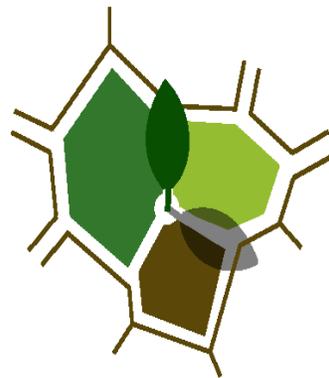


Languages in My Life



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LANGUAGE: *Any method of communicating ideas, as by a system of signs, symbols, or gestures, or the like.* – American Heritage

Using this definition as a starting point, it becomes clear that languages are, essentially, *communication systems*. ‘Co-communication’ implies an interchange of ideas or feelings, such that there is, alternately, a transmitter and a receiver, and that each is acquiring meaning and understanding from the interchange. ‘System’ implies an organized collection of parts whose active inter-relationships create a whole that embodies emergent properties not apparent in any of the parts. Languageing, then, is any coherent activity that can achieve the above criteria, and this can be expanded beyond the obvious spoken and written word to include: mathematics, chemistry, musical notation, computer programming, cryptology, urban planning (zoning and codes), manufacturing, politicking, etc. All languages are designed or have developed to be comprehended within a circumscribed (originally biogeographic), vernacular, or specialized sub-group. Some languages, however, could be considered universal.

Languageing is said to be an inherent or defining characteristic of being human, though it can be demonstrated that all organisms employ organized communication systems of some kind in the ordinary business of living. All Plants, for example, use chemo-messengers; the language is in the particular bio-geometric molecular configurations of the chemical constituents. And even the most predecessor of animals uses a variety of postures, gestures, movements, sounds, colors, or patterns to communicate their intentions, motivations, or dispositions. Who could sit in a meadow on a sunny afternoon, surrounded by the cacophony of cheerful birding, and not realize that some languageing is going on? In all of the above cases, if the message transmitted was coherent, structured, and capable of being reiterated – and was meaningfully understood by the receiver so as to influence their behavior – then we can say that languageing was indeed being employed. With all these life-forms, language is a representation of actual conditions in the inner or outer environments.

In the species *Homo sapiens sapiens*, however, language enters a whole new realm. Due to the conspicuous growth of a neocortex, a mental organ capable of facilitating abstract, symbolic imagination, the languageing employed by this organism may *or may not be* representational of actual reality. In the latter case, communication (or intended

communication) may be taking place entirely within a “linguistic domain,”¹ a realm of ideas, concepts, theories, speculations, hypotheses, vague worries, and projections into the future that have no substantial basis in ‘reality-as-it-is.’ Unfortunately, and increasingly, these abstract thought-forms are accepted and acted upon as actual reality, to the detriment of *Homo sapiens sapiens* (and the rest of the living world). The inevitable, extrapolated endpoint condition of such reliance on abstract, symbolic languaging is the total immersion in a “virtual reality,” a “technosphere” entirely disconnected from organic roots. This is already the situation of many ‘advanced’ urban dwellers today. Language is both a reflection of and a contributor to perceived reality.

The particular “Languages in My Life” are a collection of communication systems I have adopted, practiced, and integrated to purposely temper this disconnecting, abstracting proclivity of *Homo sapiens sapiens* and my own neocortex. Pre-reactionary to that, these languages I have adopted and integrated are practiced for the purpose of expressing, articulating, and understanding what I perceive to be my unique individuality, arising from a desired symbiotic and co-evolutionary relationship with the Source of Life.

In that sense, I have not put any effort into learning temporal technical languages; nor do I expose myself to the rhetorical, propagandist, techno-corporate-consumer languaging of the mass media. I wholly avoid popular slogans, slang and vernacular, and instead immerse myself as much as I can in timeless fundamental principles – the universal Language of Life. I accept as a maxim the Taoist phrase: “If it doesn’t positively contribute to the ongoing evolution of the planet, then it is not worth mentioning.”

“[L]anguage [is] an essential part of human living...[W]e must face the fact that every human being is born into a *neuro*-linguistic and *neuro*-semantic environment from which there is no escape.”² Yes, this describes the situation accurately – it also could be referred to as ‘cultural conditioning.’ Our very apperception of reality is consumingly influenced by the cultural context in which we were born. The surrounding neuro-linguistic and neuro-semantic environment impresses itself indelibly upon the developing mind of the infant. I was born absorbed in the English language in a context of ascending faith in never-ending material ‘progress.’ While effectively taking steps to disassociate myself from this temporal (and disintegrating) cultural context, I am still left imbued with the English language – the *lingua franca* of commercialism. By ongoing engagement with this language, I have come to subconsciously accept and unwittingly reinforce the notion that I am somehow separate from others, that there is an I ‘in here’ and a world ‘out there’ – subject, verb, predicate. As an American user of the English language, I routinely use commercial and war inferences to

¹ Maturana, Humberto and Francisco Varela (1987) *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding*. Shambhala; Boston

² Lee, Irving J., Ph.D. (1941) *Language Habits in Human Affairs: An Introduction to General Semantics*. Harper & Row Publishers; New York

describe my most daily activities – for example, I *spend* my time; I *mobilize* my resources; I'm supposed to *sell* myself for profit; etc. There may be “no escape” but I am doing all I can to frame my experience in a more inclusive, life-centered context.

