

AXIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE WORD IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

With a very rich vocabulary at our disposal today, whose foundations were very carefully laid down by the ancient Greeks, we do not always realize that in the course of the word's long history thoughts in their development came into existence as a testimony of emergence of a fragment of reality, and the structure of the word often indicates what kind of perspective this fragment of reality was actually, genetically, or in our opinion, as we think based on our knowledge of the modern language, captured from.

In the course of history, the role and meaning of the word were perceived from different perspectives, submitting arguments to various interpretations located in successive incarnations of the human thought in its development. Looking at the role and meaning of words through the inexhaustible prism of possibilities, homo loquens allows us to see the looming horizon of peculiarities not found in non-verbal areas of broadly understood human activity and creativity. In fact, it is obvious that words play a major role in human cognitive processes. This will probably remain so, since man's world from the beginning of his intelligent existence up to the end of life is a world of concepts that are learnt and understood according to their meaning, and consequently internalized and exteriorized by the subject, or challenged, and rejected, or their content is sometimes distorted or trivially deformed, or, on the contrary, creatively enriched by the individual. In fact, the phenomenon of the word symbolizes the expression of man's thought and human emotions, as well as the extent and wisdom of the experience somehow "extracted" from the consciousness of the individual, and made accessible to others. In fact, human speech can constitute not only a source of knowledge, truth, wisdom, but it can also manifest an attitude of unfairness, lies, falsehood, lack of good will, deceit, manipulation, even to the point that sometimes it is difficult to subject these manifestations to the decisive anagnorisis.

Key words: *axiological aspects, homo loquens, word, antropospheric universe, languages, values, dialogue*

INTRODUCTION

Out of around 6-7 thousand languages and their varieties functioning today on the globe, inhabited by more than 7 billion people¹, the Indo-European language family is one of the largest and earliest discovered. It includes hundreds of modern languages related to one another, which have been in use for several thousand years in Europe, India and in south-west Asia. In modern times, mainly due to English, Spanish and Portuguese, Indo-European languages have spread across all the continents.²

Almost all modern European languages, including Polish and Sanskrit, ancient Greek and Latin, belong to Indo-European languages. It is from the ancient family of Indo-European languages that *the word* originates. It is believed that it existed then in the form of *kleos*, whose root means to hear, to inquire. Thus, since time immemorial, the word has been associated with the physical phenomenon of hearing, and the mental interpretation of what is heard. From the beginning, it was expressed in a phonic sign, bringing some knowledge, thus referring to something outside itself. Ever since and in different languages, e.g. *verbum* in Latin; *word* in English; *Wort* in German; *le mot* in French; *słowo* in

¹ A precise determination of this number is impossible, because of disagreements among linguists in the classification of certain ethnolcts as separate languages, or dialects. A large part of the world's languages exists in the nonwritten form.

² It is estimated that today, around the world, about 3,000,000,000 people (that is almost half of Earth's population) speak them as mother tongues.

Russian; *parola* in Italian; *duma* in Bulgarian; *parobla* in Spanish; *palavra* in Portuguese; *slovo* in Slovak and in Czech, has been ambiguous.

