

CONTRIBUTIONS TO GENERAL SEMANTICS FROM CHARLES MORRIS: AN ABSTRACTION

RICHARD FIORDO, PhD

“When I asked Einstein whether he could generalize his theory of relativity to metaphysics,” noted Charles Morris to me in a face-to-face interview on August 18, 1973, “Einstein reminded me he was but a physicist” (Fiordo, 1973). Pressured intellectually to entitle his philosophy, Morris—renowned for his semiotics and for his pragmatic philosophy, despite his early studies of psychiatry and Asian religion and philosophy—named his overall philosophy *objective relativism*. He was known for his affiliation with and support for the Unified Science Movement and the *Encyclopedia of Unified Science*. From his affinity for the unification of science—with an inarguable orientation toward the empirical balanced against the rational—he (Fiordo, 1977) endorsed scientific empiricism, which might be best viewed as a subcategory of his philosophy of objective relativism.

Consistent with general semantics, Morris (1970b) sets forth a philosophy with a methodology based on observation, science, and scientific method to deal with problems, the tracking of changes in problems, and solutions to

Richard Fiordo received his BA in English from Northern Illinois University, MA in Speech from San Francisco State College, and PhD in Speech Communication from the University of Illinois, Urbana, IL. He studied general semantics with S. I. Hayakawa and Richard Dettering at San Francisco State College. He taught communication and served in administration in higher education in the USA and Canada. His publications apply primarily to semantic and communication theory. An earlier version of this paper was presented in November 2010 at the National Communication Association Annual Conference in San Francisco.

problems. Additionally, he analyzes problems in the context of intact and interactive environments. Similar to sound medical and health education models, general semantics and Morris' philosophy offer ways to think sanely and clearly as well as to observe, record, and communicate precisely (Levinson, 2002). Like Morris' pragmatic semiotic perspective, general semantics advances a "process-oriented, problem-solving system" that "helps individuals better evaluate and understand the world and therefore make more intelligent decisions" (Levinson, 2002, p. 2).

Introduced by Korzybski (2000) and drawing from the ideas of such thinkers as Whitehead, Russell, and Einstein, general semantics became a "practical discipline, to be used by individuals, groups, and organizations to solve important problems," and it aimed to "use the scientific method to explore and understand the importance of language as a shaper of perceptions and thoughts." Korzybski maintained that his system of general semantics would assist humanity in avoiding future conflicts by helping people examine their "hidden assumptions and solve problems" (Levinson, 2002, p. 2). By improving their understanding of human thought and evaluation processes through the principle of general semantics, individuals would live better lives and public officials would make saner decisions.

General semantics emphasizes "precision in description, understanding the differences between the general and the specific, becoming aware of the dangers of overgeneralization, and discovering hidden assumptions" about how humans think and act (Levinson, 2002, p. 2). Among the tools it offers for using language with more precision, general semantics proposes extensional techniques such as indexing and dating. To map the influence of language on thought and action, it delivers such valuable principles as the process of abstraction with its many levels, along with the importance of distinguishing facts from inferences to avoid language misuse and judgments based on confusion. Abstraction is particularly significant because what someone "abstracts (selects, notices, highlights) from the world depends on a variety of factors" (p. 89) that include one's biology, temperament, intelligence, education, culture, and language.

That the philosophy of Morris contributes positively and favorably to general semantics will become clear as this discussion proceeds. Morris (1970b) reduces his philosophy of objective relativism to its lowest terms through this formulation: *Whatever Alpha is in perspectival relation to Kappa depends in part on what Alpha is in perspectival relation to Omega*. Explaining scientific empiricism, he aims to extend empirically grounded, evidence-based, and research-established science as far as scientific method,

its technologies, and its advancements will allow. Only when scientific support, research based, is no longer available might scientists dare to become philosophers or metaphysicians.

Metaphysics begins at the outer limits of science; it boldly extends science in the form of physics, behaviorism, etc., into areas where no methodological science could venture, namely, metaphysics. Morris integrates empirical and behavioral dimensions in his semiotic philosophy. Although a number of rhetorical (Burke, 1966; Toulmin, 1958; Foucault, 1980) and semiotic (Eco, 1976; Ogden & Richards, 1923; Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993; Barthes, 1968; Derrida, 1988; Sebeok, 1976) theorists have written on matters relevant to general semantics, Morris' philosophy, particularly his semiotic, constitutes the focus in this study because of its scientific inclination toward extensionality and sanity. His semantic and pragmatic dimensions of semiotics integrate the possibility of empirical and behavioral components; his overall philosophy supports the Korzybskian theme that the ways of science are the ways of sanity, reasonableness, and balance.

Research Question and Response

In this paper, a selection, that has been identified, of contributions to general semantics from the thought of Morris is abstracted and propounded. The empirical components of Morris's semiotic and pragmatic philosophy are related to general semantics and thus emphasized in this paper, while the syntactic and metaphysical dimensions are just intimated. The research question investigated here is, What philosophical concepts from Morris can be justified as contributions to general semantics? The question is answered affirmatively by addressing the following notions from the philosophy of Morris: (1) objective relativism, (2) scientific empiricism, (3) fallibilism, (4) problematic and unproblematic contexts, (5) a ground in behavioral semiotics, (6) a ground in preferential behavior, and (7) selected types of discourse. Morris' thought is related to general semantics, its concepts, and its terminology. In general, this paper is dedicated to the continued growth of general semantics as an open system.

