Word as a Tool for World Creation at the Turn of Pre-theoretical to Theoretical Thinking

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the awareness of the power of language in mythical culture relating pre-theoretical to theoretical thinking. Emphasis on the power of word in a myth and its identification with the essence of thing give prominence to the usage of names. The word is understood as the tool of creation and the element giving birth to the world and its order. Language for the ancient man provides both the cognitive basis and the examples of practical behavior. This paper makes the assumption that the inherent belief of the pre-theoretical thinking in the exclusive power of language to represent things determined the insight into the language as the tool for revealing the essence of world in theoretical thinking. The creative power of language became the starting point for the philosophical analysis of the relation between things and names. Philosophical thought while transforming the belief inherent to pre-theoretical thinking in exceptional powers of language into the theoretical analysis of the suitability of language for knowing, raised the problem of the relationship between the world of things and the world of language which is analyzed in philosophical theories from Plato to Wittgenstein, Popper or Feyerabend.

Keywords: pre-theoretical thinking, myth, naming, logos, word

Introduction

The works of the outstanding researchers of the myths James George Frazer, Mircea Eliade, Ernst Cassirer, Claude Levi-Strauss and others emphasize a very special role of the language in mythical thinking.

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The myth, as the historically earliest reflection of the world, proclaims awareness of the powers of language in the archaic culture and originates the insight into the word as the tool and principle of creation, from where the world and its order is born both in Christianity and in theoretical thinking.

In the myths, the ancient man, by means of the form of narration, reconstructing real developments and phenomena, symbolically expresses his relation with the world, recollects its structure, seeks to find order, links and sense. The myth characterized by the integrity of reality and its experiences, by poor differentiation of objective and subjective aspects determines the fact that things, beings and their symbols, in the first place, names are equalized. Thinking of the archaic man characterized by his belief in magic powers and "realistic nature" of language implies recognition of the active role of language in man's relation with the world, which became the starting point for the philosophical reflection of the powers of language. The developing theoretical thinking tends to transform the belief typical for the pre-theoretical knowledge in exceptional powers of language into the theoretical analysis of the suitability of language for the cognition of the essence of the world. The recognition of their correlation leads to better awareness of the first philosophical attempts to find the real names of things with the view to reveal the nature of the world, to grope the origins of the universal principles of the formation of human thought.

The Power of Word in Pre-Theoretical Thinking

The archaic mind sees language as a given reality equal by its authenticity to physical reality and even surpassing it by its importance. The world of language is as objective as the world of things, and the names are not conventions, but, rather, the equivalent of the essence of things. The name is seen as something inseparable from the object to be denominated, as something that gives it fullness and perfection.

There exists an intuitive precondition that the object consists not only of the visible corporeal part, but also of spirit which is represented by a name. Due to its name the object is perceived not only by the empirical, but also by the ideal aspect.

Cassirer (1957) defines the role of the word in pre-theoretical images very precisely and concisely, when he says:

For this first level of reflection < … > the word is not a designation and denomination or a spiritual symbol of reality; it is itself a very real part of reality. The mythical view of language < ... > characterized by this indifference of word and thing. Here the essence of every thing is contained in its name (p. 117-118).

The viewpoint of myths to the name as to the core essence of the object and its spirit gives prominence to the usage of names. The change of name in the mythical consciousness is understood as destruction of the existing object and creation of the new one. Incantation, spell, different taboo, secret speeches – all these are what the verbal magic is based on. The myths proclaim the belief that man can be affected in a good or bad manner depending on the context where his name is enounced. For example, naming the disease is seen as its invitation, because it can arrive on hearing its name. The taboo of the names of the dead is based on the fear to provoke their spirit, the boy's becoming a man is reinforced by a new name, etc. That evidently testifies unconventional conception of names, their ontological sense, because a name is recognized as a spiritual equivalent of the object. Belief in the magic power of the name forms the viewpoint that a word is valuable in itself and that the thought acquires the form of reality only by wordy expression. A word, like God or a demon, for a man is not his own creation. It is significant or essential as something objectively real. On the other hand, language is seen as a way by which human being is related to the world's order. Hussey (1982) says, that language reveals how everything occurs in the world of things (p. 56).

Pre-theoretical mind relates the word with the divine creation. Almost in all religions the word is understood as God's tool for creation due to which everything occurs. The Demiurge power creating the Universe from separate elements is materialized in the word. In all archaic cultures naming is equal to the act of creation, and the giver of a name is also the creator of the world. All being acquires subsistence and beginning from God's word.

It determines order within which man and Universe exist and act. Eliade (1990) describes cosmogonic Polynesian myth, according to which, the highest God by the power of his words separated waters, created Heaven and Earth. Thanks to these words the world started to exist. Naturally, they are not simple words. They bear a sacred power.

