# THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

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# THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

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# Words and Their Meanings

by ALDOUS HUXLEY

For a long time past, thinking men have tended to adopt a somewhat patronizing attitude towards the words they use in communicating with their fellows and formulating their own ideas. "What do you read, my lord?" Polonius asked. And with all the method that was in his madness Hamlet scornfully replied, "Words, words, words." That was at the beginning of the seventeenth century; and from that day to this the people who think themselves realists have gone on talking about words in the same contemptuous strain.

There was a reason for this behavior—or at least an excuse. Before the development of experimental science, words were too often regarded as having magical significance and power. With the rise of science a reaction set in, and for the last three centuries words have been unduly neglected as things having only the slightest importance. A great deal of attention has been paid, it is true, to the technical languages in which men of science do their specialized thinking, particularly, of course, to mathematics. But the colloquial usages of everyday speech, the literary and philosophical dialects in which men do their thinking about the problems of morals, politics, religion and psychology—these have been strangely neglected. We talk about "mere matters of words" in a tone which implies that we regard words as things beneath the notice of a serious-minded person.

This is a most unfortunate attitude. For the fact is that words play an enormous part in our lives and are therefore deserving of the closest study. The old idea that words possess magical powers is false; but its falsity is the distortion of a very important truth. Words *do* have a magical effect—but not in the way that the magicians supposed, and not on the objects they were trying to influence. Words are magical in the way they affect the minds of those who



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use them. "A mere matter of words," we say contemptuously, forgetting that words have power to mold men's thinking, to canalize their feeling, to direct their willing and acting. Conduct and character are largely determined by the nature of the words we currently use to discuss ourselves and the world around us. The magician is a man who observes that words have an almost miraculous effect on human behavior and who thinks that they must therefore be able to exercise an equal power over inanimate nature. This tendency to objectify psychological states and to project them, thus objectified, into the external world is deeply rooted in the human mind. Men have made this mistake in the past; men are making it now; and the results are invariably deplorable. We owe to it not only the tragic fooleries of black magic, but also (and this is even more disastrous) most of the crimes and lunacies committed in the name of religion, in the name of patriotism, in the name of political and economic ideologies. In the age-long process by which men have consistently stultified all their finest aspirations, words have played a major part. It was, I believe, the realization of this fact that prompted the founders of the two great world religions to insist upon the importance of words. In the Christian gospels the reference to this matter is contained in one of those brief and enigmatic sayings which, like so many of the *logia,* unfortunately lend themselves to a great variety of interpretations. "But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." It is possible to interpret this utterance in terms of a merely magical theory of the significance of language. It is equally possible to put another construction on the saying and to suppose that what Jesus was referring to was what may be called the psychological magic of words, their power to affect the thinking, feeling and behavior of those who use them. That it was the intention of the Buddha to warn men against such psychological magic the surviving documents leave us in no doubt whatever. "Right speech" is one of the branches of the Buddhist's Eightfold Path; and the importance of restraint in the use of words for intellectual purposes is constantly stressed in all those passages in the Pali Scriptures, where Gotama warns his followers against entangling themselves in the chains of metaphysical argument.

It is time now to consider a little more closely the mechanism by which words are able to exercise their psychological magic upon the minds of men and women. Human beings are the inhabitants, not of one universe, but of many universes. They are able to move

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at will from the world, say, of atomic physics to the world of art, from the universe of discourse called "chemistry" to the universe of discourse called "ethics." Between these various universes philosophy and science have not as yet succeeded in constructing any bridges. How, for example, is an electron, or a chemical molecule, or even a living cell related to the G minor quintet of Mozart or the mystical theology of St. John of the Cross? Frankly, we don't know. We have no idea how thought and feeling are related to physical events in a living brain and only the very vaguest notions about the way in which a brain is related to the charges of electrical energy which appear to be its ultimate components. So far as we are concerned, the only connection between these various universes consists in the fact that we are able to talk about all of them and in some of them to have direct intuitions and sensuous experiences. The various universes we inhabit all belong to *us;* that is the only thing that unites them. Logical and scientific bridges are nonexistent; when we want to pass from one to another, we have to jump.