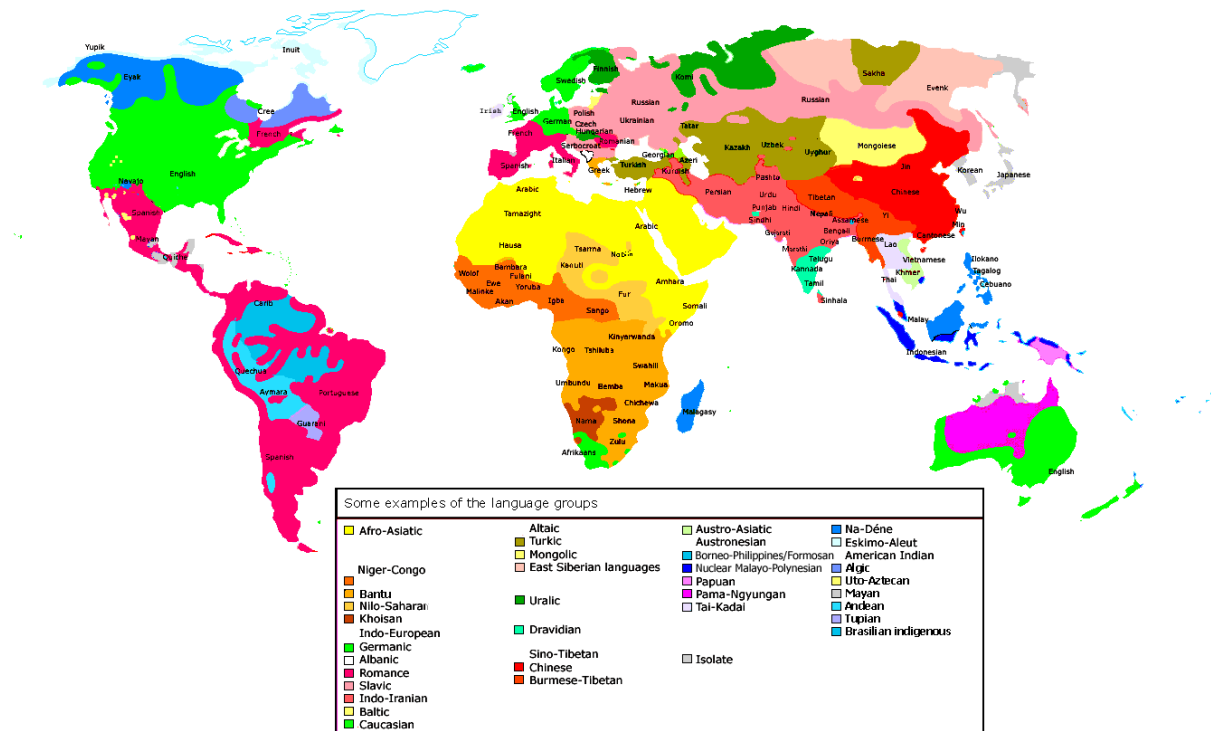


Fig.1. The percentage of language families among the world population
Source: https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/J%C4%99zyki_%C5%9Bwiata 10.07.2015.

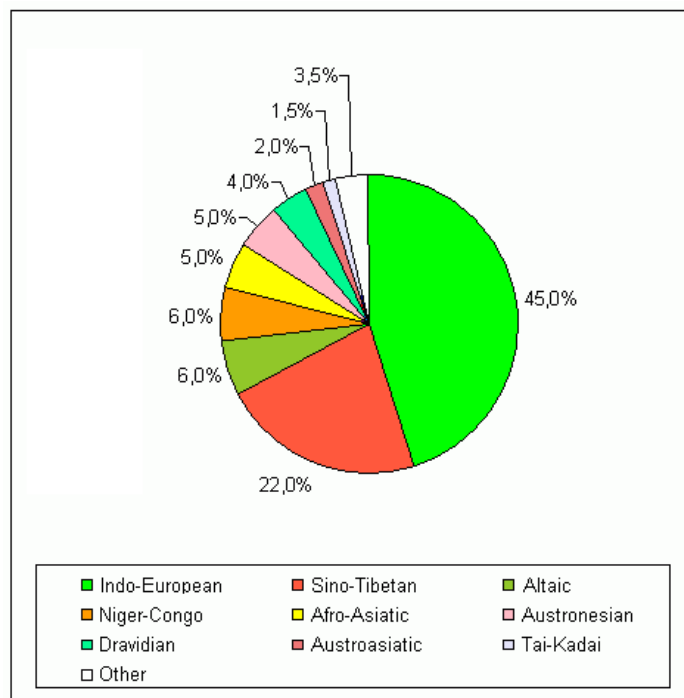


Fig.2. The percentage of language families among the world population
Source: https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/J%C4%99zyki_%C5%9Bwiata 10.07.2015.

