

IN MEMORIAM

SAMUEL ICHİYÉ HAYAKAWA

1906-1992

I met Samuel Ichiyé ("Don") Hayakawa three times and reviewed him once. The personal encounters happened in the District of Columbia, Denver, and San Diego; my review was of the pre-publication copy of his *Through the Communication Barrier: On Speaking, Listening and Understanding*, 1979, published that year by Harper and Row. (*General Semantics Bulletin* # 48, 1981, pp.96-99.) During our personal encounters, some twenty minutes of conversation about general-semantics in Washington (well before his term as U.S. Senator) and the brief exchanges of greetings and comments on what he was presenting in Denver and San Diego, he was warm, affable and humorous, speaking in that soft, somewhat velvety, 'accented' voice that led some of his early friends to nickname him "Don" — as in Oxford.



That S. I. Hayakawa, as he was most widely known, was an important time-binder cannot be questioned. He clearly achieved a major infusion of aspects of general-semantics into not only American but world culture. Suffice it to mention the several-year-old Ukrainian Association for Pragmatics and General Semantics at the University of Kiev; at the Association's founding they owned only one text in general-semantics: an underground copy of Hayakawa's *Language in Thought and Action*.

Readers of the *Bulletin* will likely remember that writers herein have sometimes challenged Hayakawa's presentation of general-semantics (or 'semantics' as he persisted in calling it). Bruce Kodish does an excellent, balanced job of presenting those challenges in his paper on the Fifth Edition of *Language in Thought and Action* elsewhere in this issue. Here I will just observe that there's nothing scandalous about such challenges in the fraternity-sorority of conscious formulators, a subset of what Witold Gombrowicz has called, without any theistic implications, the "interhuman church"; what we might call the community of time-binders. Recall Einstein's and Bohr's jousting over "complementarity" in the roaring '20s. Structurally appropriate evaluating may emerge from such interactions; it almost certainly won't emerge without them.

Hayakawa's life is so well known (his extensional behavior in restoring order to the universe of discourse at San Francisco State, 1968-72; his term in the Senate, 1977-83; and his subsequent campaign to legislate English as the lingua franca of the United States, etc.) that I will here limit myself to reviewing his linkage with the history of general-semantics.

In the excellent "Introduction" to *Through the Communication Barrier*, Hayakawa describes his first face-to-face encounter (they had already corresponded) with Korzybski in 1938:

Korzybski greeted me with great cordiality. "So you are Hayakawa! You have been lecturing on general semantics at the University of Michigan and you don't know a goddam thing about it!" I couldn't take offense at this greeting. It was warmly meant — and I was certainly in no position to disagree. I laughed and he laughed and we were on good terms at once. (p. xi)

The vigor and openness of this beginning characterized their relations through Hayakawa's studies with Korzybski, the publication of Hayakawa's *Language in Action* in 1941 (which Korzybski supported)*, and Hayakawa's founding of *ETC.* and the organization now known as the International Society for General Semantics. It also powered the formulational estrangement which developed during the middle '40s. Given the occasion of this writing, I won't detail that here; I refer you to pp. 783-837 of Korzybski's *Collected Writings* for those details. However, what was done in those years is part of the history of Hayakawa and of general-semantics and requires mentioning.

Despite these troubles, which sometimes provoked Korzybski to complaining that his work was being distorted, I know of no major publication by Hayakawa in which he failed to credit Korzybski:

My deepest debt in this book is to the General Semantics ("non-Aristotelian system") of Alfred Korzybski....

How are all these separate insights to be brought together and synthesized? This is a task which I cannot claim to have performed here, but I have examined the problem long enough to believe that it cannot be done without some set of broad and informing principles such as is to be found in the General Semantics of Korzybski.

Language in Thought and Action, 4th edition, 1978, pp. ix-x.

I wrote about Korzybski in introducing the present volume because so many of his fundamental ideas have helped to shape my thinking; their influence is no doubt to be detected on almost every page. *Through the Communication Barrier*, 1979, p. xi.

The essays in this volume all reflect, to greater or lesser degree, the influence of the general semantics of Alfred Korzybski (1879-1950), a system of thought that continues, after twenty-five years of acquaintance with it, to prove useful and fascinating to me.

Symbol, Status, and Personality, 1963, p. v.

Characteristics of Hayakawa the man: frankness, generosity, even, in this context, humility. And, despite events of pique, lack of vindictiveness. Among his co-strugglers in formulating was M. Kendig, Korzybski's associate and, after his death, his successor at the Institute and leader in general-semantics. She had occasion to talk in exasperated tones about Hayakawa as formulator: "... poor Hayakawa!" But, then, she said more than once, "... poor Alfred!" When Hayakawa (January, 1977) was to be sworn in as Senator of the United States, he invited Kendig to attend the swearing-in and reception in Washington. She was too ill then to accept. When Kendig died on November 23, 1981,

* For Hayakawa's mis-remembering of this, see Charlotte Read's letter to the editor of *ETC.*, (49 74-5 Spring 1992). (Editor's Note: I deem it unlikely that Hayakawa's being a Book-of-the-Month selectee could have made Korzybski "furious," confident as he was that he himself had written the book of the century.)