Now, all these various universes in which we live are members of one or other of two super-universes; the universe of direct experience and the universe of words. When I look at this paper in my hand I have a direct sensuous experience. If I choose to, I can keep my mouth shut and say nothing about this experience. Alternatively, I may open my mouth and, making use of a certain system of signs, called the English language, I may impart the information that my experience consisted of whiteness mitigated by rows of black marks which I recognize as belonging to the alphabetical system by means of which spoken language can be rendered in terms of a visible equivalent.

To discuss the formal mechanism by which the world of immediate human experience is related to the various languages of mankind is a task which, even if I had the time, I should be quite incompetent to perform. And fortunately it is not necessary for our present purposes that it should be performed. It is enough, in this context, to point out that, between the world of immediate experience and the world of language, between things and words, between events and speech, certain relations have in fact been established; and that these relations are governed by rules that are in part purely arbitrary, in part dictated by the nature of our common experiences. The form of the rules varies from language to language. We are not, however, concerned with these variations. For our present purposes, the significant fact is that all human societies use some kind of language and have done so from the remotest antiquity.

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Human behavior as we know it, became possible only with the establishment of relatively stable systems of relationships between things and events on the one hand and words on the other. In societies where no such relationship has been established, that is to say, where there is no language, behavior is nonhuman. Necessarily so; for language makes it possible for men to build up the social heritage of accumulated skill, knowledge and wisdom, thanks to which it is possible for us to profit by the experiences of past generations, as though they were our own. There may be geniuses among the gorillas; but since gorillas have no conceptual language, the thoughts and achievements of these geniuses cannot be recorded and so are lost to simian posterity. In those limited fields of activity where some form of progress is possible, words permit of progress being made.

Nor is this all. The existence of language permits human beings to behave with a degree of purposefulness, perseverance and consistency unknown among the other mammals and comparable only to the purposefulness, perseverance and consistency of insects acting under the compulsive force of instinct. Every instant in the life, say, of a cat or a monkey tends to be irrelevant to every other instant. Such creatures are the victims of their moods. Each impulse as it makes itself felt carries the animal away completely. Thus, the urge to fight will suddenly be interrupted by the urge to eat; the all-absorbing passion of love will be displaced in the twinkling of an eye by a no less absorbing passion to search for fleas. The consistency of human behavior, such as it is, is due entirely to the fact that men have formulated their desires, and subsequently rationalized them, in terms of words. The verbal formulation of a desire will cause a man to go on pressing forward towards his goal, even when the desire itself lies dormant. Similarly, the rationalization of his desire in terms of some theological or philosophical system will convince him that he does well to persevere in this way. It is thanks to words and to words alone that, as the poet says:

> Tasks in hours of insight willed
> May be in hours of gloom fulfilled.

And let us remember incidentally that by no means all of our tasks are willed in hours of insight. Some are willed in hours of imbecility, some in hours of calculating self-interest; some under the stress of violent emotion, some in mere stupidity and intellectual confusion. If it were not for the descriptive and justificatory words with which

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we bind our days together, we should live like the animals in a series of discrete and separate spurts of impulse. From the psychological point of view, a theology or a philosophy may be defined as a device for permitting men to perform in cold blood and continuously actions which, otherwise, they could accomplish only by fits and starts and when the impulse was strong and hot within them. It is worth remarking, in this context, that no animals ever make war. They get into individual squabbles over food and sex; but they do not organize themselves in bands for the purpose of exterminating members of their own species in the name of some sacred cause. The emphasis here must be placed on the word "name." For, of course, animals have no lack of sacred causes. What could be more sacred to a tiger than fresh meat or tigresses? What is lacking in the animal's world is the verbal machinery for describing and justifying these sacred causes. Without words, perseverance and consistency of behavior are, as we have seen, impossible. And without perseverance in slaughter and consistency in hatred there can be no war.

