

## Overviews of General Semantics: **Wendell Johnson**



**Wendell Johnson**, Ph.D., author of *People In Quandaries, Your Most Enchanted Listener, Because I Stutter*, and dozens of published articles about general semantics, taught speech, general semantics, and performed clinical studies at the University of Iowa. The following excerpt comes from the opening lecture to his general semantics class in the fall of 1956. The entire course was broadcast live by the campus radio station, WSUI, and, thankfully, recorded on tape.

This is a course which deals with the part that our use of words, designs — symbols of all kinds — tends to play in the development of our individual personalities, our institutions, and our human societies. So we shall be concerned in the course with the disorders of our symbolic processes, which is to say the language of maladjustment — the language which reflects maladjustment and which tends to produce maladjustment. We shall be even more concerned with the kinds of language which we are able to develop or cultivate which tend to be very effective, which tend to be conducive, to what we call "normal adjustment".

Now, I am not too happy with this word "adjustment". I do not mean by it some kind of self-satisfaction, some sort of blind acceptance of things as they are, but something much, much more dynamic and helpful than that. I mean by "adjustment", by healthful adjustment, something that we might call the "realization of our own individual potentials for development." I don't mean being like somebody else, like the average man, or like the mold, but being oneself as fully as possible.

Well, there is a way to use language which tends to encourage this sort of development. Then there is a way to use language — there are probably many, many ways to use language — which tend to make it difficult to develop one's full potential, and so we will be concerned with these kinds of language. This means we're going to be concerned with things like speaking, writing, listening, reading, designing, and figuring with the pictures we make in our heads. We'll be concerned with the talking we do to ourselves that we recognize as thinking, and feeling, and imagining, and wishing, and regretting, and so forth.

We're going to be concerned especially with the language we use for talking ourselves into trouble, and that which we use for talking ourselves out of trouble. We are going to be concerned — because we're concerned so much with the language that is effective for the solving of problems and for the realization of potential self-development — we're going to be especially concerned with language in its most effective forms for the purpose of solving problems. This means we will be especially interested in the language used by scientific research workers, and also by others — outstanding novelists, poets, any of the users of language who are very effective in the solving of human problems.

*To a mouse, cheese is cheese. That's why mousetraps work.*