguish a subject from a verb clearly, nor put it in its "natural"

[30] This criticism is embodied in Anton Berg's *Die Anschauung Ludwig Noirés über Ursprung und Wesen von Sprache und Vernunft* (Darmstadt, 1918), p. 30.

[31] *Ursprung der Sprache,* p. 304.

place before the verb; a "deliberative" one will. Moreover, according to Byrne,

> If the self-direction of a race be an element of no great significance in its life, either because the will, though strong and active, cannot control the external conditions, or because action, though it may in its commencement spring from will, is in its performances little guided by volitional thought, but rather by habit or imitation, or because action springs little from will, but rather from pleasure and desire, or from the habitual suggestion or constraint of object or circumstance; the thought of self as governor and realizer of life will be less noted, and the thought of the subject distinct from the verb as the realizer of fact will be proportionally weak, and the nominative as such, that is, its distinctive element, will get weak expression in language.[32]

To the weary reader who has struggled through to the end of such a sentence, it may seem like nothing so much as confusion and obscurantism; actually, it embodies a basis for labelling African and Indian languages as intrinsically "inferior" for all time. The social and political consequences of such value judgments are clear. Moreover, the insufficiency of their theoretical basis is apparent from a comparison with Humboldt's treatment of the same subject. Humboldt never loses sight of the fact that grammatical categories are not only the product of the thought of people speaking but have a *Rückwirkung* at the same time; that the interplay of these two influences simultaneously at work in opposite directions causes change in the very nature of the grammatical categories, which are by no means fixed for all time; and that a language is not only discursive or repetitious because of the character of the people speaking it, but also the speakers are themselves shaped by the language they use.

V. THE "SOCIOLOGICAL" SCHOOL

Another example of the weakness of non-dialectic analysis may be found in the "sociological" theories of language held by Father Schmidt. Here an attempt is made to relate grammatical and phonetic structure with the forms of society—an attempt which holds some promise of reward, if properly made. After a wide linguistic survey, Schmidt concludes that purely vocalic *Auslaut*[33] is to be associated with a developed patriarchal-totemistic culture of hunting; and that

[32] James Byrne, *General Principles of the Structure of Language* (London, 1885), p. 27.

[33] *Auslaut* means the sound occurring at the end of a word or syllable; *Anlaut*, the one at the beginning. Schmidt's conclusion is stated on p. 310 ff., *op. cit.*

Auslaut of a single consonant is more typically connected with primitive matriarchal culture of digging and hoeing. He admits that the native Australian languages deviate from this pattern of correspondence, and states further: "I am not in a position to state how this one-consonant *Auslaut* differs from the similar *Auslaut* of many [other] languages of primitive cultures." As for the nomadic cattle-raising tribes of the Ural-Altaic peoples, he finds multiple consonant *Auslaut* (and *Anlaut* as well) characteristic of these, particularly combinations with the sibilant *s*. To this group he relates Indo-European, Hamitic, and Semitic.

Grammatical usage is also associated with specific types of culture. To the position of the genitive noun which modifies another, Schmidt attaches pivotal importance. If we regard the compound *house-key* (with the first word more strongly stressed) as involving a pre-positional genitive, and *key of the house* as involving post-positional genitive, we have an instance of the difference in usage. The social implications, according to Schmidt, are as follows: in the former usage, *house-key,* the genitive represents the differentia, through which the generality of the following concept is limited. The differentia, representing the new idea modifying an older one, draws the greater attention (expressed in accent). "Therefore, in the naive, natural, spontaneously warm thought-process involved in the formation of words, the genitive is placed first. But in the cooler, constructive, 'logical' thought-process, the genitive is placed second precisely because it expresses the *differentia specifica,* the later, limiting concept,—as for instance in the scientific terminology of zoological and botanical genera and species." [34] The former must therefore be the more primitive, the latter the more advanced mode of expression. But "naive, natural, spontaneously warm thought-processes" are, according to the Father, distinctively feminine (this is an underlying axiom with him), and are to be associated with primitive matriarchy. The more rational, cool, and constructive post-position of the genitive is to be associated with the superior patriarchal form of society with private property and individual ownership of land, so that "instead of the simple pre-position of the genitive characteristic of this thought-process, the substantive or genus is now placed first, and then a word which means *property, belonging,* or *owning* is added as analytical periphrasis *before* the genitive."

