

**LANGUAGE AND EMOTIONS:
THE CASE OF JAC. VAN GINNEKEN'S
*PRINCIPES DE LINGUISTIQUE PSYCHOLOGIQUE (1907)***

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It is argued that Van Ginneken paid due attention to the role of feeling in language and language change. According to Van Ginneken, feeling is the basis for the primary meaning of the indeclinabilia. Some commentators attribute to Van Ginneken the position that feeling is the dominant factor in linguistic meaning and structure as a whole. This view on Van Ginneken's work is brought into question. Van Ginneken's treatment of the relation between language and emotions is analyzed against the background of the long-standing but minor line of research on the expressive function of language.

Keywords: Van Ginneken, Expressive function, Indeclinabilia, Feeling, Emotion.

1. THE EXPRESSIVE FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE

With language we can communicate our thoughts, but we can do other things with it as well: direct the behavior of others, perform social rituals, etc. This multifunctionality has been studied in the framework of modern speech act theory, and we all know older function lists, of which Bühler's (1934) tripartition in 'Darstellung', 'Appell' and 'Ausdruck' is a classical one. I will restrict the discussion in this paper to these three functions, as they form the constant part of every functional typology in linguistics or linguistically oriented psychology and philosophy.

The 3 functions are, in the view of most writers on the subject, not of equal rank. The cognitive (or ideational, informative or whatever we choose to call it) function is considered as the main function of language. In the words of Sapir (1921:38): «[I]deation reigns supreme in language, (...) volition and emotion come in as distinctly secondary factors». Traditionally, the attention paid to these 'other functions' has been rather limited, but the rise of pragmatics as a new approach in modern linguistics brought with it a strong stimulus for research on the non-cognitive functions. At first, it was the directive, 'Appell', function which profited most from the pragmatic turn. Many papers from the 70s on direct and indirect speech acts pertained mainly to directive speech acts (request, command, advice, etc.). The 'Zeitgeist' of political action might have been a stimulating factor on the background.

Only later, in the 80s and, stronger still in the 90s, the expressive function came in the picture of pragmatic research. At the Berlin International Congress of Linguists in 1987, F. Daneš devoted a plenary paper to 'Cognition and emotion in discourse interaction'. The *Journal of Pragmatics* had a special issue on 'Involvement in language' (Caffi & Janney eds., 1994) and the papers of a symposium on 'The language of emotions' were published in a volume with the same title (Niemeier and Dirven eds., 1997). The pragmatic research on expressive language use stimulated a renewed interest in the lexical and grammatical description of the forms that are available in languages for the direct expression of emotions, cf. the overviews in (Fries, 1996; Foolen, 1997; Konstantinidou, 1997).

As with the interest for the directive function in the 70s, there might be, again, a 'Zeitgeist' factor underlying the present interest in the expressive function. In psychology, emotions are back on the agenda, cf. (Damasio, 1994) as only one example, and Goleman's (1995) book on emotional intelligence is an international bestseller.

The recent interest in the issue of language and emotions led me to the question how this relation has been treated in the history of linguistics. I will concentrate here on the 20th century, but publications such as (Rosier, 1992) and (Bologna, 1995) show that the question is relevant for the earlier history of western linguistics too.

Browsing through the literature, I found that the issue of language and emotions has been discussed from at least three different perspectives.

1. The perspective of the origin of language. The idea that the expression of emotion was an important factor in the origin of language has been christened 'Pooh-pooh theory' by Max Müller (1860/1885:420). This view has been endorsed by respectable authors, although they are keen to emphasize that human language begins when the emotional factor is reduced, cf. (Whitney, 1875:283): «It is where expression quits its emotional basis, and turns to intellectual uses, that the history of language begins», and, in the same vein, (Jespersen, 1922:441): «The development of our ordinary speech has been largely an intellectualization, and the emotional quality which played the largest part in primitive utterances has to some extent been repressed».

2. The perspective of language change, in particular the origin and change of word meaning. Sperber (1914) has stressed the importance of the emotional factor in semantic change, and

Schreuder (1970:11) argues along the same line, when he writes: «It is a drawback of many attempts to trace the psychological laws of sense-change that they are too much directed towards a psychology which conceives the human soul as a mere 'Schauplatz logisch-abstrakter Denkoperationen', while too little allowance is made for the fact that language is not only a means of understanding, but in no less a degree a means of affect-utterance. This is of particular importance when we consider that in this latter function the influence on linguistic change is greater than in the function of communicating thoughts».