In the face of the beginning of the third millennium, it should be recalled that the date of the final breakup of the former language community, from which the group of Slavic languages so close to the heart of all Slavs emerged, is adopted at the beginning of the second millennium B.C.

With a very rich vocabulary at our disposal today, whose foundations were very carefully laid down by the ancient Greeks, we do not always realize that in the course of the word's long history thoughts in their development came into existence as a testimony of emergence of a fragment of reality, and the structure of the word often indicates what kind of perspective this fragment of reality was actually, genetically, or in our opinion, as we think based on our knowledge of the modern language, captured from.

THE ROLE AND MEANING OF THE WORD FROM THE AXIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE, IN THE COURSE OF HISTORY

'It is from the word and from the meaning put into it that man draws all the power of cognition'

Ferdinand Ebner

In light of the outlined introduction, one can decide that the provenance of *the word* constitutes a *sui generis* ontological principle of the speech act, not closing up merely in the processes of communicating with, contacting persons, but also developing as a specifically human process, at the same time exerting a stimulating effect on humanity, until creative fulfilment in the ability to create nonpetrified linguistic forms, and also the vast horizon of interpersonal communication. Looking at the problem of phenomenology of the word through the outlined problem perspective, one can probably read a verse from *the Vulgate* '*In principio erat verbum*' [In the beginning was the Word] not only theologically, but also attempt to investigate the essence of genealogical meaning of the protolanguage of *homo loquens*, i.e., a speaking human being, one who uses the word, the language.

In the course of history, the role and meaning of the word were perceived from different perspectives, submitting arguments to various interpretations located in successive incarnations of the human thought in its development. Shared and developed later by the humanists, the belief that *the word* - logos, the ancient Greek word meaning also understanding, thought, and reason, i.e. what has to do with thinking or speech, is an overwhelmingly mighty potentate able to lead man in the most human way, derives from the Hellenes. An expression of this belief is, among others, attested to by Socrates in Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus* in the form of '*Persuade, and let yourself be persuaded.*'³ Following this, Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* added: '*The power of persuasion results from appropriateness*'.⁴ Therefore, one is not only to have beliefs, but also to be able to justify them appropriately.

Delving into the abundance of ancient poetry one can notice in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* the repeatedly appearing phrase "*epea pteorenta*", meaning *winged words*, a metaphor symbolizing the speed with which they move from the sender's mouth to the listener's ears/consciousness, which is closely related to the fact that in ancient times poetry existed in the spoken, sung, or recited form for a long time. That expression, *winged words*, is used today in a variety of languages, e.g. in English: *Words have wings*, in German: *Geflügelte worte*, in Russian - *krylatyje slova*. In the contemporary language this phrase means maxims, sayings, quotations widely known and used.

It is not difficult to see that in ancient times words were attributed great axionormative importance. For it was Ovid who, with regard to lengthy disputes not leading to an end or fulfilment of promises, and/or in the case of trivial disputes coming down to bragging about personal courage, actions, qualities, etc., stated directly: *Words, sounds, names, and nothing more*. In the same sense in modern times the notion of the word was perceived from the axiological perspective. For example, Andrzej

³ Plato, *Phaedrus*, translated by L. Regner, PWN Warsaw 1993.

⁴ Aristotle, *Works*, translated by Gromski D. and L. Regner, PWN Warsaw 1996

Frycz Modrzewski in the famous work '*De Republica emendanda*' [*On the improvement of Commonwealth*], condemning meaningless chatter wrote in the second book as follows: '*It would be a fair thing to decide that no one speaking about their own business should stray from it.* [and he added a Latin saying] *Verbis ut nummis utendum est* (words should be used like money).⁵ It is probably not easy to meet this recommendation, since verbosity to the present day often threatens the quality of words, not to mention a word of honour, that *Verbum nobile*, or a promise given to anyone, once treated as an almost sacred commitment which absolutely had to be met under the threat of loss of honour. *Verbum nobile* survived longer than the nobility, and to this very day it means a word of honour, directing attention to the commitment made by righteous, conscientious man, and thus one keeping the word given, which, as it turns out, is not so easily experienced in everyday interpersonal relations.

