

CHAPTER 14

LANGUAGE ANALYSIS

1. LANGUAGE AS A PHENOMENON

It is evident that language also is an affective-volitional matter and not merely a rational one. Gouws (77, 49) says that language is a bridge to a represented world, as this bridge is formed by thinking; language is not a neutral, but rather a personal matter; the intensity of an appeal by language for a child is not inferior to the visual, because its receptive aspects increasingly become a matter of language.

Thus, language also always remains a matter of actualizing the psychic life, and by means of language, the child arrives at a constructed experiential world, as a lived world. Van der Stoep (281, 178-179 [in Afrikaans]) says "Should a child stumble in mastering his language milieu, he is off balance in meeting the task of living, which essentially is a cultural task, and there is a lameness in expression, and still later, if this is partial, in carrying out a task."

Stander describes language as **"a multidimensional system of symbols, intentionally stemming from the psychic-spiritual dimension of being a person, and from his entering a dialogue with his world:** It is a phenomenon sustained by the volitional-affective, and intellectual and as such, as a **human phenomenon**, is a person's most subjective possession. A person's linguistic world, thus, means a **spiritually shared world**, as a power available from the beginning, for a person in his dialogic speaking relationship with his world, and as such, a culturally inventive possession, and creation of a person in his intentional rising above the otherwise concrete-visual boundness of his existence." (242, 23-24 [in Afrikaans]).

2. EVALUATING LANGUAGE

In orthopedagogic evaluation, in particular, language also is evaluated. In this regard, Van der Stoep (281, 175) says that the point of departure is the question of whether the investigation of

language provides the pedagogue with the opportunity to encounter the child in his/her world so that it can be appreciated in its linguistically acquired form. The problem here is whether a person shows him/herself in his/her language, and if an exploration of his/her linguistic world is a reliable reflection of his/her child-world relationship.

Van den Berg (272, 32 [in English]) believes that he "(w)ho wants to become acquainted with man should listen to the language spoken by the things in his existence. Who wants to describe man should make an analysis of the 'landscape' within which he demonstrates, **explains** and reveals himself."

Language is usually of concern in an orthopedagogic evaluative study, and always is immediately available; in and through language, the "other" is always available and reachable, which then, analogously puts the child within reach, according to Gouws (77, 49). Van der Stoep (282, 197) says that language, in addition to communication, implies dialogue; it establishes relationships; and I am my language. Therefore, a child's language provides an image of his/her inner dealings and foundation (282, 64).

Linschoten (144, 75-101) points to the relationships among language, lived experiencing, and reality, and stresses that, in acquiring language, reality now becomes for the child a verbalized reality. Kwant (116, 211 [in Dutch]) says, "... in and through speaking, the intentional attitude arises", and "Our speaking is one manifestation of the mystery which we are." According to Nel (174, 111), language is our most important means of expression, and reflects a person's deepest feelings.

Thus, in language, one always runs across two aspects, i.e., the affective charge, and the gnostic control of what is named. Sonnekus (232, 33 [in Afrikaans]) says, "Language is always language-with-feeling, also in the gnostic, distanced language-constituting act, because a child always proceeds to expression in his use of language."

As far as what is involved in investigating language, a few opinions from the available literature suffice. Schonell (223), Nanninga-Boon (169), Vliegenthart (310), Van Gelder (287), Van der Stoep (281; 283), and Stander (242) have unquestionably shown that the

orthopedagogue is right to involve him/herself with the child's language in the exploratory investigation.

In the investigation, the orthopedagogue also comes forward linguistically to meet the child, and he/she encounters him/her, and sees him/her, in his/her language image, as a person (see 281, 179). It is possible to learn to know a child in this way because he/she allows him/herself to be known to him/herself and to others, also with others, through language, and still more: his/her world is manifested through the word as it is factually given in his/her lived experiences, according to Linschoten (144, 82).

Evaluating the child's language does not amount to concentrating on linguistic data, or the number of spelling and language errors as such (see 281, 179). Rather one carefully listens to **what** he/she says, **how** he/she says it, and **why**. The **meaning** of his/her errors is much more important than their nature. The child is disclosed in the various modes of his/her psychic life and their actualization on various levels.