There is no attempt in this study to be definitive about the justifiable contributions Morris' thought has, or can, make to general semantics. Rather, the response will be partial, that is, incomplete and selective. Because of spatial limits, much of Morris' sophisticated thought has to be reduced and simplified—hopefully not beyond recognition by other scholars of Morris. General semantics and the philosophy of Morris are too complex and sophisticated to be confined to this relatively short paper. I do not

pretend to present the general semantics school of thought and the thought of a systematic American pragmatic philosopher in so short a space as this paper. Rather, what is attempted in this writing is an abridgement and a bridging of the extensive output of general semantics and Morris. Every effort is made to condense their cumulative wisdom to manageable and understandable composites with minimal distortion. Please excuse statements that might seem reductionistic or simplistic. The goal of directing attention to the convergence of general semantics and Morris' philosophy has been deemed more important here than a robust account of these two complex perspectives and systems.

Objective Relativism

In a panoramic sense, through the phrase *objective relativism*, Morris entitled his philosophy to the best of his ability, yet declaredly that he entitled it due to pressure from scholars and students. He would rather not have named his philosophy (Fiordo, 1977). While Morris does not provide a precise definition, he explains the title in his writings. After considering the terms *perspectivism* and *contextualism*, he settled on *objective relativism* to name a pluralistic philosophy that links itself "in close relation to the results and the methods of science" (Morris, 1948, pp. 129, 130). This philosophical perspective adds dimensions to the following premises of general semantics, namely, non-allness, et cetera, dating, indexing, the process of abstraction, levels of abstraction, the extensional orientation, multivalued logics, time-binding, and the ways of science being the ways of sanity.

Objective relativism differs from science in generality alone, not in method or in securing results; its data constitutes all data, whether the data is from the special sciences or the everyday world of perceiving and acting. Since all available data controls its course, as evidence demands, its systematization and formulation may have to be modified or rejected. Yet, one ideal goal of objective relativism is to erect a conceptual schema so general that it is confirmed by the totality of available data (Fiordo, 1977). For objective relativism, things exist only within a perspective and context. There is "no all-embracing absolute perspective within which everything exists" (Morris, 1948, p. 130). The correspondence of this philosophy with science is unequivocal. Plurality coexists with unity, the cosmos being both one in some ways and many in other ways. The cosmos is "as an organized system of perspectives"; that is, every individual thing is in "perspectival relation to *some* other things, but not to *all* other things" (p. 131). For example, nature "consists of interrelated perspectives or systems." The

nature of the members in a system is “determined by the relationship to other members of the system” (Fiordo, 1977, pp. 17, 18).

As for individuals, each is what she or he is in part because of the systems or perspectives of which each was and is a member. While the individual does not have a nature outside of all such contexts, systems, or perspectives, his or her nature cannot be stated exhaustively in regard to what he or she is from a perspective. If the individual became a part of a new situation and perspectives, new features of this person’s personality would emerge. For example, if a woman from a small town in North Dakota entered Fordham University in New York City, aspects of her personality will influence her reactions within this university community, and aspects of her personality will surface because of her “interactions with others in the university.” With every other social situation she experiences, “this process will continue” and likewise for “every other person with whom the [woman] interacts in the small town or in the university” (Morris, 1970b, pp. 129, 130).

In other words, “whatever something is in one perspective influences what it is when it enters other perspectives” (Fiordo, 1977, p. 19). Formally stated, Morris (1970b) maintains the “what x will be in perspectival relation to y depends in part upon what x is in perspectival relation to z ” (p. 131). Subsequently, “that an apple will be valuable in perspectival relation to behavior showing a preference for one thing over another depends in part on the fact that an apple is edible in perspectival relation to a digestive system” (Fiordo, 1977, p. 19). In the realm of human and humane values, standards are established. To qualify a claim that “something is good by stating for whom and under what conditions it is good” does not deny that a good can be objectively embodied; instead, it calls for the rejection of an “arbitrary acceptance of existing standards or an arbitrary imposition of one’s own standards on others.” For instance, no one would argue that a “certain diet is not good for a certain individual merely because it is not good for every person.” Ergo, there is not likely to be found a justifiable ground for being alarmed “unless all persons accept the same art, the same philosophy, the same way of life” (Morris, 1948, p. 132).

In conclusion, objective relativism entails unity and diversity. Truth and value, in objective relativism, are not merely subjective; rather, objective relativism strives to enhance objectivity in that it aims to generalize a tendency in science and extend it metaphysically to “all features of the cosmos” (Morris, 1970b, pp. 130, 131). The metaphysical extension of the cosmos from what is known today through the methods, doctrines, and

accumulated research findings of science is seen through the philosophy of objective relativism as being “stable and changeful, filled with life and death, replete with tragedy and joy, a tissue of interlocked processes, a multiplicity of unities, a one in many” (Morris, 1948, p. 134).