Setting aside the judgments expressed in all this for the moment,

[34] *Op. cit.,* p. 464.

even though they too are open to argument, we find the greatest weakness in the whole theory manifest when we read the suggestion concerning the manner in which this supposedly so fundamental change in construction occurred. The explanation offered is quite a mechanical one. For every transition, a form of mixture of languages must be assumed. In one guise this mixture is associated with exogamy, or the marrying of strange men into a tribe, which necessitates their learning a new language. According to Father Schmidt, it is a very beneficent thing that men, not women, are most frequently obliged to learn a new language under matriarchy. "The manner of a man in learning new languages is to press, far more than a woman, towards a 'rational' analysis (*Zersetzung*) and transformation of the foreign language which they are learning." [35] Hence there results a dissolution, an *Auflösung,* of the language which is auspicious for "the transformation of the organically and psychologically developed pre-position of the genitive into a post-position, analytically and rationally devised. This latter has therefore a spiritual basis which is closely connected with economic and social factors." The author stresses the fact that this transition does not arise from an inner necessity in the language, but is brought about by purely external factors such as migrations, and consequent mixtures of languages. Wherever the oldest matriarchal culture is left undisturbed, it would never make use of post-positional genitive; likewise, once post-positional genitive is adopted, it would not revert to the former "for purely internal reasons."

From several quarters Father Schmidt has been criticized for his frequent dogmatic and mechanical assumption of *Sprachmischung* to explain linguistic phenomena of change. Trombetti and Meillet are among those who have criticized this cumbersome machinery—and also the insufficient evidence upon which it has been erected.[36] For

[35] *Op. cit.,* p. 465.

[36] "Mi duole di doverlo dire, ma le conclusioni generali dello Schmidt rappresentano un vero regresso. Egli afferma senza possibilità di dimostrazione e col tono dogmatico sembra voler togliere ad ognuno qualsiasi velleità di discutere. . . . Anche nel campo glottologico, come nell'etnologico, lo Schmidt ricorre troppo spesso al concetto delle stratificazioni successive, che egli ha adottato dalla scuola storico-culturale," *op. cit.* p. 72 f. Meillet says: "Qui sait combien il est difficile de prouver une action d'une langue sur une autre . . . , sera surpris du rôle que jouent les 'influences' dans le travail du P. Schmidt, et le caractère vague de ces 'influences' n'est pas fait non plus pour rassurer le lecteur," *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris,* 1920. Meillet also points out that Schmidt's test of consonantal versus vocalic *Auslaut,* if applied to the Indo-European languages, "conduirait a séparer le slave commun du grec, le grec du latin et du sanskrit, et le vieux slave de toutes les langues slaves modernes."

one thing, the underlying assumption that *Mutterrecht* is always and everywhere the most primitive form of culture, associated with the most primitive languages, simply has not been proved. From the theoretical point of view, Schmidt's greatest weakness is the mechanical separation of "internal" from "external" factors in explaining linguistic change. It is, if you will, his ignoring of dialectic which causes him to cry *Sprachmischung!* for every change. This criticism has been made, and well made, by A. Kholodovich in an article published in the Soviet Union several years ago.[37] After a tribute to the imposing scope of Schmidt's learning, the author criticized particularly the superficial treatment of linguistic borrowing and the frequent and mechanical use of it as an explanation. Correspondences do not necessarily mean transfer in every case; the possibility of independent development is neglected, as well as the fundamental explanations of the transfer: why and whence did the borrowing occur; especially why this linguistic element rather than another? Moreover, Kholodovich points out that Schmidt is helpless before certain contradictions: a language which does not conform to the phonetic pattern which would be expected of it according to his scheme, or a post-positional genitive occurring in a matriarchal society.

> Thus, from such examples, we are convinced that the fundamental idea of the theory presupposes the immediate contact of two different linguistic groups, otherwise not one factor of group M, in which are to be found factors of group N, can be explained. This contact is conceived of in a strictly limited segment of space, as if there might not be conceived any other geo-ethnical medium of diffusion of a given linguistic group, and as if a development of such a group might not be achieved [of itself].[38]

In fact, the whole theory is weakened by its anti-evolutionary basis, and by its failure to synthesize all related phenomena with factors tending to linguistic change. In spite of the very promising attempt to approach linguistics from a sociological point of view—an attempt which has earned for the whole *Anthropos* group in Vienna the name of "the sociological school"—the attempt was not carried through. It left out of account the dialectic relation of too many factors which are of vital importance. And the natural result was a mechanical application of the few factors included in the analysis.

[37] "Pater Schmidt i iafeticheskaia Teoriia," in *Iazykovedenie i Materializm* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1931), p. 56-90.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 76 f.

