D. DAVID BOURLAND, JR.*   ***E-PRIME AND UN-SANITY***

1. Introduction

I WANT TO EXPRESS my appreciation to Jeremy Klein, Paul Johnston, and the Board of Directors of the International Society for General Semantics for seeing fit to devote this issue of *Et cetera* largely to discussions of E-Prime. The dozen or so papers provide interesting insights into the semantic reactions of people who have concern for these matters. On the other hand, as I read some of the papers I started wondering, "Whatever happened to the peer review committee?" In the early 1980's, while serving as The American Legion Commander for the Department of Panama Canal (which encompasses the countries of Central America), I came to know the fine U. S. Ambassador to Panama, the Hon. Ambler Moss. Once, he told me of a strange experience he had during a Communist-sponsored riot which featured a horde of people throwing rocks and ink bottles at the U. S. Embassy, screaming his name and suggesting that he go elsewhere. I

had a somewhat similar feeling while reading some of the contributions to this issue, particularly Dr. Theresa Parkinson's offering.

Table I gives an "Agony Matrix" that summarizes my opinion of the problems ten contributors exhibited in their papers. I have no real quarrel with the positions described by Dallmann (save as noted in Section 2.b), Hautala, Johnson, Stewart, or Thompsen/Ahn. They stated their view in usually admirable ways. Following the material of Table I, I will comment more or less at length on Problems 2 ("Nervously Clinging to Various Uses of 'to be' ") and 4 ("Unclear on the Purposes of E-Prime"), plus the papers by French, Gozzi, and Parkinson. But first, allow me to give a few brief comments on other, minor matters. I congratulate Earl Hautala, Andrea Johnson, and Dr. Theresa Parkinson for writing their contributions in E-Prime. I hope that they each continue to exercise their E-Prime abilities.

Earl Hautala offered a quotation attributed to Einstein that snarled at *Science and Sanity*. I doubt that Einstein said, "That crazy book?" I would like to know the supposed source of that quote. We all know that a huge number of apocryphal anecdotes cluster about that great scientist.

Wanderer stated, "I see Bourland at his weakest when he attempts to deal with Korzybski's "Whatever you say a thing is, well, it is *not*; for the word is not the thing." Odd. I always have regarded myself at my weakest when attempting to squat with 210 kilos (= 464 lbs.) despite age, heart problems, iatrogenic arthritis of the knee, and tendonitis. If Bob Wanderer likes the cited slogan, fine. However, I reject his characterizing reference to the Structural Differential as a "cop-out." Do we want simply to amaze the unwashed, or to try to train people in better evaluations?

2. Two Outstanding Problems with Understanding E-Prime

When a large proportion of so distinguished a group of (supposedly) general semantics cognoscenti have difficulty with certain aspects of E-Prime, it certainly gives me pause. Although both matters have received extensive treatment in various places, let us do them all over again.

TABLE I
AGONY MATRIX

PROBLEMS

AUTHOR	1	2	3	4	5
Dallmann		x			x
French	x	x	x	x	
Gozzi	x	x	x	x	
Hautala					
Johnson					
Kenyon	x	x		x	
Parkinson			x	x	x
Stewart	x				
Thompsen	x				
Wanderer	x	x		x	

Problems:

1 = Paper not written in E-Prime

2 = Nervously clinging to various uses of "to be"

3 = Redefinition of general semantics, Korzybski's position

4 = Unclear on the purposes of E-Prime

5 = Confusing title

TABLE II
FRAGMENT OF A GENERATIVE GRAMMAR OF ENGLISH

1. S->(T) (Loc) NP + VP

2. NP->
   (Det) $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} S \\ N\ (AP) \\ Pro \end{array} \right\}$

3. VP-> (Modal) (Asp) Tense (Intens) V

4. V->
$$\left\{ \begin{array}{lll} V_1 & [intrans] & (Prep\ P) \\ V_2 & [trans] & +\ NP \\ V_3 & [linking] & \left\{ \begin{array}{l} NP \\ AP \end{array} \right\} \\ \\ V_4 & [to\ be] & \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \emptyset \\ NP \\ AP \\ VP \end{array} \right\} \end{array} \right\}$$

.
.
.

Where
S = Sentence
T = Time expression (e.g., today)
Loc = Location (e.g., in Peoria)
NP = Noun Phrase
VP = Verb Phrase
Det = Determiner
N = Noun
Pro = Pronoun

Prep P = Prepositional Phrase
AP = Adjective Phrase
Modal = might, could, ...
Asp = Aspect
Tense = ± Present
Intens = Intensifier
Parentheses = optional selection
Curly brackets = "select one"

215

a. *Uses of "to be"*

The Oxford English Dictionary (in both editions) notes five uses of "to be":

I. *Absolutely*, including to exist or occur in the world of fact (as they put it); II. *Where* or *how* (location); III. *Copula* with adjective, substantive, or adjective phrase; IV. *Auxiliary* with participles and infinitives, which includes most of the passive voice; and V. *Phraseological Combinations* which covers "to be about to," and other, mainly archaic, constructions.

