

IN MEMORIAM

WENDELL JOHNSON, 1906-1965

Dr. Wendell Johnson, Louis W. Hill Research Professor at the University of Iowa, an early exponent of General Semantics, died 30 August 1965, at the age of 59, at his home in Iowa City. Death was attributed to a heart ailment.

His widow, the former Edna Bockwoldt, a daughter, Miss Katherine Johnson of Toronto, and a son, Nicholas, survive. Nicholas, the former United States Maritime Commissioner, is a member of the Federal Communications Commission.

Professor Johnson received his doctorate in 1931 at the University of Iowa with a combined major in Clinical Psychology and Speech Pathology and a minor in Physiology. He became involved with general semantics in 1936 when he read Korzybski's books. He met Korzybski in Chicago that summer and worked with him in 1937-38 on applications of general semantics to the problems of stuttering. In 1939 he and his wife attended the August Intensive Seminar.

Language and Speech Hygiene: An Application of General Semantics, which the Institute published in 1939 as General Semantics Monograph No. 1, resulted from Dr. Johnson's work with Korzybski. In 1946 Harper & Bros. published Johnson's People in Quandaries: The Semantics of Personal Adjustment, which continues to be one of the most popular books on general semantics.

In 1941 Dr. Johnson was appointed a Fellow of the Institute of General Semantics. He served as a Trustee of the Institute from 1943 to 1950. In 1942 he helped found the Society for General Semantics in Chicago.

In his book Because I Stutter (Appleton, 1930), Wendell Johnson described the inevitability of his development in the direction of speech pathologist. The dust jacket of the book carries these sentences: 'A young man who has stuttered from childhood tells the story of his life, frankly revealing how his "awkward tongue" has moulded the development of his mind, his personality, ambitions, and attitudes towards life. It is a very vivid and human story, of absorbing interest for everyone afflicted with a speech defect, and of

unique scientific value for parents and teachers of stutterers.'

Dr. Johnson further discussed his approach in the preface to his General Semantics Monograph: 'For the past ten years or so I have enjoyed the privilege of devoting practically my entire time to the scientific investigation of stuttering. Naturally I have attempted to draw upon all possible approaches to the understanding of this traditionally baffling disorder. Consequently, I became interested in General Semantics -- for reasons which will, I believe, be clear to anyone who reads this discussion of "speech hygiene".'

Dr. Johnson's work brought him wide recognition and many professional honors. A Fellow of the American Speech and Hearing Association, he received the Honors of the Association Award in 1946. He was a consultant in Speech Pathology for the Veterans' Administration, consultant to the U.S. Office of Education, the U.S. Public Health Service and other governmental agencies.

Dr. Johnson's books also included Your Most Enchanted Listener (Harper, 1956), The Onset of Stuttering: Research Findings and Implications (University of Minnesota Press, 1959), Stuttering and What You Can Do About It (University of Minnesota Press, 1961). He also was editor and co-author of Speech Handicapped School Children (Harper, 1948, revised 1956), Stuttering in Children and Adults: Thirty Years of Research at the University of Iowa (University of Minnesota Press, 1955), Diagnostic Methods in Speech Pathology (Harper & Row, 1963). His bibliography lists over 150 professional and magazine articles and he wrote about 100 book reviews for technical journals, The New York Times Book Review, etc.

For the Second American Congress on General Semantics in 1941, Dr. Johnson reported on his experiences in developing the first university course in general semantics. That report is reprinted in the following pages from the out-of-print volume, Papers from the Second American Congress on General Semantics (1943, M. Kendig, editor).

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Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology

I first knew 'Jack' Johnson nearly 40 years ago when we were students here at the University that invited me to return in February [1966] to carry on his work for a time.

To those who knew him, these words must appear as an anti-climax. To those who did not, no words could possibly portray him.

He would have laughed at the thought that anyone should ever call him 'great'.

His genuine human warmth came through no matter what words he spoke. He was utterly devoid of pomposity. I never detected a hint of phoniness in him. I never knew him to aggrandize himself at the expense of another human being. Never did he reveal a trace of arrogance. A man of great integrity, he could be counted on. He lived what he advocated. His relationships with others were never weakened by delusions of his own omnipotence and grandeur.

Students came to hear him from all over the world. Hundreds of them will long remember how rare was their good fortune to have known him. My own debt to him is very great.

As long as any of us who knew him can remember, Jack's life will always stand out as a model of the humanity we must eventually achieve if we are to measure up to the test of continued existence. The footprints he left on the sands of time are indeed human. They are sharp and clear.

O.R. Bontrager

Ora Ray Bontrager, presently (1962-) special lecturer in education at Arizona State University, first became interested in general semantics through Wendell Johnson and in connection with 'reading problems' on which he was working in 1939. He earned his BA, MA and PhD degrees at the State University of Iowa. He was professor of education and psychology at California (Pennsylvania) State College (1936-62) and one of the chief lecturers for IGS Seminars (1950-65). Papers by Dr. Bontrager have appeared in the General Semantics Bulletin Nos. 4 & 5, 12 & 13 and 28 & 29. In early 1966, we were advised by Mrs. Wade (secretary to Dr. Johnson) that Dr. Bontrager had been invited to the University of Iowa as visiting professor for the second semester beginning February 1966 and would teach a course in general semantics and conduct a seminar in symbolic processes.

