

CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARD
KORZYBSKI'S GENERAL SEMANTICS*

by

Allen Walker Read
Columbia University

Someday someone will write a full-dress history and assessment of Korzybski and his general semantics. There is a large body of material to draw upon for such a work -- his own numerous writings, the extensive reviews of his two most important books of 1921 and 1933, transcriptions of his seminars, and the archives containing voluminous correspondence both before the Institute was founded in 1938 and since. Making an assessment can be attempted, but that is a process that will continue for many years into the future.

My presentation this evening will be much less ambitious. What I intend to do is very personal -- to give you a picture of what I have experienced in general semantics during the past five decades.

My story begins in the mid-1930s, when I held a research position at the University of Chicago. I was in my late twenties and early thirties -- a time of life for intellectual probing and expansion. My professional job too was fascinating -- helping to edit a dictionary of American English. The word-coinages that I studied kept revealing facets of American development and the interplay between language and other aspects of culture.

Beyond that, the campus of the University of Chicago was seething with intellectual controversy. A brilliant young new president, Robert Maynard Hutchins, then in his early thirties, along with his colleague Mortimer Adler, was making radical changes in the curriculum, strongly opposed by the various departments of science. The campus was so polarized that it was impossible not to take sides.

The Hutchins-Adler faction, many of us felt, were backward-looking. They held that the 'truth' had been revealed in the

*Delivered as the 32nd Annual Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture, sponsored by the Institute of General Semantics, at the Yale Club, New York, N.Y. November 4, 1983. Slightly revised for publication.

past by the great philosophers. I still remember the torture of sitting through a lecture in which medical men were told to go back to Galen, the physician of Marcus Aurelius, for their inspiration. The scientific faction to which I belonged had a strong champion in Anton Carlson, the noted physiologist.

Eager to find allies, I heard rumors in 1936 about a Polish writer who held a scientific, empirical view. In the fall of that year a student who was wealthy enough to own two copies of Science and Sanity lent me one of them, and for the next few months I read it in short stretches. Finally I felt guilty about borrowing a book for so long and bought a copy of my own. Fortunately I put the date in it, "Spring, 1937." It struck me as exemplifying the rigorous intellectual discipline that I was looking for.

I left Chicago on a fellowship for three years, and when I came back in 1941 I found that the Institute of General Semantics was flourishing on East 56th Street. I made friends with M. Kendig and Charlotte Schuchardt and took a seminar with Korzybski in 1941 and again in 1945.

But let me return to the stimulating University of Chicago campus of the 1930s. When Korzybski gave a lecture in Mandel Hall, it was crowded with students who gave him a mixed reception, but he was much discussed in dining halls and bull sessions.

This involves a relevant question -- was Korzybski charismatic? Obviously to some he was, and a devotion to him can last a lifetime. In my own case, I am amazed that my outlook should have had such an affinity with his, when our backgrounds are so very different. He sprang from an aristocratic family in Poland and spent his young manhood as something of a playboy in the capitals of Europe, studying but never writing a thing till after he was forty years old. I came from American puritanical stock that had settled in the new country in the 1600s and moved westward with the frontier as farmers, and my own life had been concentrated on academic advancement, with a B.A. at nineteen and an M.A. at twenty. Yet with such contrasting origins, I found myself seeing eye-to-eye with Korzybski. This lends some support for the generality of the Korzybskian system. Even without him, I think I would have had the same general outlook, but he led the way in sharpening my perceptions of fundamental issues.

As one looks at the early records, one finds that many of the reactions to Korzybski's work were remarkably favorable, especially among the most prestigious scientists. The initial statements about Science and Sanity are full of praise. It is a temptation to quote extensively from them, as they are so generous and receptive, but they are available in the archives of the Institute and I will quote only a few as representative.

Typical is that by Raymond Pearl, Professor of Biology, the Johns Hopkins University:

I have known and followed Count Korzybski's work for many years with the keenest interest. In this new book he makes, in my opinion, a contribution to human thought and understanding of the very first rank and importance. It states and develops a really new idea. The consequences of that idea will, in the passage of time, be far-reaching and fundamental. At long last real hope is offered of measurably freeing man from some of the dreadful consequences of his verbalistic bonds.