All the writers listed in Table I, except Dr. Parkinson, seem to understand the epistemological reasons for avoiding Uses III and IV. As a reminder I cite the basic recruiting call for E-Prime:

> The subject-predicate form, the "is" of identity, and the ele-mentalism of the Aristotelian system are perhaps the main semantic factors in need of revision, as they are found to be the foundation of insufficiency of this system and represent the mechanism of semantic disturbances, making general adjustment and sanity impossible. (1, p. 371)

Material written by such leading exponents of general se-mantics as Korzybski himself, Wendell Johnson, J. S. Bois, and Allen Walker Read all employed Uses III and IV of "to be," even while inveighing against Use III. In my experience, only those shifting to E-Prime have managed to avoid Uses III and IV, *at the price of giving up Uses I, II, and V.* I submit that when we write about serious matters we rarely, if ever, need Uses I, II, and V.

Speaking brings other problems, for we obviously do not just speak about weighty subjects. At first I tried to speak mainly in E-Prime, but to allow myself the standard social formulas that require Uses I and II: "I am David Bourland," "Today is Saturday," "Where is the book?" etc., with the intent of trying to keep from sounding like a nut case. Then, as I continued to have trouble with spoken fluency in E-Prime, I eventually came to suspect that the difficulty came from my "Social Is-iness." Upon stopping *any* use of "to be," I became gradually more fluent in spoken E-Prime. I admit that I sometimes still use odd constructions, but ever more rarely.

The parallel between the adverse effect of Social Is-iness and the effect of Social Drinking on struggling alcoholics seems inescapable.

To sum up, if *you* can stop employing Uses III and IV while allowing yourself I, II, and V, go ahead. I doubt that you can, for reasons of neural Darwinism, as extensively studied and reported by Edelman. (2, 3, 4)

b. Purposes of E-Prime

By (i) removing the forms of "to be" from the lexicon and, perhaps more importantly (ii) deleting the verb "to be" from the grammar, we produce a subset of English. This subset has the properties of the complete elimination of the "is" of identity and "is" of predication, plus making the passive voice rather awkward. These amount to significant contributions, but obviously do not solve *all* the problems of identification, confusion in orders of abstraction, etc. In addition, E-Prime removes the most frequently used static verb in English, a verb that can only give a snap-shot description of the flow of events in a dynamic world. This constitutes, for me at least, the fatal flaw in Dr. Dallmann's E-Prime$_{mod}$.

3. Reply to French

In his Arguments 10 and 9 French seems annoyed that anyone would find writing in a subset of English somehow an improvement over using the whole set. I suppose he cannot understand that the verb "to be" can seduce us into undesirable patterns of speech and writing. Too bad. This amounts to a mere matter of opinion. He can pursue it, if he wishes, with people who teach writing — Elaine Johnson, Dr. Ruth Ralph, Andrea Johnson — or, for that matter, with Cullen Murphy of *The Atlantic* or free-lance writer Debra Ryll. I suspect that the French paper might have had a higher quality had he written it in E-Prime.

Arguments 8 and 7 discuss trivial examples of "How to Live with Use III" (in the case of 8), and "But I Need These Acceptable Statements" (in the case of 7). Check the comments on static verbs above.

With regard to Arguments 6 and 5, French evidently does not understand that huge amounts of identity statements do

in fact involve "to be," with deleterious effects on humans. Dr. Albert Ellis has provided us with extensive support — clinical support, mind you — along these lines. See his Korzybski Memorial Address, delivered last November, or references (5) and (6).

Argument 4 refers to French's unhappiness with assertions (not just assumptions) that one can more easily eliminate "to be" from the language than avoid the "is" of identity and "is" of predication otherwise. These assertions have the support of the testimony and experience of various general semanticists. Incidentally, French would do better to confine himself to the semantic problems of his native language, rather than speculating about the problems of Spanish-speakers.

Concerning Argument 3, may I remind French that "=" translates, in English, to "equals." As I have mentioned before, I suspect that teachers who drill very young students to say "4 plus 2 *is* 6" set up a potential problem for some of them when they reach fractions. After all, even the slowest student can see that "2/4" *is not* "1/2." Of *course*, mathematical hot-shots like French and Bourland had no trouble along those lines, but what of the others?