Throughout history, attempts have been made to overcome the antinomy of the word and the deed with varying degrees of success. Brave with his philosophical reflection, Cyprian Kamil Norwid in the epilogue of his philosophical treatise '*Promethidion*' wrote: '*What cannot be attained in a deed, is then tested - transmitted in a word; only such words are needed, and only those resurrect in a deed - others are more or less erudite phraseology or mechanical necessity.*'⁶ It is no wonder that according to the American neopragmatist Hilary Putman, the question '*How do Words apply to the World?*' can be read as a particularly important philosophical problem, which significantly absorbs attention not only of contemporary philosophers. In my further considerations I shall return to this question and make an attempt to answer it.

Meanwhile, I shall turn my attention to attributing, since time immemorial, enormous causative powers to words, especially those spoken live, which was included in the Socratic sentence in the form of *Viva vox docet* [the living word teaches], an idea also exposed, among others, by the ancient formula *Dictum factum* [What is said is done]. The meaning of these statements refers to the logical consequence of the spoken word in the form of, according to its idea, setting about taking action. In fact, words have ever since proved to be also a characteristic touchstone of significant human attributions, for example, words of wisdom. In this regard, Demosthenes stated: '*Sapienti saris dictum* [a word said to the wise is enough]. To this day, quite a well-known proverb exists in Polish, which in free translations says '*Two words are enough for a wise head*' [*Mądrej głowie dość dwie słowie*']. It encapsulates the idea that in contacting clever/wise man there is no need to make much effort in order to reach understanding. Meanwhile, the Pythagoreans had a custom of invoking their master's words, which was expressed in the formula *ipse dixit* [he, himself (our master) said it]. It served as the key argument in a discussion. This approach, however, was approved neither by Cicero, nor by Horace, who in his letters usually criticized *Iurare in verba magistri* [invoking the teacher's words]. Also Seneca opposed the "blind" attachment to the customs of the Stoics, recommending the right to independently judge about things (*De vita beata*). However, there is still a lot of evidence of this type of safeguard in people's communication until today.

A message not less important for the ethos of the word can be found in a statement by Jerome S. Bruner, namely: '*When we move in our thinking to the farthest limits of possibilities, we use words, what is more, it is words that move us forward, provoke us to form concepts, creative and combinatorial properties of the language invite us to break our experience into parts and put them together into a new whole. And the most amazing thing is that words can simultaneously command and inform, describe and poetize, create beauty and explain, and perform all these and many other functions while supporting contact with another human being.*'⁷

Thus, looking at the role and meaning of words through the inexhaustible prism of possibilities, *homo loquens* allows us to see the looming horizon of peculiarities not found in non-verbal areas of broadly understood human activity and creativity, albeit attempts to seek analogies with regard to the use of

⁵ A.F. Modrzewski, *O poprawie Rzeczypospolitej* [*On the improvement of Commonwealth*], Przemyśl 1957, p. 229.

⁶ C.K. Norwid, *Dzieła* [Works], Vol. III. selected and explained by J.W. Gomulicki, PIW Warsaw 1971, p. 463.

⁷ J.S. Bruner, *Life as Narrative*, [in]: "Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny" 1990 No. 4, pp. 200.

the word in artistic and musical means of expression, and to borrow terminology from these fields into linguistic means of expression, if only when talking about the colour of the word, the clarity of expression, about the landscape of content, the music of words, the range of connotations, the harmony of conversation, indeed, about the polyphony of words, or of verbal dissonances, are fairly widely known. Following this path, we can say that just as a collection of pure colours, without a properly constituted artistic architecture and background is not a work of visual art, and a collection of pure sounds, deprived of any consonances, aliquots, is not a work of musical art, the living speech cannot do without a wide, indistinctly separated semantic field which builds up around individual words while they are used. For the word says, means something only in the context of the situation in which it was used.