Scientific Empiricism

Scientific empiricism becomes the method of a philosophy of objective relativism and supports general semantics likewise with respect to its principles of non-allness, et cetera, dating, indexing, levels of abstraction, the extensional orientation, multivalued logics, and the ways of science being the ways of sanity. For purposes of clarity, it seems wise to describe his method of scientific empiricism, that is, the observational-hypothetical-deductive-experimental method.

The observational-hypothetical-deductive-experimental method can be described as having four phases: (1) the appearance of a problem, (2) deducing the consequences of the hypothesis—corresponding to an inference of abduction or determining plausibility based on a set of evidences, (3) the formulation of a hypothesis to solve the problem—corresponding to an inference of deduction or reasoning from general to specific, and (4) the testing of the hypothesis by measuring and checking deduced consequences—corresponding to an inference of induction or reasoning from specific to general. In other words, an area of investigation is identified as being problematic in a context of other events that are unproblematic. A hypothesis is formulated to solve the problematic event. The consequences of the hypothesis are elaborated, tested, and measured against observation. When the test of the hypothesis is positive, that which is problematic may be resolved, thereby verifying to a degree the hypothesis and perhaps advancing to “new problems which are encountered” (Fiordo, 1977, pp. 42, 43). This method can be a simple looking to confirm empirically that one is standing on a glacier in (say) Alberta’s Columbia Ice Field to elaborate scientific examinations of glacial ice on the Athabasca Glacier in the Columbia Ice Field.

Korzybski’s extensional orientation for sanity coincides with Morris’ account of scientific empiricism, which integrates theory, observation, and practice. Morris treated scientific empiricism as the method or procedure of the sciences; it points to the “widest possible generalization of scientific method” (Morris, 1938, p. 69). Orienting itself around the methods and results of the sciences, scientific empiricism includes “everything the scientific enterprise involves, together with the implications of this enterprise for other

human interests.” Because its orientation is empirical and logical, scientific empiricism is “positive and cooperative in nature” (Fiordo, 1977, pp. 41, 42) and incorporates “its one observational-hypothetical-deductive-experimental method” (Morris, 1938, p. 72).

Morris’ (1938) scientific empiricism “embraces the entire enterprise of science,” integrating the “rationalist, empiricist, and pragmatist while simultaneously correcting their isolated one-sidedness” (Fiordo, 1977, p. 42). Highly relevant to general semantics and Korzybski’s (2000) extensional orientation, scientific empiricism, “resting on a science expansive in scope and critical in disposition,” unites the “empirical habit of mind with an emphasis upon logical analysis and conceptual clarification” while “recognizing the social element in knowledge”—science’s “social objectivity.” In sum, scientific empiricism “avoids the extremes of traditional ‘rationalism’ and ‘empiricism’” (p. 43). With reference to a hypothetical extensional–intensional orientation interaction continuum, both have coexistence with the intensionality of rationalism being potentially respected while being subjugated pragmatically to the extensionality of empiricism.

In addition, Morris (1955) talked about the empirical grounding of a term through its *denotatum*. All terms may have signification, but not all terms have denotation. For Morris, a term with denotation has a denotatum. A term or symbol can have a denotatum but it need not. A *denotatum* constitutes a referent that can be experienced through the senses or scientific extensions of the senses through technological devices and other sensing equipment. In the language of traditional grammar, many nouns have denotata in the natural world, for example, dog, cat, bird, fish, car, bicycle, airplane, and so on. However, many nouns do not have denotata in the natural world. They may have no natural denotata or denotata that belong to human invention and imagination in its fictional and artistic manifestations, for example, unicorn, jackalope, griffin, minotaur, sharktopus, avatar, flying saucers, cylons, and so on. People can experience the denotata of dogs and cats at any pet store, but they can only experience a unicorn or avatar in such forms as statues, graphics, or holograms. The denotata of the two differ significantly: one group being real by nature and one being real through human ingenuity and artifice. While Morris (Fiordo, 1977) may have tended to use denotata to refer to natural phenomena, his tendency would not preclude the application of denotata to things of human construction such as material items manufactured for mass consumption (e.g., toothbrushes, bicycles, etc.) or unique material objects (e.g., the Empire State Building, the Taj Mahal, the Tokyo Tower, Michelangelo’s

statue of David, Picasso's portrait of Igor Stravinsky, and an authentic copy of the Gutenberg Bible owned by the New York Public Library).

Lastly, to illustrate the difference between a term having signification and denotation, two specific nouns known to traditional grammar as proper nouns will make the point. The term *President Barack Obama* carries the meaning of the person elected to the top office in the USA, with all the powers and responsibilities that accompany that significant role and has the denotatum of the specific male human being who can be observed in person, who was born August 4, 1961, and who in 2010 is serving in the capacity of the 44th President of the United States and the first African American to hold this office. The term *Liberty Bell* carries the meaning of a historical symbol of American independence and has a denotatum as well: the copper and tin bell cast in 1752 and recast in 1753 with a distinctive crack and a circumference of 12 feet, weighing 2,080 pounds, and located at the Liberty Bell Center in Philadelphia, PA. In sum, the significant communication question becomes, Do the words employed have denotata? And, if the words employed have denotata, do the denotata belong to the natural or fabricated world? Scientific empiricism and general semantics both have extensional orientations. They anchor themselves in the empirical grounding. And, the empirical grounding may range from direct observation to highly sophisticated methods of testing, measurement, and confirmation.