VI. LANGUAGE AND WORK

One of the disciples of Humboldt who made fruitful use of the dialectic formula was Ludwig Noiré. He based some of his speculation on the work of Lazar Geiger, who had traced the origin of speech back to animal grimaces with vocal accompaniment, and the imitation of these on the part of onlookers. Geiger assumed that the first period of language was one in which only verbal roots existed, since he believed that activities received the first designation in speech. He constructed an elaborate chart of verbal roots and their semantic connections in primitive speech, in an attempt to deduce what these activities were: weaving, kneading, binding, etc. Unfortunately, his etymologies are now discredited; but Noiré took them over uncritically. The material on which his discussion was based was unreliable, but his insistence on the importance of semantics was quite justified. Nineteenth century linguistic science was so preoccupied with the rigid and detailed formulation of "sound laws" on the analogy of the "laws" of natural science, that the study of meanings was comparatively neglected.

The work of Geiger and Noiré in semantics was premature; they simply lacked the requisite information. Moreover, Geiger's assumption of a *Wurzelperiode* was pure fantasy. A linguistic root is merely a formulaic expression of a series of correspondences in related languages. Usually it has no more claim to objective existence in ordinary human speech than an algebraic formula. Thus the "root" *pet-* in Indo-European is merely a convenient symbol expressing the fact that there is a regular correspondence between Sanskrit *patati,* Greek *pétomai,* Latin *penna* < *pet-na,* Russian *ptitsa,* Irish *et* < *(p)et,* English *feath-er,* etc. As used by philologists today, it does not imply, as with Geiger, that the root was once a primeval word. Only rarely, as in the case of Latin *fer* and Indo-European **bher-,* does a root-form coincide with an authentic word.

Despite his uncritical use of Geiger's etymologies, Noiré made a fresh and significant contribution to linguistics. He raised the fundamental question—unsolved by Geiger's animal grimaces and gestures —how it is that certain sound-symbols are universally attached to the same referent by all members of the community and evoke approximately the same reference for all of them. In other words, he realized even more clearly than his idealist predecessors that the problem of

language is not one of an isolated thinker,[39] but of individuals in relation to a community. What is there, he asked, about men living in a community which would make for universally comprehensible sound-symbols?

His answer was: communal work; the use of tools. As early as Aristotle there had been a realization of the importance of tools in the development of thinking: "The soul is as the hand: for the hand is the tool of tools, and the mind is the image of images, and sense-experience is the image of the things experienced." [40] Franklin had called man a tool-making animal; Noiré elaborated the statement. Only communal work could offer the conditions, according to him, under which rhythmical sounds would be attached consistently to the same object and have the same meaning for all who heard them. His hypothesis concerning the nature of the first speech-expressions was an improvement over Geiger's in that he suggested, not unreal roots, but complete affirmations connected with activity, as the constituents of primordial language. He imagines it to be some such statement as: "This is our work! This is what we have *dug* [or *heaped* or *woven*] together!"

The theory was elaborated in a whole volume devoted to the tool.[41] The importance of the hand is first stressed in the development of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*):

> The hand practised itself first on one thing, and then on another, and in this manner achieved the characteristic of universality which marks it. . . . It is not difficult to understand how the hand instructs the eye and reason by means of the changes which the hand itself has created, for it constitutes the true transition from the semi-projection to the complete projection of the organs [from the subject into the environment]; more than any other animal organ it is under the complete control of the sense of sight; it can bring about effects of all sorts by means of its mobile and artful parts. Therefore it is quite understandable how the creative hand had to become gradually the organ of perception and comprehension (the very term [*comprehend, auffassen, begreifen*] is taken from the very sphere

[39] Cf. Herder's statement: "Das erste Merkmal, was ich erfasse, ist Merkwort für mich und wird Mittheilungswort für Andere"; this is in part corrected by Humboldt: "Die Sprache verlangt an ein äusseres, sie verstehendes Wesen gerichtet zu werden." Both quoted by Noiré, *Der Ursprung der Sprache* (Mainz, 1877), p. 64f. But how does it come about that the external *Wesen* is also a *sie verstehendes Wesen*?

[40] *De Anima*, III, 8.