Speaking of musical art, it is worth noting that music as a factor unifying individuals in a joint action already appears in Confucius, namely in his discussion of the shaped ideal of *noble man*, in whose words '*there is nothing that might be of little importance*', to which he added: '*If names are not correct, words do not correspond to the truth. If words do not correspond to the truth, obligations cannot be properly fulfilled. If obligations are not properly fulfilled, neither manners nor music flourish.*'⁸

Nevertheless, an 'alchemist of the word', Jan Parandowski, recognized that no creative material, (as he wrote) *neither stone, nor wood, or metal, which are used by architecture and sculpture, or paint, which is disposed of by painting, or sounds extracted from instruments that are creative material for works of music, can be compare themselves with the mysterious majesty of the word*'.⁹

In fact, it is obvious that words play a major role in human cognitive processes. This will probably remain so, since man's world from the beginning of his intelligent existence up to the end of life is a world of concepts that are learnt and understood according to their meaning, and consequently internalized and exteriorized by the subject, or challenged, and rejected, or their content is sometimes distorted or trivially deformed, or, on the contrary, creatively enriched by the individual. In fact, the phenomenon of the word symbolizes the expression of man's thought and human emotions, as well as the extent and wisdom of the experience somehow "extracted" from the consciousness of the individual, and made accessible to others. This does not mean that the mysterious majesty of the word, incomparable with any creative material, at the same time solves all verbal problems. For every man as if, if one may use such an expression, "assimilates" words reaching him in his own, and specific only to himself, way, i.e. one particular for his current status quo. Hence, it is not surprising that even the same statement is sometimes differently "assimilated" by particular individuals into, let me use another metaphor within the convention adopted here, "one's own intellectual-emotional-noetic tissue". For apart from the common range, there is also the individual, esoteric *privatissimum*, unnoticed by others, sometimes unattainable for others, and especially everything that *en bloc* turns out to be untranslatable in/from the perspective of others. The endless diversity of expressing man's creative works attests to this fact in the most meaningful way, although obviously not only this sphere exemplifies the problem, but so do the most ordinary disagreements arising in the course of interpersonal communication.

However, the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard stated that '*words dream and swell with new meanings, and man is the blacksmith of thoughts, words and deeds*'.¹⁰ Forging words, however, *homo loquens* is not always their polisher. He often makes gross mistakes in this art, sometimes deforming them without any reprehensible intention. Overcoming aporias appearing here and there, man can sometimes be mistaken, speak no sense, say trivial or even false things. It sometimes happens that people use a speech full of platitudes, dull clichés, or try to express more complex and subtle thoughts than their own verbal-intellectual dispositions allow them to, not excluding the possibility of

