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INNER FORM

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[Sketch of the use of this term. Marty's understanding of it, while not coinciding with v. Humboldt's usage, is an important contribution to linguistic thought. However, in Marty's sense it is better to speak of 'bridge meanings'. The various other meanings that have been attached to the phrase 'inner form' had better be expressed by less ambiguous terms.]

The term 'inner form' is usually traced¹ back to Humboldt, and it has certainly gained its currency thru him. But Professor Funke of Bern has recently shown² that it has its remotest root in Shaftesbury, who speaks of 'inward form' in works of art. The application of the term to language was made by James Harris. Harris was well known to Hamann and Herder (pp. 8, 67), and thru such channels the term reached Humboldt, who took it up and gave it a central position in his philosophy of language. From that time on it has never been abandoned. But it has been used by almost every author in a different sense, and with some it changes its meaning like a chameleon. The following discussion will try to demonstrate and to remedy the chaos existing with regard to the use of the term 'inner form'.

The term has, in agreement with its origin in art, at first the Aristotelian meaning of 'form' as matter refined. Humboldt, therefore, uses it³ in the same meaning, as the opposite of 'formlessness'. But in his usage the term covers a wider range: the static interpretation is enriched by the dynamic one, 'inner form' also refers to the active force (sometimes called 'inner speech sense') which *gives* form to the raw material. Repeatedly, it is raised to the position of an *ideal* form. Finally, it stands for the psychic correlate of outer form which is

¹ Cf. O. Funke, *Innere Sprachform. Eine Einführung in A. Marty's Sprachphilosophie*. Reichenberg i/B. 1924.

² *Studien zur Geschichte der Sprachphilosophie* 47 (Bern 1927).

³ Cp. W. v. Humboldt: *Die sprachphilosophischen Werke*, ed. Steinthal. Berlin 1883-84.

usually called 'meaning'. But Humboldt is not conscious of the complex character of his idea. It should, however, be noted that Humboldt himself does not use the term 'inner (speech) form' as a technical term, as it came to be used later. In his treatise *Ueber die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts* the paragraph (11) entitled 'Innere Sprachform' and the following paragraphs discuss this problem without ever using the chapter title as a technical term. In Humboldt's writings one never finds the objective exactness of positivistic science. He works with the intuition of an artist rather than the exact method of a scholar. His writings are deep mines with short side galleries that strike precious veins everywhere, but he never stops to exploit them. That he leaves to his successors, and they have been busy for more than a century without as yet exhausting the treasures.

Steinthal devoted himself with admiring love to the task of working out the inheritance of his master, not without excusable groaning at the lack of preciseness in Humboldt's statements. But in his great awe for the theories of his prophet he did not dare modify much, and therefore the 'inner form' remained more or less unchanged with him except for a second name, the 'etymon.'

The one who, with a strong hand, adapted modern methods to the old truths was Wilhelm Wundt. His monumental work *Die Sprache* is a renaissance of Humboldt in the exact frame of modern empirical psychology. On the pattern of the theory of a psycho-physical parallelism, the physiological and the psychological parts of language are represented as essentially one; every part of either is an exact representation of the other. The conception of an ideal 'inner form of speech' is repudiated (§2.440 ff.): the nineteenth century scientist observes, measures, and classifies, but does not value. For Wundt the 'inner form' is a formative power and the psychical correlate of the 'outer form'; 'meaning' would be a less ambiguous name for it.

All these old connotations of 'inner form'—and some others besides—survive, so that the term still has with almost every author a different sense; for example, Morsbach: trend or spirit of a language (*Festschrift Hoops* 62 f.); Sapir: opposite of 'formlessness' (*Language* 132 f.); William Stern and others: 'meaning' (Marty 639 note) (Cp. *MLJ* 13. 173).

Finally Anton Marty connects a totally different meaning with the term. In his writings, the 'inner form' does not belong in the realm of meaning, but of form, his definition for form being: means of expression.

A trace of his conception may be found incidentally in Humboldt,⁴ but essentially he is opposed to Humboldt and Steinthal as well as to Wundt. All of these he characterizes as 'nativists', while he calls his own system an 'empirical-teleological' one. It is necessary to discuss the essential difference between these two positions, in order to explain Marty's conception of 'inner form'. It has a central position in his philosophy of language⁵ and seems to me to be so revolutionizing and yet so incontestable, that it is astonishing to see how slow it is in gaining general recognition, tho a number of the best linguists adopted it twenty years ago.