Another testimonial is by Roy J. Kennedy, Professor of Physics at the University of Washington, Seattle:

Many of the impasses in which we of this lunatic world are involved are the result of verbal difficulties, and it is precisely these difficulties at which Count Korzybski's technique for the elimination of identity is chiefly aimed. He has shown a striking versatility in developing this technique which he has originated: he discusses the shortcomings of the sciences as facilely as those of religion. Whether or not the reader's sanity is improved by a careful study of the book, he cannot fail to enlarge his capacity for clear thinking. Paradoxically, although Science and Sanity deals largely with the unspeakable it is suitable for discussion in the most decorous circles.

A similar response was that of C. Judson Herrick, Professor of Neurology at the University of Chicago and a foremost leader in his field:

Count Korzybski has diagnosed a fundamental source of confusion in thinking and in conduct and he presents a plan for radical revamping of our theory and practice that seems worthy of further trial in a wide variety of fields. His dynamic definition of structure in terms of relations gives promise of important applications in both science and practical affairs. It provides a generally useful symbol for experience of all sorts and a technique for recasting traditional ideas and practices more efficiently. Adjustments in terms of one dominant motive (or value) are replaced by a broader (many-valued) scheme of motivation which points the way toward personal and social sanity -- a way that I believe is fundamentally correct and practicable.

I refrain from quoting the encomium of the great anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, because as he said of himself, "I am perhaps biased as a [fellow]-countryman."

I think it can be said that in the mid-1930s, a few years after the publication of Science and Sanity, Korzybski's work was

taken very seriously and was well on the way to acceptance by the scientific community. However, this has not happened, and I find the question deeply troubling -- why not?

For one thing, we can take for granted the opposition of thinkers who are out of sympathy with any scientific approach, those whose basic postulates are contrary to the ones of general semantics. This group would include a large body of philosophers, those steeped in classical doctrines of 'absolute truth' and a faith in 'essences', and also the many religious leaders who accept a supernatural element in the revelations that have been handed down from the past. (Granted, there are some naturalistic philosophers and religious leaders.)

Korzybski discriminated carefully between sound philosophers, such as Russell and Whitehead, and unsound philosophers; but he made his way hard for himself by excoriating philosophers as a body in no uncertain terms. They in turn have ever since given him their cold shoulder. It is my own observation that a line divides philosophers into two groups -- those who are aware of the neurological basis of human reaction, and those who ignore neuro-linguistic issues. The logician Ernest Nagel reviewed Science and Sanity in the New Republic for August 1, 1934, by saying: "Most of the book consists of irrelevant material taken from mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, and psychiatry." Irrelevant? Now I regard that as ludicrous, even though Nagel has very high standing in the field of 'pure logic'.

To some people, 'thinking' seems to take place in a vacuum. I remember a discussion many years ago with a professor who assured me that he was talking about "pure mentation," and not about the nervous system at all. Sometimes it is called "ratiocination." Such people assume that they can live and think in a realm outside physical constraints.

Among the budding philosophers on the University of Chicago campus was a graduate student named Martin Gardner, whom I knew and respected, but who picked up a contemptuous attitude from the department there. He later, in 1951, pilloried general semantics in his influential book, Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science. This was not completely honest of him, since he admitted that Korzybski's work was "controversial, borderline," and that it "may or may not have considerable merit." I conferred with Gardner as he was writing the book and found that he was unduly influenced by a published report from Los Angeles that a group of Korzybski's followers were founding a "General Semantics Church" and were about to go underground to preserve the purity of the faith from the impending destruction of the world. It turned out that within a few weeks this group lost its interest in general semantics and embraced scientology. But in this land of free speech, Korzybski could not prevent a few 'loonies', as I regard them, from proclaiming an alleged association with him.

Competence among philosophers is often judged by their ability to relate their discourse to the great thinkers of the past, from Thales down to Wittgenstein and later. The history of philosophy is a fascinating field in its own right, but it cannot take the place of establishing sound postulates and working out their implications in the light of developments of modern science.

Because general semantics puts great emphasis on linguistic issues, some philosophers claim that it is just a resurgence of 'nominalism', which was threshed out in medieval times. I regard this as patently untrue. A nominalism that had no regard for neuro-linguistic issues is wildly different from Korzybski's formulations. Most nominalists accept 'the word' (often called logos) as the basis. The time-honored saying, "In the beginning was the Word," is utterly antithetical to everything that Korzybski stands for. That would make impossible the extensional attitude that is at the heart of general semantics.

