

Appendices

A. W's explications and scripts

Extracted from (Wierzbicka 2013a: 14-17):

disharmonic I think about these people like this:

‘they are not people of the same kind
they are like two people are if one of them is the father of the other one,
they are like two people are if one of them is the mother of the other one’

harmonic I think about these people like this:

‘they are people of the same kind
they are like two people are if the father of one of them is the father of the other one,
they are like two people are if the mother of one of them is the mother of the other one’

[A] A CULTURAL SCRIPT FOR THINKING ABOUT PEOPLE AS TWO PARTS OF ONE BIG SOMETHING

people know that people can think like this:

‘people here are like one big something, this something has two parts
many people are part of one of these two parts, these people are people of one kind
many other people are part of the other of these two parts, these people are people of another kind’

[B] A CULTURAL SCRIPT FOR THINKING ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE IN TWO WAYS

people know that everyone can think about other people in two ways
they can think about some people like this: ‘I am someone of one kind, these people are people of the same kind’
they can think about some other people like this: ‘I am someone of one kind, these people are not people of the same kind’

[C] A CULTURAL SCRIPT FOR IDENTIFYING WITH MANY OTHER PEOPLE

people know that everyone can think like this about many other people:

‘I am someone of one kind, this is someone of the same kind’

[D] A CULTURAL SCRIPT FOR IDENTIFYING WITH PEOPLE WHO SHARE ONE’S MOTHER AND FATHER

people know that someone can think like this about someone else if it is like this:

this someone’s father is this other someone’s father,

this someone’s mother is this other someone’s mother

[E] A CULTURAL SCRIPT FOR CONTRASTING ONESELF WITH ONE’S MOTHER AND FATHER

people know that it is like this:

someone can’t think like this about someone else if one of them is the father of the other one

someone can’t think like this about someone else if one of them is the mother of this other someone

[F] A CULTURAL SCRIPT FOR IDENTIFYING ONESELF WITH PEOPLE WITH WHOM ONE’S FATHER AND MOTHER CAN’T IDENTIFY

people know that it is like this:

someone can think like this about someone else if this someone’s father can’t think like this about this other someone

someone can think like this about someone else if this someone’s mother can’t think like this about this other someone

[G] A CULTURAL SCRIPT FOR CONTRASTING ONESELF WITH PEOPLE WITH WHOM ONE’S FATHER AND MOTHER CAN IDENTIFY

people know that it is like this:

someone can’t think like this about someone else if this someone’s father can think like this about this other someone

someone can’t think like this about someone else if this someone’s mother can think like this about this other someone

[H] A CULTURAL SCRIPT FOR MUTUAL IDENTIFICATION WITH OTHERS

people know that it is like this:

if someone can think like this about someone else, then this other someone can think like this about this someone

if someone can't think like this about someone else then this other someone can't think like this about this someone

B. Further criticism of Wierzbicka (2013a)

I have a couple of other criticisms of points in W's paper, independent of the discussion of *(dis)harmonic*. They are to do with the arguments W advances for the NSM approach, but do not vitiate the logic of her main argument.

B.1 IPA analogy

W promotes a misapprehension of the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet), and draws a false analogy with NSM.

The analogy between NSM and the IPA is far from perfect, if only because the latter is, to some extent, arbitrary (there could be alternative systems of transcription), whereas NSM, which is the result of empirical cross-linguistic investigations, is not. Thus, the key difference is that the IPA was invented whereas NSM was gradually discovered (W: 3)

However, the articulatory distinctions encoded in the IPA are precisely 'the result of empirical cross-linguistic investigations'. The IPA justifies each distinctive symbol by a phonological opposition known to operate in some natural language, and characterises it in well-founded anatomical terms. The arbitrariness in the IPA is within the form of the symbols (or letters) chosen to represent each articulatory combination (and in aspects of the IPA chart's presentation). It would be just as misguided to claim that NSM is arbitrary because W presents the proposed primes in a certain order and by way of recognisable words of English (arbitrarily chosen from all possible languages) in the arbitrary English orthography.

B.2 Imperfection and the appeal to Leibniz

W has long promoted NSM as the apotheosis of logical language dreamt of by Leibniz and others, but I think this characterisation misses the mark. One aspect of the discrepancy is where W invokes Leibniz to support her view that ‘the effectiveness of NSM ... does not depend on its perfection or even on the absolute universality of the primes’ and for support invokes ‘Leibniz, who wrote of his projected universal language’:

Although this language depends on true philosophy, it does not depend on its perfection. That is to say, this language can be established even if the philosophy is not perfect: as our knowledge grows, this language will also grow. In the meantime, it can marvelously help us to use what we do know, to see what is lacking, and to invent the means for getting there, and especially to resolve controversies in matters which depend on reasoning. (W: 5)

This passage is a note written in French by Leibniz on a copy of Descartes’ letter to Mersenne (Leibniz & Couturat 1903: 27-28). With this translation compare that of Rossi (2006: 174-5) of the whole passage:

Although this language depends on true philosophy, it does not depend on its perfection. Let me just say this: this language can be constructed despite the fact that philosophy is not perfect. The language will develop as scientific knowledge develops. While we are waiting, it will be a miraculous aid: to help us understand what we already know, and to describe what we do not know, and to help us to find the means to obtain it, but above all it will help us to eliminate the controversial arguments which depend on reason, because once we have realised this language, calculating and reasoning will be the same thing.

The second sentence differs; compare also the paraphrase of this second sentence in Cohen (2002: 4):

It could be established while philosophy was yet imperfect and grow as knowledge grew

As clarified by Rossi’s (2006: 173-5) discussion, Leibniz here meant by ‘philosophy’ what Descartes meant: an encyclopaedic structuring of human knowledge (including what we might call ontology), separate from the (constructed, logical) language used to describe it. W employs the quotation to suggest Leibniz was talking about imperfection in the universal (logical) language,

but actually Leibniz (and Descartes) are not, they were considering imperfection in philosophy: ‘C’est à dire cette langue peut être établie, quoyque la philosophie ne soit pas parfaite’ (Leibniz & Couturat 1903: 28). Though of course, the kind of universal language envisaged in the times of Leibniz and Descartes was rather different from NSM (as shown by Leibniz’s final clause (in the Rossi (2006: 174-5) translation, omitted by W).

In W’s translation ‘the philosophy’ (in ‘this language can be established even if the philosophy is not perfect’) is easily taken, in the context W provides, to be something like ‘the philosophy of the [ideal] language’ but it is clear from the wider context that that was not what Leibniz meant.

Whether or not Leibniz has been validly invoked, W’s statement is in any case open to the challenge from Riemer (2006: 374-6):

the only attitude to disconfirming evidence which NSM can afford to adopt is that later research will allow apparent disconfirmations of the theory to be brought under its scope and that, as a result, the theory can maintain its claim that the existing primitives underlie all meaning. ... *any* degree of final acknowledged empirical failure should be enough to stimulate a revision of its theoretical claims (though not necessarily of its practice). ... If the value of the primes is that they underlie all meaning, the theory cannot afford to restrict them to only that subset of meaning for which they actually work.