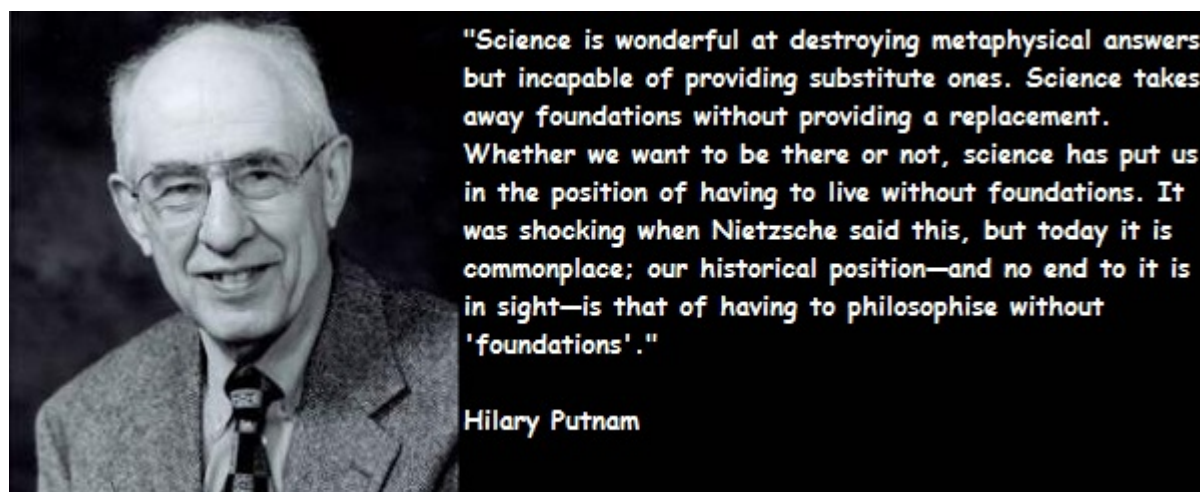
⁸ *Confucian dialogues*, translated by K. Czyżewska-Madajewicz, M.J. Kunstler, Z. Tumski, Ossolineum Wrocław 1979, pp. 122, 127

⁹ J. Parandowski, *Alchemia słowa* [The Alchemy of the Word], Czytelnik Warsaw 1986, p. 126.

¹⁰ Cf. B. Skarga, *Przeszłość i interpretacje*. [The Past and Interpretations.] *Z warsztatu historyka filozofii* [From the workshop of a historian of philosophy], PWN Warsaw 1987, p. 340.

encountering barriers in the form of so-called "lack of words". In fact, human speech can constitute not only a source of knowledge, truth, wisdom, but it can also manifest an attitude of unfairness, lies, falsehood, lack of good will, deceit, manipulation, even to the point that sometimes it is difficult to subject these manifestations to the decisive anagnorisis.

It is known, however, that there are words which are *by definition*, important, especially significant, almost sacred and, by nature of things, friendly to man. At the opposite pole, there are words full of venom, bitterness, hatred, enmity, and evil. However, it is not difficult to realize that almost every word may be the beginning for both *the sacred* and *the profane*. This is where an opportunity to answer the question posed by one of the four American neopragmatists, H. Putnam, (next to Quinne, Davidson and Roty) arises, i.e. 'How do Words apply to the World'?



Source: https://www.google.pl/search?sa=G&q=hilary+putnam&tbm=isch&imgil=B22LzCMg_1RR1M%253A%253BaoJ- 10.07.2015.

In my opinion, this answer could be most appropriately expressed as follows: words get linked to the world in various ways, but there is no doubt that who uses which words, and to what purpose, largely depends on what kind of man he is, what he recognizes and prefers, and what he condemns and rejects, what he aspires to, and what he disavows. Hence, in other words, it is closely linked to the quality of the place that an individual occupies in the *universe* of the axiological anthroposphere. Therefore, it does not seem an elaborate oddity that sometimes one word is enough to stir the intellect, awaken emotions and inspire to magnificent, seemingly endless undertakings. Or, on the contrary, to mutilate human relationships, almost completely discourage and thwart, nip everything in the bud. Hence, to put it in another way, words can contain both construction and destruction¹¹.

One can certainly, as Ovid wrote in *Heroides*, 'veritas verba dare' [waste words]¹². Or entertain the belief that the knives of words cut the deepest, or duel verbally [with words] as our two poets, Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki, once did. One can finally answer the question 'what do you read?' in such a way as Shakespeare's Hamlet did: 'words, words, words'. Nevertheless, without a doubt, it is so that in Norwid's way our words judge, and not only express us, since it is with words that we can introduce order, and spread panic, encourage and discourage, win ourselves friends and enemies, teach ourselves and others, entertain and condemn, kill and heal, make happy and bring to despair. 'And it is

¹¹ cf. U. Ostrowska, *Dialog w pedagogicznym badaniu jakościowym* [The Dialogue in the Pedagogical Qualitative Study], Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls Krakow 2000; *Aspekty aksjologiczne w edukacji* [Axiological Aspects in Education] (ed.) Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego in Olsztyn 2000; *Edukacja przełomu wieków wobec kwestii aksjologicznych* [Education of the Turn of the Centuries Towards Axiological Issues] (ed.) Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego in Olsztyn 2001.