Let us pass on to other possible reasons why general semantics has not been fully accepted. Some of them relate to the ways that general semantics has been presented. Chief of these is the nature of the popularizations. We cannot take issue with the need for popularizations, but they sometimes do more damage to general semantics than benefit.

Stuart Chase was very influential in his popular articles in Harper's Magazine, beginning in November, 1937, preliminary to his Tyranny of Words. On the whole they were, I believe, beneficial to the public, for their message was a good one as far as it went. But his work is so diluted by traditional ways of formulating that it cannot do justice to Korzybski's own contribution.

Other popularizers came from the fields of speech therapy, public speaking, and American literature. Each one was good in his way, but these fields are not held in high esteem by scientists in the old established fields, and their reaction seemed to be: "If general semantics is promoted by such people, it cannot be of serious interest to us."

Especially problematical was the writing of S. I. Hayakawa, whose book Language in Action was chosen by the Book-of-the-Month Club and became a widely used textbook in freshman English courses. I was enchanted by it at the time, and I am sure that it has had a sanitizing effect on the teaching in English departments. But it could make use of only a small part of Korzybski's system, and many people got a distorted view of what Korzybski was trying to do.

From reading Hayakawa one would never get the impression of the richness and depth that Korzybski actually provides. F. S. C. Northrop, Professor of Philosophy and Law at Yale University, said in his Korzybski Memorial Lecture in 1954:

The problem, therefore, of understanding Count Korzybski's semantics is much more complex than many of his simple-minded expositors have supposed. It requires a clarification of the type of conceptual meaning which appears in mathematical physics as well as of the type of conceptual meaning which is present in the more purely inductive, natural history sciences and in so much of common sense experience. [General Semantics Bulletin, Nos. 16 & 17 (1955), p. 2.]

Yet many people have formed their judgment of Korzybski by reading in the secondary sources without a word of Korzybski himself.

Furthermore, Hayakawa's personality had to be taken into account. In personal relations he was ingratiating and lovable, and as a colleague of his for a year at the Illinois Institute of Technology, I was devotedly friendly with him. But he had a drive for power that upset the department and was a factor in his break with Korzybski. Even the International Society for General Semantics that he founded in 1941 later had to break with him. That very power drive catapulted him into a United States senatorship.

Other historians of general semantics might lay blame for the lack of acceptance on Korzybski himself. I have already mentioned the charisma that attracted many friends, but those same qualities of personality may have repelled others. Korzybski sometimes showed a freedom of behavior that did not bow to mere social convention. At one time he kept a roll of toilet paper on his desk, which he used as we do facial tissues, in disregard of its associations. Members of his office staff had to insist that he change over to tissues, in order to avoid snide comment.

Being a 'foreigner' (I use quotation marks) also was a disadvantage to him, especially when he had the suspicious title of 'Count'. Lecturers from abroad, like the flamboyant Count Hermann Keyserling, had imposed themselves by self-promotion on American gullibility. Too many German Freiherren had paraded themselves as 'Counts'. (I may say, parenthetically, that Korzybski did not seek out the title 'Count', in spite of the standing of his family in the Polish aristocracy, but it was fostered by his wife, a talented American portrait painter, who believed it was useful to her to be called "Countess Korzybska.")

These are trivial matters, and I am embarrassed to mention them, but it is surprising how little-minded some people can be.

Korzybski has been accused, in speaking of his own work, of overstating its value and importance. Martin Gardner has called it too strong an 'ego drive'. But our Robert Pula has a good riposte to that. Drawing from a Polish source, he quoted: "A man who is a genius and doesn't know it, probably isn't."

In the academic world, it is expected that a scholar should build up a reputation in some specialty, and from that base go on to synthesize other fields into his own. Korzybski did not do this, but was a system builder from a base as an engineer, if anything. He drew from a wider range of fields, some people thought, than he had competence in. The professors at the University of Chicago kept asking, "What right does he have to pontificate as he does?"