Fallibilism

Fallibilism is a critical doctrine adhered to by Morris, Charles Sanders Peirce, John Dewey, and other pragmatists (Morris, 1934; Morris, 1970a; Morris, 1970b). With some risk, since it is intended to be critical of all positions including its own, it might be seen as functioning like pancritical rationalism (Bartley, 1990). Of course, because *pancritical rationalism* is a term made possible through high-level abstracting, it should be understood cautiously here in a context close to its etymological meaning of "being critical, potentially, of everything." Since fallibilism constitutes the perspective that any claim to information and knowledge may be faulty, inquiry must incorporate detachment. From a pragmatic point of view, although possible, it is not likely that an entire system of beliefs will fail all at once. Usually, one or several premises or facts may be challenged at a time and may sustain the rigor of a critical assault. However, of the beliefs challenged, while one may disintegrate under scrutiny, others may survive criticism.

The healthy and wise point of fallibilism is that regardless of how convinced a person may be of a position, that person cannot be certain of its

validity and reliability, that is, “that it would not be subject to modification through further inquiry” (Morris, 1970b, pp. 67, 68). The method of scientific empiricism requires people at all times to be ready to reject their “whole cartload of beliefs, the moment experience is against them.” The desire to learn the truth or the fact of a matter “forbids” him or her to be “perfectly cocksure that he [or she] knows already.” The operating principle of fallibilism never feigns finality (i.e., it respects the general semantics principle of non-allness and *et cetera*) because its inclination toward social confirmation “secures for it that relative stability which provides the *via media* between dogmatism and individualistic anarchy” (Morris, 1934, p. 12).

Fallibilism is frequently and conspicuously apparent in science and law. General semantics urges that symbol users remain open to information and seek substantial grounds for maintaining beliefs about everything from the stock market to medical decisions. Two instances from science will be used to illustrate fallibilism. Astronomers in 1910 had knowledge of Earth’s moon, but that knowledge has advanced with continued exploration and analysis of Earth’s natural satellite. As scientific methods and technologies improved, firsthand experience of the moon became historical reality, the scientific observations improved, some preexisting expectations were confirmed, others needed modification, and some had to be rejected. Geologists in 1950 had limited information on the Yellowstone Caldera in Wyoming. With advances in scientific theory and measuring technologies, scientific knowledge of the Caldera has increased and the approximate caldera boundary mapped on the territory rings in Yellowstone National Park. Of course, what is known today about Earth’s moon and the Yellowstone Caldera will, with continued scientific research on these two natural phenomena, likely improve by 2020.

Problematic and Unproblematic Contexts

To analyze the value hierarchy of general semantics, a significant feature from Morris’ philosophy resides in the notions of problematic and unproblematic contexts. General semantics values non-Aristotelian systems, time-binding, an extensional orientation, report language over inferential and judgmental language, the principle of non-allness, the ways of science as causal agents for sanity, and so on. It will be shown how Morris’ conceptualization of the problematic and unproblematic can assist in the implementation of general semantics values.

A pragmatic approach to problematic and unproblematic contexts is easily workable. Conceptual means can be practically implemented

for converting contexts problematic by general semantics criteria into unproblematic ones. Potentially, every symbol using context *r* benefits from the consideration of the problematic and unproblematic. In any context, determining what is and what is not problematic is critical to implementing general semantics principles to respect norms of verification, sensibility, and sanity—in short, scientific thinking. Any human context may give rise to a general semantics condition that is problematic. When such a condition emerges, the need to discriminate the problematic from the unproblematic can determine success and sanity in handling a situation. When a problematic condition is identified and judged to be of significance, the need emerges to convert a problematic condition into an unproblematic one (Morris, 1964). For example, in general semantics terms, a communicative situation that is problematic due to high-level abstracting may be treated with extensional devices such as indexing and dating. A communication situation that is unproblematic with respect to high-level abstracting would need no treatment at all on this item but may be problematic on another item.

In short, problems arise in particular situations. With understanding and action impeded, the problem has to be resolved. Every problematic situation has features that are unproblematic. In all inquiries to resolve a problem, the problematic is surrounded by the unproblematic. The unproblematic is usually the norm in which a problem surfaces and is treated. For example, a scientist who identifies a problem area does not question all commonly accepted “truths” in a field at once. A methodologist who identifies a problem does not question all commonly accepted methods in a field at once. And, an auditor who identifies a problem does not question all commonly accepted values in a field at once (Fiordo, 1977). In terms of general semantics, the person with a pathological intensional orientation may cause in others a response to extensionalize and clarify meaning and experience. Pragmatically, when situations are confounded by the fogginess of intensional orientations, special attempts should be made to counterbalance intensional orientations through extensionality. Ostensible and operational definitions as well as report language might serve as antidotes to excessive verbal definitions and autobiographical statements. The intensional insanity of the situation might then be transformed into extensional sanity.