The basis of Argument 2 consists of "E-Prime tends to make the expression of higher orders of abstraction more difficult." Although, when writing in E-Prime, one does tend to *start out* with the usually less-judgmental lower orders of abstraction, E-Prime simply does not impede the time-binding activities involved in constructing higher order abstractions. See the last paper in reference (7) for a reasonable example ("A Non-Aristotelian Paradigm for Linguistics").

I have, from the beginning, seen E-Prime as a potential addition to Korzybski's extensional devices. Experience over the years, by me and a number of others, as given in reference (7), confirms that view. In his supposed Argument 1, French demonstrates the shallowness of his opinions on E-Prime, despite the illusion of depth on the surface. "The first question we should ask of a principle or practice of general semantics is whether or not it fits the facts and the other formulations of the system, not whether or not it is expedient," said French. Well, check the quotation given above in Section 2 from page 371 of *Science and Sanity*, French. What

word or words there do you not understand? And where did you get that nonsense about "expedient"?

4. Reply to Gozzi

Why should metaphor disappear in E-Prime? My copy of Webster's Unabridged Dictionary explains that term in the following way: "A figure of speech denoting by a word or phrase usually one kind of object or idea in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them (as in *the ship plows the sea* or in *a volley of oaths*)..." Neither the definition nor the examples involve what Prof. Gozzi facetiously calls "the dreaded 'is's' of identity and predication." On the surface level. Of course, lacking a precise definition of any other level or levels, we can only address ourselves rationally to the surface level. It seems unfortunate to me that Prof. Gozzi turned to philosophy, rather than to linguistics, in defense of his theory (actually, more of an assertion than a theory) concerning the inevitability of the verb "to be" in underlying ("subterranean") structures of language. I say unfortunate, for little remains today of the once-proud field of ontology outside of phenomenology. My colleague, Dr. E. W. Kellogg, III, may enjoy debating this issue and the interactions of E-Prime and phenomenology.

A properly trained child, if you will pardon the near-oxymoron, would ask, "What do we call this?" And then Mommy or Daddy would reply, "(We call it) a personal computer," with no magic involved. Sorry, Prof. Gozzi: "with every name we will find a subterranean homesick 'is' " only as a consequence of Aristotelian assumptions from philosophy or, for that matter, linguistics. Assumptions always false to facts.

E-Prime involves more than just fiddling with the lexicon. It also has powerful syntactic consequences. A discussion of this point requires the careful statement of what one *means* by English syntax. Table II contains a beginning fragment of a generative grammar of English, inspired by reference (8), to illustrate where and how the verb "to be" enters the picture, and what remains when we make the E-Prime choice.

Table II shows explicitly a part of what some linguists consider the basis for a "deep structure." When we remove "to be," (V4 in Table II), we have pruned a high-level rule that

reverberates throughout the language. To a certain extent the linking verbs can fill many of the roles played by "to be" in standard English — and improve the quality of the resulting statements at that. Some of the linking verbs (particularly "to seem" and "to appear") tend to become overworked in one's early days with E-Prime. Unfortunately, they can preserve in large part the "to be" sentence pattern. Consider these examples:

(1) Jack is a jerk.
(2) Jack seems (like) a jerk.
(3) Jack acts like a jerk.
(4) I have seen Jack act like a jerk on three occasions.

While I would prefer (2) to (1), as having become less pompous and allowing for some degree of error on the part of the speaker, only (4) really tells us something potentially useful about the speaker-Jack interaction.

I certainly agree with Prof. Gozzi that naming consists of "one of the primary acts of language," but the "is" of identity or predication does not function as the "core of naming." One cannot deny that theories exist that proclaim such a circumstance, but those theories have little to do with the world as described by the physics of this century. A whole field exists that has bearing on these important issues. We call it "general semantics." Prof. Gozzi, please see reference (1).

We hear from Prof. Gozzi that, "The verb 'to be,' in fact, must be larger than anyone, except a few philosophers, suspects." On the contrary, this verb portrays a static relationship that has no place in the semantic reactions of people trying to come to grips with a dynamic, ever-changing world. And those alleged "few philosophers" should probably seek counselling and not operate any heavy machinery.

I would like to thank Prof. Gozzi for reminding me of the rightful place the "abstraction ladder" has in the theory I call "Lieutenant Semantics." See references (9) and (10). I will certainly make use of this insight in the future. Prof. Gozzi would do better, in my opinion, to proceed from focussing on what he calls Korzybski's "maxim" of the map-territory relation to a study of the non-Aristotelian premises and their

consequences. I also suggest that he hop off the "abstraction ladder" and study the Structural Differential carefully. (Reference (1, p. 386ff).)

I regret that I no longer teach a course in general semantics. I did so for almost ten years, using reference (11) as the text. For you active teachers out there, Prof. Gozzi has presented you with a great exam quotation in his closing remark: "No matter if the underlying ontology of the language is constructed out of the variations of the verb 'to be': there is no escaping being." Have the students comment on *that* statement from a non-Aristotelian point of view!

