THE LANGUAGE OF SPACE

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The Language of Space is an artificial language developed by the late W. John Weilgart, a linguist and psychotherapist. Unlike other artificial languages such as Esperanto and Volapük, its words are constructed out of an alphabet of 31 basic concepts, each depicted by a symbol (a plus, a circle, a triangle, a wavy line, etc.) and an alphabetic letter (only the latter is depicted below):

a	space (place, locality)	n	quantity (many, dimension)
A	time	o	life
b	together	O	feeling (emotion, sensation)
c	being	p	before
d	through, by (tool, means)	Q	condition (in the manner of)
e	movement	r	positive (good)
E	matter	s	thing (object, article)
f	this	t	to, toward
g	in, inside	u	(hu)man (person, people)
h	question (what, why, how)	U	mind, spirit (intellect)
i	light	v	active
I	sound	w	power (strength, possibility)
j	equal (level, horizontal)	x	relation
k	above (high)	y	negative (anti, opposite of)
L	round	z	part (division, separate)
m	quality (kind, sort, form)		

The basic words in the Language of Space are nouns; a verb related to a noun is created by adding a v, an adjective, by adding an m, and an adverb, by adding either mQ or g. Other parts of speech – pronouns, articles, prepositions, conjunctions – are formed by combining one to three basic concepts: for example, and is Ib (sound-together), he is vu (active-man), and a is yl (not-sound). Numbers and spectral colors are handled by special rules: 1234567890 becomes aeiuoAEIUO, and red is ai (first-light), yellow is ei (second-light), etc. The chemical elements are dealt with analogously: hydrogen is Eza (matter-part-one), helium is Eze (matter-part-two), etc.

Weilgart's basic premise is that all nouns, from concrete ones like book or horse to abstractions like charity or schadenfreude, can be expressed as combinations of the 31 basic concepts. Thus, the Language of Space embodies a taxonomy of ideas, much in the spirit of Roget's original Thesaurus; closely-related nouns are expressed with similar combinations of letters. In principle, one can envision all nouns diagrammed in a network in which nouns differing by only one letter are joined by lines, for example

iO SIGHT ⟨ iOd SPECTACLES ⟨ jiOd MIRROR
        ⟨ iOz EYES   ⟨ iOdE GLASS

In practice, the total network would be an impenetrable thicket,
impossible to diagram clearly on a single sheet of paper, no mat-
ter how large. Though Weilgart's goal is a noble one, it seems
doubtful that the luxuriant tangle of English can be neatly recast
into a logical structure of ideas.

The flavor of Weilgart's work can be captured by looking at
various regions of the network. For example, here are a number
of words related to time:

fA (this-time) PRESENT
pA (before-time) PAST
tA (toward-time) FUTURE

iA (light-time) DAY
iAz (day-part) HOUR
fiA (this-day) TODAY
pfiA (before-today) YESTERDAY
fiAt (today-toward) TOMORROW
yiA (not-day) NIGHT
ikA (light-above-time) NOON
yikA (not-noon) MIDNIGHT

ki (above-light) STAR
aki (first-star) SUN, the brightest light in the sky
akitak (sun-toward-place-above) SUNRISE
akityk (sun-toward-not-above) SUNSET

EiA (seven-days) WEEK
eki (second-star) MOON, the second brightest light in the sky
ekiA (moon-time) MONTH
akiA (sun-time) YEAR
akiAz (year-part) SEASON

These examples show how Weilgart builds complex ideas out of sim-
ple ones.

The examples given above have a certain degree of logic. How-
ever, when dealing with complex objects, considerable arbitrari-
ness appears in the language. In cataloguing insects, for example,
what aspects of each insect should be emphasized in the word?

os (life-thing) ANIMAL, the entire animal kingdom
zos (division-animal) ARTHOPOD, which is segmented
izos (three-division-animal) INSECT, segmented in three parts

gaizos (inside-red-insect) MOSQUITO, when full of blood
gizos (inside-insect) FLY, typically found in houses
grizos (inside-good-insect) BEE, producer of honey inside itself
wizos (power-insect) BEETLE
vizos (active-insect) ANT
buizos (with-man-insect) VERMIN
ynbuizos (not-large-vermin) FLEA
yrbuizos (not-good-vermin) BEDBUG

riOzos (beautiful-arthopod) BUTTERFLY
  riO (good-light-feeling) BEAUTY
nyEdzos (net-arthopod) SPIDER
  nyEd (many-holes-tool) NET, yE (not-matter) HOLE