3. The perspective of language structure and language use, i.e. the synchronic perspective. Interesting remarks concerning the role of the expressive function in the language system and in language use can be found in writings of European structuralist origin. Bühler (1934:30) acknowledges «die ... unbestrittene Dominanz der Darstellungsfunktion der Sprache», but he adds (p. 32): «'[D]er sprachliche Ausdruck' und 'der sprachliche Appell' sind Teilgegenstände der ganzen Sprachforschung, die verglichen mit der sprachlichen Darstellung, eigene Strukturen aufweisen». This view is shared by Trubetzkoy, who designates the investigation of the non-referential functions as 'Lautstilistik', cf. (Trubetzkoy, 1939, 1958²:17) and by Jakobson, cf. (Jakobson, 1960:345): «The emotive function, laid bare in the interjections, flavors to some extent all our utterances, on their phonic, grammatical, and lexical level». Special attention should be given to the French tradition, not because the conference during which this paper is read takes place in Paris, but because at the beginning of this century, the French linguists stressed the importance of research on the expressive function. Michel Bréal, for decades the secretary of the Société de Linguistique de Paris, devoted a chapter to «L'élément subjectif» (chapitre XXV, pp. 234-244), in his *Essai de sémantique*, which was published exactly 100 years ago, in 1897, in Paris. Charles Bally should be mentioned as an important representative of this line of research, cf. (Bally, 1909), which is continued by Vendryes (1921). For them, investigating the tools that are available in language for the expression of emotions is as important as describing the intellectual side of language.

Nowadays, a clear distinction between the three perspectives (language origin, change and structure) is self-evident, but we often see them blended together in writings of the past, in particular in those of the pre-structuralist type.

In my search through the literature on language and emotions I came across a book, the author of which was accused by several commentators of overemphasizing the importance of emotion or feeling for language. This book is *Principes de linguistique psychologique* by Jac. van Ginneken and was published in Paris exactly 90 years ago. The discovery of this historical coincidence led to my decision to consider this book more closely today. The fact that its author became the first professor of Indo-European linguistics at the University of Nijmegen upon its foundation in 1923, and that he was actively involved in the organisation of the first international congress of linguists in The Hague in 1928, were additional reasons for selecting this book for today's discussion. The question for consideration is: what exactly was Van Ginneken's view on the relation between language and emotion, and did he really overemphasize the emotional factor, as has been repeatedly claimed in the literature?

2. THE RECEPTION OF *THE PRINCIPES*

One of the most remarkable references to Van Ginneken is to be found in Sapir's *Language* of 1921, in a passage where he discusses the issue of language and emotion (p. 38-41). Sapir states (p. 39): «There are, it is true, certain writers on the psychology of language who deny its prevailing cognitive character but attempt, on the contrary, to demonstrate the origin of most linguistic elements within the domain of feeling. I confess that I am utterly unable to follow them». In a footnote to this text, Sapir refers to «the brilliant Dutch writer, Jac. van Ginneken», apparently considered a prototypical example of the writers he intends to criticize. Sapir does not explicitly mention the *Principles*, but we may assume that he had that book in mind.

Upon publication, the *Principles* had attracted quite a lot of international attention. It was reviewed by Meillet (1908) and Bühler (1909) and in 1909 Hermann Paul referred to it in the 'Vorrede zur vierten Auflage' of his *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte*. In 1978, Roman Jakobson wrote in a letter to Tatiana Slama-Cazacu: «By the way, my first linguistic interest in the new trends in psychology was awakened by van Ginneken's book of psychological linguistics (1908, sic!), which was lent to me by Trubetzkoy in 1915" cf. (Elffers, 1996:73). When linguists in the Netherlands referred to the 1907 book by their countryman, they tended to lay stress on the importance of the emotional factor in that book. De Vooy (1938), in an introductory book on semantics, devotes a section to the affective side of word meaning, writing that «In our country, Van Ginneken pointed out the affective side of the word» (p. 16, my translation, A.F.). Van Hamel, in a concise book on the history of linguistics, written in 1945, discusses Van Ginneken's work in a section on the psychology of language (p. 64-67) as follows: «In the beginning, his [Van Ginneken's] main interest was the study of word meaning and change of meaning. He aims to establish a just balance of the role of the logical and the emotional factor in the change of meaning and he concludes that the latter has a dominant role» (p. 66, my translation). Van Ginneken was attacked, in several publications, by J.M. Hoogvliet (1860-1924), who defended a 'rational' view on language, cf. (Noordegraaf, 1988). In his view, Van Ginneken attributed too important a role to the emotional factor.

