S. I. HAYAKAWA

LANGUAGE IN THOUGHT & ACTION

FOURTH EDITION

FOURTH EDITION

Language in Thought and Action

S. I. HAYAKAWA
United States Senator from California

In consultation with
Arthur Asa Berger and Arthur Chandler
San Francisco State University

HARCOURT BRACE JOVANOVICH, PUBLISHERS
San Diego New York Chicago Austin
London Sydney Toronto

Designed by Bob Goff

ISBN: 0-15-550119-4

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 77-92247
Printed in the United States of America

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank the following publishers and copyright holders for their permission to reprint the material listed below:

Anderson & Ritchie: For excerpt from *Words and Their Meaning* by Aldous Huxley.
Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc.: For excerpts from the *Illiteracy of the Literate* by H. R. Huse, copyright, 1933 by D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc.
Barrie & Jenkins Ltd: For "The Guitarist Tunes Up" from *On a Calm Shore* by Frances Cornford, The Cresset Press.
John Calder (Publishers) Ltd: For "Jealousy" from *Two Novels* by Alain Robbe-Grillet. Published by John Calder.
Jonathan Cape Ltd: For "Fire and Ice" by Robert Frost. From *The Poetry of Robert Frost,* edited by Edward Connery Lathem.
Bayard Coll: For "Amerigoround."
Delacorte Press: For excerpt from *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., a Seymour Lawrence book, Delacorte Press, Publisher.
Estate of Robert Frost: For "Fire and Ice" by Robert Frost. From *The Poetry of Robert Frost,* edited by Edward Connery Lathem.
ETC.: A Review of General Semantics: For excerpts from the writings of S. I. Hayakawa.
Faber and Faber Ltd: For "A Study of Reading Habits" from *The Whitsun Weddings* by Philip Larkin. Reprinted by permission of Faber and Faber Ltd.
Fawcett Publications, Inc.: For excerpts from *True Confessions,* August 1948. Courtesy of *True Confessions.* Copyright 1948 Fawcett Publications, Inc.
Grove Press, Inc.: For *Jealousy* from *Two Novels* by Alain Robbe-Grillet. Reprinted by permission of Grove Press, Inc. Translated by Richard Howard. Copyright © 1965 by Grove Press, Inc. *Jealousy* copyright © 1959 by Grove Press, Inc.
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.: For excerpts from T. S. Eliot; from *The Meaning of Meaning,* 3rd Edition, by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards; from *The Child's Conception of the World* by Jean Piaget; and from *The Modern Researcher* by Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff.
Harper & Row, Publishers, Incorporated: For excerpts from *The Mind in the Making* by James Harvey Robinson; and for "Commuter" from *The Lady Is Cold* by E. B. White, copyright 1929 by Harper & Row, Publishers, Incorporated, reprinted with their permission.
Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.: For "Fire and Ice" by Robert Frost. From *The Poetry of Robert Frost,* edited by Edward Connery Lathem. Copyright 1923 by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., copyright 1951 by Robert Frost, reprinted by permission of Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.; and for "Happiness" from *Chicago Poems* by Carl Sandburg, copyright 1916 by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., copyright renewed 1944 by Carl Sandburg, reprinted by permission of Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

Language in Thought and Action

FOURTH EDITION

Houghton Mifflin Company: For excerpt from *The Human Use of Human Beings* by N. Wiener, Houghton Mifflin Company, Publisher.

McGraw-Hill Book Company: For excerpt from *Understanding Media* by Marshall McLuhan. Copyright 1964 by Marshall McLuhan. Used with permission of McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Hughes Mearns: For "The Man Who Wasn't There." Reprinted by permission of the author.

Oxford University Press: For excerpt from *Problems of Philosophy* by Bertrand Russell, Oxford University Press, Publisher.

Laurence Pollinger Limited: For excerpt from "Morality and the Novel" (in *Phoenix*) by D. H. Lawrence, published in England by William Heinemann Ltd., used by permission of Laurence Pollinger Limited and the estate of the late Mrs. Frieda Lawrence; and for "Happiness" from *Chicago Poems* by Carl Sandburg, published in England by Jonathan Cape Limited.

