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***Expansion of linguistic paradigm
in studies on childhood and school***

Introduction

The “linguistic turn” in humanities and social sciences put language in the centre of attention of scientists, and so it is possible to talk about expansion of the philosophy of language and linguistic paradigm. This paradigm also brings about a shift of emphasis from speaking about the world by means of language towards the position whereby language shapes the world being learnt by assignment of meanings. The “linguistic turn” was followed in social sciences by “a narrativist turn”, after which language is perceived as a peculiar medium thanks to which complex internal narrations convey meanings. Each of the subjects creates a different type of narration about the world, so “the truth” is constructed/negotiated in the process of social exchange of narration.

The change in the cognitive paradigm was first revealed in linguistics alone, from which there emerged peculiar scientific trends encompassing increasingly larger areas: cultural linguistics, ethnolinguistics, pragmatic linguistics, sociolinguistics, cognitive linguistics, linguistics of gender, linguistics of age, and others. The multi-directional realm of issues dealt with in linguistics and its peripheries caused linguistic methodology to be enriched with strategies derived from different disciplines of knowledge, such as philosophy, anthropology, ethnography, sociology, psychology. At the same time into these disciplines of knowledge the linguistic perspective pervaded.

I want here to conduct an overview of conceptions grounded in linguistics and pertaining to issues of studies on childhood and school. The range of these issues is very extensive and encompasses various cognitive aspects subject to exploration in many

disciplines of science. Particular disciplines of knowledge deal with component issues concerning children, their development and functioning in the social, symbolic and educational world. The linguistic paradigm allows for **integration of different cognitive perspectives**, constituting a methodological base for interdisciplinary studies. It forms a peculiar bond which joins together sometimes very remote premises, which enables an in-depth description of the reality of the child's world.

Linguistic trends in studies on childhood and school

For studies on childhood and school the perspective of **pragmatic linguistics** proves most useful. This scientific trend deals with relationships between language signs and their users. In studies expanding the issue of language with a pragmatic aspect it is revealed how elements of the grammatical system are intertwined in multifarious cultural-and-social contexts. The perspective of pragmatic linguistics covers: communicating, comprehension, expression, the psychological motivation of speakers and social conditioning of language communication. Pragmatics deals with the entire sphere of "language use", and for this reason it differs from semantics in that it studies the meaning of a message together with all its circumstances: the sender's intention, situation, stance and understanding. This branch of linguistics takes into account also a psychological aspect (creating the strand of psycholinguistics) and/or a sociological aspect (the strand of sociolinguistics). This is why in studies on childhood and school, due to the complex cognitive matter, it appears particularly useful.

The range of problems in studies on childhood and school covers broad issues of the relationship: man-society-culture-reality, which is also the subject of interest in **cultural linguistics** (ethnolinguistics). In this strand of linguistics this relationship has a three-component form, as in the title of the book by B. L. Whorf, co-author of the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, *Language, Thought and Reality*, and it assumes the man's reasoning to be strictly related to the structure of the language the man uses. Language affects thinking about reality, and thinking about reality impacts on language, which, finally, exerts influence on the type of culture. This thought underlies the theory of cultural linguistics, which does not treat language as only a means of information transfer, but also as a representation of the cultural heritage of society. Ethnolinguistic publications concern language reflection on the image of

the world, with its relevant issues covering semantic and grammatical categories of language, their vocabulary, phraseology, proverbs, metaphors, proper nouns and, finally, speech acts.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is a theoretical basis for the category of the **language image of the world (LIW)**, which, stemming from cultural linguistics, assumes different forms in different linguistic strands and serves an important function in studies in other disciplines, e.g. cultural anthropology or pedagogy. The latest studies on LIW are connected with cognitive linguistics, in which language can be treated as a subject of studies or as a means for reflection on cognitive processes (related to knowledge and comprehension)¹, which opens up a wide perspective for studies on childhood and school. The LIW category enables an analysis of elements of language systems at different levels, being manifestations of the image of the world of both individuals as well as of a specific community (e.g. children's generation).

