

**PHILOLOGY, OR THE  
SCIENCE OF  
ACTIVITIES DESIGNED FOR  
EXPRESSION; PP. 139-170**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649236961

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

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**J. W. POWELL**

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EXTRACT FROM THE TWENTIETH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE  
BUREAU OF AMERICAN ETHNOLOGY



WASHINGTON  
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE  
1903

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## PHILOLOGY, OR THE SCIENCE OF ACTIVITIES DESIGNED FOR EXPRESSION

### INTRODUCTION

The fourth group of arts in the scheme hitherto presented in this journal consists of the languages which men devise to express their thoughts. Every art has its foundation in nature, for art arises through the attempt to improve on nature. Activity, as we have defined it, or self-activity as it is often called in psychology, is the primeval expression of animals by which their thoughts are interpreted by other animals. This primeval activital expression assumes a new phase under development, when it is known as the language of the emotions. In fact, primitive activital expression is the germ from which all other kinds of language are developed.

All nature is expressive, but activital nature is especially expressive of mind. Thus activities constitute a natural language expressing the minds of activital bodies, but such expression is not designed to be understood by others; it is therefore not conventional, and therefore not artificial. Natural expression must be distinguished from artificial expression or language, for natural expression is not designed to convey concepts, while expressions which are designed to convey concepts constitute language. Hence language may be defined as the artificial expression of concepts in judgments by words in propositions.

Natural methods of activity are themselves indicative of thought which others may interpret, but when activities are conventionally produced for the purpose of expression and are interpreted as such by others, language is produced. The producer of the speech implies the interpreter of the speech, and the two by custom come into a tacit agreement or understanding by which the language becomes artificial as conventional. So language may again be defined as an activital movement designed to convey thought to others.

It may be well to reexamine briefly the nature of activital movement, although the subject has more elaborate treatment in my former work entitled Truth and Error. Movements in the animal body are performed by muscles. The muscles are found in opposing pairs, or more or less in opposing groups, which have the function of contracting and relaxing, and one may contract while the other relaxes, and thus originate a movement in the animal body. The contraction and relaxation are produced through the agency of metabolism. When metabolism is constructive it is called anabolism, when it is destructive it is called catabolism. I suppose that catabolism produces contraction and that anabolism produces relaxation, but of this I am not sure. Certain it is that when muscles are contracted and relaxed, metabolism in both its methods is involved, so that all muscular action is founded on metabolic action, and metabolic action involves affinity, which is choice, as we have heretofore deductively demonstrated. The movements in animals which depend on muscular action due to the function of opposing muscles, one of which relaxes and the other contracts, we call activity. Activity is under the control of the will, for the individual animal controls activity indirectly by controlling the metabolism of molecules. It is thus that activity is innate in every living animal body.

#### EMOTIONAL LANGUAGE

The natural expression of strong emotion is cultivated by man in the earlier stages of society and likewise in childhood, so that an artificial language of the emotions is produced. Thus we have in laughter the language of joy, and in weeping the language of grief, each highly expressive of emotion.

To man who already uses language in its highly developed state, it may seem at first blush that laughter is a purely natural ebullition of joy, but on further examination he will see that it is no less artificial and conventional than the term joy itself; yet it is probably universal with mankind and is an expression inherited from his anthropoid ancestor. Those species nearest allied to this anthropopithecus indulge in laughter, and even squirrels chatter in a manner exceedingly suggestive of laughter.

Of what emotion laughter is the expression in its purely natural state we are left to conjecture. Let us assume, as seems probable from the little evidence we have, that it was the expression of joy, for it has this meaning with the species allied to anthropopithecus. Then came a time when laughing was conventional, as being designed for such expression that others who heard might understand it in this manner; then laughter became true language as we have defined it. Used at first with difficulty, it speedily became easy, and becoming easy it gradually became habitual, and finally instinctive by inheritance. The nature of this process can well be illustrated by citing the case of screaming, of which we will treat a little later. Even laughter is consciously used with designed expression, as when we laugh at things which are not amusing to us out of courtesy to others, when its original nature becomes apparent.

In treating of emotional expressions it will serve present purposes to speak only of one meaning for each expression; thus we speak of laughing as an expression or word of joy, but laughter, like all words in spoken or written language, has many meanings; in fact, emotional signs are especially characterized by multifarious meanings; for this reason emotional language is highly ambiguous and a ready tool for deception.

*Smiling as an expression of pleasure.* In smiling we have an expression of an emotion, less intense than that of joy, which may best be called pleasure. In laughter the muscles about the mouth, especially the risorius, are contracted, as also are the orbicular muscles about the eyelids. The group of muscles involved may be called the smiling muscles. The smile needs no further description. It expresses pleasure in a great variety of meanings, and it is clearly seen to be artificial, whether the approval be genuine or assumed.

"I set it down

That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain."

*Weeping as an expression of grief.* In weeping tears flow and various muscles about the eyelids, especially the orbiculars, are involved, for through their agency tears are produced.



