

# ***“IN SHORTS” FROM LANGUAGE HABITS IN HUMAN AFFAIRS***

IRVING J. LEE

**W**HAT SHOULD you get from this book?  
Students who read this book carefully should get:

1. a sense of the problems and difficulties involved in making accurate statements about themselves and the world in which they live; and,
2. a sense of the maladjustments, both personal and social, that have their roots in improper evaluation, because of false-to-fact language habits.

Given this awareness, none of the principles set forth need be taken on ‘faith.’ There is nothing mystical or mysterious in their origin, their analysis, or their use. Having come from the empirical findings of modern science, they should be checked by the same methods.

Because this book was designed as an introduction, no effort was made to exhaust the possibilities of adequate language habits. There remain enough to fill many books. There are, however, a sufficient number of ‘new’ habits outlined here to keep one busy for a long time — and the experience of teachers shows that it is likely to be even longer than you think.

## Chapter II — The Useful Use of Words

A map is not the territory. To be most useful, statements must fit, must be similar in structure to the life facts being represented. Words can be manipulated independently of what they represent, and so made false to fact both consciously and unconsciously. In either case their reliability and our predictability are impaired.

The basic question: not, *What did he say?* but *Did what he said fit the life facts?*

## Chapter III — The Many Uses of a Word

Relatively few words are available to represent an infinity of objects, situations, happenings, feelings, etc. Any one word may have many uses. We waste time looking for but one-and-only-one-‘meaning.’ Misunderstanding and confusion arise when readers and listeners assume that their word uses are also the word uses of writers and speakers. Only study of the utterance and direct questioning can reveal the use.

The basic question: not, *What do I represent by the terms?* but *What does he?*

## Chapter IV — Acquaintance, Abstracting, Non-Allness

We see what we see, but human nervous systems cannot get to ‘all’ the details of anything. Our speech abstracts some details and neglects others. Partial descriptions must not be defined as ‘complete.’ The assumption of ‘allness’ leads to tension and conflict, the preservation of ignorance, and the blockage of further learning.

Habits to be acquired: 1) a consciousness of abstracting; and 2) memory of the *etc.*

## Chapter V — A World in Process

In this world ‘things’ and ‘thinking’ are ever in process. There is no ‘rest.’ Our language use too often emphasizes the static. We speak *as if* life facts were not changing, *as if* our statements fit for ‘all-time.’ The time factor must become a part of human orientation.

Habits to be acquired: 1) consciousness of the process character of nature; and 2) *date* your statements.

## Chapter VI — Indexing Makes the Differences

No two of anything in this world have been found ‘identical,’ absolutely the same in all respects. Similarities are abstracted by neglecting the differences. Too often we discriminate *against* rather than *between* individuals. Differences must not be obscured by habits of identification. Language use must represent both similarities *and* differences. An infinite-valued orientation does not project few values on to facts, but starting with the facts of direct experience makes language similar in structure to them. We need devices to give the sense of difference in our evaluations.

Habits to be acquired: 1) consciousness of *similarities in differences and differences in similarities*; and 2) *index* your statements.

## Chapter VII — Facts First, Then Words

To be oriented *extensionally* is to realize the primary importance of life facts, to emphasize the roles of observation and investigation, to go to the facts first and to abide by them. To be oriented *intensionally* is to order behavior in terms of definitions, arguments, verbal proofs, and theorizings, essentially disregarding the existence of verifiable life facts. Fairy tales, fiction, myths, etc., may be considered intension-with-a-purpose. Verbalization which represents what goes on inside-the-skin must be analyzed as such and not in terms of its correspondence with facts-outside-the-skin.

The basic attitude: “I don’t know. Let’s see.”

## Chapter VIII — A Spell of Words

Words do not exist in objects, situations, feelings, etc. Words can affect human evaluations, but not ‘things.’ Calling a spade a *shovel* does not change *it*. In spite of the experiments in euphemism, the ascription of magical properties to words, and the taboos of certain words, language serves as a form of representation. To respond to words as if they were more than symbols of something other is to revert to the primitive and the infantile.