One of the important problems in this realm is semantics revealing in children's narratives a whole layer of connotations of the expressions used as strongly dependent on socio-cultural contexts. In this way it is possible to unveil understanding of reality (image of the world) characteristic of the author. A word formation analysis of children's language allows for interpretations of social relationships (e.g. a use of diminutives or augmentatives). In this approach language stereotypes also appear interesting, which can be an expression of social attitudes.

Studies on etymology of words used by a child can show meanings from the world of adults permeating to the world of children (e.g. expressions coming from youth slang or the language of pop-culture). Stylisation and language labels belong to messages indicating affiliation to a particular group and they unravel a relationship to other social groups. It is a research area which also covers children's word folklore. The process of their incorporation into the children's repertoire and creation of new words can picture the way of the image of the world of a particular generation of children being formed².

¹ J. Ożdżyński, *Perspektywa kognitywna w badaniach nad językiem dzieci i młodzieży*, [in:] *Językowy obraz świata dzieci i młodzieży*, composite volume under edition of J. Ożdżyński, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, Kraków 1995, 36.

² A. Wasilewska, *Archetypy świata dziecięcego. Światy wyobraźni w narracjach dzieci*, Harmonia Universalis, Gdańsk 2013, 85.

Great theories on linguistic grounds vs. social sciences

I. Structuralism

- **Theses of structuralism:** the world consists mostly of relationships between elements rather than components, whereas the meaning of things or experiences cannot be understood without noticing the relationship of those components with other elements of situations (in a structure); a structure has a dynamic character, it changes under influence of relationships with other structures. Man structures experiences into his world of culture.
- **Structuralism in linguistics:** reaching beyond diachronic studies, searching for synchronically functioning comprehensive systems.

Among multiple linguistic conceptions, structuralism appears to be the most expansive, also in social sciences. One of the precursors of structuralism in linguistics, Ludwig Wittgenstein, associated with the pragmalinguistic strand claimed that the language structure of a sentence “copies” the structure of a described situation; hence the statement: “the limits of my language means the limits of my world”³ becomes an important thesis for issues related to the cognitive processes of an individual. In psychology, structuralism most strongly combated “atomistic” tendencies confining particular wholes to ordinary elements existing formerly⁴. According to structuralism, the world consists largely of relationships rather than components, whilst the meaning of things or experiences cannot be understood without noticing the relationship of those components with other elements in a structure. It is within structuralism that the man’s common ability not only to create structures, but also to subject his own nature to requirements of this structuration⁵ was observed. Man structures experiences into his world of culture – he generates myths, social institutions, an image of the world by processing understandable and repetitive forms. Thus, we can repeat after Lévi-Strauss that we are all structuralists.

³ Cited after: A. Kiklewicz, *Aspekty teorii względności lingwistycznej*, Studia z Teorii Poznania i Filozofii Języka 1, Instytut Dziennikarstwa i Komunikacji Społecznej Uniwersytetu Warmińsko - Mazurskiego, Olsztyn 2007, 18.

⁴ J. Piaget, *Strukturalizm*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1972, 32.

⁵ Cf. T. Hawkes, *Srukturnalizm i semiotyka*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Poznań 1988, 13.

- **Structuralism in social sciences:** recognising the importance of relationships in social sciences – departing from studies of isolated elements. The structuralist idea introduced the concept of cognitive constructivism, which finds its place in developmental psychology and pedagogy.

Structuralist anthropology assumes that the sense of language reflects senses of culture, whilst social meanings are “encoded” in cognitive structures of its particular participants. By studying language structures it is possible to reach phenomena extremely important for culture. A synchronic analysis, as the basic method of structuralist studies, enables recognition of structural analogies between different spheres of life within a particular culture. Meanings are studied as encoded in cognitive structures of members of particular social groups, with “in-variants” being common to all the participants. As Katarzyna Rosner puts it, reality – social or historical world – is no longer perceived as external and independent from a man living in it or studying it; it is a world of human experience, constituted through this experience⁶.

