This morning Bob Pula introduced us to the general semantics formulation called the semantic reaction. This stimulus triggered some responses in me and raised some questions. I would like to spend the next ten minutes first reviewing and adding to Bob's explication and then sharing with you the questions raised for me. I hope that this process will stimulate you to further consider the complexities of what we are grappling with.

Bob defined semantic reaction as a consistently non-elementalistic way to represent the total response of an organism-as-a-whole-in-an-environment to some stimulus, not separating the so-called 'mental'-'physical'-'intellectual'-'emotional', etc., 'elements'.

This orientation is non-elementalistic in that it emphasizes joining what we have split off by using such elementalistic terms as 'thoughts', 'feelings', 'head', 'gut', etc. Our reactions occur as-a-whole at the event-object-verbal levels of abstracting.

Semantic reactions occur continuously -- we cannot not react. Sometimes they seem to occur very rapidly -- what we call signal reactions. For example, I become immediately anxious when presented with the task of making a presentation about semantic reactions. Sometimes our responses are delayed -- what we call symbol reactions. I pause and remember that this presentation is to be a learning experience in a supportive environment and respond with concern rather than anxiety.

Our signal-to-symbol ways of reacting occur on a continuum and grow out of our past experiences; our past, stored semantic reactions. Reactions on the signal 'end' of the continuum can be thought of as conditioned -- reactions based on past experiences without consideration of what is new in this stimulus situation. In school my speeches were severely criticized; hence I become immediately anxious when required to speak.

*Presented as an 'exercise' at the 1984 Training-Workshop for Teachers of General Semantics. I thought the explication a model of clarity, asked Dr. Presby's permission to print it, and present it herewith. Ed.
Reactions on the symbol 'end' of the continuum can be thought of as conditional -- delay allows us to consider what is different in this situation. Here I'm among friends interested in my development as a speaker. I am not back at school.

Now that I've described these aspects of semantic reactions, I'd like to circle back over what I've said and pick up some aspects which concern me.

Bob has mentioned the importance of differentiation in relation to integration. Semantic reaction is a term of integration (note the "total" in the definition). I think that differentiating terms are not only in common usage but are important in our self-understanding, understanding of others, and as aids in changing. One question then is, "How can we best differentiate aspects of our semantic reactions without losing our integrative orientation?"

Right now it seems to be most helpful to develop as many differentiating words as we can to describe, evaluate, etc., our reactions. I think that an increased vocabulary could have what might seem a paradoxical effect of leading to an increased appreciation for our meanings related to total integrated responses. For example, Charlotte Read leads us in experiencing at the silent level, focusing on ourselves as organisms-as-a-whole-in-an-environment. She then leads us in describing that integrative experience. I think that the more completely and accurately we can describe the experience, the more our nervous systems will comprehend the complexity and interrelatedness of what we have experienced.

I invite you to work on noting as many descriptors as you can for your reactions, to experiment with detailed descriptions and to let me know how you find this.

I think it's important to emphasize the on-goingness of semantic reactions.

As Rachel Lauer demonstrated this morning in her presentation about sequencing, where a stimulus begins and ends is arbitrarily selected. We say a semantic reaction is a response to some stimulus. This raises the question for me of how we can best represent that we are breaking into a sequence of events and are stopping at some arbitrary point when we think about and describe what we call a semantic reaction.

One suggestion I have is to surround our hyphenated descriptions of what is going on with three dots before and after. For example:

... assumptions about speaking situations-shaky hands-anxiety ...
... 'thinking' -- 'behaving' -- 'feeling' ...

These dots may also help to remind us that our responses are based on prior experiences and reactions and in turn become part of our basis for future responding.

Please note that in writing summary words ('thinking', 'behaving', 'feeling') for my description, I used the verb forms. I think that this kind of representation also is important in helping us to get the process character of our semantic reactions into our awareness.

To summarize, I've raised some questions about how best to 'think' about and represent some aspects of semantic reactions -- differentiating within total responses, sequencing of responses, noting the process nature of responses.

While I hope you don't get a headache as I did this afternoon, I hope you will also grapple with these and other complex issues about semantic reactions.

**BIOGRAPHY**

Susan Presby is a psychologist in private practice in New York City. She has for several years been associated with Albert Ellis's Institute for Rational-Emotive Therapy (Staff Therapist and Supervisor).

Assistant Editor of the Bulletin, this is her second paper herein. Dr. Presby also contributed to G.G.B. 50 (General Semantics Views by Harold L. Drake), pp. 184-185.
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