Princeton University Press: For excerpt from "Has History Any Meaning," in Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. II, 5th revised edition, 1966, Princeton University Press, and Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1945, 12th impression 1977. Princeton Paperback, 1971, p. 270. Reprinted by permission.

Random House, Inc.: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.: For excerpt from *Culture Against Man* by Jules Henry, p. 59; for "Dream Deferred," copyright 1951 by Langston Hughes. Reprinted from *The Panther and the Lash*, by Langston Hughes, by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.; and for "A Study of Reading Habits" from *The Whitsun Weddings* by Philip Larkin. Copyright © 1964 by Philip Larkin. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.

William H. Schneider. For cartoons from *Danger: Men Talking*, Random House, Inc. Copyright 1954, © 1955, 1963, 1965 by William H. Schneider. Reprinted by permission of William H. Schneider.

Charles Scribner's Sons: For "Invictus" by W. E. Henley, and for excerpt from *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway.

Simon & Schuster, Inc.: For excerpts from *The Story of Civilization:* Vol. IV, by Will Durant, copyright 1950; and from *The Lessons of History*, by Will and Ariel Durant, copyright 1968, Simon & Schuster, Inc., Publisher.

The Viking Press, Inc.: For excerpt from "Morality and the Novel" (in *Phoenix*) by D. H. Lawrence.

E. B. White: For "Commuter" from *The Lady Is Cold* by E. B. White.

Preface

TO LEARN to think more clearly, to speak and write more effectively, and to listen and read with greater understanding—these have been the goals of the study of language from the days of the medieval trivium to present-day high school and college English. This book tries to approach these traditional goals by the methods of modern semantics—that is, through an understanding in biological and functional terms of the role of language in human life, and through an understanding of the different uses of language: language to persuade and control behavior, language to transmit information, language to create and express social cohesion, and the language of poetry and the imagination. Words that convey no information may nevertheless move carloads of shaving cream or cake mix, as we all know from television commercials. Words can start people marching in the streets—and can stir others to stoning the marchers. Words that make no sense as prose can make a great deal of sense as poetry. Words that seem simple and clear to some may be puzzling and obscure to others. With words we sugarcoat our nastiest motives and our worst behavior, but with words we also formulate our highest ideals and aspirations. (Do the words we utter arise as a result of our thoughts, or are our thoughts determined by the linguistic systems we happen to have been taught?) To understand how language works, what pitfalls it conceals, what its possibilities are, is to understand what is central to the complicated business of living the life of a human being. To be concerned with the relation between language and reality, between words and what they stand for in the speaker's or the hearer's thoughts and emotions, is to approach the study of language as both an intellectual and a moral discipline.

Perhaps an illustration will clarify my position. What is the teacher's duty when a child says in class, "Taters ain't doin' good this year"? Traditionally, teachers of English and speech have seen their first duty as that of correcting the child's grammar, pronunciation, and diction in order to bring these up to literate standards. Teachers with a semantic orientation will give priority to a different task. They will ask the student such questions as "What potatoes do you mean? Those on your parents' farm, or those throughout the county? How do you know? From personal

observation? From reports from credible sources?" In short, teachers of semantics will concern themselves, and teach their students to concern themselves, first of all with the truth, the adequacy, and the degree of trustworthiness of statements. Often when students who are bored with studying grammar and diagraming sentences become interested in the content and purposes of communication, their hostility to linguistic instruction vanishes, and problems of grammatical and syntactical propriety are solved in passing.

Today the public is aware, perhaps to an unprecedented degree, of the role of communication in human affairs. This awareness arises in large part out of the urgency of the tensions existing everywhere between nation and nation, class and class, individual and individual, in a world that is undergoing rapid change and reorganization. It arises too out of the enormous powers for good and evil—powers apparent to even the least reflective members of society—that lie in the media of mass communication: the press, motion pictures, radio, and television.