Hayakawa, still in the Senate, wrote to the Institute: "... His [Korzybski's] work would not have continued as it did for so long after publication of *S&S* without her devoted efforts."

These people "had a life" together; with varying success and with others they built the general-semantics we see working as an agent in our culture to this day.

I mentioned Hayakawa's humility. But, as with most people who manage to accomplish much, he was not without a sense of self-worth — wedded to a fully developed sense of humor. In an interview (*ETC.* Fall, 1991), published just before his death, he was asked what he attributed the success and longevity of *Language in Thought and Action* to. Perhaps this is the Hayakawa we should remember:

SIH: [laughing] Because I'm a good writer, that's all!

— Robert P. Pula

HAYAKAWA AS AN EDITOR

I met Samuel Ichiyé Hayakawa a few times fleetingly at meetings over the years, but our closest acquaintance came through correspondence about a couple of articles I sent to *ETC.*

My first article was a bit of whimsy based on a classic story of the vaudevillian Lou Holtz's, and was called "The Zen Koan and the Lapidus Principle". (*ETC.* 17 368-70, Sept. 1960.) Hayakawa was in the forefront of the civil rights movement, as befits a general-semantacist, especially of Japanese origin; he wrote for the *Chicago Defender* and spoke on "How to be Sane though Negro". Yet he never boggled at the fact that the story used Jewish and Negro dialects, in a manner that would undoubtedly be called "politically incorrect" today. Nevertheless it's a great story, and bears retelling, even in this skeletal form:

Sam Lapidus and his friend Garfunkel were eating in the unaccustomed splendor of a railroad dining car. Two-thirds of the way through the meal, the waiter put before each of them a bowl of warm water with a few rose petals floating in it, and a slice of lemon at its side. After a hasty whispered conference, Garfunkel, despite Lapidus's pleas not to, decided to ask the waiter what it was for. The article then went on as follows:

The waiter, seeing at once that the quandary was genuine, answered with gentle urbanity. "Well, suh" (this is dialectic unashamed), "it may have happened in the co'se of yo' meal that you may have soiled yo' fingers slightly. So, you squeeze a little lemon juice on them, dabble them in the wotah, and wipe them off on yo' napkin, that's all."

I then had Lapidus immediately enunciate his Principle with all the passion I had heard from the lips of Dr. Holtz — but Hayakawa, influenced perhaps by a different ethnic style of conveying eternal wisdom, altered the final passage to:

After the waiter left, the two men sat in silence for a while. Finally Lapidus spoke: "Nu, so you esk a foolish question, you're entitled to a foolish enser!"

Returning the galley proofs, I wrote him "... if you feel that a pause for neurosemantic integration will be a good example to all who read it, I won't argue with you."

I had first sent the article to him with a letter on January 3, 1960, in which I also proposed a much more serious article answering the criticisms of Korzybski's work by Max Black, Professor of Philosophy at Cornell, and Francesco Barone, Professor of Theoretical Philosophy at the University of Pisa. Barone's critique had appeared, translated by Walter Stuermann, in the Summer 1958 *ETC*. I got a quick card acknowledging my proposal, followed soon by Hayakwa's encouragement to proceed with it. (Would that I had remembered to follow that example of promptness when I became Editor of the *GSB*!)

My first attempt at the second article was a chapter-by-chapter review of Black's book, *Language and Philosophy — Studies in Method*, Cornell University Press, 1949. Korzybski was dealt with in Chapter X, and I slapdashed through the others in haste to get to it. Then in July 1960 I reconsidered, and cut out everything but the discussion of general-semantics (for the first appearance in print of the hyphenated name!). And also, fortunately, I changed my working title from "A Hunting We Will Go" to "Non-Aristotelian Foundations: Solid or Fluid?"

Having got "Lapidus" out of the way, Hayakawa wrote November 27, 1960:

"I would write the article myself if I could understand the g.s. theories better.

"First of all, I think the most important point ... is that in which you take on Maxie and Barone on the subject of the 'colossal vicious circle.' You deny AK's implication of circularity (bottom of your p. 18). But my understanding of AK is that he asserted the circularity of knowledge (S&S, pp. 220ff, 398ff, 471ff) as a virtue (and certainly not a defect) of his system.

"Now AK himself used to give me hell on this matter, saying that my 'ladder of abstraction' does not show the circularity of knowledge and was hence a defective diagram. The highest inferential level of abstraction represents the 'lowest' level from which all abstractions are made. Rightly you point out that the 'mad dance of electrons' (the words) are confused in Black and Barone with the 'mad dance of electrons' (the process). But the circularity is there, said AK, and it's important to understand the full implications of that circularity!!