The expression of sorrow is also found about the corners of the mouth, which droop. All the muscles that take part in the expression, and there are many, may be called the muscles of grief. Those naturalists who are also psychologists explain the origin of weeping in the irritation to which the eyes are subject from smoke, dust, or other foreign particles and from scratches and blows. Primitive man seized upon this natural effect of discomfort to artificially produce weeping in order that he might express grief to others. Thus weeping became a linguistic sign, and a linguistic sign is a word in the generalized meaning of the term. Weeping is expressive of many emotions; hence the word has many meanings. Like all other signs of emotion it may be used in the practice of deception.

*Sobbing as the expression of despair.* Sobbing is caused by sudden or spasmodic inspiration and is accompanied by the facial signs of grief through the action of the muscles of grief. Habit has made it instinctive, but its true nature as an artificial sign is plainly exhibited when sobbing is simulated.

*Screaming as a sign of command.* Screaming is common to many of the lower animals, both mammals and brutes; it seems to be universally used by the young as a cry for help and is thus subject to the will. In the human infant the instinct of screaming is exhibited before that of weeping. It is probable that all generations of human beings and generations of remote prehuman ancestry practiced the art. In the human being it is a cry or command for relief, and is so interpreted by every mother. Thus a cry has evolved into a word.

*Bodily attitude as a sign of anger.* The emotion of anger, which is naturally expressed by striking, has many concomitants. In the infant it is accompanied by kicking and the general activity of the body which may be called squirming. This general activity causes a determination of blood to the head, so that the angry person becomes red. Another accompaniment of anger is the assumption of an attitude of belligerence, when the form is held erect, the hands are clenched as fists, and the arms held akimbo. With the adult, striking and kicking are often inhibited, while there yet remain the attitude and the flushed face. This attitude is a true linguistic

sign and hence a word. Sometimes the anger is expressed by simulated kicks, but usually this expression is one of contempt. Among some of the lower races the expression of striking is with the hands, for they are more accustomed to slapping than to fisticuffs.

*Showing the teeth as a sign of rage.* Rage is a more intense anger, and to the sign of anger is added an additional element which is earlier than that sign. Brutes fight mainly with their teeth, and express their anger by showing their teeth, especially their canines; they also express anger by bodily attitude, and finally they express it as an artificial sign by erecting the hairs of the body, especially around the head and neck, thus causing a show of great size and strength. There remains with the more evolved man the sign-word of exposed teeth, in which the canines especially are displayed, as a habit inherited from the brute. It is thus that the more intense anger which we call rage is artificially expressed by man in an exhibition of the teeth, and perhaps in grinding them together.

*Compressing the lips as a sign of determination.* The compression of the lips as a word expressing determination or fixed purpose is universal among mankind. In origin it probably expressed the meaning, "there is no further word to be said." If so, its meaning has gradually changed. With this meaning it has become habitual and hereditary, so that the expression is made when the determination is made, without conscious intent to express this meaning to others; yet it is still used with this intent when we wish to simulate determination.

*Frowning as a word of disapproval.* Disapproval is expressed by frowning, which as a sign has become an artificial word. No word of emotional language is more common or more readily understood, and yet it is not devoid of ambiguity. It is expressed by the eyebrows through the corrugator muscles. But as these muscles are used in many other signs there is an element of uncertainty in its interpretation.

Many other activities are used for expression. We may mention a few more without discussing their origin. They are, averting the head as a word of disdain; shrugging the shoulders as a word of doubt, hesitancy, or helplessness; raising the

eyebrows as a word of surprise; turning the eye without averting the head as a word of warning; beckoning to approach; beckoning to depart; beckoning to keep silence; beckoning not to move; nodding assent; shaking the head in negation.

The principle of antithesis has been potent as an agency in the development of emotional language, as from its nature it is the expression of judgments about qualities. Qualities are always antithetic. This is one of the characteristics by which they are distinguished from properties and quantities. Darwin, in his *Emotions in Man and Animals*, abundantly demonstrates this principle.

In a subsequent article we shall attempt to demonstrate that the emotions are fundamentally and properly classified as feelings, enjoyments, affections, understandings, and sentiments.

## ORAL LANGUAGE

### INTRODUCTION

One method of expressing emotional language has been developed as oral speech. The characteristics of this method peculiarly fit it for development in the first stages of human culture. The organs of speech can be used when the organs of locomotion and manipulation are otherwise employed. This characteristic serves a double purpose: it is advantageous to the maker of speech, and it is also advantageous to the interpreter. In visual language the interpreter must have his attention preadjusted thereto, while in order that it may serve his purpose the maker must also see that attention is paid. The conditions for conveying speech are superior in these respects to those for conveying visual language. Doubtless this advantage led to the development of speech in advance of the development of gesture language.

With the development of speech the organs with which it is produced were evolved until an apparatus was constructed capable of making with precision the differentiated sounds of speech and music, and of combining them into syllabic successions and the syllables into polysyllabic words. Doubtless