



Henryk Kardela, henkar[at]klio.umcs.lublin.pl  
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland

### **Liberating the signifier from the signified: A Cognitive Grammar perspective on Ernst Cassirer's conception of language as a system of *symbolic forms*.**

Following Ernst Cassirer's claim about the same "intuitions and the same processes underlying the development of both language and myth," (Langer 1946:ix), the paper addresses the question of how, according to Cassirer, language takes us, as Langer puts it "from the mythmaking phase of human mentality to the phase of logical thought and the conception of facts" (ibid.), i.e. to a phase when scientific judgments can—via language—be formulated. This "odyssey of the mind" (Langer's formulation)—from myth to language— could not be possible were it not for the fact that, as Cassirer holds, quoting Humboldt, "man puts language *between* himself and the nature which inwardly and outwardly acts upon him [so that he] surrounds himself with a world of words in order to assimilate and elaborate the world of objects [...]" (Cassirer 1955. Vol. 2: 23). Yet, "the elaboration of the world of objects," Cassirer maintains, can only take place when the content, i.e. the signified, is not only bound up with the signifier, but when "at the same time they remain distinct from one another" (ibid.). And it is only when "they remain distinct", when the signifier can be *ambiguously used*, irrespective of the expressive content and irrespective of the *here and now* that the true *symbol*-based "scientific judgement (via language) can be formulated." Language, Cassirer says (1955. Vol. 1: 197) makes a virtue of necessity, that is of the ambiguity inevitable in the linguistic sign. For this very ambiguity will not permit the sign to remain a mere individual sign; it compels the spirit to take the decisive step from the concrete function of "designation" to the universal and universally valid function of "signification." In this function language casts off, as it were, the sensuous covering in which it has hitherto appeared: mimetic or analogical expression gives way to purely symbolic expression which, precisely in and by virtue of its otherness, becomes the vehicle of a new a deeper spiritual content.

What underlies the Cassirean "liberation" of the signified from the signifier, what changes "mimetic and analogical expression [...] to purely symbolic expression," is, in our view, *intersubjectification*, i.e. the cognitive process which makes it possible for "[a plurality of subjects] to share [...] experiential content (e.g., feelings, perceptions, thoughts, and linguistic meanings" (cf. Zlatev et al. 2008: 1).

Generally speaking, intersubjectification can be viewed from two perspectives: (i) from a *representational diachronic- and/or language acquisition-related perspective on language development* or (ii) from a *synchronic-representational* perspective, involving the speaker-hearer discursive exchange. It is the latter perspective that this presentation focuses on. Specifically, adopting as a point of departure for our analysis Chris Sinha's (2007: 1281) modified version of Karl Bühler's *Organon Model* and Bühler's distinctions between *signals* and *symbol systems* (adopted by Sinha as well), we claim that the Cassirean "liberation of the signifier from the signified" involves (i) an intersubjectification-based *agreement* between the speaker and hearer on *what constitutes the referential situation* and (ii) the degree to which the symbol "coordinates the "joint attention" of the speaker and hearer, directed toward the symbolically represented referential situation" (cf. Sinha (2007:1282—cf. Figure 49.2; dotted lines symbolize "joint attention")

The best testing ground for the aforementioned intersubjectification-based *agreement* between the speaker and hearer and for the role of the symbol as a "coordinator" of the "speaker-hearer joint attention" (cf. Sinha's modified version of the Organon Model) are finite complements which are embedded in main clauses with verbs of *saying, thinking, seeing* or



*feeling* as in *George saw/knew/said that his opponent was closing in*. In cognitive linguistics, sentences of this sort have been analyzed, among others, by Verhagen (2005:78). The paper offers a discussion of such structures, recasting Verhagen's analysis in terms of what Langacker (2007: 183) calls the *apprehension of other minds*, i.e. the *conceptual integration*-based "mind-reading" process which takes place in the *Current Discourse Space*—CDS (cf. Langacker 2008).

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