According to constructivist rationale, in the process of experiencing the world all that a child perceives is for the child a source of information acquired intuitively. The perceived and memorised elements of external reality are introduced into original arrangements and they are structured anew. The concept of scripts, concerning non-volatile memory, should be mentioned⁷. Information stored in the non-volatile memory is subject to repeated and multiplied processing: dismemberment, classification and combination into multifarious categories of schemata. They constitute a basis for creation of new internal models in the mental and cognitive system of an individual. This also applies to the process of learning a language by a child. This property has been described and popularized thanks to Noam Chomsky’s theory. Such a presentation of the cognitive process corresponds to latest theories concerning creative thinking and psychocognitive development of a child. The learning of reality proves to be a process consisting in permanent, successive growth and enrichment of structures. In this cognitive process a new term is always assimilated to existing schemata, which in the next cognitive step fall subject to enriching changes. Thanks to practical activity

⁶ K. Rosner’s work is referred to after: A. Martuszevska, *Prawda w powieści*, Słowo/Obraz/Terytoria, Gdańsk 2010, 182-183.

⁷ M. Przetacznik-Gierowska, M. Tyszkowa, *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1996, 99.

of the subject, particular objects of the real world are subsumed into a cohesive and relatively permanent system. From the perspective of the structuralist idea knowledge has a dynamic character – it is constructed by an individual, in the process of his/her own cognitive activity, into a personal system of understanding the world. This thesis presents a child as a researcher of reality, and so it also points to a need of shift in school didactics from the behavioural-transmissive approach, whereby the “giving of” and “checking of” knowledge takes place, to the constructivist approach, enabling a child to construct his/her own structure of knowledge in the process of studying the world. Thanks to language, a child becomes an active explorer and experimenter, learning and trying out its functions in social contexts. Active contact with the (social, material and cultural) world becomes important, and also responding to a child’s cognitive curiosity and not hampering his/her search.

II. Semiotics:

- **Theses of semiotics:** all reasoning about the world and about ourselves proceeds in language semiotic systems; symbolic systems of meanings delineate cognitive boundaries of an individual.
- **Semiotics in linguistics:** language organises, arranges semantic *universum* of our thinking; a narrative (text) is partial realisation of the world’s model.

A natural language is a primary system. Culture and social life employ secondary modelling systems, comprised on many co-functioning semiotic systems, such as social practices, rituals, arts, literature, etc. According to semioticians, every text of culture, not only verbal, is realisation of a particular model of the world. A model of the world is more broadly understood as an interpretation of all semiotic systems, serving communication in a given collectivity, whereas in a narrower meaning – an interpretation of a given semiotic system. A narrative (text) is partial realization of the system, and so also partial realization of a model of the world or some aspect of the model of the world of the narrative’s author. Language organizes and establishes semantic *universum* of our thinking. The semiotic mechanism of culture functions in such a way that creation of a new sphere of social activity causes symbolic innovations to occur⁸. A semiotic analysis of a person’s narrative concerns what in the individual is social, intersubjective (collective), and available to all.

⁸ A. Kiklewicz, *Aspekty teorii względności lingwistycznej*, op. cit., 83.

Within the semiotic perspective the issue of linguistic universals arises. For a natural language a shift from relativity of codes (in different natural languages) to acknowledgment of existence of steady elements, which enable communication, is possible. While in the case of other semiotic systems, such as gestures, the situation becomes more complex, as it is dependent on cultural conventions.

- **In social sciences:** semiotics provides a shared language for description of heterogeneous phenomena (images, gestures); it uncovers subjectively-objective implications of the processes of social creation of reality; it recognises cultural-and-social relativity of symbolic codes.