For evil, then, as well as for good, words make us the human beings we actually are. Deprived of language we should be as dogs or monkeys. Possessing language, we are men and women able to persevere in crime no less than in heroic virtue, capable of intellectual achievements beyond the scope of any animal, but at the same time capable of systematic silliness and stupidity such as no dumb beast could ever dream of.

It is time now that I gave a few typical instances of the way in which words have power to modify men's thought, feeling and conduct. But before doing so, I must make a few more remarks of a general nature. For our present purposes, words may be divided into three main classes. The first class consists of words which designate definite and easily recognizable objects or qualities. Table, for example, is an easily recognizable object and brown an easily recognizable quality. Such words are unambiguous. No serious doubts as to their meaning exist. The second class contains words which designate entities and qualities less definite and less easily recognizable. Some of these are highly abstract words, generalizing certain features of many highly complex situations. Such words as "justice," "science," "society," are examples. In the same class we must place the numerous words which designate psychological states—words such as "beauty," "goodness," "spirit," "personality." I have already mentioned the apparently irresistible human tendency to objectify psychological states and project them, on the wings of their verbal

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vehicle, into the outer world. Words like those I have just mentioned are typical vehicles of objectification. They are the cause of endless intellectual confusion, endless emotional distress, endless misdirections of voluntary effort.

Our third class contains words which are supposed to refer to objects in the outer world or to psychological states, but which in fact, since observation fails to reveal the existence of such objects or states, refer only to figments of the imagination. Examples of such words are the "dragon" of the Chinese and the "death instinct" of Freudian psychologists.

The most effective, the most psychologically magical words are found in the second category. This is only to be expected. Words found in the second class are more ambiguous than any others and can therefore be used in an almost indefinite number of contexts. A recent American study has shown that the word "nature" has been used by the philosophers of the West in no less than thirty-nine distinct senses. The same philosopher will give it, all unconsciously of course, three or four different meanings in as many paragraphs. Given such ambiguity, any thesis can be defended, any course of action morally justified, by an appeal to nature.

Ambiguity is not the only characteristic which makes these words peculiarly effective in determining conduct. Those which stand for generalizations and those which designate psychological states lend themselves, as we have already seen, to objectification. They take verbal wings and fly from the realm of abstraction into the realm of the concrete, from the realm of psychology into the external universe.

The objectification and even the personification of abstractions is something with which every political speech and newspaper article has made us familiar. Nations are spoken of as though they were persons having thoughts, feelings, a will and even a sex, which, for some curious reason, is always female. This female, personal nation produces certain psychological effects on those who hear it (or rather her) being talked about—effects incomparably more violent than those that would be produced if politicians were to speak about nations as what in fact they are: organized communities inhabiting a certain geographical area and possessing the means to wage war. This last point is crucially important. California is an organized community; but since it does not possess an army and navy, it cannot qualify for a place in the League of Nations.

Another familiar entity in political speeches is the pseudo-person called "Society." Society has a will, thoughts and feelings, but, unlike

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the Nation, no sex. The most cursory observation suffices to show that there is no such thing as Society with a large S. There are only very large numbers of individual societies, organized in different ways for different purposes. The issue is greatly complicated by the fact that the people who talk about this nonexistent Society with a big S, tend to do so in terms of biological analogies which are, in many cases, wholly inapplicable. For example, the so-called philosophical historians insist on talking of a society as though it were an organism. In some aspects, perhaps, a society does resemble an organism. In others, however, it certainly does not. Organisms grow old and die and their component cells break down into inanimate substances. This does not happen to a society, though many historians and publicists loosely talk as though it did. The individuals who compose what is called a decadent or collapsed society do not break down into carbon and water. They remain alive; but the cells of a dead organism are dead and have ceased to be cells and become something else. If we want to talk about the decline and fall of societies in terms of scientific analogies, we had better choose our analogy from physics rather than biology. A given quantity of water, for example, will show least energy, more energy, most energy according to its temperature. It has most energy in the form of superheated steam, least in the form of ice. Similarly, a given society will exhibit much energy or little energy according to the way in which its individual members live their lives. The society of Roman Italy, for example, did not die; it passed from a high state of energy to a lower state of energy. It is for historians to determine the physiological, psychological, economic and religious conditions accompanying respectively a high and a low degree of social energy.