Grounding in Behavioral Semiotics

When Charles Osgood (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957) first proposed his semantic differential on connotative meaning, Morris (Fiordo, 1975)

applauded his former student's ambitious and insightful work. After reflection over a number of years, believing that the technique and the technology were still not where they needed to be to map cognitive space and activity, Morris took refuge once again in his hardcore base in a behavioral semiotic. While he yearned to map the psychological interior, he concluded that the scientific technology was not yet there to do so validly and reliably. For the time being, human researchers would have to be patient until a technology for probing mental imagery exists. Philosophical speculation on what is going on in the "black box" (or human mind) would be all that is currently possible. Measurement techniques have improved and would be acceptable to a number of psychological researchers, but Morris preferred to wait until the technology caught up with the human desire to map the territory of the human mind, –at least at fundamental levels.

Although a radical behaviorism (Skinner, 1974; Skinner, 1983) need not be attributed to or associated with Morris, a cautious approach to cognitive psychology can be. Morris seemed to prefer to error toward behavioral over cognitive psychology under pragmatically challenging circumstances. He would rather wager on a behavioral than a cognitive psychology—given the field of cognitive psychology as Morris last observed it. As a tribute to the dating of general semantics, with his eyes keenly on emerging developments, cognitive psychology in 2010 would likely please Morris far more than it did in 1975. Verifiable and verified information seemed to guide Morris in his decision to advance a behavioral semiotic. For instance, while functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scans as a technology in 2010 might be a respectable brain activity map to Morris, fMRI might still fall short of being an acceptable mind map—or, a map of cognitive space. Relying likely on the behaviorist notion that the mind is what the body is doing, Morris might still defer to watching what a person does for his final determination.

Terms and concepts from Morris' behavioral semiotic that apply to general semantics follow. Morris (1964, p. 2) views semiosis as a five-term sign process in which a "*sign* (or sign-vehicle) sets up in an *interpreter* (or an organism for which something is a sign) an *interpretant* (or a disposition to react in a certain kind of way) to a *signification* (or certain kind of object which is not then acting as a stimulus) in a particular *context* (or under certain conditions)" (Fiordo, 1977, p. 47). Therefore, in the process of semiosis, "signs mediate, agents interpret, *interpretants* of the agents take account of or dispose them to respond, and significations are what is taken account of or what an agent is disposed to react toward" (p. 48).

As for semiotics, he formulates the general study of signs behaviorally. Semiotics is the science of semiosis. Subsequently, it is as separate from semiosis as any science is from the object of its study (p. 56). Morris develops semiotics in terms relevant to behavior since behavior takes place in an environment. Regarding behavioral science, semiotics can use principles and predictions from whatever the general theory of behavior has attained and connects meaning with behavior or action (p. 56). Semiotics, thus, has three sign relations: to people and contexts or pragmatics, to objects or semantics, and to other signs or syntactics. Especially useful to a behavioral semiotic is pragmatics, for pragmatics is a dimension that deals with the uses, effects, and origins of signs in a behavioral context (p. 57). In short, pragmatics dramatically addresses the organism acting in an environment toward an objective, for “pragmatics considers the biotic aspects of semiosis” (p. 58). To be consistent with Morris’ emphasis on semiotics over its dimensions of pragmatics, semantics, and syntactics, a behavioral semiotic holds that to “think semiotically is to think wholly” (p. 60).

Sometimes *interpretant* can be a troublesome term because Morris’ treatment of the interpretant is incomplete (p. 54). Nonetheless, Morris tries to clarify this term through the following synonyms, suggesting an inclination to respond or behave to something not then acting as a stimulus: “*disposition, readiness, tendency, and habit*” (p. 52). Three major interpretants include dispositions to believe, to prefer, and to act (p. 53). Linguistically, these correspond to designative statements, appraisive statements, and prescriptive statements (p. 93).

When Hayakawa (1972) named his text *Language in Thought and Action*, he came close to linking general semantics with the behavioral semiotics of Morris. Hayakawa’s text stressed in its title the interpretant and the pragmatic dimension of meaning while implying the semantic and syntactic dimensions of meaning. Through his configuration of semiosis, Morris may have overlapped with Korzybski’s (2000) conception of semantic reactions. Of course, once an organism responds to a sign in an environment, the interpretant has given birth to a sign-vehicle stimulus through a behavioral response or action on the environment. A word (or sign), like *pineapple*, might dispose persons to respond. When they respond to the object known by the name *pineapple*, they act on the pineapple by eating it and the pineapple acts on them. Once action has been initiated, the interpretant moves toward consummatory behavior, that is, action that is completed by eating the pineapple. Hence, words give rise to dispositions to respond.

When dispositions become actions, sign functioning is grounded in behavior (Fiordo, 1977).

When communicating under routine circumstances, especially in face-to-face interpersonal settings, two inarguable possibilities present themselves. One is behavior and another is verbal behavior (Skinner, 1957). Behavior and verbal behavior can be construed, broadly speaking, as behavior and semiotic behavior. Semiotic behavior would be verbal behavior plus nonverbal behavior and would include products of human behavior or things human beings make: everything from an abacus to a zucchetto. People signal to one another through gestures, words, iphones, clothing, etc. Behavior or the products of behavior serve behavioral semiotics. Cognition is never denied. Behavior, though, allows communicators to ground their abstractions.