For the nativists like Wundt, the forms of language are a direct outgrowth of the mind, directly and inseparably connected with it: 'Man kann sich beide nie identisch genug denken' (Humboldt 253, ed. Steinthal). Speech is in the first and main place an expression of a psychic condition without any purpose; its employment for communication is secondary. The teleologist, on the other hand, sees in the forms of language the material which the mind uses arbitrarily for the purpose of communicating its thoughts, feelings, and volitions to others.⁶ To avoid confusion with the old 'theory of invention', Marty is very emphatic about his explanation that every single act of speech implies a deliberate choice between several possibilities of expression, without the intention, but with the result, of influencing the development of language. The desire to be understood is a constant check on the use of language. Linguistic creation is conscious, tho without plan ('bewusst, aber planlos'). The source of language is not the desire for self-expression (Wundt calls language, in his psychological terminology, an 'Ausdrucksbewegung'), but the desire for communication. Creation is therefore not spontaneous, but purposeful, teleological. The speaker reaches his aim of being understood most safely by using a form which is generally associated with the meaning he desires to evoke. If a universally accepted form is not available, or not satisfactory, he selects another form, the habitual meaning of which is closely enough related to the actually desired one, by either contiguity or analogy, to be likely to lead

⁴ Funke, *Innere Sprachform* 121.

⁵ Main work: *Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der allgemeinen Grammatik und Sprachphilosophie*. Halle 1908 (here cited by page only).

Also: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Halle 1916-1920 (here cited by volume, part, and page).

Other writings: see bibliographies in Funke's publications and in his articles in *Englische Studien*.

⁶ Cf. Sapir 17: 'communication, which is the very object of speech'.

the hearer to the correct understanding with the help of the context. Such an auxiliary concept Marty called (with Steinthal), the 'etymon', or, more frequently, the 'inner speech form'. He who first spoke of 'a *poor* piece of work', of 'the *decline* of the West', of the '*rise and fall* of an empire', evoked in the hearer primarily a conception which was not the desired meaning, but which helped him to grasp it. Thru continued association with the new meaning the original one *may* fade out of consciousness, as we see happen in the word 'moonshine', which now evokes the new meaning more directly than the original one. The adverb 'hardly' can hardly be used any longer in its original meaning, because the occasional meaning has got to be the usual one. Every metaphor falls under this category of 'inner form'. It is the guiding principle in all semasiological development. That means, hardly a word in the vocabulary of any language remains unaffected. It is not necessary, frequently not possible, in etymology to find one idea to cover all the meanings of a given form; it may come to convey, after repeated, chain-like use as 'inner form', the very opposite of its original meaning: 'quite a *few*' or 'eine *schöne* Geschichte' or '*awfully* sweet' mean the contrary of what they seem to indicate. He who first called an amorous adventurer a 'sheik' or a 'lounge lizard' or a 'drug store cowboy', or in German a 'Schwerenöter', or in Spanish a 'tiburón', availed himself of an auxiliary meaning by boldly choosing a form which served his special purpose better than an accepted one, on account of the meaning habitually connected with it. The linguistic inventor of the 'airship' did the same thing to convey a meaning for which there was no special form in existence.

From his standpoint, Humboldt was right in his contention that metaphors obscure the innate harmony between form and meaning; but he failed to explain the very possibility of such a divergence on the basis of his own theory. Marty's theory denies the existence of such a rigid correlation and makes the association between form and meaning flexible and changeable, thereby supplying a principle for the explanation of all semantic development, taking the logical pedantry out of it, and also the need for improbable hypotheses like 'imperfect apperception'. The man who first spoke of a ship as a 'sail' did not have an imperfect conception or apperception of it any more than did the one who called an electric incandescent lamp a 'bulb' or 'Birne'. He used an auxiliary concept consciously different from the meaning he had in mind, but apt to suggest it to the hearer with the help of the context. The sphere from which a speaker takes most of his auxiliary concepts, and the way

they get the upper hand of the original meanings, is indicative of his individual mentality and of that of his group. That is where personal and national psychology of speech is recognizable: not in the forms as direct correlates of the meanings, as Wundt took it, but in the trend of the auxiliary concepts used to convey the meanings. I suggest to retain for this phenomenon the term 'trend (Richtung) in speech' as used by Humboldt, Wundt, and (incidentally) Marty; the latter, however, gives this aspect only passing attention, eager as he is to refute Wundt's parallelism.

The principle of 'inner form' does not apply to the meanings of words alone, but also to the meanings of sentences or parts of them (Marty's 'meaning' includes 'grammatical function'). If we say: 'he will come', the original meaning of *will* is volition. Looking for more exact expression of the idea of futurity than the one current at that time, the English language hit upon this same form as being akin in meaning and apt to produce in the hearer, with the help of the context, the desired psychic reaction; the form *will*, strictly speaking, did not *develop* into an auxiliary of futurity, but was *adopted* as such. The idea of volition is the 'inner form' for the idea of futurity; the old meaning may or may not be present in the new one. The German language chose for exactly the same purpose the idea of entrance into a condition: 'er wird reich', and correspondingly also 'er wird kommen'. As the desire for more exact expression of the meaning progresses, languages rarely coin new forms, but freely choose from the old forms enlisting them in the service of the new meanings, in syntax even more than in vocabulary. That is also why our terms for the realm of abstract thought are taken from the more directly accessible physical world, and those for time often from those for place.

