

4.5 Conclusions

Linking language and culture to evolution shows not only their relation to each other but also illustrates how all cultures are related and how all languages are related to one another. The link between them is the common biological-cognitive relation of the species *Homo sapiens* to the world in which it lives.

4.5.1 Culture is nature

Culture and language are social constructs which themselves derive from humans' biological constitution. Because cultures and languages select, construct and define which realities are perceived by their respective communities, we can say that for each cultural and linguistic community there is for most practical purposes no objectively independent reality. For most cultural purposes, the only *relevant* reality is that which has been defined by culture-as-theory and language-as-theory and is articulated in language-as-practice. The natural world has become culturalised. And to such an extent that the cultural world *seems* natural.

4.5.2 Compatibility of theories

In the natural world, a number of different theories and their embodiment as organisms co-exist side by side. The theory of a frog about its *Umwelt* "pond" does not mean that a fish which lives in the same body of water cannot have its own theory of its own *Umwelt* "pond". The frog's "pond" and the fish's "pond" are different abstractions and different constructs of the "same" body of water in which they live.

Both the frog's theory and the fish's theory of the independent reality of this body of water are valid, at least for the duration of their respective lives. Both their theories can co-exist and be valid in the same independent reality because, although they both refer to the same independently existing phenomenon (the pond), each theory refers to and highlights different aspects of this pond. In other words, the frog and the fish each have their own *Umwelt* within one and the same independently existing reality. In this way, different theories define different *Umwelts* which are at the same time compatible with one another. Compatible means here: the *Umwelts* are not mutually exclusive.

Human beings also have different theories about independently existing reality, which we have called cultures. These different theories or cultures can thus also be said to define different human *Umwelts*. These human *Umwelts* are also compatible with one another. They are not only compatible, i.e. mutually exclusive, but, because of humans' common biological relations to the world via their consciousness, they are also all *related to one another*. This is a fact of evolution.

Because of this evolutionary fact, the various languages which, as we have seen above, serve to articulate theories-as-cultures are not only related to one another but also compatible with one another and are also commensurable. It will be clear that, here, *commensurable* does not mean that languages are logically equivalent, but that they have the potential to refer to (or to *mean*) the "same" thing, i.e. relate to the same independent reality. Languages are potentially mutually comprehensible because their *tertium comparationis* is the real relation of real beings to the real world. We can thus say that languages-as-theories are compatible with one another and are also commensurable via humans' cognitive structures and their relation to the real world.

4.5.3 Objective relativity

Language refers to, and relates to, independent reality via human consciousness. The different languages are related to one another and to independent reality because humans are viable organisms which have a real, direct and unmediated relation to independent reality. This real and unmediated relation persists even though humans have become estranged from it through their second-order theories, i.e. through their languages and cultures. Languages are the articulation of humans' interpretations of their first-order theory. They are the means by which second-order theory is expressed. As such, they are embodied second-order theory, are second-order theory in practice.

The relativity of languages is an objectively given real phenomenon and can be explained in terms of evolutionary theory. The concept of *objective relativity* accommodates both the real relation between the individual languages and independent reality and their relation to one another. It thus develops the concept of linguistic relativism in a way which explains how different languages can come to construct different realities while at the same time forestalling the criticism that “anything goes” by grounding this relativity firmly within the bounds of humans' biological reality. It also establishes clearly and in a manner which is compatible with other theories of the human condition (primarily evolutionary theory, biological explanations of interaction with reality such as the *Umwelt* theory and Biosemiotics and theories of consciousness), that no “neutral vantage point” need to be posited to account for culture and language-specific perception or for the fact of translation. Important as it is for understanding the link between language, thought and human behaviour as expressed in culture-as-practice, the identification of linguistic and cultural differ-

ences must be seen as the surface manifestations of a common human basis for relating to the world. It is the *conditio humana* itself which provides the *common*, and not *neutral*, “vantage point” which relates all languages and cultures and makes them commensurable.

Identifying the objective relativity of languages means there is no need to have recourse to a mythical “pure language” to find the relation between languages. This relation is given through the evolutionary history of the human species. And, as we shall see in Chapter Five, it is objective relativity which makes translation, as the real practice of real humans in a real world, both possible and logical.

4.6 Summary

The development of consciousness made humans aware of an “external” world. It estranged them from their first-order, natural theory.

This increasingly sophisticated consciousness gave the species *Homo sapiens* a dis-embodied theory, a second-order theory, a conscious interpretation of its relation to its *Umwelt*.

These second-order theories, which select characteristics from amongst a variety of independently existing phenomena, are a further selection and abstraction of independent reality and of humans’ *Umwelt*.

This second-order theory also becomes attuned to the specific *Umwelts* of various human collectives.

All humans have the biological-cognitive potential to understand and

to grasp any and any number of second-order theories of reality. This second-order theory is embodied in culture-as-practice.

Culture selects those features of the general human *Umwelt* which are considered relevant for the needs of the respective human collective. The diversity of specific human *Umwelts* means that there is a diversity of second-order theories, ie. of cultures.

The diversity of cultures also springs from the ability of human consciousness to accommodate and to adapt to whichever *Umwelt* it is required to survive in.

Human consciousness is the interface between the natural and the cultural.

Human language is the articulation of second-order theory.

The plasticity of human consciousness and its relation of fit to its respective *Umwelt* means it can also accommodate any *articulation* of second-order theory.

Language and culture constitute a way of *referring to reality*.

The diversity of languages and cultures constitutes the diversity of ways in which humans can refer to and communicate about reality.

All languages are related to each other via their relation to independent reality and via the potential of human consciousness to adapt to any one of them.

The *objective relativity* of languages is the result of evolution, of humans' relation of fit with the world.

The so-called incommensurability of languages is overcome by this objective relativity.

There is no need for metaphysical speculation on an “original” or “pure” language.

Languages relate to one another because they relate humans with the world. They are “commensurable” because human consciousness is “commensurable” with language and with the world.

This human relationship to reality is flexible, adaptable and open to change.

Enabling changes in cultures and languages means changing the way humans refer to the world. It means opening up new interpretations of reality.