The tendency to objectify and personify abstractions is found not only among politicians and newspaper men, but also among those who belong to the, intellectually speaking, more respectable classes of the community. By way of example, I shall quote a paragraph from the address delivered by Clerk Maxwell to the British Association in 1873. Clerk Maxwell was one of the most brilliantly original workers in the whole history of physics. He was also what many scientists, alas, are not—a highly cultivated man capable of using his intelligence in fields outside his particular specialty. Here is what he could say before a learned society, when at the height of his powers.

"No theory of evolution," he wrote, "can be formed to account for the similarity of molecules." (Throughout this passage, Maxwell

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is using the word "molecule" in the sense in which we should now use the word "atom.") "For evolution necessarily implies continuous change, and the molecule is incapable of growth or decay, of generation or destruction. None of the processes of Nature, from the time when Nature began, have produced the slightest difference in the properties of any molecule. We are therefore unable to ascribe either the existence of the molecules or the identity of their properties to any of the causes which we call natural. Thus we have been led along a strictly scientific path very near to the point at which Science must stop. . . . In tracing back the history of matter Science is arrested when she assures herself, on the one hand that the molecule has been made and, on the other, that it has not been made by any of the processes which we call natural."

The most interesting point that emerges from these lines is the fact that, like the Nation, but unlike Society, Science has a sex and is a female. Having recorded this item in our text books of natural history, we can go on to study the way in which even a mind of the caliber of Clerk Maxwell's can be led into absurdity by neglecting to analyze the words which it uses to express itself. The word "science" is current in our everyday vocabulary. It can be spelt with a capital S. Therefore it can be thought of as a person; for the names of persons are always spelt with capital letters. A person who is called Science must, *ex hypothesi,* be infallible. This being so, she can pronounce without risk of contradiction, that "none of the processes of Nature, since the time when Nature began," (Nature is also spelt with a capital letter and is of course also a female) "have produced the slightest difference in the properties of any molecule." Twenty-three years after the date of Maxwell's speech, Becquerel observed the radioactivity of uranium. Two years after that Mme. Curie discovered radium. At the turn of the new century Rutherford and Soddy demonstrated the fact that the radium atom was in a process of rapid disintegration and was itself derived from uranium whose atoms were disintegrating at a much slower rate.

This cautionary story shows how fatally easy it is for even the greatest men of science to take the particular ignorance of their own time and place, and raise it to the level of a universal truth of nature. Such errors are particularly easy when words are used in the entirely illegitimate way in which Maxwell employed the word "Science." What Maxwell should have said was something like this, "Most Western scientists in the year 1873 believe that no process has ever modified the internal structure of individual atoms. If this is

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so (and of course the beliefs of 1873 may have to be modified at any moment in the light of new discoveries), then perhaps it may be legitimate to draw certain inferences of a theological nature regarding the creation of matter."