Marty seemed to think that his interpretation of the term 'inner form' was the original one, and that others misinterpreted it.⁷ He gives an outline of the history of the 'principle' (p. 154), because he thinks it 'one of the most important in the entire philosophy of language and general grammar'. This is rather a naïve illusion: Marty's 'inner form' has very little to do with the phenomena previously so called; it is his own discovery—in my opinion, a very remarkable one.

But by now the expression 'inner form' has accumulated so many different meanings (there are more than I have enumerated) that it is almost certain to mislead and thereby miss its prime aim of explaining. It therefore seems advisable in this particular case to abandon the

⁷ *Untersuchungen* 151, 156f.

traditional term and coin new ones. Marty himself is aware of its inadequacy for his own purpose and invites proposals for a better one (p. 157). He uses himself incidentally, as an auxiliary concept, the term 'Band der Assoziation'. Professor Funke takes this name up⁸ and also speaks repeatedly of 'das Bildhafte'.⁹ Both of these names are better than 'inner form', but not quite satisfactory. May I propose instead the term 'bridge (Brücke)'. This expression has the advantage of being applicable in two ways: as 'bridge meaning' (or 'bridge concept') for the auxiliary concept bridging the gulf between form and meaning, Marty's 'inner form'; and as 'bridge form' for the form which connects the old and the new meaning.¹⁰ It is inoffensive to those who want to classify it with either form or meaning. And it is not burdened with the superabundance of associations which stifles the old term 'inner form' as a whole and in its parts.

My definitions would therefore be: A *bridge meaning* is an auxiliary concept which serves to suggest to the hearer a new meaning for an old form. A *bridge form* is a form which either genetically or descriptively links two different meanings together.¹¹ Its use as such may be individual or general, habitual or actual, usual or occasional,¹² local or universal, adequate or inadequate. Its purpose may be esthetic or logical,¹³ momentary or permanent, serious or facetious; it may be a new, or more exact expression, or merely a variant for an old one.

To illustrate: In 'begreifen', 'comprehendere', 'to grasp', the concrete idea would be the *bridge meaning* between the sound-form and the abstract meaning; and the phonetic form would be the *bridge form* between the concrete and the abstract meaning. In 'he stood convicted', the form 'stood' is the bridge between the meanings of 'to stand' and 'to be convicted', and the auxiliary concept of 'standing' is the bridge between the form 'stood' and the new meaning it is intended to suggest, namely the result of an action.

⁸ *Innere Sprachform* 123.

⁹ *Sprachphilosophie* 62, 129.

¹⁰ I owe this extended application to a discussion with Professor Curme, who accepts my term.

¹¹ It will be noted that the term 'bridge' itself is such a bridge.

¹² Paul's terminology, *Prinzipien* § 51. Cf. Marty's criticism, *Untersuchungen* 497 ff.

¹³ Professor Cassirer's incidental distinction between theoretical shades of meaning and emotional shades of appreciation (*Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, 1. 273, Berlin 1923) might be developed into a fruitful extension of Marty's bridge principle.

There is one more bridge function, which is not taken into account by Marty.¹⁴ As Professor Jaberg indicates (*Herrigs Archiv* 136. 106), the hearer is sometimes confronted with a word which does not convey any meaning (or not a clear one) to him (let us say, 'adipose tissue'). In such a case the speaker—to stay within the theoretical conception of a conversation—has to stop to explain the word by another word used for suggesting the same meaning (say 'fat'). Here we have a meaning bridging the chasm between two forms, the intention being not, as usually, to associate a new meaning with an old form, but an old meaning (that of 'fat') with a new form ('adipose tissue'), the bridge serving traffic in both directions. In this group belongs translation from one language into another. The form 'father' conveys in English the same meaning as 'Vater' in German, 'père' in French, 'padre' in Spanish, 'pater' in Latin, etc. The meaning is a bridge of many arches connecting the forms of the different languages.

So much about the term 'inner form' in Marty's interpretation. To replace it in its value of 'inner correlate of the outer form', I think 'meaning' would be adequate, and this word would at the same time cover the 'formative power', since it is the meaning which governs the expression. For 'inner form' of a language denoting its 'spirit', I have recommended above the old term 'trend'. For the 'opposite of formlessness', 'inner form' would do. But since this expression is ambiguous beyond hope, it seems best to abandon it in this application too, tho it is a little hard to replace in English. In German I should suggest 'innere Geformtheit' as a means of avoiding misunderstanding. But upon closer inspection, 'inner form' in this interpretation comes very near to, or is even identical with, 'meaning'.

With the adoption of such terms, the present confusion would be cleared up, and the venerable term 'inner form' could be relegated to the museum of linguistic antiquities, as a witness of the struggle and progress in the field.

¹⁴ Where Marty speaks of definitions (see index in *Untersuchungen*), he thinks of circumscriptive or analytic definitions, not of synonymic ones.