After this short history of the reception of van Ginneken's work, the question with which I ended the first section of this paper, has become still more urgent: What exactly was Van Ginneken's view on the emotional factor and, secondly, was his view portrayed correctly by his commentators?

3. THE STRUCTURE OF *THE PRINCIPES*

In order to understand the place of the emotional factor in the *Principles*, we have to take a look at the structure of Van Ginneken's book as a whole. And to understand this structure itself, we have to look at the historical background in which Van Ginneken's enterprise is rooted. The author has written his book in the true tradition of the 19th-century psychology of language as Elffers (1996) has shown convincingly. In this framework, language and speech were seen as a direct reflection of processes and contents in the human psyche. The research program implied a search for correlations between aspects of language and language behavior and aspects of the psyche, cf. (Knobloch, 1988; Nerlich, 1992). Finding

the right psychological counterpart of a linguistic phenomenon constituted the explanation of that phenomenon.

Of the writings in this paradigm, the first 2 volumes of Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie* (1900), which deal with language, are the most widely known. For Van Ginneken, Wundt's *magnum opus* functioned as the standard which had to be surpassed. Van Ginneken attempted to outdo Wundt, first of all by using all the psychological literature available at the time, and secondly by providing as many linguistic data as he could find, not only from the Indo-European language family, but from as many languages as he was aware of. Compare the critical remark on Wundt by a reviewer: «There is far too much theory and too little fact to please us», quoted by Van Ginneken with approval in the introduction to his book (p. v).

One of the psychological works of which Van Ginneken made extensive use, was *Vom Fühlen, Wollen und Denken*, by a Munich Professor of Psychology, Theodor Lipps (1851-1914), published in 1902. One could even say that the *Principes* originated from a review of Lipps's book, cf. (Van Ginneken, 1904). The title of that book reflects the classical tripartition which philosophers, psychologists and linguists assumed for the structure of the human psyche: thinking, volition and emotion. Against this background, we can easily understand the structure of Van Ginneken's book. After an introductory section ('livre premier'), the book contains 3 main sections, with the following titles: 'L'intelligence et son adhésion', 'Sentiment et appréciation' and 'Volonté et automatisme'. It comes as no big surprise that the first of these sections deals with nouns, adjectives, verbs and their accompanying morphological categories (indicative, conjunctive, etc.) are dealt with. The content words are seen as the linguistic correlate of the perceptual and intellectual dimension of the psyche. The third main section of the *Principes*, 'Volonté et automatisme', deals with prosody, sound change and morphological composition, which are correlated with the volitional and automatic or routinized aspects of the psyche. The basis of this latter correlation is not easy to understand, but space does not allow me to go into this matter here.

What interests us most, in the context of this paper, is the middle section, in which the linguistic correlates of 'sentiment et appréciation' are discussed. Here, one would expect to find a discussion of interjections or expressive constructions but, somewhat surprisingly, we encounter here the indeclinabilia: conjunctions, prepositions and particles. Van Ginneken argues that these words derive their meaning from the domain of feeling: «Toutes les conjonctions, toutes les prépositions, toutes les particules ont pour signification fondamentale un tel sentiment (...). Leur fonction logique est d'une nature figurée et accidentelle»(p. 132).

Considering the structure of the *Principes* as a whole, we can draw as a first conclusion that Van Ginneken places the factor of feeling or emotion, and also volition, on an equal footing with cognition. This is, indeed, a marked position in linguistic theorizing because, for most authors, cognition dominates the other two factors. But it is not true, as commentators have suggested, that for Van Ginneken feeling is the *primary* factor in explaining linguistic phenomena.

4. EMOTIONS AND INDECLINABILIA

The next question is, then, whether Van Ginneken succeeds in showing that the indeclinabilia typically derive their original meaning from the sphere of feeling. Let us consider some of the linguistic phenomena discussed in the relevant part of the book.

Van Ginneken first analyzes the conjunctions (p. 134 ff.). He shows, for example, that in many languages the conjunction *and* derives from a directional meaning 'from ... to'. According to Van Ginneken, we have a 'feeling of movement' here. Equally, the English connective element *too* is related to the more original *to*, again a spatial directional meaning, or a feeling of movement, as Van Ginneken calls it. Ten pages are devoted to negation (p. 199-208). According to the author, the feeling of resistance explains the abstract logical notion of negation: «La négation dans la langue naturelle n'est pas la négation logique, mais l'expression du sentiment de la résistance» (p. 199). Next, the distinction of first, second and third person in the pronouns is correlated with the feeling of 'here', 'there' and 'over there'. And intensifiers such as *terribly* (as in 'terribly good') are often words that originally refer to intense negative feelings, as Van Ginneken demonstrates (p. 216 ff.).