A deliberate decision on the part of Korzybski served to reduce his reputation with some people. After his Herculean labors in establishing the system between 1921 and 1933, he began giving seminars and discovered that his teachings had a profound effect, just as he had anticipated, on the personal adjustment of his students. More and more his purpose came to be to have an impact on the society of his time. To accomplish this, the whole person must be involved, with the reactions of the nervous system restructured. For the academic intellectual, this intrusion into his personal life arouses antagonism. Most of us have resistances to assaults on our ways of evaluating. Some people cannot stand it and have left seminars in the middle of them.

Korzybski's own method that he called "semantic relaxation" has been expanded in later seminars, in cooperation with developments in the area of "sensory awareness." The work of Charlotte Selver, carrying on that of the German founder, Elsa Gindler, has been assimilated into the general semantics seminars, especially by Charlotte Read, as a necessary constituent. The term 'inner quiet' is very much in harmony with the way of life that would result from Korzybski's formulations.

Korzybski broadened the approaches of general semantics in other ways too, by developing what he called "the extensional devices." An exposition of them appeared in 1941 in the "Introduction" to the Second Edition. They set forth a method that can readily be used even in lower schools with children. Such a wide-ranging scope took the field beyond what would appeal to Ernest Nagel and Alfred Tarski.

The material I have been presenting may seem to be unduly negative. I have been trying to explain why general semantics has not achieved general acceptance, and this is based on my deeply-held positive belief that general semantics deserves to pervade the orientation of the mainstream contemporary outlook.

In charting the attitudes toward Korzybski, it may be helpful to look at what has happened to some of his contemporaries. One of these was Arthur F. Bentley, a sociologist and mathematician of Indiana University at Bloomington. He carried on a lively correspondence with Korzybski when both were writing their major books. No doubt the letters will be published at some time in the future and will show two fine formulators grappling with fundamental problems. I have talked with some of Bentley's stu-

dents and they remember him as an inspiring teacher. And yet he has been swept pretty much out of memory. Toward the end of his career, he collaborated with John Dewey in a very fine book, Knowing and the Known (1949).

John Dewey, too, in his day was a giant to be reckoned with, but his influence has faded in recent years. Articles about him still appear in philosophical journals, but he is no longer the whipping boy for critics of certain tendencies in education. Attacks on each other by philosophers seem to exceed those in other fields, and Korzybski had to bear the brunt of some of it.

Oswald Spengler has gone into an eclipse. Yet in the 1920s his Decline of the West was one of the most influential books of the decade. It was an inspiration to Korzybski in the writing of Science and Sanity, and in his early pages he called it "unique and astonishing," having "unusual scholarship and breadth of vision." Later he emphasized Spengler's limitations, as recording only "The Childhood of Humanity."

Likewise, C. K. Ogden's work is scarcely ever referred to these days. Yet in 1933, Korzybski spoke of it as "the only determined attempt made, so far, to deal with the symbolic problems whose importance is emphasized in the present work."

In view of such ups and downs of reputation, Korzybski has not fared as badly as we might think.

The most extreme example of a change in reputation of a forerunner of general semantics is the case of Alexander Bryan Johnson. He was a banker in central New York at Utica who wrote several important books on language in the 1820s and 1830s, far ahead of their time. He wrote, for instance, in his Treatise on Language in 1836: "We need not confound the verbal identity with the realities of nature. In nature, the identity is just as we discover it to be. It must not be measured by names, but ascertained by observation. We reverse this rule: we interpret the natural identity by the verbal." (In ed. 1947, p. 81.) This sounds very Korzybskian, but it fell on deaf ears.

Johnson became well-known as a business man and friend of important national figures, but his books were forgotten until 1940, when they were discovered by a California scholar and by the noted general semanticist Irving J. Lee. After that a conference of first-rate scholars was held in 1967 and a full-dress biography appeared in 1977.

The history of the great scholar Charles S. Peirce, founder of the American form of semiotics, is no less remarkable. He had a stormy personal life, but wrote voluminously from 1859 till his death in 1914 without publishing very much. He had to be discovered by a band of devoted followers, and his Collected Papers, largely from manuscript, began publication in 1931. His changes

of outlook over the years make him a treasure-trove for interpreters, and another edition of his writings, in many volumes, is now under way.