"Well, I never did understand why that circularity was so important. That's why I'd like to refer you to S&S and figure it out for me, then go back to the demolition job on Black-Barone.

"Also, I think it would make your explanation of what's wrong with Maxie's passage if you would use only two subscripts instead of six or seven. Maybe W for words, and P for process."

These excerpts from his letter of 1960 should be read in connection with Bruce Kodish's review in this issue of the fifth edition of *Language in Thought and Action* (1990), where the "ladder of

abstraction" remains with all its "defective" lack of circularity. As the letter attests, Hayakawa persisted in that omission not out of ignorance, so much as stubbornness; he wanted to write his book his way, preferring defective clarity to complicated circularity.

The ensuing months are obscure; the next item in my file is a letter from Hayakawa dated September 12, 1961:

"I won't take time now to explain why it has taken so long for us to get organized in re your article. But here it is, all edited... and ready for the printer. But looking it over for the last time before sending it away, a couple of things occurred to me in which you might strengthen your argument, so I have written out memoranda for you ...

"I wonder if you would be so good as to revise the parts where I have suggested revision? Maybe my suggestions are all wrong, but if they are, please take them into consideration anyway and revise in such a way as to forestall such criticisms as I am making.

"Will you please let me know by postcard when I might expect your revision? This is a hell of a trick to rush you now, after keeping you waiting for over a year. But that's the way we run *ETC.*, alas! Best to you and Mrs. M. ..."

The first page of the accompanying memoranda corrected me on what I had said about Section 2, "*Ideas of the Nature and Function of Logic.*" Hayakawa typed forthrightly on orange paper (with none of the demure hesitancy of his letter): "I feel that this section is weak. ... The weakness of Black in this section is not the particular issue you discuss (in which I think you do him injustice) but in the following ..."

That page was followed by a half-page on Section 4, "*The Vicious Circle*":

"Following your long quote (with subscripts added) from Black, you explain the subscripts.

"This section is crucial. It is your smashing blow. Hence I wish it could be made just a bit easier to follow. Please read this whole section over again with untutored reader in mind — someone who has read neither AK nor Black, but will be able to see precisely the confusion between words and whattheystandfor [sic] in Black's own argument.

"It occurs to me that subscripts might be reduced to three: S for submicroscopic, inferential level; O for objective level; V for verbal level???? Something of this order. Please consider and rewrite as necessary. Don't forget — this is the Sunday punch."

Then suddenly it was November — and a postcard which read in its entirety:

11-6-61

Dear Stuart:

We could use your revised manuscript right now.

Yrs, etc.,

Don

S. I. Hayakawa

I sent it off November 11, with a letter of explanation:

"... Your notes on Section 2, on Logic, were taken much to heart. I had missed the point of Black's complaint. In revising this section I cribbed mercilessly from your notes ...

"I've cut out the subscripts from the long quotation from Black in Section 4, the Vicious Circle. I found that even I was distracted by them from following the train of Black's argument. It's much fairer, and also more devastating, to present his views intact, and then repeat the significant portions with the ordinal labels attached. Full-size caps, tho, with comment, to really hit the reader in the eye." [I seem to have forgotten who was supposed to be my target.]

"I acknowledge a slight concession on your part; at first you wanted to cut my labels down to two, but now you propose... S, V, and O. I honestly don't think that the 'Sunday punch' can be delivered with less than eight, and I am using A to H for a very good reason: I want to emphasize that the abstraction-levels occur in a definite order... when I show him leaping from A to F, toying with G, then back to A again, the enormity of his semantic crimes becomes apparent....

"I also included a reference to AK's circularity. You wrote that you could never see why it was so all-fired important. I have dug up a fine quotation which should convince you that it is, but this doesn't come from S & S; start reading in the middle of page 305 of a book I recommend highly, called 'Language in Thought and Action.' [1949 edition] If that guy can't convince you, nobody can."

The quotation described how "the extensionally oriented person" behaves, "governed not by words only, but by the facts to which the words have guided him. But supposing there were no words to guide us? ... Experience itself is an extremely imperfect teacher ... [it] does not tell us what it is we are experiencing. Things simply happen. And if we do not know *what to look for* in our experience, they often have no significance to us whatever. ..."

Good stuff, if a little absolutistic, but I don't know how much it convinced Hayakawa. As I said, he was stubborn. My article was published and elicited some interesting responses, though none from Black or Barone. But what power it had owed a lot to his hawk-eyed editing, and his knowing when to give me my head.

That was the peak of our correspondence. Seven years later he became a national figure, assuming the presidency of San Francisco State College at a time of turmoil, with real threats of bombings and riot. His picture was in the news media wearing a tam-o-shanter and ripping out loudspeaker wires to silence opposing speakers. I sent him a postcard reading "It shouldn't happen to a Don!"

Then he became a Senator, on a rather conservative platform. I think I twitted him then with a quotation from *Othello*, but he was far too busy to answer either effusion. My fond memories are of him as the Editor of *ETC*. — a great one!

— Stuart A. Mayer