With intensifiers like *terribly*, Van Ginneken seems to have a strong case for his thesis of the emotional basis of function words. But in the paradigm of intensifiers we also encounter E. *enormously*, *incredibly*, D. *waanzinnig*, G. *irre*, *wahn-sinnig*, etc. Apparently, all adjectives that have as part of their meaning the 'exceeding of a norm' can develop into adverbial intensifiers. Feelings - in particular negative feelings - can easily be experienced as exceeding a norm because, for a human being, the norm is 'absence of a negative feeling'. Words like *terribly* etc., are, thus, good candidates for becoming intensifiers, not because they are feelings, but because they are intrinsically good norm exceeders.

All these examples will sound familiar to those who are acquainted with the modern literature on grammaticalization, in which it is repeatedly shown that function words are typically recruited from content words with spatial meaning, or words relating to physical, bodily experience. Nowadays, such transitions of meaning are analyzed in terms of metaphoric and metonymic processes.

Apparently, similar views were already held in Van Ginneken's time, as he himself indicates: «Et c'est là l'analogie, disent les linguistes» (p. 227). But, for Van Ginneken, such an analysis is not really explanatory: «Mais ont-ils dans ce mot-là bien compris le véritable état des choses?» (ibidem). For Van Ginneken, it is the feeling of directionality, proceeding from one point to the next, that explains the logical connection *and*. But this analysis easily raises the question whether this is really feeling in the sense of emotion? Van Ginneken concedes that many readers might consider «le mot *sentiment* mal choisi pour les faits psychologiques décrits ici» (p. 126), but, according to the author, they should not blame him, but the word 'sentiment' itself, which has «significations nombreuses et divergentes» (ibidem).

My conclusion would be, then, that Van Ginneken's use of the term 'feeling' in relation to the phenomena under discussion is primarily a way of speaking, forced by the tripartite system (cognition, emotion and volition) he adopted for structuring the analytical framework of his book. The system forced him to search for aspects of language which would be proper candidates for analysis from the perspective of feeling. Apparently, the indeclinabilia were

considered suitable candidates to fill this slot in the system. The commentators who criticized Van Ginneken for overemphasizing the role of feeling as a basis for word meaning, rightly criticized his 'feeling terminology' in relation to the indeclinabilia.

5. PRESENT RELEVANCE OF THE *PRINCIPES*

What, then, does Van Ginneken's *Principes* have to offer to the present day reader? Those who are interested in the language and emotions issue, in the question of how language expresses the emotional involvement of the speaker, will not find in the *Principes* what they might expect to find there on the basis of the comments by Sapir and others. They are better advised to turn to the writings of Bally or Vendryes or, for that matter, to Pos (1934) (based on a presentation at the 3rd International Congress of Linguists in Rome, 1933), who shows that function words may develop an affective use: «Remarquons toutefois que l'histoire des mots affectifs révèle en bien des cas une origine non-affective» (p. 328), a view which seems opposite to Van Ginneken's. Pos does not mention Van Ginneken in his text, but a sentence like the following sounds as if it is directly addressed to the latter: «Je crois que pour comprendre la sphère affective en matière de linguistique, il faut se fonder sur la langue prise comme instrument de la raison. Sur cette base, le sens affectif apparaîtra comme une complication du langage rationnel» (p. 329). This view of Pos is in line with what I argued in (Foolen, 1997), namely that expressive semantics is parasitic on conceptual semantics. The marked use of words and constructions with conceptual and propositional meaning can have expressive effects. Conventionalization of such effects may lead to expressive means in the language system.

In the *Principes*, Van Ginneken looked at language primarily from the perspective of language change. In his view, affective meanings are not the *result* of semantic change but they are a *source*, from which function words with logical-conceptual meaning are recruited. This view is rather idiosyncratic in the history of linguistics. Nevertheless, Van Ginneken's analyses are still useful if the reader replaces his notion of feeling with spatial and physiological notions. Then his approach fits in the line of modern grammaticalization research and cognitive linguistics. For researchers in this area, Van Ginneken's book can serve as a rich source of data.

Let me finally point out that there are two later studies in which Van Ginneken deals in a more adequate way with the relation between language and emotions. In (1911) and (1912) he had two long articles in *Leuvense Bijdragen* on the emotional vocabulary, and in (1919) he published a book on the non-verbal and paralinguistic means of expression of emotion. There is, therefore, no doubt that Van Ginneken had a strong interest in emotions. However, the application of this interest to the indeclinabilia was not a satisfactory one, as I hope to have shown.

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