


LANGUAGE AND KNOWLEDGE -- SOME SUMMARY THOUGHTS

- Language is a system of symbols, separated from the physical reality to which they refer. Those symbols classify and impose a pattern on the world of our perception and interpretation, so immediately affect the way we "know" and "know about" the world.
- Those symbols can be combined and recombined flexibly in vast numbers of combinations. Language is thus a very effective tool for manipulating thought.
- Language both expresses thoughts and allows us to develop them. We express, clarify, refine, but also create new definitions and distinctions for new thoughts and new knowledge. (e.g. distinctions between "knowledge" and "belief" are themselves examples of using language to define abstract concepts)
- Language moves us beyond what we can "know" solely through our own personal experience, and enables us to exchange our thoughts and experiences. "Knowledge by description" depends on language, which provides the description. Written language extends the scope of this second hand knowledge, allowing us to store it, retrieve it, and exchange it internationally. (journals, papers, libraries, etc.)
- Language 
our understanding of the world. That understanding is not exactly the same from language group to language group, with the particular language tied very closely with the particular culture. Language binds us together in groups -- and separates us from other groups.
- The variety of languages in the world is an indication of the range of possibilities for human symbolism. Under the "surface structure" of language, though, seems to be a "deep structure" which is universal and innate -- a shared human characteristic.
- Language performs many functions: it can be representative (referring to specific phenomena in the world); or expressive (conveying feelings); or creative (using language for its own power and beauty); or solely social (binding people in groups by the fact of friendly mouth noise); or performative (carrying meaning dependent on the context of ceremony). What we consider to be the "meaning" of a word -- and whether ambiguity is a problem or a strength -- is affected by its function.
- Language is not objective or neutral -- some bias is inescapable simply because of the cultural map provided by each language. The language of reports, though, is closer to neutral than the language of inference or judgement. *Slanted* language is language in which the bias, the value judgement being made, is evident on examination.
- Language, ultimately, is limited. It is ambiguous and imprecise. It cannot duplicate our personal experience for someone else in exactly the way that we experienced it. And it may be that much of our human experience, thought, or feeling lies beyond the expression of even the most brilliant of poets.

THE MAP IS NOT THE TERRITORY.