Similarly, in Hindu religion or Egyptian mythology the highest entity from which Universe evolves is equalized to language (word). In the Veda books the word regulates and governs every motion of the Nature. Wilson (1977) writes about Egyptian mythology in which God of Wisdom takes care of word, language, measure, number, i.e., all knowledge which illustrates the ancient man's awareness of their interrelation. The idea of creative power of the word was taken over by Christianity. St. John's Gospel (2013) says:

At the beginning of time the Word already was; and God had the Word abiding with him, and the Word was God. He abode, at the beginning of time, with God. It was through him that all things came into being, and without him came nothing that has come to be. In him there was life, and that life was the light of men (1 – 4).

The ancient man bases his creativity on the analogy with the divine creation. He utters the sacral words. The words with which God modeled the Universe are pronounced seeking to cure disabilities, to ease the heart or to give inspiration for victorious deeds. The man in some sense tends to repeat the main fact, i.e. creation of the world, archetypical gesture of God the Creator. That act of creation is related to language, rather than to the physical act. It is word that is acknowledged as the instrument of creation and the beginning of everything. Everything surrenders to its power, naturally, he who is in control of the word governs the world.

Language of the myth as the Earliest Reconstruction of the World

Considering the myth as knowledge conveyed in the form of symbols we encounter the language of the myth. Language, however, is not only a component of the myth. They both are in a direct relationship. Even the myth itself can be defined as a language of a certain type which symbolically creates the world.

Language does not develop from material nature of the world; however, the word in the myth is actualized. It is perceived as part of reality, as something inseparable from the denominated object, as its inherent part capable of substituting or representing an object or a being which otherwise are superior to human mind.

The myth hides a new power, i.e. logos. Mythic thinking intuitively envisaged that thought acquired reality only in a word, expressing it by word and granting it the feature of individuality.

So, words which denominate something are not accidental; they have a specific meaning and express a specific value. The myth as a specific projection of the human mind symbolically reconstructs the world, governs its elements and creates the whole from them. The archaic consciousness has a specific strategy of the realization of the world embodied by complicated operations of thinking. Mythical thinking is no less demanding than theoretical thinking. A 'story' retold in a myth is not a simple fantasy, but, rather, a kind of knowledge representing the analysis and conclusions of events. That knowledge is subject to deciphering in a way used for mathematical or physical symbols. As soon as the myth occurs beyond the magic practice seeking specific results, e.g. to call rain, or hunting catch, etc., it becomes a model of cognition. It is mythology that consolidates the available wisdom, the gained experience, the perceived meanings, i.e., things of undoubted importance in the societies with no writing or archives.

With the forming of writing, mythic consciousness perceives characters as sacral signs which turn into a tool important not only by its material or formal shape, but also by power to deliver knowledge. Inner development of writing from material pictures towards more universal symbols, deviating from the principles of imagery and similarity to the object, expanded the opportunity to embody abstract thought which gradually transforms word into the sign of concept. Even though the anthropomorphic language of the myth is a language of 'proper names', where a proper name is a general name of a thing, it expresses what today is understood as abstract categories.

The main thing is that while being 'language of proper names', on the one hand, the myth allowed representing concrete objects or beings; on the other hand, those names represented abstract concepts and created opportunities for the primitive people to accumulate knowledge, systemize it in different areas and construct models of the united world. Myths illustrate the need of the human mind to conceptualize the aspects of Universe and by them to reconstruct the world.

In that respect the myth can be acknowledged as 'primeval science' the study of which helps to better understand the diversity of human thinking. Such attitude is maintained not only by the researchers of myths, but also by modern physicists who do not establish a strict dividing line between theoretical and pre-theoretical thinking.

Recognition of the conditional character of division between scientific and pre-scientific thought leads to the supposition that a human was always thinking rightly, and that levels of theoretical and pre-theoretical thinking are based on the same universal principles of thought formation. According to Levi-Strauss (1996), the logic of mythical thinking is equally demanding as that on which theoretical thinking is based. The author is led by the provision that changes occur not in the very thinking, but, rather, in the world, and the difference between theoretical knowledge and the myth is determined not so much by the quality of intellectual operations, but, rather, by the nature of things which are the object of these operations. It would be the same as to compare a stone axe and an iron axe. The latter is better not because it was better made. The core difference lies in the material from which they are made (p. 75).

Cognition which started with the myth gradually passes over to the level of theory. Not only the researchers of myths, but also some other scientists, including Einstein (1999), the outstanding physicist, father of the theory of relativity, maintain the idea that scientific thinking is a continuation of pre-scientific thinking (p. 253). At the time of the early history man started looking for general principles to be able to make use of natural phenomena. The imagination of myth creator intuitively anticipated what later was going to be cognized and named scientifically. It can be said that mythical thinking can be considered paradoxical, however, by no means primitive. Lotman and Uspenskii (2004) pointed out parallelism between the mythical thinking and the conventional logical thinking functions.