As one example, if a congregation is pleased with the sermons of an evangelist, a behavioral semiotic tries to locate or invent behavioral measures of the congregation's appreciation: attendance at sermons, donations, recorded endorsements of the evangelist, purchase of religious tapes, etc. A behavioral semiotic, in general semantics terms, contributes to the attainment of low levels of abstraction without denying the potential value of high levels of abstraction. As another example, without knowing another's language, to say to that person in Spanish, "Que te diviertas!" (Have fun!), and to get a reply in Spanish like "Por que no?" (Why not?) means the signs meant something to that message receiver. Although there are other inferences that can be drawn, a blank stare with no feedback might mean the words were not understood because there was no verbal behavior resulting from the verbal stimulus. Human organisms interact with, act on, and relate to physical, semiotic, and verbal environments.

This section closes with a short statement on signification and denotation. Morris holds that *signification* refers to what is taken account of. A sign's signification entails the conditions that fulfill the denotation. When something functions as a sign, it has to have signification; it does not have to have need denotation. As mentioned earlier, denotation requires a denotatum, that is, an object that completes a sequence of behavioral responses set forth by a sign in an interpreter to an object that actually exists (Fiordo, 1977). Thus, in 2010, the name *Larry King* has signification and denotation because the person exists and can be observed and witnessed. However, in 2010, the name *ambrosia* from Roman mythology has signification but lacks denotation because it does not exist—unless it is in a fictional form created by the wizardry of advertisers! The distinction

between signification and denotation, therefore, is critical and applicable to general semantics—especially notions of extensionality and descending the abstraction ladder to the perceptual and process levels of experience.

Grounding in Preferential Behavior

To Morris, preferential behavior gauges human value, values, and valuing. Preferential behavior can be observed in situations where a person accords caring, caring-for, or selection–rejection behavior to something in the situation or symbolized in the situation. Values are properties of objects in relation to preferential behavior. People exhibit positive preferential behavior to objects and situations when they take action to maintain their presence or construct the objects and situations when they are absent (Morris, 1964, pp. 16, 17). People exhibit negative preferential behavior to an object or situation when they strive to move away from or destroy the object or situation or prevent the object or situation from happening. For example, people eat some foods and avoid others, admire some paintings and ignore others, and select some people as friends and others as enemies (Fiordo, 1977, pp. 117, 118).

Preferential behavior allows for the development of rankings and weightings of objects and situations. The value hierarchy created and measured through preferential behavior can be quite practical and may vary between individuals and within an individual over time. Thus, an individual with automobile driving experience might prefer this ranking of five new 2010 automobiles, ranging from most- to least-frequent manifestations of preferential behavior: (1) a Toyota Camry, (2) a Honda Accord, (3) a Subaru Outback, (4) a BMW Mini-Cooper, and (5) a VW Bug. Likewise, an individual with traveling experience in the following cities and countries might also display preferential behavior from most- to least-frequent manifestations of preferential behavior in the following hierarchy: (1) Oslo, Norway; (2) Reykjavik, Iceland; (3) Nagasaki, Japan; (4) La Paz, Bolivia; and (5) Kathmandu, Nepal. Consequently, when an individual drives a Camry the most and a Bug the least, preferential behavior for the Camry surfaces through frequency. When an individual visits Oslo the most and Kathmandu the least, preferential behavior for Oslo emerges also through frequency. Instead of talking about value at a high level of abstraction, value becomes grounded in behavior that demonstrates a preference for one choice over another.

With meaning having two poles, signification and significance (Morris, 1964), Morris thinks of axiology as the science of preferential behavior.

As a science, axiology strives toward a verified theory of preferential behavior; it describes who prefers what under varying conditions while aiming through observation and experimentation to establish laws that may underlie such behavior. As the science of preferential behavior, a behavioral axiology completes a behavioral semiotics by studying the ways in which preferential behavior influences the language and symbols people encounter or generate and how language and symbols influence preferential behavior itself (Fiordo, 1977; Morris, 1956). In effect, through preferential behavior, Morris (1970a) demonstrates that an axiology or value theory can be grounded “empirically and behaviorally oriented” (p. 105). The extensional orientation of general semantics is practiced and celebrated.

Selected Types of Discourse

Morris (1955) designs and proposes 16 types of discourse to underscore the possible varieties that could be constructed, delineated, and defined. The number 16 is not magical; rather, it is a counterpart to oversimplified notions of discourse types, such as referential and non-referential. The 16 types are not definitive but suggestive, for he sees discourse types as specializations of language designed to accomplish a specific purpose. Rather than applauding conventional categories of discourse, Morris advances the notion of specialized language used for specific purposes. Consistent with general semantics, Morris emphasizes and cautions that ordinary language has amazingly complexity, entails risks unperceived by most users, and serves multiple positive and negative functions in everyday social interaction. However, the numerous general operations it performs reduce its communicative adequacy when special needs of discourse surface (Fiordo, 1977).

When special functions of language are required, special forms of discourse are necessary. Humanity evolved specialized forms of discourse from the general language—the specialized discourse being used to perform special tasks as efficiently as possible (Fiordo, 1977; Morris, 1955). Korzybski’s (2000) view that ordinary language needs special linguistic and punctuation improvements propounds similar warnings and makes similar pronouncements. The special languages described and endorsed by Morris and Korzybski suggest sublanguages or languages purposefully restricted to a special area—such as, science, poetry, or HCI (human–computer interaction).