¹² Ovid, *Heroides*. Wydawnictwo Literackie, Warszawa 1986.

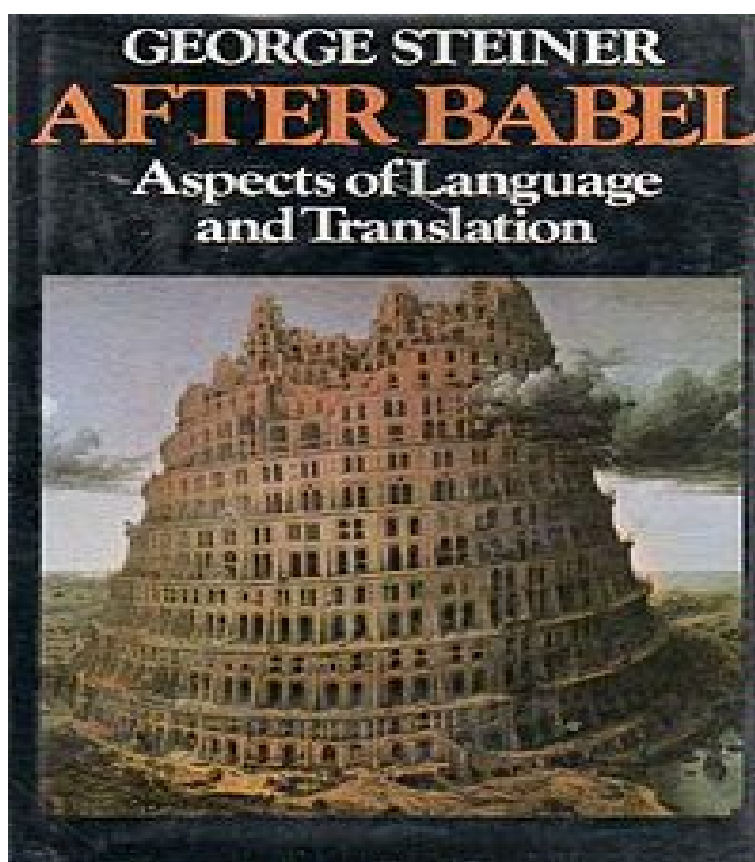
not at all certain whether someone driven to despair is less desperate than the one who was driven to despair by someone else's action. Or is he less happy who was made happy with a good word, or someone made happy by some action?'¹³

CONCLUDING REMARKS

'The more beautiful a thought is, the more resonantly a sentence sounds'.

Gustav Flaubert

In view of the discussion presented, a stance should be taken with regard to the signed by the author of 'After Babel', George Steiner, the 'time of the after-Word'.¹⁴



Skurce: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/After_Babel, 10.07.2015.

He argues that the collapse of the alliance between the word and the world defines our present. However, it seems important to note that if this state of affairs was a fact, then probably the author of that phraseology, due to the gap existing in his opinion, could not direct his words to anyone authentic and make statements on any true reality. Meanwhile, it turns out after all that, paradoxically, he denied himself, weaving the thread of the alliance, which he was trying to cut or lose, and in this way, he not only exposed himself to the harsh words of protest, but in addition he inevitably placed himself in a

¹³ T.P. Krzeszowski, *O funkcjach języka, czyli o potędze słów* [On the Functions of the Language, or on the Power of Words], [in]: "Język Polski" LXXV 4-5 in 1995.