Peirce's studies of symbolism would have been very stimulating to Korzybski, if they had been available, for he was working along the same lines. Throughout Science and Sanity are found bold passages that look forward to the field of semiotics, now burgeoning in such a lively way. For instance, listen to this: "Man's achievements rest upon the use of symbols. For this reason, we must consider ourselves as a symbolic, semantic class of life, and those who rule the symbols, rule us" (p. 76). He emphasized how the manipulation of symbols governs our lives. On a later page he continued: "When we say 'our rulers', we mean those who are engaged in the manipulation of symbols. There is no escape from the fact that they do, and that they always will, rule mankind, because we constitute a symbolic class of life, and we cannot cease from being so, except by regressing to the animal level" (p. 77).

Peirce is to be credited with bringing the very word semiotic into the English language. Admittedly, a forerunner is found in John Locke, whose famous Essay on Human Understanding of 1690 divided sciences into three branches: ". . . the third branch may be called Σημειωτική, or the doctrine of signs." However, he gave the word in the Greek form, in the Greek alphabet. The editors of the Oxford English Dictionary, although they collected Locke's vocabulary carefully, did not use this passage, evidently not regarding it as an English word. Peirce used the word semiotic in 1897 in an unidentified fragment that was not printed until 1932. Later, around 1908, he used the word again in his correspondence with Lady Welby, but so far as I can find, it was never printed during Peirce's lifetime. It seems to me very reasonable to believe that Korzybski would have adopted the word semiotic rather than semantic if it had been available to him.

Another comparable reputation that is deserving of our attention is that of the great linguist Leonard Bloomfield. His masterpiece entitled Language, which established linguistics upon a solid scientific base, was published in 1933, the same year as that of the book we are celebrating this evening. Korzybski recognized the need for just the sort of basis that Bloomfield accomplished, writing in 1933:

We speak much and vaguely about the 'structure' of language, but extremely little work has been done in this field. In the present work, we not only tackle this problem as best we can, theoretically, but we also use a language of a new non-el[ementalistic], functional structure, and the results, whatever their value, are actually the results of such procedure. [Science and Sanity, p. 241.]

Korzybski's way would have been much smoothed, as he recognized,

if he had had available the work of Bloomfield and later linguists, who have emphasized structure.

Bloomfield came to the University of Chicago in 1927, much under the influence of the behavioral psychologist Albert P. Weiss, whose book A Theoretical Basis of Human Behavior had appeared in 1925 and in a much revised edition of 1929. Bloomfield was caught up in the controversy between mentalism versus mechanism, an issue that in Korzybski's terms was between "elementalism" versus "non-elementalism." Bloomfield's position was that terms like idea, concept, and thought had no place in the discourse of linguistics, for they were merely popular terms that muddied any discussion that attempted to be scientific.

In a trenchant paper of 1936, entitled, "Language or Ideas," Bloomfield declared his view that "the term 'idea' is simply a traditional obscure synonym for 'speech-form'." (Language, XII, 95.) This represents a drastic change from his outlook earlier in life, when he wrote his Introduction to the Study of Language in 1914, in which he reflected the psychological system of Wilhelm Wundt. This amounted to a revolution that would be called, in Thomas Kuhn's terminology, a change of paradigm. He stated his belief in his Preface to Language in 1933 that "mechanism is the necessary form of scientific discourse." He recognized that he was likely to be misunderstood, for as he wrote in an essay in 1944: "According to our cultural tradition, certain activities are so obviously and indisputably 'mental' that anyone who says he will not use mentalistic terms or explanations is understood to mean simply that he will not recognize the existence of these activities." (Language, XX, 51.)

Bloomfield had an uneasy relationship with Saussurean linguistics. He recognized the greatness and importance of Saussure, but he felt a shortcoming in basic scientific methodology. Saussure had a system with a series of four stages: (1) the actual object, (2) concept, (3) acoustic image, and (4) speech utterance. The speech utterance, his number 4, is of course la parole in his terminology, while numbers 2 and 3 are la langue, the socially determined language pattern. Bloomfield was severe in his criticism of this systematization, writing in 1927: "What he [Saussure] calls 'mental' is exactly what we [misprinted he] and all other linguists call 'social'; there is no need for the popular finalistic terms. We shall do better to drop (2) and (3) and speak instead of a socially determined correspondence between certain features of (1) and (4)." (Modern Philology, XXV, 216.) You will recognize that Korzybski's formulation of this very problem was in the 'map-territory' relationship.

