

CHAPTER 14

LANGUAGE ANALYSIS

1. LANGUAGE AS A PHENOMENON

It is clearly 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 really is for a child not inferior to the visual because the 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 multi-dimensional system of symbols, intentionally stemming from the psychic-spiritual dimension of being a person and from his entering into 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 also 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 world so that it can be appreciated in its

linguistically acquired form. The problem here is whether a person shows himself in his language and if an exploration of his linguistic world is a reliable reflection of his 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 immediately available; in and through language the "other" always is 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 among others, I am my language. Therefore, a child's language provides an image of his 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 that 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, among others, one always runs across two aspects, namely 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 will suffice. Schonell (223), Nanninga-Boon (169), Vliegthart (310), Van Gelder (287), Van der Stoep (281; 283) and Stander (242) have unquestionably shown that the orthopedagogue is right to involve himself with the child's language in the exploratory investigation.

In the investigation, the orthopedagogue also comes forward linguistically to meet the child and he encounters him and sees him in his language image as a person (see 281, 179). It is possible to learn to know a child in this way because he allows himself to be known to himself and to others, also with others, through language, and still more: his world is manifested through the word as it is factually given in his 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 says, **how** he says it and **why**. The **meaning** of his errors is much more important than their nature. The child is disclosed in the various modes of his 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 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 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 that 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; these tasks are not essentially different from those that he 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 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 participates in the conversation or merely answers particular questions. The researcher's complete acceptance is conveyed here. Does the child continually escape with a mere "yes" or "no" or with only absolutely essential words? Does he elude the implications of the researcher's questions or does he possibly not grasp them? Why does the child restrained in becoming adult respond in short, measured, simple sentences? How timid or defiant is he? Does he lived experience his deficient achievements also on an affective level or does he merely accept the case that he "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, among other ways, 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 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 language as the embodiment of his thoughts, fantasies and flights, of his loneliness and ostracism, of his 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 particular requirements, without quantification and is merely directed to **understanding** a child through the conversation he 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 relationship to the matters in his educative situation and also how he defines himself as bodiliness (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 also organizing experiences. Through language everything that 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 means, what he knows, what he thinks, what he wants.

The incomplete sentences medium is based on the **Incomplete Sentences Test** of Rotter (213). It is comprised of a number of incomplete sentences that the child has to be complete. According

to Nel (174, 119), the incomplete parts are designed in such a way that in completing the sentence, the child is able to "double", i.e., project himself into the completed sentence. Thus, into each sentence, he brings a "little piece of the world" as he lived experiences it, as he has embodied it and as it has significance for him. The **completed** sentence, thus, represents reality, and especially reality as a **represented world** and it also is a **representation of his inner reality**. Thus, actualizing his psychic life within the context of his educative relationships is illuminated, and his relationships with things, other children and adults in and out of the family and school are explored. Also, the child as bodiliness 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 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 particular meanings that 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 have to go to school.
42. **Most boys** like motorcycles.
43. **My greatest shortcoming** is grades.
44. I **strive** towards the work that has to 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.