From what I understand by communicating with people from other ‘native language contexts,’ English is the most useful language for describing in detail what one actually means. This is because English is such a hodge-podge of linguistic influences that subtle nuances may be reflected upon and expressed. This, of course, can only go so far, for all languages, as symbolic communication systems, have inherent limitations in that they can only forever *approximate* reality. Still, as a student-writer for some eight years now, I fervently practice and refine my skills at using this language in an attempt to convey ever more precise meaning. I believe I have a subtle message to deliver so I must ‘master’ this technique: grammar, syntax, vocabulary, semantics, phrasing, modulation, reference, modification, etc. This will be life-long learning in expressing ideas, feelings, and perceptions in a manner that they may be effectively communicated. What *exactly* is it I want to say? A serious paper may take twenty or thirty revisions, yet even after that, is the essence of my point received, felt, and *known* by the reader? Do I really have anything to say anyway? Or is this all an exercise in futility? Language is certainly limited.

In any case, I would rather write than orate my ideas because in spoken language there are so many emotional, personality, and somatic references (including body language) that may detract from the pure essence of the ideas I wish to convey. While oratory and rhetoric are effective means for arousing the emotions and consensus of the masses, I see my own utilitarian use of the English language as an effort to analyze as precisely as I can my perceptions of reality and to convey the meaning of these perceptions to whomever may be interested.

I also have some functional familiarity with the French and Spanish languages. Eventually, I want to become proficient in Spanish and actually live for a time in a Latin American culture, observing how my own apperception of reality is influenced and altered by immersion in this language-culture. I hear there is more opportunity to express love and romance, beauty and splendor, as compared with stoic Northern European languages. I also want to study more Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit, gaining an understanding of the ontogeny and evolution of words and concepts commonly used today. A study of Chinese would be rewarding, as practice in ‘right-brain’ comprehension.

Other languages I am attempting to master fall into the esoteric or occult (hidden) categories. These include the languages of astrology, the I Ching, and the Tarot. All three are essentially symbolic languages of fundamental archetypes; this is not the equivalent of abstraction.

Astrology is a 'pattern language' based on the number twelve. It is useful for understanding the evolution of consciousness in our solar system, as perceived from a geocentric perspective, and as applied to an evolving, conscious life experience.

The I Ching is also a 'pattern language' but one based on an alternating binary interpretation of the number sixty-four. Its purpose is to provide meaning to the definable stages of any organic evolution. Many writers have drawn the parallel between the sixty-four hexagrams of the I Ching and the sixty-four available codons of the genetic structure, discovered millennia later. This language may very well be an expression of the universal Language of Life.

The Tarot is another 'pattern language,' this time based on the numbers twenty-two and seventy-eight. Its purpose is to provide visual archetypal images of the recognizable stages in the spiritual initiation and unfoldment of human experience.

All three of these esoteric languages give me valuable practice exercising holistic perception – that is, whole mind-brain perception. The interpretations provide for me meaning to my life experiences, and frame those experiences within the larger, more-inclusive context of archetypal human experience. Like all languaging, esoteric languaging can only be communicated between people who have made the effort to learn their various structures, vocabularies, grammars, etc. Some users of these languages, however, are able to translate and interpret them for others.

Another language that I use fairly frequently is that of music. Though I can read and write musical notation, I usually just go with the flow and improvise. This language is a wonderful medium for conveying moods and feelings. Unlike most other communication systems, the receiver need not be well-versed in the structure of music in order to apprehend the message. Apprehension comes in the form of an involuntary emotional response – an identification with the material on a mood-feeling, often primordial level. Most Western music is based in an eight-point scale, and it has been shown that the values and proportions in these scales correlate directly with the values and proportions of the wavelengths of visible light, so music may very well be another universal language. Music from India is based on a twelve-point scale, so they may be resonating with another universe.

Finally, in these days I am working to gain greater proficiency in the use of 'design languages.' Soon to graduate with an M.A. degree in Whole Systems Design, I want to be able to effectively communicate these languages to clients in my professional activities. Design languages come in a multitude of forms: it could be said that each individual design project has its own unique, corresponding design language. If that be the case, then as designers we would do well to study the fundamental patterns and principles that underlie and are common to them all.

In my own chosen work as a Village Designer, employing to their greatest extent the disciplines of Ecological Design and Permaculture Design, this means for me a thorough,

ongoing, life-long investigation of the languages of Nature. Yes, like all languages, Nature encodes her timeless wisdom in observable, definable, repeatable patterns, processes, and structures with their own grammar, vocabulary, syntax, semantics, etc. In order to create a sustainable culture – one that can be continued into the indefinite future – it will be absolutely necessary to learn, interpret, and apply the languages of Nature in all our design scenarios. This implies that we are living in an unsustainable culture because the patterns, processes, and structures that undergird and define this culture are derived from abstract languages formulated in the neocortex, disconnected from their organic roots. It's really that simple.

To wrap it up, writing this paper has made me aware of how ubiquitous the process of communication is in my life – in *any* life. Indeed, for the living it is downright impossible *not* to communicate. The various languages (communication systems) that I have adopted and integrated are tools that (hopefully) enable me to communicate *effectively* – to express my ideas, feelings, and perceptions clearly, unambiguously, creatively. I will continue to practice these languages to refine my skills, to one day master them as a wise old man in the Winter of my life.

The ultimate purpose for all this communication is, I believe, to engender meaningful *relationships*, of all kinds. That understood, I realize now that I must concentrate more diligently and carefully on a language that I have comparatively neglected up till now – *the language of the heart!* This may be the most instinctual yet most easily misunderstood language of all.