Van der Stoep (281, 181) says the orthopedagogue should get to know the child as an acting person, who also is present in the situation by means of his/her language. He mentions the following considerations: "What is the nature of the child's intentionality and its directedness; what indications are there regarding the affective, as revealed in the meaning-giving aspects of language; is the child's volitional life directly involved in dealing with the task; what is the quality of his/her intelligence; on what level does he function (e.g., concrete, abstract); how does his language intertwine with his thinking; does language function as a medium which promotes a breaking through to insights (137; 193); does the child handle the task as his own responsibility, or is he continually seeking help, and does he accept the help offered; does he arrive at a point of view, and can he account for it; what is the nature of his fantasy as an aid to thinking and lived experiencing, or is it merely used to escape from the demands of reality; does his intelligence perform a controlling function, e.g., in relation to his emotional life, or is the use of language hampered by a labile, or meta-stable affectivity; what is the nature of the communicative force and range of his language; is his language a medium of expression; what is the nature of his attending, etc.?" (281, 181-182 in Afrikaans]).

In addition to listening to the way a child uses language during the entire orthopedagogic evaluative study, there also are specific **language tasks** assigned to him/her; these tasks are not essentially different from those which he/she continually receives in school.

3. LANGUAGE ASSIGNMENTS

Specific topics can be discussed. With a younger child, this can involve a few sentences. Usually, this conversation serves to allow the relationship with the child to develop, and to gain indispensable information about his/her academics, sports, social activities, likes and dislikes, relationships with others, relationships to teachers, hobbies, and other out of school interests (281, 183). Van der Stoep (281, 183) says this use of language is a direct and immediate communicative and expressive involvement within which the child continually thinks and formulates. He/she participates in the conversation, or merely answers questions. The researcher's complete acceptance is conveyed here. Does the child continually escape with a mere "yes" or "no", or with only essential words? Does he/she elude the implications of the researcher's questions, or does he/she possibly not grasp them? Why does the child restrained in becoming adult respond in short, measured, simple sentences? How timid or defiant is he/she? Does he/she lived experience his/her deficient achievements on an affective level, or does he/she merely accept the case that he/she "can't do anything else"? (281, 183).

Moreover, the orthopedagogic evaluator can use specific **written compositions** to get to know the child better. This is especially appropriate to explore the emotional life of the child restrained in becoming adult. Van der Stoep says "There are few occasions more favorable for revealing blunted emotions than the written composition. Fantasy and lived experienced fantasy can be disclosed here if the topic is correctly chosen with a view to some suspected deficiencies in this respect. On the other hand, the child's abstract reasoning may be investigated, how he relates to things of the world, the degree of organization of the structure of his thinking which is shown in his planning and attack, in the suppleness of his language, etc." (281, 188 [in Afrikaans]). In addition, he (281, 188) says that if there is one instance where a child **is** his/her language, it is the composition; and if we restrict the meaning of **expression** to **telling about myself**, we can definitely say that here, the child comes to self-expression. Thus, the child is discovered in his/her

language, as the embodiment of his/her thoughts, fantasies, and flights, of his loneliness, and ostracism, of his/her rejection of conventions and authority. As a subject co-experiencer, the orthopedagogic evaluator grasps for little details, a word, a sentence, a mistake--and these data are important—because, if we should ignore them, this will lead us to live past the child, and allow the investigation of language to assume the form of a mere test (281, 188).

The topics about which a child can write a **paragraph or essay** are inexhaustible. The following are mentioned as examples:

Homework
In school
My future studies
Playing sports
When I grow up
Important events from my past
A beautiful sunset
The story of my life
My future
If I were an astronaut

The evaluation remains intuitive, without requirements, without quantification, and is merely directed to **understanding** a child through the conversation he/she has carried out with life on paper with a pencil. However, the orthopedagogic evaluator also must not fall into the trap here of literal interpretations. Mainly, this assignment amounts to learning to know the child in particular situations, i.e., in his/her relationship to the matters in his/her educative situation, and also how he/she defines him/herself as body-ness (corporeality).

The following is a brief discussion of the incomplete sentences medium.

4. THE INCOMPLETE SENTENCES MEDIUM

As has become evident in the foregoing, language and thought not only have the role of putting experiences into words, but especially of organizing experiences. Through language, everything we experience and lived experience (feel, think, etc.) we learn to organize into available, clarified forms of expression. Language

makes it possible for the child to say what he/she means, what he/she knows, what he/she thinks, what he/she wants.