A lot of effort is required to realise the conventional, historic, cultural character of e.g. the language of gestures or colours. Semiology points to relativity of such codes and their sociocultural background. In this case, Whorf's hypothesis that man is determined in his perception of the world by language (cultural) codes, which regulate his communication, remains valid⁹. From the subjective point of view reality appears only as a certain symbolic system, construed by an individual through mediation of different frames of reference, way of interpreting various domains of reality, there existing multiple levels and layers of experiencing reality¹⁰. The subjective way of interpreting experience relates to a socially distributed attitude to a specified fragment of reality. There occurs continual interpretation and reinterpretation, reality is thus constructed, not discovered. Owing to this, a researcher should focus on establishing conditions in which specific experience is regarded by an individual as facts. The sources of subjective vision of reality lie in different types of social participation, in which social roles determine specific schemata of orientation. This means that perception and interpretation of the world by an individual is dependent on basic things being established by a given social community which is a specific frame of reference. Social processes form "a structure of giving credence" to subjective reality¹¹. The social surroundings help maintain self-identification, it affirms and also has influence on construction of a person's identity.

⁹ U. Eco, *Nieobecna Struktura*, przekład A. Weinsberg, P. Bravo, Wydawnictwo KR, Warszawa 1996, 362.

¹⁰ Cf. A. Manterys, *Wielość rzeczywistości w teoriach socjologicznych*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1997, 46–47.

¹¹ P. L. Berger, T. Luckmann, *Spoleczne tworzenie rzeczywistości*, translated and provided with introduction by J. Niżnik, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1983, 237.

IV. Post-structuralism

- **Thesis of post-structuralism:** openness to multiplicity of readings; texts are a source of knowledge about the world and our vision of the world, a metaphor of text as the world and the world as a text. **Postmodernist thought – cognitive “game”** – handling different elements; multi-meaningfulness, semantic tension; visible crisis of representation and its social, political, artistic and epistemological consequences.
- **Post-structuralism in linguistics:** openness to other disciplines; going “outside” language; recognition of interdependence between language and cognitive structures and between language and other systems serving familiarisation with reality. **A blend of theories of substantially different content** – cognitive “relativity” dependent on a paradigm, emergence of new linguistic strands.

Paul Ricoeur emphasises that understanding a language system in its process of development requires reference to the **use of language**, to speech: to think into speech is to think into the unity of what Saussure separated – into the unity of language system and word¹². Interpretation and communication of experience proceed within a specified framework socially conditioned. This framework is created by a symbolic system providing an individual with model solutions. The symbolic system ensures permanence of the complex of the world’s perception structures, presenting oneself both in the categories of a subject as object of an acting entity; it constitutes a type of stage on which communication is possible¹³. Only as a unit of speech has a language sign a semantic character, due to which a shift from the structure of a language system to its function becomes possible. With this postulate Paul Ricoeur justified his theory of discourse. Semiotics, the theory of language system, analyses only its elements, whilst the theory of discourse examines in what way there occurs integration of language elements into sentences, giving sense to them. The theory of discourse

¹² Cf. P. Ricoeur, *Egzystencja i hermeneutyka. Rozprawy o metodzie*, selection, preparation and introduction by S. Cichowicz, translated by E. Bienkowska, Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, Warszawa 1985, 227.

¹³ Cf. *ibidem*, 49.

is not explained from the perspective of the psychological concept of meaning, which refers to one-off extralinguistic circumstances of utterances, but it concerns the intersubjective (non-psychological) semantic content of a sentence. It allows for a semantic definition of intent, i.e. the meaning of a sentence for a user, The meaning assigned to it by the speaker leaves its mark on the meaning of the very utterance¹⁴. According to Ricoeur, all forms of speech, although not identically, refer to existence beyond language. Explaining texts of culture, one cannot evade existential issues as it is by agency of culture (reading and interpreting texts) spiritual development of man and development of collectivity occurs.

Ricoeur starts the discourse analysis with speech, yet he reaches the conclusion that properties of speech are only revealed by a written text¹⁵. Replacing a voice with written signs implies recording discourse and **what is recorded is the meaning**. Texts are a source of our knowledge about the world and a source of our vision of the world. To Ricoeur, the world is a complex of references unveiled by all types of texts¹⁶. In studies on childhood and school this idea can be employed to disclose ideological connotations of written texts (e.g. in schoolbooks or literary works) addressed to children, or teachers' utterances, or school documents.