An additional configuration of sublanguages might be helpful. Three classifications are proposed here for English: *English Alpha Language*,

English Beta Language, and *English Omega Language*. The three classifications might be seen as stages in linguistic consciousness. Ordinary language with all its powers and limitations would constitute Alpha language. Of course, ordinary language in English would include the plays of Shakespeare and the poetry of Emily Dickinson as well as the language used in everyday life. However, Shakespeare and Dickinson exemplify ordinary language used in a way that is anything but “ordinary.” The following English sentence, for example, would be in Alpha: “Theodore Roosevelt served as Vice-President of the US and then inherited the role of Vice-President of the US when President McKinley was assassinated.” The special language features of general semantics would constitute Beta language. These would include hyphenated terms, dating, and E-Prime (Korzybski, 2000; Kodish & Kodish, 2001). Using dating, hyphenation, and E-Prime (English less all forms of the verb “to be”), Beta can be exemplified in this English sentence: “Theodore Roosevelt (1900) served-enjoyed the role of Vice President of the US, but Theodore Roosevelt (1915) inherited-accepted the role of President of the US after the assassination of President McKinley.” Omega language transcends the Beta language stage by translating the special language of general semantics into a stylized form of ordinary English that might serve as the final translation from English Alpha and Beta languages. Hence, the above statement might become as follows: “In 1900 Theodore Roosevelt was the Vice President of the US, and in 1901 he became the President of the US after President McKinley was assassinated.” The English omega language respects the coded discourse of general semantics but reformulates an ordinary English sentence derived from the coded one and stylized with an end in view to suit general language users.

For Morris, discourse forms involve meaning in terms of signification and significance as well as functions in terms of modes and uses. Three readily applicable modes of discourse include these: designative, appraisive, and prescriptive statements—or designations, appraisals, and prescriptions. Three readily applicable uses of discourse entail these: to inform, to value, and to incite. Based on their highly complementary design regarding mode and use, three forms or types of discourse from Morris are used to demonstrate their contribution to general semantics, namely, designative-informative, appraisive-valuative, and prescriptive-incitive. Instead of discussing categories of discourse, such as rhetorical and dialectical, informative and persuasive, or scientific and non-scientific, Morris argues that many diverse forms can surface to meet specific purposes. For a full account of the 16 types of discourse, Morris (1955) elaborates them in *Signs, Language, and Behavior* on page 125,

and Fiordo (1977) renders them in *Charles Morris and the Criticism of Discourse* on page 102.

The formulation and classification of the discourse types can be construed as sublanguage abstractions from the incredible complexity of language and its situational or field-dependent uses. In fact, different discourse theorists from different language bases and cultural origins may likely abstract different features from their base natural languages and derive discourse types that hypothetically diverge from all the categories historically classified and inherited to date. Morris, in brief, suggests a creative approach to humans functioning in language environments and possibly generating forms of discourse never before identified or invented to address special purposes (Fiordo, 1977). With discourse defined by its attempt to satisfy a special purpose with a special group in a unique context, the forms of discourse potentially become one and many—or one by definition in an infinite array of contexts.

Consistent with the general semantics extensional device of the hyphen, hyphens will be used to symbolize the fluid and dynamic boundaries of discourse. For illustrative purposes, three types of discourse are chosen from Morris: designative-informative, appraisive-valuative, and prescriptive-incitive. Morris (1955) bases discourse classifications on the modes and uses of language. Since human behavior is semiotically and neurolinguistically complex, it is served poorly when one type of discourse claims to cover adequately and efficiently purposes it cannot serve. The discourse types selected here are hyphenated to emphasize the link between the mode and the use or a mode–use classification. The fluidity of Morris' classifications make his conceptual framework for discourse a dynamic map of a complex, risky, and changing territory, and it aims to do this as satellite images map the origin and path of a storm such as the Super Typhoon *Megi* that hit the Philippine Islands on October 17, 2010. In other words, he allows us to look at discourse with vision as clear as humanly possible without, if possible, viewing it through a rearview mirror (McLuhan, 1964; McLuhan & Fiore, 1967).

Designative-informative discourse is associated with accurate reporting in general and science in particular. The statements in this type of discourse resemble Hayakawa's (1972) rendition of "reports." The statements in designative-informative discourse can be confirmed or disconfirmed through empirical evidence. Hence, statements that cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed do not belong to this type of discourse. To belong to designative-informative discourse, a language user must obtain either direct or indirect "evidence that a

statement has either truth or falsity.” Aiming at the most adequate way to transact valid information pertaining to what exists, has existed, or will exist, designative-informative discourse “elaborates and refines ... statements as occur in common speech” (Fiordo, 1977, pp. 102, 103).