The incomplete sentences medium is based on the **Incomplete Sentences Test** of Rotter (213). It is comprised of incomplete sentences the child must complete. According to Nel (174, 119), the incomplete parts are designed in such a way that, in completing the sentence, the child can "double", i.e., project him/herself into the completed sentence. Thus, into each sentence, he/she brings a "little piece of the world", as he/she lived experiences it, as he/she has embodied it, and as it has significance for him/her. The **completed** sentence, thus, represents reality, and especially reality as a **represented world**, and it also is a **representation of his/her inner reality**. Thus, actualizing his/her psychic life within the context of his/her educative relationships is illuminated, and his/her relationships with things, other children, and adults in and out of the family and school are explored. Also, the child, as body-ness, is investigated with the help of a few sentences directed specifically to that.

There is a penetration into the various modes of the child actualizing his/her becoming adult, as this is done on a predominantly pathic, gnostic, pathic-gnostic, or affective-cognitive level. For example, a predominantly pathic involvement with the educative contents is evidenced by a **hesitant** way of dealing with the medium, where some sentences are not completed, or where only one or a few words are added, meaningless sentences are constructed, or where the same word is repeated over and over, for example "good", "nice", "beautiful", "bad", etc. as in:

"I feel **good**";
"Even my best friend is **good**";
"My mother is **good**";
"I feel **nice**";
"The future is **nice**";
" I like **nice** ice-cream";
"I enjoy **nice** things".

The following sentences were completed by a sixteen-year-old boy in 10th grade (IQ = 103; V = 107; NV = 101), who showed learning problems, played hooky, and behaved aggressively toward his mother. They disclose meanings which are part of his experiential world.

1. I like cars and motorcycles when they roar.
2. The happiest moment is Saturday when I wake up.
3. I feel tired when I have to go to school.
4. At night in my bed I dream of racing.
5. Even my best friend doesn't like my mother.
6. I would very much like to afford a motorcycle.
7. If I could afford it, I would buy a motorcycle.
8. I can't stand my father's drinking.
9. My friends know I can't stand any nonsense.
10. I am sorry that my mother is divorced.
11. The best is to leave school.
12. People who don't understand me are stupid.
13. I get angry at people nagging me.
14. My mother is your mom, and you must not despise her.
15. My greatest fear is that I won't be allowed to leave school.
16. I could never play rugby well.
17. It disgusts me now at tomorrow's test.
18. When I was small, my father played with me.
19. I suffer a lack of school.
20. I shall never forget that I have never been happy in school.
21. My nerves are nearly shot.
22. My greatest worry is school work.
23. My thoughts are good.
24. The future is a difficult thing for me to decide.
25. I can't pay attention to my school work.
26. I sometimes wonder where my father is.
27. People who don't like me are stupid.
28. I have no time for a bookworm.
29. I feel a need for grades.
30. I enjoy myself at the seashore.
31. I hate school.
32. I am very tempted to run away.
33. The only obstacle is school.
34. I wish I was finished with school.
35. My father had a bad temper.
36. In secret I hate her.
37. Most girls think I am stupid.
38. I sometimes imagine that I am at Kailamy.
39. I have definitely decided to leave school.
40. Nothing upsets me more than when my father drank.

41. I **regret** that I must go to school.
42. **Most boys** like motorcycles.
43. **My greatest shortcoming** is grades.
44. I **strive** towards the work that must be done tomorrow.
45. **My strongest desire** is to win a car.

From these sentences the following, among other things, can be inferred:

Lack of trust between mother and son (5, 14, 36);
rejection of mother by son (5, 10*, 14, 36);
rejection of authority (13);
poor direction to tasks (2, 3, 32, 45*);
inferiority feelings (1*, 4*, 6*, 16, 37);
poor self image (12, 27);
school is an unnecessary burden and meaningless (2, 3**, 11, 15, 20, 28, 31, 33, 39, 41);
guilt feelings about neglect of duty and school tasks (17, 19, 22, 25, 29, 43);
longing for father (18, 26);
poor future perspective (6*, 15, 33*, 39, 41*);
escape via fantasy (4, 6*, 30*, 38);
insufficient awareness of values (1*, 4*, 5*, 7*, 15, 31, 33).

* In my opinion, questionable classifications [there are others]--G.Y.

** Add--G.Y.