When we were planning this memorial section in 1965 there was immediate consensus among us of the Institute that Dr. Bontrager was most qualified to 'speak' about Wendell Johnson. His words printed here were in response to our request.

ANNUAL REPORT*

There is a temptation to memorialize in this report. That, however, has been avoided as much as possible because it seems basically inappropriate in the review of a year during which Dr. Johnson often spoke of his 'joy in being creatively busy.' Though for most of the year he was in house or hospital confinement, he was not confined. Like Thoreau, he 'travelled a good deal in Concord.' He managed to write, to edit, to ponder research questions, to read, to correspond with friends, to entertain callers, and to plan for the future. He continued to put his ideas on tape as he had for years, ideas like these:

- Our ancestors have handed down to us a language they constructed out of their great need to be consoled by a sense of understanding.

- Each of us is a process within a great complex of processes.

- To be human is to speak: it may be that there is no other short sentence that is so meagerly appreciated by very nearly everyone.

- We are most likely to discover our ingenuity when we have to.

- Unless we can see the individual clearly in meaningful relationship to all of mankind through all the past and in the present over all the earth, we fail by so much to understand him and to grace his days with justice.

- I believe that my own most important specific technical contribution to language behavior research and theory was the type-token ratio although some of the other measures I developed, such as the extensional agreement index, may come in time to prove more significant.

- The most important thing about research is the problem; I believe it is the rare person who has a dedicated sense of problem.

- It is a thoroughly false education that leads us to believe that we might ever return to the past.

- I find resting is not too bad when you give in to it.

And then in an open letter to friends in July 1965 he had this to say: 'I am hoping to learn to live more or less graciously within these... limitations. [In the past when energy was no problem] mostly I was attending to what seemed urgent, and I doubt that I ever applied to myself the late Ed Murrow's wry observation that it is the urgent that distracts us all too often from the important. Now with a need to be less extravagant of my available vim, I suspect that, by disregarding the merely urgent, I will accomplish much more that I consider important than I used to. In fact, I am eager to get on with it--but not without much more time for rumination and wonder, even an occasional siesta, and a little hockey now and then devoted to delightful diversions. Ever since I reached middle-age, I have agreed with George Bernard Shaw's opinion that youth is much too glorious to be wasted on the insensibilities of the young--and I

have now lived enough longer to appreciate, also, that the mellow years hold rewards far too precious to be endangered by the potentially disabling ambitions of the middle-aged.'

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Dr. Johnson's new publications include these:

1. 'Speech Disorders,' article in Encyclopedia of Mental Health, 1963, pp. 1952-1961.
2. 'Speech Problems - The Problem Called Stuttering,' My Baby, April 1965, p. 18. From Today's Health Guide, published June 1965 by the American Medical Association.
3. Book Review (written 31 May 1965) for Contemporary Psychology of New Directions in Stuttering, edited by Dominick A. Barbara, MD, publication No. 602, American Lecture Series; a monograph in the Bannerstone Division, American Lectures in Communication. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1965.
4. Stuttering and What You Can Do About It, Japanese translation to be published by Froebel-Kan Co., Tokyo.
5. Stuttering and What You Can Do About It, Swedish translation to be published by the Stockholm publishing firm of AB P.A. Norstedt & Soner.
6. Section of Speech Problems in Today's Health Guide, American Medical Association, June 1965.
7. Definition of 'stuttering' in Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary, 24th ed., 1965 (half a dozen lines of type but considered very important by Dr. Johnson because they place in a position of authority the idea that stuttering is to be defined in terms of listeners as well as speakers).
8. Article entitled 'Speech Disorders' to be published in the Encyclopaedia Britannica in the 1967 edition.
9. 3rd revision of the textbook, Speech Handicapped School Children (of which Dr. Johnson was senior author and editor) to be published in December 1966 with a 1967 copyright.
10. Your Most Enchanted Listener, Collier Books paperback edition under the title, Verbal Man: The Enchantment of Words, 1965.

These new editions of Dr. Johnson's books are being discussed by publishers: Stuttering and What You Can Do About It, Wilshire Book paperback edition, and People in Quandaries, German translation which Dr. Guenther Schwarz of Darmstadt wishes to undertake as both translator and publisher.

As in previous years, Dr. Johnson was mentioned often in various publications, for example, Time magazine, in its issue of 11 December 1964, in an article about the University's new president. Here the Iowa campus was referred to as 'home for the most adventuresome minds in science and the arts: Physicist James Van Allen, Psychologist Wendell Johnson, Printmaker Mauricio Lasansky, Paul Engle's famous Writers Workshop.'

*Excerpts from the Annual Report to the Hill Family Foundation (which supported Dr. Johnson's research work) submitted in 1965 by Dr. Johnson's Editorial and Research Associate, Mrs. Dorothy W. Moeller.