Language is understood as an act of change (in the dynamic perspective), as “a process of taming the world”. In studies consisting in revealing meanings of multifarious utterances the perspective of **post-structuralism** offers completely new perspectives. There arise issues of “sense-productivity” of language utterances. Literary texts, thanks to peculiar language organization, generate a multiplicity of fuzzy and non-continuous senses¹⁷. Jacques Derrida calls it “dissemination” semantic spawning, undecidable multi-meaningfulness. In the practice of American deconstructivists, the intensity of undecidable meaningfulness and internal self-contradiction become a measure of a text's value. In Anglo-American New Criticism in language utterances “multi-meaningfulness”, “irony”, and “tension” are sought¹⁸. In the post-structuralist perspective it is characteristic to think of the world as a metaphor of text. The

¹⁴ Cf. P. Ricoeur, *Język, tekst, interpretacja. Wybór pism*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1989, 81.

¹⁵ Ibidem, 96.

¹⁶ Cf. ibidem, 112.

¹⁷ Cf. *Współczesna teoria badań literackich za granicą. Antologia*, prepared by H. Markiewicz, Vol. IV, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1996, 19.

¹⁸ P. de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, Oxford University Press, New York 1971, 9.

world is presented as a system of signs in different codes, which in the social or individual interpretation can be "read" and in this interpretation of meanings the world's understanding is constructed. In everyday existence in the world there occurs a continuous process of interpretation of signs – "sense-productivity". To the postmodernist thought, this possibility of different signs and generation of new meanings for the same signs is characteristic.

- **In social sciences:** interdisciplinarity, expansion of the realm of studies with new aspects of social, cultural, historical reality; openness to new aspects and cognitive perspectives.

Post-structuralism is related to postmodernist thoughts in Jean Baudrillard's, Michael Foucault's, Jacques Derrida's, Jacques Lacan's texts, which are devoted to the crisis of representation and its (social, political, artistic, epistemological) consequences¹⁹. In the post-structural strand there lies the category of narration, being increasingly more employed in the methodology of social sciences. Researchers of different disciplines dealing with narration refer to structuralism, semiology, structural linguistics and anthropology.

- **References to post-structuralism:** the sense of language reflects the senses of culture; unravelling intersubjective meanings

In this perspective, questions on **the commonness of meanings** expressed in language utterances are raised. The describing of socially gained knowledge occurs here, and uncovering meanings shaped via social and historical experience, as well as studies of social discourses. From these perspectives sociology, anthropology and pedagogy benefit.

- **References to hermeneutic thought:** utterances constitute a way of discovering and constructing truth about an individual; uncovering subjective meanings.

There emerge questions here on **one-off meanings** of utterances in biographical narration, in personal narrations. It is a very strong research strand in sociology, psychology and pedagogy.

¹⁹ See: *W kręgu socjologii interpretatywnej. Badania jakościowe nad tożsamością*, scientific editors: J. Leoński & U. Kozłowska, Uniwersytet Szczeciński, Instytut Socjologii i Psychologii, Economicus, Szczecin 2007.

In the hermeneutic perspective research problems concern one-off meanings, whilst in considerations derived from structuralist theories there arise problems concerning commonness of meanings expressed in narration. The former include studies which, via an analysis of biographical narration, lead to reflection on the formation of man's identity. In this case narrations constitute a way of discovering and constructing truth about oneself²⁰, whereby they can have a supportive function in man's development. An individual biography constitutes a type of text which can be studied via hermeneutic interpretation, the same as other facts of culture. The latter strand of narrative studies is that in which there occurs understanding of common meanings (shared by a community covered by studies). Depending on the cognitive perspective adopted, the researcher's attention focuses on the text per se or on the way of arranging meanings in one's mind, an utterance as a cultural sign or a community's image of the world (e.g. in application of the category of discourse). The subject matter of a narrative can become a text's structure, language of narration or the process of text creation. The perspective adopted in studies defines not only the subject matter of studies (senses in texts of culture or subjective meanings in biographical narrations), but it also becomes useful for particular aspects of the learning of reality.