In the bubbling ferment of the University of Chicago campus, if I may revert to that situation, another participant was Charles Morris, who later published his important book, Signs, Language and Behavior (1946). He was working along the same lines as Bloomfield and Korzybski, as is shown by his exposition

of his outlook in 1938, when he wrote:

. . . It is possible to include without remainder the study of science under the study of the language of science, since the study of that language involves not merely the study of its formal structure but its relation to objects designated and to the persons who use it. . . . It has become clear to many persons today that man -- including scientific man -- must free himself from the web of words which he has spun and that language -- including scientific language -- is greatly in need of purification, simplification, and systematization. [Foundations of the Theory of Signs, pp. 2-3.]

A few linguists held out against the Bloomfieldian outlook, such as Leo Spitzer of Johns Hopkins University, who, in a famous debate with Bloomfield in 1944 cried out: "By what miracle have sound and meaning been joined in the first place?" (Language, XX, 251.) The bankruptcy of his point of view is clearly evident when he must assign the problem to the realm of 'miracle'.

Such a dualistic outlook is deeply embedded in the outlook of most people -- and it is kept alive in the religions, where it is thought that there must be a special 'spiritual realm'. But for people with the general semantics orientation, manifestations commonly called 'spiritual' can be explained by the neuro-linguistic orientation and process of abstracting. Nothing is left out, and 'spiritual' issues are not ignored, but the phenomena are taken care of under other terminology.

Sound linguistics is carried on by a scholar such as Charles F. Hockett of Cornell University, who has said of these terms that trouble students of Korzybski: "Other social scientists use terms such as idea, mind, concept as common-vocabulary words; the linguist must not, for part of his task is to investigate the operational definition of these terms and attempt their translation into more fundamental behavioristic language." (American Scientist, XXXVI, 572).

Linguistics suffered a severe upheaval in 1957 when Noam Chomsky published his book Syntactic Structures. In its acceptance of 'Cartesian linguistics', it outrightly espoused the split between 'body' and 'mind', and lacked only a reference to the 'pineal gland', which Descartes believed would unite the two. Chomsky divorced language from the social setting that gives it its significance. In his own words of 1964: "Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly." (Aspects, p. 3.) But we may ask, where do you find any ideal speaker? What speech community is ever "completely homogeneous"? What person on the wide earth knows a language "perfectly"? Fortunately, Chomsky has lost much of his early following.

A fascinating linguist whose writings were not available to

Korzybski prior to Science and Sanity is Benjamin Lee Whorf. His hypothesis, put forward in the latter years of the 1930s, concerning the strong influence that language has in molding people's attitudes and 'thinking', is deeply embedded in Korzybski's formulations and outrightly expressed in them. Korzybski's often quoted passage on this point deserves to be quoted again. He wrote, in 1933:

We do not realize what tremendous power the structure of an habitual language has. It is not an exaggeration to say that it enslaves us through the mechanism of s[emantic] r[eactions] and that the structure which a language exhibits, and impresses upon us unconsciously, is automatically projected upon the world around us. [Science and Sanity, p. 90.]

Such a bold statement makes us recognize that linguistic revision occupies a central place in the Korzybskian system, and this point was emphasized time and again in Science and Sanity. Korzybski's whole system rests upon the use of certain key terms, non-elementalistic in nature, such as semantic reaction. We are all suspicious of terminology that is coined just for the sake of terminology, but this is not the case with Korzybski.

Because of my personal background in a life-time of study of the English language, I am considerably wary of attempts to revise it deliberately. It is always changing anyway, under natural pressures of the culture. I have developed such respect for it, knowing how deftly it can be used, from King Alfred to Ring Lardner, that I feel like saying, "Let it alone!"

On the other hand, the need for better human adjustment has its claims, and we must listen when we hear Korzybski say: "The subject-predicate form, the 'is' of identity, and the elementalism of the A[ristotelian]-system are perhaps the main semantic factors in need of revision" (Science and Sanity, p. 371).

Fortunately, we can fall back on mathematics and symbolic logic to solve some of our problems. Those are 'ideal' languages, using ideal in a technical sense. If the changes in ordinary discourse are too drastic, they will be self-defeating.