[41] *Das Werkzeug und seine Bedeutung für die Entwickelungsgeschichte der Menschheit* (Mainz, 1880).

of its action); in other words, how the shaping organ, also as organ of touch, took over important functions.[42]

The clarification of cause and effect relationships is traced to communal work with tools. The development of ideas is related to the same process. In fact (and here Noiré sidesteps some important questions!) reason is presupposed in the whole process of using tools, "(1) since the causal chain of several members, in which it constitutes an integral part, can only be produced and established by thinking—that is, by ideas and their equivalents, words; (2) since the spiritual tradition of men and at the same time the constant perfecting of it is only possible in this way . . . ; (3) since the tool, as we have proved, has essentially the character of a universal and general idea," peculiar to man.[43] It is, for instance, the spectacle of the knife which gives rise to the idea of cutting, because of iterated communal action. Since Noiré shows signs of Schopenhauer's influence throughout, he connects such action with the will: the will is first made conscious insofar as it is made visible in some object of the external world.

It is apparent from this that Noiré has avoided certain issues implicit in his theory. In deriving both reason and speech from communal work, he claimed to have broken the vicious circle: speech, therefore reason; but reason, therefore speech. Yet thinking—or a kind of pre-rational intellectual activity—is assumed as a prerequisite of both work and speech. And so Noiré, as we have already seen, has recourse ultimately to an inspirational act of genius, otherwise undefined, to bring about the transition from pre-rational thought to speech and thinking. Even the tool itself, on which so much hinges, comes into being by a kind of idealist miracle: "The tool sprang from the Idea, just as something which was not yet the tool, but was to become the tool, developed the Idea of it. Once present, it powerfully transformed the inner spiritual world of man as well as the outer." [44]

As a matter of fact, no theory of the origin of speech has satisfactorily solved the problem, as Edward Sapir points out in his excellent book on language; [45] and it may be that in the absence of objective evidence concerning so remote an event, we may never achieve an entirely clear picture of the process. But Noiré's speculations

[42] *Das Werkzeug*, p. 91 and 95.
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 160.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 162.
[45] *Language* (New York, 1921), p. 5.

are valuable, nevertheless. His insistence upon communal activity in the development of the essentially social function of speech is sound and suggestive. "Only within the collective (*Genossenschaft*) did primitive man find strength, protection, and security," he says; and he never loses sight of this condition. He stresses the dialectic nature of the experiences which shaped human speech. Although he does not commit himself to the reality of the objective world of tools and the products of labor—what Berg calls *das absolute An-sich der Gegenstände* in his criticism of Noiré—he chooses among the *Gegenstände* ideally considered, those most likely to evoke speech. And it is precisely his awareness of the social basis of linguistics that gives the refreshing concreteness to his work.

More recently Ernst Cassirer has made a fresh approach to the problem of language from the idealist point of view, using some of Noiré's suggestions. He iterates the familiar statements concerning the impossibility of having direct knowledge of things, or of the fundamental concepts of any science. These concepts, such as time, space, energy, etc., in physics, are free, useful, illusory images (*Scheinbilder*) to which nothing in sensuous data corresponds. "But although no such correspondence is to be found—perhaps exactly *because* it is not found—the conceptual world of physics is completely closed within itself." [46] These concepts are related as words are in a language. But the theory of language must be freed from any idea of imitation or reflection of reality. Speech can no more grasp the immediacy of life than of things: to quote one of Cassirer's favorite lines: *"Spricht die Seele, so spricht, ach, die Seele nicht mehr."* The peculiar achievement of symbolic expression and the content of every separate symbolic form "is not demonstrable, so long as we hold to the belief that we possess 'reality' before any sort of intellectual formation, as a postulated and self-sufficient Being, as a totality, either of things or of simple experiences." Language is of value in exact ratio to its removal from the immediate and proximate. "This distance from immediate existence and experience is the condition of its visibility and intellectual certainty." The closer a sound-symbol is to what it expresses, the less it can signify. Hence the poverty of onomatopoetic words. Hence the cumbersomeness of those primitive languages which employ a multiplicity of verbs to designate all kinds of *going,* but no one general, abstract verb—to that extent removed from immediate experi-

[46] *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* (Berlin, 1923), I: *Die Sprache,* p. 17.

ence—meaning simply *to go*.[47] This brings Cassirer to the familiar problem of the achievement of general, unmodified terms, the common nouns and unrestricted verbs of speech, which may be used for the expression of abstract ideas.