The main aim of narrative studies in the structuralist paradigm is a social description of acquired knowledge and uncovering of meanings formed via social and historical experience²¹.

Summary

All great theories of language also contribute new interpretations of social and cultural reality, which translates onto new cognitive paths in studies on childhood and school being opened. The linguistic paradigm in social sciences makes it possible to go "outside" language and to recognise interdependence between language and cognitive structures, and between language and other systems serving familiarisation with reality. How is expansion of the linguistic paradigm manifested in studies on childhood and school? Most importantly, the linguistic perspective enables formation of the concept of research methodology concerning e.g.:

²⁰ See.: W. Błaszczak, *Narracja jako sposób rekonstruowania i konstruowania historii życia w terapii Metodą Konfrontacji ze Sobą Hermansa*, [in:] *Narracja - koncepcje i badania psychologiczne*, edited by E. Dryll & A. Cierpki, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Psychologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa 2004, 241–253.

²¹ Cf. *Ibidem*, 26.

- the cognitive sphere of a child (cognitive linguistics, LIW);
- knowledge and ways of interpreting the world by a child (cognitive linguistics, pragmalinguistics, cognitive linguistics, theory of discourse, theory of narration);
- interpersonal relationships and social mechanisms at school (sociolinguistics, LIW);
- intersubjective attitudes in pupils' and teachers' utterances;
- stereotypes, colloquial reasoning (psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, cultural linguistics, LIW);
- discourse of child subcultures, pedagogical discourse;

The structuralist idea introduced the concept of cognitive constructivism, which has its place in developmental psychology and pedagogy. Recognition of the importance of relationships in structures leads to studies of isolated elements being departed. The world of a child or the world of a school can always be described in this perspective in the context of broader dependencies: social, cultural, ideological, historical or geographical. Delineating issues related to childhood and school in context allows for deeper analyses of a child's situation in various cognitive environments, which prove dependent on one another. The most characteristic feature of a structure is changing under influence of relationships with other systems, and so the category of childhood is perceived as changeable and possible to describe only in a specific context. A child's situation depends on the social context, the context of material resources, the context of parents' and teachers' upbringing ideologies, the context of accessibility of cultural messages, etc. Childhood is implicated in pedagogical discourse – different in various educational environments, in ideological discourse of a specific community, discourse of grown-ups and discourse of children at a particular age, etc.

Semiotic concepts disclose subjectively-objective implications of the processes of social creation of reality and point to the culturally-social relativity of symbolic codes. Meanings recorded in different codes, not only language, invariably prove to have “a hidden agenda” (e.g. they show the relationship: power-subservience), which enables a new view on texts of culture addressed to children. Signs surrounding a child cease to be “innocent”, whilst the phrase “for the child's sake” proves ambiguous.

Poststructuralism creates room for interdisciplinarity in pedagogical studies, it expands the range of studies on new aspects of social, cultural, and historical reality. The

postmodernist thought introduces a cognitive “game” – handling different elements; multi-meaningfulness, semantic tension. At the same time a crisis of representation in visible (particularly due to relativity of senses) with its social, political, artistic and epistemological consequences.

Today’s state of linguistics can be defined as **a blend of theories of substantially different content**, whilst particular paradigms existing beside one another create peculiar cognitive “relativity”²². As a French sociologist of culture, Abraham Moles, said as early as in the 70s, the task of contemporary researchers does not consist in knowing, but in “knowing who knows”. Adopting a specific methodological perspective determines not only the subject of research, but it also causes that subject of research to be differently described and different research aims to be attained by it. In the contemporary humanistic and social thought, language is treated as a link mediating between an individual and the world, it constitutes an individualistic “medium of meanings”. Theories having linguistic grounds become for researchers effective “matrixes” of interpretation of the intersubjective world of meanings. Expansion of the linguistic paradigm brings about new possibilities of description of the world of a child and that of a school, enables deeper than earlier understanding of a child’s equivocal situation in the world implicated in different dependencies.

²² A. Kiklewicz, op. cit., 8.