The subject-predicate relation is so deeply embedded in the English language, as a member of the Indo-European family, that it is hard for me to envision an elimination of it. An attempt in this direction is being made by the brilliant theoretician Dr. Andrew Hilgartner, and we must await his findings as to whether his linguistic revision is actually feasible in ordinary discourse. He has promised us what he calls a 'discursive' form of his revision, and we look forward to it eagerly.

A plan to cut out every form of the verb to be would deny us the use of the progressive aspect and of the passive voice, and

that would diminish the flexibility of English intolerably. We would not be permitted to say "It is raining," but would have to use sentences such as "The rain continues" or "It has started to rain." The progressive aspect helps us to represent the fluid, on-going nature of all we do.

Similarly, the loss of the passive voice would be intolerable, as we would always have to search out for some actor to be made the subject of the verb. The passive voice emphasizes our place in the flow of nature, recognizing that we interact with our environment and do not control it. Actually it might be a pleasant game to attempt to introduce these forms in one's use of language. At worst it would be mere whimsy.

The subtitle of this lecture, as given in the announcement, states that I will give "Some Projections for the Future." I hang back from assuming the role of 'prophet'; but still, making predictions is one of the functions of sound science.

I have no doubt that general semantics, or something similar to it, perhaps under another name, will inevitably be accepted, even by what can be called 'establishment science'. Entrenched authority does not welcome any sharing of its power. We are justified in being wary of 'the establishment', for it often represents a frame of mind that is resistant to change. And yet sound science is self-correcting, so new formulations do get recognized every once in a while.

It has sometimes been asked whether Korzybski was optimistic or pessimistic about the future. He lived in turbulent times and he would have been inhuman not to have had deep concern. The mainspring of the undertaking of his studies was his awareness of the devastation caused by World War I; and in the thirties he well knew where Hitler's policies were leading. Some critics made fun of him for his strident warnings, but we now know that he was right. What would he say today? A devastation far worse than that of World War I or World War II is now possible.

The outlook for world civilization is too important for mere optimism or pessimism, as they are mostly determined by one's personal vitality. I think he would be pessimistic over the short range prediction, but if we can survive our immediate problems, we can have a long range optimism. The distant future, if we can reach it, holds great promise.

In 1948, two years before his death, writing in the Preface to Selections from Science and Sanity, Korzybski expressed his ardent belief that had motivated his life work -- that "the extensional methods and devices of General Semantics can be applied to all existing languages, with deep psycho-logical effects on the users and through them on their countrymen." In world affairs, this would lead to "inter-communication, mutual understanding, and eventual agreement."

I hope that general semantics will not come to be regarded as one of the many superficial enterprises often labeled "consciousness-raising." Such efforts are no doubt helpful to some people, but their shallowness, their short-term application, is repugnant to me. We have in Korzybski's formulations a basic re-structuring of human reactions, with the prospect that sound evaluation will be the automatic result.

The process of evaluation runs through the whole of Korzybski's system. It may well be that the goal of the individual sciences is to establish validated results that are 'value free'. If that is the case, general semantics is not in itself a science, but draws upon the methods of various sciences to make what is well called a 'discipline'. What are thought of as 'ethical questions' are special problems that rise to our attention out of the plenum of living, and their solution is implicit if the evaluations we must constantly make are adequate. Means and goals over the long run become one.

One of the greatest changes for the future may be that general semantics may help people to live comfortably with uncertainty. Our findings are strong in their rejecting of absolutisms and finalistic judgments, but they support the principle of uncertainty, with a probabilistic outlook. Many people still love their 'eternal verities' and without them would be unhappy.

But with a Korzybskian recognition that we are part of an ongoing process, we can still have a sense of security. The poet Rupert Brooke used a phrase that I think is very revealing -- "safe though all safety's lost." We need not deal with static entities, like 'safety', but can still feel safe by being in harmony with our evolving environment. I wish to give you several lines from a sonnet by Rupert Brooke:

We have found safety with all things undying,
 The winds, and morning, tears of men and mirth,
 The deep night, and birds singing, and clouds flying,
 And sleep, and freedom, and the autumnal earth.
 We have built a house that is not for time's throwing,
 We have gained a peace unshaken by pain for ever.
 War knows no power. Safe shall be my going,
 Secretly armed against all death's endeavour;
 Safe though all safety's lost; safe where men fall;
 And if these poor limbs die, safest of all.