Worsley (1967) emphasized the ability of the Australian aborigines to systemize concepts referring to abstract features, to establish equivalence and analogies, which demonstrates evident ability of conceptual thinking. Myth researchers develop the origins of the universal principles of the formation of human thought.

Transformation from the Magic Powers of the Word into the Philosophical Search for "Real Names"

The belief of the archaic mind in exceptional powers of the word gave the impetus for the philosophical reflection of the relation of the word and thing denominated by it. In that reflection direct relation of the word and the object inherent to mythical thinking is broken by inserting thought between them while perceiving their unity.

That can be envisaged in the early conception of *'logos'* as the principle of reality and its cognition, which illustrates the transition from mythical image of the world to its philosophical idea. According to Cassirer (1957),

The world is no longer the plaything of demonic powers who govern it according to their whim and fancy, but is subject to a universal rule which binds together every particular reality and event and assigns to them their unchanging measure. <...> And it is this one intrinsically immutable law of the cosmos which is expressed in the world of nature as in the world of language, in different form yet intrinsically the same (p. 119).

The concept of *'logos'* is interpreted as the one covering language and what it says about reality as well as reality itself. It is also related to mythical viewpoint of the creative power of word. The perception of the unity of reality is based on the power of the word. In philosophy of Heraclitus (1995) *'logos'* presents identity between general background of reality and the principle of its cognition. It expresses the power of reality to reveal itself through thinking and language and to emphasize the essence of the whole by means of language. Envisaging the constant given in the words, i.e. the concept, it was realized that knowing expressed by language is not an introspective activity, that, when thought is expressed by language something objective occurs which does not allow deviation of thinking to any other direction at any time.

Starting to think from some point the sequence of thinking is already determined. This occurs due to the regularities of language and forming the thought. That fact, undoubtedly important for further development of the conception of language, enabled philosophy to raise the question about the power of language to reveal the essence of the world phenomena.

In Plato's works *'logos'* treated as thought expressed by language, in other words, as a pronounced thought, expands and deepens the old concept of *'logos'*. Language for him is important as a form allowing us to observe and study what is not accessible to immediate observation, however, important for philosophical reflection, i.e., thought. Acknowledging the identity of the whole of knowing or mind to the whole of language, Plato raises the question whether language can be the cognition instrument expressing the essence of things.

The philosophy of Plato is characterized by the separation between being and the reality of things, rationally cognized and sensually perceived aspects.

Due to perception of the qualitative difference between being and becoming objects and the conviction that it is not possible to cognize something that cannot be embodied in language, philosopher relates the question about what we can cognize to how much language is able to help reason in the cognition process. Relating cognition act with denomination, Plato considers language a tool for cognition. We read in Plato's *Cratylus* (1996) that who knows names knows things and who has discovered names discovers whose names these are (p. 217). While being *'logos'*, the word is not only an arbitrary sign. It provides the opportunity to relate the changing thing to its constant essence. By clarifying whether it is possible to cognize the essence as the models of things and the actual cognition object by language, Plato also raises a question about what cognition of essence can tell about things as the reflections of their essence. According to Popper (1998), "what [Plato] was looking for was knowledge … the purely rational knowledge of the world that does not change; but at the same time, knowledge that could be used to investigate this changing world …" (p. 23). This implies the importance of active cognitive role of language in theoretical thinking.

Plato expresses his belief that cognition acts and thought cannot be studied apart from language. When studying language we recognize thought. We can understand the thinking content as much as it is engraved in language.

The philosopher, while analyzing language in different dialogues *Parmenides, Theatetus, Timaeus, Sophist* and, specifically, *Cratylus,* revealed the generality of the names of things and of the names of their essence, thus showing the possibility to denominate things by the names of their essence. This provided the opportunity to apply the cognition of essences for the changing world of things, i.e. to recognize language as the tool for cognition of the world and seek to find 'real names', i.e. forms which could by themselves express the structures of the world and thinking and reveal the nature of the world. But Plato refused mythological understanding of the identity between a thing and a word and raised the problem of their relationship which is relevant for different language study programs.

Conclusions

Enormous attention paid to the name and to the divine creative power of language in mythical thinking shows awareness of the importance of language and its 'realistic nature' in the archaic cultures.

The magic power of the word to create and change the world implies the insight into the active role of language in the relation of man and the world.

The study of myths leads to the discovery of the universal principles of formation of human thought and historical origins of the awareness of the power of language.

At the turn of pre-theoretical to theoretical thinking the transition from the awareness of the power of language to the philosophical reflection of the role of language occurs. Philosophical thought transforms the inherent belief of pre-theoretical knowing in the exceptional powers of language into the theoretical analysis of the cognitive role of language and raises the problem of the relationship between the world of things and the world of language which is analyzed in philosophical theories from Plato to Wittgenstein, Popper or Feyerabend.

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