How was it possible, we may ask ourselves, that a man of Clerk Maxwell's prodigious intellectual powers, should have committed a blunder so monstrously ridiculous, so obvious, when attention is called to it, to people of even the most ordinary mental capacities? The question demands a double answer—the first on the purely intellectual level, the second in terms of feeling and will. Let us deal with these in order. Maxwell made his mistake, first of all, out of a genuine intellectual confusion. He had accepted the English language without question or analysis, as a fish accepts the water it lives in. This may seem curious in the light of the fact that he had certainly not accepted the technical language of mathematics without question or analysis. We must remember, however, that nontechnical language is picked up in infancy, by imitation, by trial and error, much as the arts of walking and rudimentary cleanliness are acquired. Technical languages are learned at a later period in life, are applied only in special situations where analysis is regarded as creditable and the ordinary habits of daily living are in abeyance. Children and young people must be deliberately taught to analyze the nontechnical language of daily life. With very few exceptions, they will never undertake the task on their own initiative. In this respect, Maxwell was not exceptional. He turned his intensely original and powerful mind on to the problems of physics and mathematics, but never on those of everyday, untechnical language. This he took as he found it. And as he found in it such words as "Science" with a capital S and a female sex, he made use of them. The results, as we have seen, were disastrous.

The second reason for Maxwell's error was evidently of an emotional and voluntary nature. He had been piously brought up in the Protestant tradition. He was also, as the few letters to his wife which have been printed seem to indicate, a practising mystic. In announcing that "Science" with the capital S and the female sex had proved that atoms had not evolved, but had been created and kept unchangingly themselves by nonnatural forces, he had a specifically religious purpose in view. He wanted to show that the existence of a demiurge after the pattern of Jehovah, could be demonstrated scientifically. And he wanted also, I suspect, to prove to himself that the psychological states into which he entered during

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his moments of mystical experience could be objectified and personified in the form of the Hebraic deity, in whose existence he had been taught to believe during childhood.

This brings us to the threshold of a subject, profoundly interesting indeed, but so vast that I must not even attempt to discuss it here; the subject of God and of the relations subsisting between that word and the external world of things and events, between that word and the inner world of psychological states. Shelley has sketched the nature of the problem in a few memorable sentences. "The thoughts which the word, 'God,' suggests to the human mind are susceptible of as many varieties as human minds themselves. The Stoic, the Platonist and the Epicurean, the Polytheist, the Dualist and the Trinitarian, differ infinitely in their conceptions of its meaning. . . . And not only has every sect distinct conceptions of the application of this name, but scarcely two individuals of the same sect, who exercise in any degree the freedom of their judgment, or yield themselves with any candor of feeling to the influencings of the visible world, find perfect coincidence of opinion to exist between them." Such, I repeat, is the problem. No complete solution of it is possible. But it can at least be very considerably clarified by anyone who is prepared to approach it armed with equipment suitable to deal with it. What is the nature of this suitable equipment? I would assign the first place to an adequate vocabulary. Students of religion have need of a language sufficiently copious and sufficiently analytical to make it possible for them to distinguish between the various types of religious experience, to recognize the difference between things and words, and to realize when they are objectifying psychological states and projecting them into the outside world. Lacking such a language they will find that even a wide knowledge in the fields of theology, of comparative religion and of human behavior will be of little use to them. It will be of little use for the simple reason that such knowledge has been recorded, up to the present time, in words that lend themselves to the maximum amount of intellectual confusion and the minimum of clarity and distinctness.

Words and their meanings—the subject is an enormous one. "Had we but world enough and time" as the poet says, we could continue our discussion of it almost indefinitely. But unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, world and time are lacking, and I must draw to a close. I have been able in this place to let fall only a few casual and unsystematic remarks about those particular aspects of the science of signs which Charles Morris has called the semantic

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and pragmatic dimensions of general semiosis. I hope, however, that I have said enough to arouse an interest in the subject, to evoke in your minds a sense of its profound importance and a realization of the need to incorporate it systematically into the educational curriculum.