In suggesting a solution of this problem, Cassirer makes use of the work of Usener [48] concerning the names of the gods. Language and religion, or mythology, are both important for the development of a concept of classes or categories (*Gattungsbegriff*). Usener had discriminated three phases in the development of gods' names: the first and lowest stage was the naming of momentary gods or *Augenblicksgötter,* evoked by a passing stimulus or an isolated occasion. These transitory deities are, apparently, evoked and then quite forgotten. In the second stage, we have a series of gods associated, not with transitory impressions, but with the continuous activities of men. Repeated events give rise to these separate gods or *Sondergötter.* Finally we have personal gods, of whom Usener himself said that the condition for their emergence is a process of linguistic history. The name is now associated with a general activity. "The concept of the *Sondergott,* which expresses a definite Doing, rather than a definite Being, is now for the first time endowed with corporality and to a certain extent achieves flesh and blood." [49] The significance of the development lies in its connection with the elevation of the individual to the general. Universal concepts are evolved like the *persönliche Götter* from the *Augenblicksgötter.* In this way language and myth are vitally connected. Language should rather be compared with myth-making than with the logical thought-processes. And the process of word-making is described in terms of religious-mystical experience: "All concepts of theoretical knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) constitute, as it were, a mere logical upper stratum, which is based on another stratum, that of linguistic concepts." In the process of mythical thinking, "where man is under the spell of this mythical-religious observation (*Anschauung*), it is as if the world had sunk into oblivion. The momentary content upon which his religious interest is intent, completely fills his consciousness, so that nothing else exists beside himself or outside of himself. The ego is concentrated with the maximum of

[47] *Ibid.,* p. 135f.

[48] *Die Götternamen* (Bonn, 1896). Also used by Karl Vossler, *The Spirit of Civilization in Language,* p. 37ff.

[49] Ernst Cassirer, *Sprache und Mythos* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1925), p. 14-17.

energy upon the one object, living in it and forgetting itself in it." [50] The objectification of such internal excitement is a god or demon—one of Usener's *Augenblicksgötter!* It is, we might add, merely a personification of the miracle, the undefinable inspiration to which Noiré had recourse in describing the ultimate origin of speech. Although this was written before 1933, the glorification of myth and irrational internal excitement mark it as fascist in tendency.

From the examples he gives it would seem that Cassirer has not solved the problem which baffled his predecessors. The Ewe-speaking Africans, he tells us, perceive a *trõ* in every momentary experience of water found to slake thirst, of food or shelter achieved. This is comparable to the *Augenblicksgott* whose memory survives after the momentary excitement has passed. But *trõ* is apparently a common noun, abstract and unlimited in application, of precisely the sort which the *Augenblicksgötter* are supposed to bring into being and explain. So with the primitive idea of an all-pervasive *Mana,* a universal force, the positive side of tabu, which is designated under various names (*Manitu* of the Algonquins, *Mulungu* of the Bantus) by various primitive peoples. Cassirer claims that the term is an exclamation referring to a definite impression and used upon all occasions which arouse wonder, fear, or excitement. But the use of this same term upon all such occasions is again the sign of a general idea, and presupposes the very linguistic situation for which the *Augenblicksgötter* were evoked as explanation. The problem has merely been stated in new and poetic terminology.

Cassirer's discussion is not entirely devoted to a description of the mystical experience of word-making. He also discusses more practical matters, such as the importance of the tool and rhythm of work (following Noiré and Büchner), and the creative part played by *deixis,* or the act of pointing out, in the formation of language. These aspects of his work have provided suggestions both for speculation and practical work on the part of Soviet scholars, as we shall see. His linguistic idealism is, as a matter of fact, nothing new; despite the ambitious terminology and the lengthy use of mythology, he leaves us not greatly advanced beyond the work of Humboldt and his immediate disciples. He is little concerned with the consequences of his system if adopted in practical work. As an antidote to his sweeping

[50] *Ibid.,* p. 25 and 29.

idealism, to his divorce of thinking from reality, one can do no better than repeat the words of Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell:

> The greatest discoverers in science have been the greatest law-breakers. As in the fable of the Golden Bough, the new priest murders his predecessor. But the sacrificial knife is not forged from the depths of his conscious or subconscious mind; it comes from the extended world, sharp and raw with reality. Not by abstraction, but by experiment and observation, not by getting away from the field and laboratory, but by a closer approach to reality, knowledge has come and will continue to come.[51]

The materialist attitude here expressed can evidently profit by the Hegelian dialectic method, the value of which I have already indicated. The second part of this paper will attempt to show the efficacy of this union as exemplified in the work of recent Soviet linguists.

[51] *Materialism and Vitalism in Biology,* Herbert Spencer Lecture at Oxford (Oxford, 1930), p. 8.