The vacuum tube and transistor produced in the twentieth century a revolution in communication, a revolution probably more far-reaching in its effects than the invention of printing, which ushered in the Renaissance. The rising aspirations of the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America are due to advances in transportation and communication: the airplane, the jeep, the helicopter, bringing newspapers, magazines, motion pictures, and especially the radio. In thousands of remote villages, my African students used to tell me, people who formerly had no cultural contacts beyond the next village gather today around transistor radios to hear the news from London, New York, Tokyo, and Moscow—and start wanting to become citizens of a larger world than they have ever known before.

Television, too, is helping to change the world. In the United States, for example, commercial television invites everyone to participate fully in the benefits of an industrial and democratic culture by buying toothpastes and detergents and automobiles, by taking an interest in national and international affairs, by sharing the emotions and dreams and aspirations and values that are depicted in the entertainment. What television communicates to Whites, it also communicates to Blacks, who constitute one-tenth of the nation. There is nothing to be surprised at, therefore, in the increased urgency of Black demands, not only for better job opportunities but for full rights as consumers to eat, drink, wear, and enjoy what all other Americans are daily urged to eat, drink, wear, and enjoy. A revolution in the patterns and techniques of communication always has more consequences than are dreamed of at the time the innovations are introduced. The increased density of the communication network in the nation and in the world resulting from technological

advances means an increased tempo of social change—and therefore an increased need for semantic sophistication on the part of everyone.

The original version of this book, *Language in Action,* published in 1941, was in many respects a response to the dangers of propaganda, especially as exemplified in Adolf Hitler's success in persuading millions to share his maniacal and destructive views. It was my conviction then, as it remains now, that we need to have a habitually critical attitude toward language—our own as well as that of others—both to provide for our personal well-being and to ensure that we will function adequately as citizens. Hitler is gone, but if the majority of our fellow citizens are more susceptible to the slogans of fear and race hatred than to those of peaceful accommodation and mutual respect among human beings, our political liberties remain at the mercy of any eloquent and unscrupulous demagogue.

Semantics is the study of human interaction through communication. Communication leads sometimes to cooperation and sometimes to conflict. The basic ethical assumption of semantics, analogous to the medical assumption that health is preferable to illness, is that cooperation is preferable to conflict. This assumption, implicit in *Language in Action,* was made explicit as a central and unifying theme in *Language in Thought and Action,* an expansion of the earlier work, published in 1949 (Second Edition, 1964; Third Edition, 1972). It remains the central theme of the Fourth Edition.

The principal change in the Fourth Edition is the new material in the "Applications" at the end of each chapter. A book on semantics is not something simply to be read and put aside. Its principles, to be meaningful, must be tried out in one's own thinking and speaking and writing and behavior; they must be tested against one's own observations and experience. The "Applications" therefore have a double purpose; they offer a means whereby the reader may, in addition to reading about semantics, absorb the semanticist's point of view by undertaking actual semantic investigations and exercises. They are also a way of urging the reader not to take my word for anything that is in this book. (It is further hoped that the reader will find the "Applications" amusing. The world is fortunately full of people who say and write wonderfully preposterous things for the semanticist's notebook.)

In addition to new "Applications," examples and references throughout the text have been brought up-to-date; recent books have been added to the lists found in several of the "Applications" and to the end-of-the-book bibliography. And the book is enlivened by the semantic cartoons by my friend William H. Schneider, reprinted from his book *Danger: Men Talking.*

My deepest debt in this book is to the General Semantics ("non-

Aristotelian system") of Alfred Korzybski. I have also drawn heavily upon the works of other contributors to semantic thought, especially C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, Thorstein Veblen, Edward Sapir, Susanne Langer, Leonard Bloomfield, Karl R. Popper, Thurman Arnold, Jerome Frank, Jean Piaget, Charles Morris, Wendell Johnson, Irving J. Lee, Ernst Cassirer, Anatol Rapoport, Stuart Chase. I am also deeply indebted to the writings of numerous psychologists and psychiatrists who hold one or another of the dynamic points of view inspired by Sigmund Freud: Karl Menninger, Carl Rogers, Kurt Lewin, Abraham Maslow, Prescott Lecky, Rudolph Dreikurs, Milton Rokeach. I have also found extremely helpful the writings of cultural anthropologists, especially those of Benjamin Lee Whorf, Ruth Benedict, Clyde Kluckhohn, Leslie A. White, Margaret Mead, Dorothy Lee, Weston La Barre.