Any education that aims at completeness must be at once theoretical and practical, intellectual and moral. Education in the proper use of words is complete in the sense that it is not merely intellectual and theoretical. Those who teach, teach not only the science of signs, but also a universally useful art and a most important moral discipline. The proper use of language is an important moral discipline, for the good reason that, in this field as in all others, most mistakes have a voluntary origin. We commit intellectual blunders because it suits our interests to do so, or because our blunders are of such a nature that we get pleasure or excitement from committing them. I have pointed out that one of the reasons for Maxwell's really monstrous misuse of language must be sought in that great man's desire to reconcile his scientific ideas with the habits of religious belief he had contracted in childhood. There was a genuine confusion of thought; but a not entirely creditable wish was very definitely the father of this confusion. And the same is true, of course, about those who for propagandist purposes, personify such abstractions as "Society" or "the Nation." A wish is father to their mistaken thought—the wish to influence their hearers to act in the way they would like them to act. Similarly, a wish is the father of the mistaken thought of those who allow themselves to be influenced by such preposterous abuses of language—the wish to be excited, to "get a kick," as the phrase goes. Objectified in the form of a person, the idea of a nation can arouse much stronger feelings than it can evoke when it is spoken of in more sober and accurate language. The poor fools who, as we like to think, are helplessly led astray by such machiavellian demagogues as Hitler and Mussolini are led astray because they get a lot of emotional fun out of being bamboozled in this way. We shall find, upon analysis, that very many of the intellectual errors committed by us in our use of words have a similar emotional or voluntary origin. To learn to use words correctly is to learn, among other things, the art of foregoing immediate excitements and immediate personal triumphs. Much self control and great disinterestedness are needed by those who would realize the ideal of never misusing language. Moreover, a man who habitually speaks and writes correctly is one who has cured himself, not merely of conscious and deliberate lying, but also (and the task is much

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more difficult and at least as important) of unconscious mendacity.

When Gotama insisted on Right Speech, when Jesus stressed the significance of every idle word, they were not lecturing on the theory of semiosis; they were inculcating the practice of the highest virtues. Words and the meanings of words are not matters merely for the academic amusement of linguists and logisticians, or for the aesthetic delight of poets; they are matters of the profoundest ethical significance to every human being.

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# Thought and Language

by SAMUEL BUTLER

It may perhaps be expected that I should begin a lecture on the relations between thought and language with some definition of both these things; but thought, as Sir William Grove said of motion, is a phenomenon "so obvious to simple apprehension that to define it would make it more obscure." [1] Definitions are useful where things are new to us, but they are superfluous about those that are already familiar, and mischievous, so far as they are possible at all, in respect of all those things that enter so profoundly and intimately into our being that in them we must either live or bear no life. To vivisect the more vital processes of thought is to suspend, if not to destroy them; for thought can think about everything more healthily and easily than about itself. It is like its instrument the brain, which knows nothing of any injuries inflicted upon itself. As regards what is new to us, a definition will sometimes dilute a difficulty, and help us to swallow that which might choke us undiluted; but to define when we have once well swallowed is to unsettle, rather than settle, our digestion. Definitions, again, are like steps cut in a steep slope of ice, or shells thrown on to a greasy pavement; they give us foothold, and enable us to advance, but when we are at our journey's end we want them no longer. Again, they are useful as mental fluxes, and as helping us to fuse new ideas with our older ones. They present us with some tags and ends of ideas that we have already mastered, on to which we can hitch our new ones; but to multiply them in respect of such a matter as thought, is like scratching the bite of a gnat; the more we scratch the more we want to scratch; the more we define the more we shall have to go on defining the words we have used in our definitions, and shall end by setting up a serious mental raw in the place of a

[1] Sir William Grove, *Correlation of Forces* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., Inc., 1874), p. 15.



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small uneasiness that was after all quite endurable. We know too well what thought is, to be able to know that we know it, and I am persuaded there is no one in this room but understands what is meant by thought and thinking well enough for all the purposes of this discussion. Whoever does not know this without words will not learn it for all the words and definitions that are laid before him. The more, indeed, he hears, the more confused he will become. I shall, therefore, merely premise that I use the word "thought" in the same sense as that in which it is generally used by people who say that they think this or that. At any rate, it will be enough if I take Professor Max Müller's own definition, and say that its essence consists in a bringing together of mental images and ideas with deductions therefrom, and with a corresponding power of detaching them from one another. Hobbes, the Professor tells us, maintained this long ago, when he said that all our thinking consists of addition and subtraction—that is to say, in bringing ideas together, and in detaching them from one another.

