STUART A. MAYPER*   **_E-PRIME AND E-PLUS_**

E-PRIME AROSE as a bold stratagem, a straightforward attack on a pervasive problem of English — the way the ubiquitous verb "to be" tempts us into identities. Korzybski tells us we should avoid identities at 'all' costs, and E-Prime accomplishes that by forbidding *any* use of this verb. The resulting restriction of language does force us to think about its structure rather than rattle on in habitual patterns; it reveals some hidden assumptions; it toughens (though sometimes lengthens) our sentences.

But it presents a classic example of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The verb "to be" has many useful functions in English, other than sowing confusion; it contributes greatly to the language's subtlety and flexibility. E-Prime has not yet provided satisfactory substitutes.

As an auxiliary verb, "to be" puts other verbs into the progressive mode ("I am walking", "I was running"). That focuses on the instant present, distinguished from the more

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timeless mode of the simple verb ("I walk ten blocks every day," "I often ran three miles in my younger days").

The auxiliary "to be" also forms the passive voice, allowing one to emphasize the object of an action without having to specify a subject. We know that authors, especially scientists, may abuse the passive, but one can also use it skillfully to give situations a terser "realism." "The car was run off the road" has more impact than what E-Prime would permit: "The car ran off the road," or "Something or someone ran the car off the road."

Korzybski noted two other uses of "to be": to indicate predication and existence as well as identity. He observed: "The fact that four semantically entirely different words should have one sound and spelling appears as a genuine tragedy of the race; the more so since the discrimination between their uses is not always easy." (1)

To assuage this tragedy I proposed (initially with tongue in cheek, but now I begin to take it seriously) that instead of amputating the verb, we apply constructive surgery: designate the manifold forms of "to be" to clarify its various functions, assign them on the basis of these semantical distinctions rather than those of person and number. (2)

With a nod acknowledging Dave Bourland as my preceder and inspirator, I termed my resulting enriched language *E-Plus*. Its rules follow:

I  Assign **be** (past, **been**) in all persons for *predication* or as an *auxiliary* verb — normally succeeded by an adjective (including a present or past participle).

"The apple be red"; "I been hungry; the apple be eaten."

II  Assign **am** in all persons for *existence*. (Past tense: shall we invent a new word, **wam**?) This allows E-Plus to make a distinction resembling that which Spanish makes between "ser" and "estar": "estoy borracho" = "I be drunk" (right now); "soy borracho" = "I am drunk" ("I exist drunk") — what Bourland gave as an example of a "durative" difference.

III  Assign **is** (past, **was**) for *identity*. Yes, we need to speak in identities, if only to make crisp denials: "The word *is not*

the thing; the map *is not* the territory." But I also can cite some poetic positives: "Bess, you is my woman now," and Pogo's "We have met the enemy and they is us."

IV The usual examples given for the "is of identity," such as "The apple is a fruit; John is a farmer" turn out to not quite fit. To quote reference (2): "No alert user of English would conclude from 'The apple is a fruit and the orange is a fruit' that an apple is identical to an orange. The 'is'es quoted do not assert identity, a symmetrical relation; they assert a nonsymmetrical one we can call *class membership*." The two items connected by such an "is" differ in order of abstraction. I proposed for this very common relation that we use **are** (past, **were**): "The apple are a fruit; John are a farmer." Or more comfortably in the plural, "Apples are fruits; John and William are farmers" — but "John and William is not each other."

E-Prime, it turns out, are a very powerful training device (I switched in my writing here from E-Prime to E-Plus.) I suggested to Bourland that we might try giving students alternate assignments in E-Prime and E-Plus; whether that would result in greater power or utter insanity remains to be seen.

One other point: I note that some of the illustrative quotations in Rules I and III above sound just like "Black English". This been not intentional, but it makes me wonder; could it am that the distinctions I be trying to make here are reflections of some structural aspects of African languages? Has our new Indo-European linguistic sophistication been anticipated?

## REFERENCES

1. Korzybski, A. (1933) *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics.* Lakeville, CT: The International Non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Co. (now part of the I.G.S., Englewood, NJ). 4th edition, 1958. p. 750 (Supplement III: A Non-Aristotelian System and its Necessity for Rigour in Mathematics and Physics.)
2. Editorial — "Reforming the Language," *General Semantics Bulletin* # 55 21-3 (1990).