Insight into human symbolic behavior and into human interaction through symbolic mechanisms comes from all sorts of disciplines: not only from linguistics, philosophy, psychology, and cultural anthropology but from attitude research and public opinion study, from new techniques in psychotherapy, from physiology and neurology, from mathematical biology and cybernetics. 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.

Since anything approaching a full citation of sources would have made these pages unduly formidable in appearance, I have appended, in lieu of detailed documentation, a list of books (pp. 301–05) which I have found especially useful. However, none of the authors whose works I have profited by is to be held accountable for the errors or shortcomings of this book or for the liberties I have taken in the restatement, application, and modification of existing theories.

Professors Berger and Chandler of San Francisco State University have suggested revisions and provided new "Applications." I am indebted to many students; to innumerable colleagues in the teaching profession, including those who have sent in comments and those who proposed specific "Applications" and provided help with earlier editions; to business executives, training directors, and advertising people; to friends in medicine, law, labor relations, and government (especially in the diplomatic service), whose criticisms and discussions have helped me clarify and enlarge my views.

S. I. Hayakawa
United States Senate

Contents

BOOK ONE
The Functions of Language

A great deal of attention has been paid . . . to the technical languages in which men of science do their specialized thinking. . . . But the colloquial usages of everyday speech, the literary and philosophical dialects in which men do their thinking about the problems of morals, politics, religion and psychology—these have been strangely neglected. We talk about "mere matters of words" in a tone which implies that we regard words as things beneath the notice of a serious-minded person.

This is a most unfortunate attitude. For the fact is that words play an enormous part in our lives and are therefore deserving of the closest study. The old idea that words possess magical powers is false; but its falsity is the distortion of a very important truth. Words *do* have a magical effect—but not in the way that the magicians supposed, and not on the objects they were trying to influence. Words are magical in the way they affect the minds of those who use them. "A mere matter of words," we say contemptuously, forgetting that words have power to mould men's thinking, to canalize their feeling, to direct their willing and acting. Conduct and character are largely determined by the nature of the words we currently use to discuss ourselves and the world around us. ALDOUS HUXLEY, *Words and Their Meanings*

Foreword

Whenever agreement or assent is arrived at in human affairs, . . . THIS AGREEMENT IS REACHED BY LINGUISTIC PROCESSES, OR ELSE IT IS NOT REACHED.

BENJAMIN LEE WHORF

Red-Eye and the Woman Problem: A Semantic Parable

ONCE, LONG AGO, tens of thousands of years before history began, people were worried, as they have often been since, about the chaotic condition of their lives. For in those days men took by force the women they desired. There was no way of stopping them.

If you wanted a woman but found that she was already the partner of another man, all you needed to do was to kill him and drag her home. Naturally, someone else might slug you a little later to get her away from you, but that was the chance you took if you wanted a woman at all.

Consequently, there wasn't much of what you could call family life. The men were too busy suspiciously watching each other. And time that might have been spent fishing or hunting or otherwise raising the general standard of living was wasted in constant and anxious measures to defend one's woman.

Many people saw that this was no way for human beings to live. As they said among themselves: "Truly we are strange creatures. In some ways we are highly civilized. We no longer eat raw flesh, as did our savage ancestors. Our technical men have perfected stone arrowheads and powerful bows so that we can slay the fastest deer that runs. Our medicine men can foretell the running of the fish in the streams, and our sorcerers drive away illnesses. At the Institute for Advanced Studies at Notecnirp, a group of bright young men are said to be working out a dance that will make the rain fall. Little by little, we are mastering the secrets of nature, so that we are able to live like civilized men and not like beasts.

"Yet," they continued, "we have not mastered ourselves. There are those among us who continue to snatch women away from each other by force, so that every man of necessity lives in fear of his fellows. People agree, of course, that all this killing ought to be stopped. But no one is stopping it. The most fundamental of human problems, that of securing a mate and bringing up one's children under some kind of decent, orderly system, remains unsolved. Unless we can find some way