Turning from thought to language, we observe that the word is derived from the French *langue,* or "tongue." Strictly, therefore, it means "tonguage." This, however, takes account of but a very small part of the ideas that underlie the word. It does, indeed, seize a familiar and important detail of everyday speech, though it may be doubted whether the tongue has more to do with speaking than lips, teeth, and throat have, but it makes no attempt at grasping and expressing the essential characteristic of speech. Anything done with the tongue, even though it involve no speaking at all, is "tonguage"; eating oranges is as much tonguage as speech is. The word, therefore, though it tells us in part how speech is effected, reveals nothing of that ulterior meaning which is nevertheless inseparable from any right use of the words either "speech" or "language." It presents us with what is indeed a very frequent adjunct of conversation, but the use of written characters, or the finger-speech of deaf mutes. is enough to show that the word "language" omits all reference to the most essential characteristics of the idea, which in practice it nevertheless very sufficiently presents to us. I hope presently to make it clear to you how and why it should do so. The word is incomplete in the first place, because it omits all reference to the ideas which words, speech, or language are intended to convey, and there can be no true word without its actually or potentially conveying an idea. Secondly, it makes no allusion to the person or persons to whom the ideas are to be conveyed. Language is not language unless it not only expresses fairly definite and coherent ideas, but unless it

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also conveys these ideas to some other living intelligent being, either man or brute, that can understand them. We may speak to a dog or horse, but not to a stone. If we make pretence of doing so we are in reality only talking to ourselves. The person or animal spoken to is half the battle—a half, moreover, which is essential to there being any battle at all. It takes two people to say a thing—a sayee as well as a sayer. The one is as essential to any true saying as the other. A. may have spoken, but if B. has not heard there has been nothing said, and he must speak again. True, the belief on A.'s part that he had a *bona fide* sayee in B., saves his speech *qua* him, but it has been barren and left no fertile issue. It has failed to fulfil the conditions of true speech, which involve not only that A. should speak, but also that B. should hear. True, again, we often speak of loose, incoherent, indefinite language; but by doing so we imply, and rightly, that we are calling that language which is not true language at all. People, again, sometimes talk to themselves without intending that any other person should hear them, but this is not well done, and does harm to those who practise it. It is abnormal, whereas our concern is with normal and essential characteristics; we may, therefore, neglect both delirious babblings, and the cases in which a person is regarding him or herself, as it were, from outside, and treating himself as though he were someone else.

Inquiring, then, what are the essentials, the presence of which constitutes language, while their absence negatives it altogether, we find that Professor Max Müller restricts them to the use of grammatical articulate words that we can write or speak, and denies that anything can be called language unless it can be written or spoken in articulate words and sentences. He also denies that we can think at all unless we do so in words; that is to say, in sentences with verbs and nouns. Indeed, he goes so far as to say upon his title page that there can be no reason—which I imagine comes to much the same thing as thought—without language, and no language without reason.

Against the assertion that there can be no true language without reason I have nothing to say. But when the Professor says that there can be no reason, or thought, without language, his opponents contend, as it seems to me, with greater force, that thought, though infinitely aided, extended and rendered definite through the invention of words, nevertheless existed so fully as to deserve no other name thousands, if not millions, of years before words had entered into it at all. Words, they say, are a comparatively recent invention, for the fuller expression of something that was already in existence.