¹⁴ G. Steiner, *Zerwany kontrakt* [The Broken Contract], translated by O. Kubińska, Instytut Kultury Warszawa 1994.

trap of a performative contradiction, which it will not be easy to get out of. For it turns out that no period in history so far has been able to do without the word, even the information era much dominated by the image, accompanying us today, and probably the one that will succeed it. One can certainly ask, following the Nobel Prize winner Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?*¹⁵

However, one should also bear it in mind that without the knowledge of facts it is impossible to think, speak, or act rationally in any way. Above all, it is not in words themselves, or in information, that knowledge is contained, for it interiorizes itself in man who not only knows, but also thinks, feels, acts, and evaluates in a particular community with others in the anthropospheric universe, and only such a perspective can create a meaningful whole. Undoubtedly, the fact that man as a "small" being, and only periodically existing on Earth, can almost completely embrace that impenetrable world using words only attests to the boundless magnitude of lexis. Besides, as a conscious individual, he can often explain, understand, interpret, and communicate to others a lot, in an amazing way. More than that, *homo sapiens* can thoroughly consider even that which does not exist at all, as well as in his most daring ventures or dreams design what seems to be impossible to be fulfilled in the course of the emergence of these ideas. Thus, words contain the potentiality of nowhere defined creativity, since as a rule, they have a vast, transcending horizon for which boundaries are delineated and expanded in the course of thinking and communicating with/between people. These boundaries are final neither for words, nor for people, and the sphere of meaning cannot be in any way *a priori* predicted, which is clearly shown in the course of history, especially by breaking or exceeding the accepted conventions in thinking in the intersubjective communication of people, which accompany people today, including eventually the possibility of creating new, somewhat/completely different linguistic elements, or even more extensive structures. It was probably from such a perspective that Sergius Hessen saw the strength *'of each word not in what it says, but in what is supposed in it'*. In his view, *'a word that said everything that it wanted to say, beyond which the listener does not feel anything unspoken, is a word that is superficial, shallow, one that says hardly anything'*, and he added that *'the whole art of speech consists in allowing to feel beyond a said thing this inexpressible depth whose only small part, though hiding in itself a grasping whole, is the content expressed'*.¹⁶ Therefore, a question arises: how should *homo loquens* use words, since - as noted by Pavel Alexandrovich Floriesky - *'they are unique, each time said anew, i.e. with a new meaning and, at best, it is a variation on a previous theme'*¹⁷, which proves to be obvious for this particular reason that no repetition is ever fully reproduced, since the endless succession of fact causes, that nothing can be the same as before this course of events. The answer to this question is probably that in Norwid's way man should assign an appropriate word to a thing, i.e. he should above all speak understandably. Using plain language, as some will add, but is it always and everywhere that simplicity can be trusted? For as Benjamin Lee Whorf writes, *'I have a liking for those who say: Do tell me it clearly and in plain language. However, limiting ourselves only to thinking in terms of [...] standard [...] language, means losing the ability to think, which once lost, can never be recovered'*.¹⁸ Therefore, since man as a potentialized being - not so much is = *non esse*, but constantly becomes = *posse*, then one may want to complete these deliberations on the axiological aspects of the word in education by recalling the inexhaustible depth of Norwid's thought from the poem entitled *'Great words'*:

*'Where is the common land of these great words,
One for all people and the same;
That does not end, but still begins ...*

¹⁵ cf. U. Ostrowska, *Doświadczenie wartości edukacyjnych w szkole wyższej* [Experiencing Educational Values at University]. Wydawnictwo Akademii Techniczno-Rolniczej w Bydgoszczy, Bydgoszcz 1998, p. 257 et seq.

¹⁶ S. Hessen, *Podstawy pedagogiki* [The Foundations of Pedagogy], translated by A. Zieleńczyk, Wydawnictwo Nasza Księgarnia Warszawa 1931, pp. 261-262.

¹⁷ P.A. Florieski, *Strojenije słowa*, [in]: "Kontekst" 1921, Moscow 1973.

¹⁸ B. L. Whorf, *Język, myśl i rzeczywistość* [Language, Mind and Reality], translated by B. Hołówka, PIW Warszawa 1982, p. 330.

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