

culture, history, and experience of that culture's historic development. When a language is lost, we may be losing more than just an individual expression of universal laws, but a unique expression of human experience, an ethnographic history, that is irreplaceable and the loss of which diminishes our psychosocial diversity.

From this worldview, I suggest that language becomes an integral element in both the expression of personality and the creation of it. In the same way that we can examine the use of positive words by extraverted people and negative words by neurotic people (Pennebaker & Kind, 1990), we can also examine the way that changing the types of words we use can trigger changes in personality—from the top down. Anyone who has experienced the yes/no experiment that Dan Siegel has conducted at various conferences will know how just the spoken presence of the word “no” triggers a cascade of negative psychobiological experiences. Equally, the spoken presence of the word “yes” can radically and rapidly change how we think and feel at a visceral level.

Holtzman and Yarkoni (Holtzman et al, 2010; Yarkoni, 2010) work in the new field of Personality Science (see www.personality-arp.org), which has a particular focus on language. A number of different processes have been developed

to assess personality through word count analysis (Pennebaker et al., 2001). Others are looking more deeply into the relationship of words used in close proximity (Landauer & Dumais, 1997). I believe that a lot of this theoretical work describes what has long been practiced in the art of careful, empathic listening. When we therapists hear a client using negative or apologetic words in close

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proximity to “I” and “me,” we can often feel the low self-esteem or guilt issues. This may not even be a conscious process, but the word and sentence composition affects us right brain to right brain (Schore, 2010) on an emotional and implicit level with the potential to convey a felt sense similar to that conveyed by somatic cues.

This, I believe, reflects that language forms, shapes, structures, and proximal usage is a bi-directional dynamic that both communicates and integrates, especially when we are listening, when we are open, and when we are mindful.

Perhaps, as our knowledge grows, we can become even more perceptive, in the same way as we can train ourselves to be aware of micro-facial expressions (Ekman & Friesen, 1975). Language is not just a means of communication. It is a deeply engaged and integrated process that, when treated with great respect and attention, can take the experience of listening to a new and deeper level in more ways than we yet know.

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Language is not an abstract construction of the learned, or of dictionary makers, but is something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes, of long generations of humanity, and has its bases broad and low, close to the ground.

-Noah Webster