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Children, they urge, are often evidently thinking and reasoning, though they can neither think nor speak in words. If you ask me to define reason, I answer as before that this can no more be done than thought, truth, or motion can be defined. Who has answered the question, "What is truth?" Man cannot see God and live. We cannot go so far back upon ourselves as to undermine our own foundations; if we try to do so we topple over, and lose that very reason about which we vainly try to reason. If we let the foundations be, we know well enough that they are there, and we can build upon them in all security. We cannot, then, define reason nor crib, cabin, and confine it within a thus-far-shalt-thou-go-and-no-farther. Who can define heat or cold, or night or day? Yet, so long as we hold fast by current consent, our chances of error for want of better definition are so small that no sensible person will consider them. In like manner, if we hold by current consent or common sense, which is the same thing, about reason, we shall not find the want of an academic definition hinder us from a reasonable conclusion. What nurse or mother will doubt that her infant child can reason within the limits of its own experience, long before it can formulate its reason in articulately worded thought? If the development of any given animal is, as our opponents themselves admit, an epitome of the history of its whole anterior development, surely the fact that speech is an accomplishment acquired after birth so artificially that children who have gone wild in the woods lose it if they have ever learned it, points to the conclusion that man's ancestors only learned to express themselves in articulate language at a comparatively recent period. Granted that they learn to think and reason continually the more and more fully for having done so, will common sense permit us to suppose that they could neither think not reason at all till they could convey their ideas in words?

I will return later to the reason of the lower animals, but will now deal with the question what it is that constitutes language in the most comprehensive sense that can be properly attached to it. I have said already that language to be language at all must not only convey fairly definite coherent ideas, but must also convey them to another living being. Whenever two living beings have conveyed and received ideas, there has been language, whether looks or gestures or words spoken or written have been the vehicle by means of which the ideas have travelled. Some ideas crawl, some run, some fly; and in this case words are the wings they fly with, but they are only the wings of thought or of ideas, they are not the thought or ideas themselves, nor yet, as Professor Max Müller would have it, inseparably

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connected with them. Last summer I was at an inn in Sicily, where there was a deaf and dumb waiter; he had been born so, and could neither write nor read. What had he to do with words or words with him? Are we to say, then, that this most active, amiable, and intelligent fellow could neither think nor reason? One day I had had my dinner and had left the hotel. A friend came in, and the waiter saw him look for me in the place I generally occupied. He instantly came up to my friend and moved his two forefingers in a way that suggested two people going about together, this meant "your friend"; he then moved his forefingers horizontally across his eyes, this meant, "who wears divided spectacles"; he made two fierce marks over the sockets of his eyes, this meant, "with the heavy eyebrows"; he pulled his chin, and then touched his white shirt, to say that my beard was white. Having thus identified me as a friend of the person he was speaking to, and as having a white beard, heavy eyebrows, and wearing divided spectacles, he made a munching movement with his jaws to say that I had had my dinner; and finally, by making two fingers imitate walking on the table, he explained that I had gone away. My friend, however, wanted to know how long I had been gone, so he pulled out his watch and looked inquiringly. The man at once slapped himself on the back, and held up the five fingers of one hand, to say it was five minutes ago. All this was done as rapidly as though it had been said in words; and my friend, who knew the man well, understood without a moment's hesitation. Are we to say that this man had no thought, nor reason, nor language, merely because he had not a single word of any kind in his head, which I am assured he had not; for, I should add, he could not speak with his fingers? Is it possible to deny that a dialogue—an intelligent conversation—had passed between the two men? And if conversation, then surely it is technical and pedantic to deny that all the essential elements of language were present. The signs and tokens used by this poor fellow were as rude an instrument of expression, in comparison with ordinary language, as going on one's hands and knees is in comparison with walking, or as walking compared with going by train; but it is as great an abuse of words to limit the word "language" to mere words written or spoken, as it would be to limit the idea of a locomotive to a railway engine. This may indeed pass in ordinary conversation, where so much must be suppressed if talk is to be got through at all, but it is intolerable when we are inquiring about the relations between thought and words. To do so is to let words become as it were the masters of thought, on the ground that the fact of their being only

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