The basic question: not, *What was it called?* but *What was being so called?*

## Chapter IX — Descriptions and Inferences

Event, Objective, Descriptive, Inferential — these constitute different levels of abstracting, and in that progression the natural order of human evaluation. Descriptive terms, because closer to life facts, actional and functional, make verification and agreement possible. Inferential terms add to the products

of direct experience, introducing judgments, conclusions, creeds, theories, etc. Life is impossible without inferences, which, nevertheless, must be differentiated from descriptions. Confusion of the orders of abstraction leads to non-adaptive signal reactions, automatic, unconsidered behavior, copying animals in our responses. Delay of reaction gives time for observation and more human symbol reactions.

New habits to be acquired: 1) consciousness of abstracting in different orders; 2) recognition that descriptive statements are inferential statements; 3) delay for an instant while looking.

### Chapter X — When to “Keep Still”

Silence on the objective levels is paralleled by silence in human responses. To get to silent levels, we must keep still. Silence<sub>1</sub> makes possible consciousness of many details and the abstracting therefrom, gives time for more looking, develops a more critical attitude, and helps to induce delay-of-reaction. Silence<sub>2</sub> in the play of social situations may breed antagonism and ill will, for the conventions of group life encourage idle conversation and *phatic communion*.

New habit to be acquired: Get to silent levels by learning silence.

### Chapter XI — The Four “Is’es”

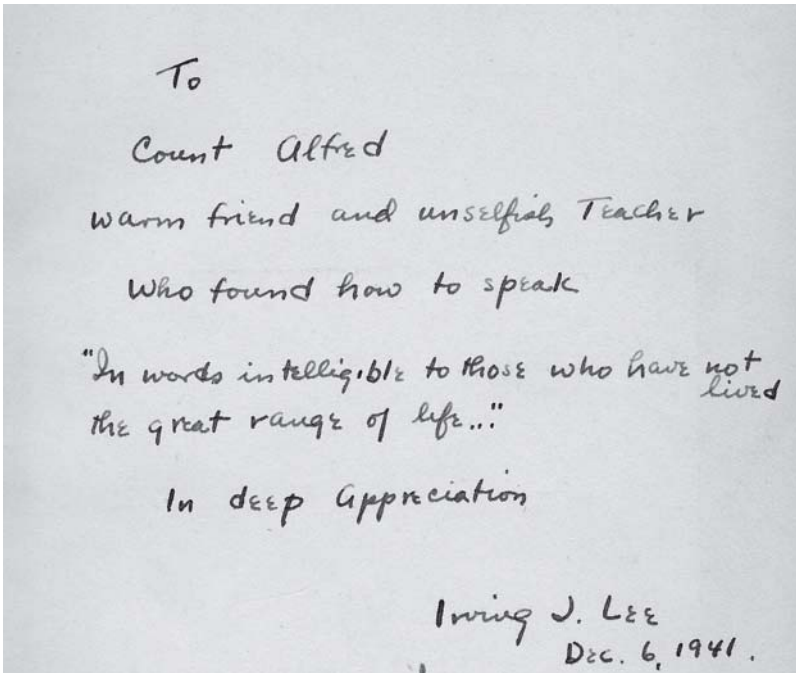
Something cannot exist as something else. An object is not a word. An object may be classified in as many ways, by as many terms as an observer wishes in terms of his interests at a date. When any form of the verb *to be* is followed by a noun the translation “may be classified as” should serve to prevent the assumption of ‘allness’ — that there exist no other modes of classification. Sense impressions arise as a *joint phenomenon of an observer with something observed*. ‘Qualities’ do not exist in ‘things,’ though projected there by implications of any form of the verb *to be* preceded or followed by an adjective. The translation “appears to me” reveals the existence of relations and helps dissolve the conflicts which come from ignorance of the projection mechanism.

Basic question: not, *What ‘is’ it?* but *How may it be classified? How does it appear to you?*

## Chapter XII — The Necessity for Application

“One of the best ways for grown-up persons to train themselves in the present theory of sanity is to try to explain it to others, repeatedly pointing to the Structural Differential. In my experience, those who have disregarded this advice have always made very slow progress, and have never got the full semantic benefit of their efforts.” — Alfred Korzybski

From an IGS handout mailed to members, 1941-42.



Lee's inscription to Korzybski inside his *Language Habits in Human Affairs*.