Rupert Brooke has even made peace with the prospect of dying, inevitable as it is. Dying can be regarded as a form of being safe, in this cyclic, process world. This feeling we can achieve without the aid of any 'eternal verities'.

My deep concern has, I hope, been manifest throughout my remarks this evening, but my expression of it has been mixed with trivialities, such as mention of Korzybski's own quirks and idio-

syncracies. They have been a factor for some people.

But the issues before the world at this time are so important, for our very survival, that we must insist firmly on the need for a fundamental, basic re-orientation of outlook. We do not have a 'solution' or a 'panacea', but we do have a naturalistic framework that will make possible the unflinching facing of our problems.

I wish I could finish my lecture with a gallant call to arms, but I do not feel like doing so. Heroic leaders have their time and place, but what we need now, with the help of general semantics, is a broad, unrelenting effort at re-education. Those of us who appreciate the insights that Korzybski has provided will wish to continue the steady pressure to re-educate people of good will on all levels -- in personal relations, in cultural attitudes, in international policies.

BIOGRAPHY

Allen Walker Read (see General Semantics Bulletin Nos. 47 and 48) continues, in his 'retirement', an active life as peripatetic scholar. Since 1981 he has delivered 52 formal papers in eleven states and D.C., and in places as far afield as Canada, England, East Germany, and Poland. His subjects include semiotics, onomastics, and other subsets of linguistics. As noted in our previous biographies, his production of papers in general semantics continues to grow. Recent titles include, "The Contributions of Alfred Korzybski to Linguistic Theory," "The Semiotic Aspects of Alfred Korzybski's General Semantics," "Is There a

Place for 'Mysticism' and 'Occultism' in General Semantics? A Position Paper Proposing a Dozen Positions," "Building a System from Scratch," "Linguistic Aspects of Nuke-speak," "Walt Whitman as Exemplar of the General Semantics Orientation," "The Functioning of Language in Personal and Social Life," and "Live Issues in General Semantics."

In May 1984, Professor Read was granted an honorary D.Litt. by Indiana State University at Terre Haute. As we go to press, he has been elected an Honorary Trustee of the Institute of General Semantics.

BEFORE AND AFTER 1933*

by

Charlotte Schuchardt Read

On the 10th of October, 1933, the United States and international copyrights for Science and Sanity were established, when copies were sold in this country and in Toronto. We may recall, if we were alive and aware enough, or we have heard and read about it, what conditions in the world were like in 1933. Korzybski was living in Brooklyn at the time. We were in the depths of the Depression. The cost of \$7.00 for a book seemed astronomical. Even the special price of \$5.50 for teachers in those days was probably very hard for most to meet. Korzybski and his printer, the Science Press Printing Company at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, wondered whether it would be possible to sell the 2,000 copies of the first printing. Jacques Cattell, editor of the Science Press, congratulated Korzybski on the high caliber of the people who were reading the galley proofs and thought that if they reacted to the book favorably, there should be no difficulty selling that many copies. They were the leading scientists, psychiatrists and mathematicians of that time, men like Percy Bridgman, Bronislaw Malinowski, Eric Temple Bell, William Alanson White, etc.

It is fifty years later, and the book is still selling. So far, with the 6th printing of the 4th edition, 54,000 copies have been printed. Considering the present inventory of about 3,500, this means that approximately 50,000 copies have been sold. We do not know how many of those have actually been read, or read at least twice, as Korzybski urged. Copies exist all over the world, carried into far away countries by GI's during the Second World War, ordered by persons in many lands; it has passed through a time-span of about three generations chronologically speaking, and innumerable generations of teachers and students; it has spawned countless words about it in other books, in reviews, articles, classrooms, conferences, 'bull sessions', and wrestling with it privately alone with an individual's own thoughts. Could we possibly estimate such influences?

I am attempting here a sort of brief summary of the 'fate' of the work in the span of fifty years. Most of you will know how

*Presented at the conference, "General Semantics: The First Half-Century and Beyond," New York, November 5, 1983.