5. Reply to Parkinson

I feel sure that Paul Johnston joins me in thanking Dr. Parkinson for lumping us together in the same state of ignorance as Korzybski in her first three paragraphs. How could I hope that she would understand E-Prime, when she has expended so much energy making up nonsense and attributing it to Korzybski? Item: (when summarizing Korzybski's alleged false identifications comparing bridges, treaties, etc.) "What applies to physical nature does not necessarily apply to human nature." Whoever said it did? Certainly not Korzybski. Nor I, for that matter. Item: "Contrary to Korzybski's opinion, morality and reason do not necessarily walk hand in hand." Whoever said they did? Certainly not Korzybski. Nor I, for that matter. Given that Dr. Parkinson does not understand time-binding and has no hesitancy in accusing Korzybski of ridiculous positions he did not espouse, why should anyone expect her to understand E-Prime? Yes, she used it in her paper, and did so very well. She probably also uses her TV: does she understand how the electrons do what they do in it? I call her understanding of E-Prime into question due to the following surprising statement: "What a choice example of E-Prime the following Biblical passage offers: 'The fool hath said in his heart: "There is no God." ' (Psalms 14:1)." In my heart I say: that does not give much of an example of E-Prime (see Section 2.b if necessary).

Dr. Parkinson further shows a certain amount of reading incapacity when she says:

If, then, "the *technique* of E-Prime does in no way guaran-
tee...reducing dishonesty and prejudice (prejudging) in our
communications," if "E-Prime does not cure or resolve all lin-
guistic and behavioral problems," if "the intention of the in-
dividual involved plays the predominant role," if the present
writer can write this little critique of E-Prime in E-Prime,
what can David Bourland mean when he states that "E-
Prime provides a simple discipline that does work"? (See
Parkinson's paper for references cited.)

If you check that last statement, attributed to me, you will
find that it refers to "Piecemeal attempts to avoid the undesir-
able uses of 'to be' (that) simply have not worked" (7, p. 106).
In this paper I have called them Use III. Do you deny that
E-Prime prevents problems with Use III, Parkinson?

If the reader has not already done so, I invite him or her to
review Dr. Parkinson's last three paragraphs. Rarely does
one encounter such a parade of tired cliches that whine over
the distance between activities on the objective level and
those on the symbolic level. I fail to see, however, how Dr.
Parkinson could have omitted comparing E-Prime to re-
arranging the deck chairs just before the *Titanic* went down.
In closing, let me say that perhaps the most amusing aspect
of Dr. Parkinson's paper consists of its title. She certainly
never got *to* E-Prime; how could she possibly think that her
temper tantrum had anything to do with "*Beyond* E-Prime"?

REFERENCES

1. Korzybski, Alfred. *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-
   Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*. Lakeville, Conn.: Interna-
   tional Non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Co. 1933. Fourth edition,
   1958.
2. Edelman, G. M. "Group Selection as the Basis for Higher Brain Func-
   tion," in F. O. Schmitt, F. G. Worden, and S. G. Dennis (eds.), *The Orga-
   nization of the Cerebral Cortex: Proceedings of a Neurosciences Research
   Program Colloquium*, pp. 535-563. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. 1981.
3. Edelman, G. M. "Neural Darwinism: Population Thinking and Higher
   Brain Function," M. Shaftto (ed.), *How We Know: Nobel Conference XX*,
   pp.1-30. San Francisco: Harper & Row. 1985.

4. Edelman, G. M. *Neural Darwinism: The Theory of Neuronal Selection.* New York: Basic Books. 1987.
5. Ellis, Albert. *How to Live with a Neurotic.* North Hollywood: Wilshire Book Co. Second edition, 1975.
6. Ellis, Albert. *Sex and the Liberated Man.* Secaucus, N. J. : Lyle Stuart. 1976. (Second edition of *Sex and the Single Man.*)
7. Bourland, D. David, Jr., and Paul Dennithorne Johnston (eds.) *To Be or Not: An E-Prime Anthology*, San Francisco: International Society for General Semantics. 1991.
8. Chomsky, Noam. *Syntactic Structures.* The Hague: Mouton. 1967.
9. Bourland, D. David, Jr. "Reply to Dallmann," *Et cetera: A Review of General Semantics.* 47: 283-285. 1990.
10. Bourland, D. David, Jr. "Reply to Menefee," *Et cetera: A Review of General Semantics* 48: 292-295. 1991.
11. Korzybski, Alfred. *Selections from Science and Sanity.* Lakeville, Conn.: International Non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Co. 1948. Eighth printing, 1976.