Since *most signifying entails designation*, this discourse gauges its improvement as a specialized language on whether its statements become primarily designative or “more purely designative, more general, better confirmed, and better systematized.” The statements of designative-informative discourse focus on the “search for reliable signs” that represents the “best knowledge of a given time” for which “evidence is highest that the statements are true.” In other words, what constitutes the body of this type of discourse at any time are “pruned, precise, and confirmed statements, systematically organized.” Designative-informative discourse predicts with increasing accuracy what one “encounters in direct experience,” neither approves nor disapproves of the conditions described, yet asserts as firmly as evidence allows that “substances with such and such characteristics have such and such further characteristics under such and such conditions” (Morris, 1955, pp. 126–128). The more accurate the maps are of the territory, the stronger is the designative-informative discourse. As a historical example, the statement “the sun revolves around the earth” becomes improved after much evidence is gathered with the statement “the earth revolves around the sun.”

Appraisive-valuative discourse is associated with poetry and poetic language. Embodying metaphor, this type of discourse acknowledges the designative mode but employs words that are primarily appraisive in mode (Fiordo, 1977, p. 107) and strives to accord preferential status to the “discourse itself rather than to what is designated.” The emphasis in this specialized use of language manifests itself in the poetic or specifically in poetry, where the interest of persons in the way signs are utilized may become “the prominent interest—so much so that such persons may wish to limit poetic discourse to appraisive discourse which aims to induce approval of the discourse itself” (Morris, 1955, pp. 136, 137).

The significance of appraisive-valuative discourse involves the recording and sustaining of established valuations (or assessments of preferred behavior) while “exploring and strengthening novel variations” (Fiordo, 1977, p. 108). Appraisive-valuative discourse permits communicators to experiment vicariously to take the role of others (or oneself at another time in another place) with sign and preferential behavior where the signs become ends per se, that is, it intensifies, modifies, and reorganizes the human

capacity to react critically to accepted values with the consequence of reinforcing or of changing the values. In the end, appraisive-valuative discourse highlights what it has judged to have significance while serving a “dynamic role in the development and integration of valuative attitudes and explicit evaluations” (Morris, 1955, p. 138). A passage from Walt Whitman might illustrate this type of discourse. Affirming the value of death, Whitman writes in his *Leaves of Grass* from the section “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d”:

Dark Mother, always gliding near, with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?
Then I chant it for thee—I glorify thee above all;
I bring thee a song that, when thou must indeed come, thou com
unfalteringly.
(Albery, 2001, p. 160)

Prescriptive-incitive discourse is associated with moral and religious communication. This type of discourse prescribes preferred deportment and strives to “arouse such conduct in its interpreters.” This discourse type focuses the individual on an end and gains adequacy in its attempts through the specializing of language to meet the end. Prescriptive-incitive discourse urges a holistic orientation in the personality of the interpreter in terms of which all other behaviors are judged; it verbalizes or symbolizes a goal to be grasped and tries to influence people to “do what is necessary to attain it” (Fiordo, 1977, p. 111). The gauge for determining whether prescriptive-incitive discourse manifests and sustains its own adequacy depends on whether it appeals to “given individuals in a given cultural milieu as a way in which their lives can be satisfactorily focused and directed.” When prescriptive-incitive discourse is inadequate, using religion for illustration, Morris contends that “new prophets appear to proclaim a mode of life which they have found significant.” When those who hear the new prophets “find the new way to be significant for themselves, a new religion and religious literature arises” (Morris, 1955, p. 148).

Examples of prescriptive-incitive discourse abound. Morris detailed some possibilities in his humanistic portrayal of seven paths of life (Morris, 1970a) and in a social science rendition of 13 ways of life (Morris, 1956), both of which are explained at length in Fiordo’s *Charles Morris and the Criticism of Discourse* (1977). Drawing from religious sources that may be familiar to American scholars, the following might elucidate this type of discourse: (1) “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and

with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deuteronomy 6:5); (2) “Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord” (Zechariah 2:13); (3) “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself” (Matthew 6:34); (4) “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God” (1 John 4:7); (5) “O People of the Book! Do not commit excesses in your religion: Nor say anything except the truth about Allah (*The Quran*, Sura 4.171); (6) “No one saves us but ourselves, no one can and no one may. We ourselves must walk the path but Buddhas clearly show the way” (*Dhammapada*, Chapter 165); and (7) “Words are for meaning: when you’ve got the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find someone who’s forgotten words so I can have a word with him?” (Zhuanzi, xxvi).

In total, Morris’ discourse types do not prevent a special interest in designative-informative, prescriptive-incitive, or any other of his categories from flourishing. On the contrary, his mode–use classification of discourse encourages it; however, it does so in a context favoring an awareness of many discourse options—some yet to be created or identified. If, for example, designative-informative discourse is the type of specialized interest given a designated goal at some time and under actual or potential circumstances that have been identified, then this specialty of discourse should be developed to its fullest to meet the demands and interests of the conditions. In pursuing the designated specialty discourse, though, the context of other diverse forms of discourse should be noted, at least in principle, lest the multiple discourse options be forgotten. Morris’ attitude toward discourse coincides readily with the non-allness and et cetera principles of general semantics.

Conclusions

This study was designed in part to invite readers and scholars to fortify and advance their knowledge of general semantics with content contributions from the philosophy of Morris—especially with reference to his scientific empiricism, behavioral semiotics, and behavioral axiology. That the features of Morris’ thought abstracted for this paper can be seen as contributing beneficially to general semantics has been attempted here. Hopefully, enough has been said in this modest effort to demonstrate the utility of Morris’ ideas to general semantics.

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