When one looks at abstract nouns, Weilgart's system falls apart; it is almost impossible to use the basic concepts to make distinctions that would be generally agreed-upon. A sample of feelings:

rUO (good-mind-feeling) TRUST
vrO (achieve-good-feeling) KINDNESS, vyrO (not-kindness) CRUELTY
UrO (spirit-good-feeling) HAPPINESS, UyrO (not-happiness) GRIEF
trO (toward-good-feeling) HOPE, tyrO (not-hope) FEAR
  twyrO (toward-power-not-good-feeling) FRIGHT
brO (together-good-feeling) LOVE, ybrO (not-love) DISLIKE
· tykbrO (toward-not-above-love) CHARITY
AtyrO (time-fear) ANXIETY, fear felt over a long period of time
krO (high-good-feeling) JOY, ykrO (not-joy) SADNESS
grO (inside-good-feeling) SWEETNESS, ygrO BITTERNESS
kypO (high-not-before-feeling) SURPRISE, being hit from behind

It is hardly surprising that Weilgart recommends the reader memorize his basic dictionary of approximately one thousand Language of Space words. Use of this dictionary is essential if ambiguity is to be avoided; one person's encoding of a word in Language of Space will not . always correspond to another person's decoding of the same Language of Space word. (One is reminded of the apocryphal story of the language-translation computer program which, taking the phrase "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" from English into Russian and back again into English, ended up with "the liquor is fine but the meat has gone bad".) Weilgart asserts that the Language of Space enables one to construct words for ideas so specialized that no English words exist for them, such as kryvO (above-good-not-active-feeling), which is supposed to represent one's passive awe while gazing at the stars in the night sky. However, a reader confronted with the word kryvO, unless it is clear from context, would have a hard time coming up with Weilgart's intention.

One of the most complex Language of Space words, unwerOve, is translated as diplomacy. The first four letters, unwe (man-many-power-movement), becomes politics, and the second four letters, rOve (good-feeling-active-movement), is play. Dydweid is the Language of Space word for transistor, with the aid of the component parts yd (not-through) against (here, a resistor) and wei (power-movement-light), meaning electricity.

Here are a few much simpler Language of Space words; can you determine what objects or ideas they represent? Hint: the answers are in alphabetical order.

Ugs (mind-inside-thing)	uga (human-inside-space)
ged (inside-move-means)	gU (inside-mind)
Ad (time-tool)	brU (together-good-spirit)
una (men-much-space)	jE (level-matter)
iOz (light-feeling-part)	Ul (mind-sound)

Answers can be found in Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.

For more information, send $11.95 to Cosmic Communication Company, 100 Elm Street, Decorah IA 52101; they will send in return a 307-page paperback book by Weilgart, The Language of Space (Fourth Edition, 1979). Be warned that the book is poorly organized and contains a good deal of material irrelevant to learning the language; however, a revision is planned.

Comment (Andrea Weilgart Patten): By totally leaving out the symbols you are definitely 'misrepresenting' the language. One of the basic and unique characteristics of the Language of Space is its three-way harmonic relationship between Sound-Symbol-Meaning; thus you omit one-third of the key concept upon which it is based. Actually, you fail to give a single example of how Sound, Symbol and Meaning relate in each character. This harmony in meaning pervades the language and is so important to mental health and especially to children, who still feel (as adults do subconsciously) that relation in meaning should follow similarly in symbol and sound.

As examples, Space [a circle] is symbolized by a round, open space and is pronounced 'a' (short as in mama), for which the mouth is opened to wide-open space; Time [an oval], the elongation of space, its fourth dimension, is measured by the elliptical orbits of earth and moon, and is pronounced 'A' (longer as in father) since time lasts. Vowels are represented by free, independent concepts as they are produced with minimal friction or obstruction in the mouth. Phonetically, upper and front vowels occur as concepts we usually sense above or in front of us by sight, forwardly: Movement, Matter, Light, Sound. Upper and back vowels on the other hand are used by symbols having a mysterious meaning, containing an ideal to be striven for: Human, Spirit, Life, Feeling.

The basic grammatical endings are unexplained and appear meaningless in the article; how is one to know that 'v' [a stylized lightning bolt] means Action, is symbolized by a lightning bolt, is pronounced as in vigor with actively vibrating lips, and is therefore used as the verb-, action-word, ending? (Phonetically, 'v' Action belongs to the group of fricatives which all portray some kind of friction in their meaning, here, because our actions often cause friction among one another.)

The words for insects are obviously lay definitions. A biologist would probably want to redefine animals according to the most significant, simple difference between related species. However, science was not the main focus for the Language of Space's design.

The explanations for the abstract nouns could be made much clearer than they were in your narrative. For instance trust (good-spirit-feeling) occurs when one feels a person is of good spirit or will. Kindness (make-good-feeling) makes the other feel good. Love (together-good-feeling) occurs when people feel each other's

goodness together, or feel good together. Fear (toward-bad-feeling) is a feeling that things are turning toward the bad. Sweetness (inside-good-feeling) reflects the fact that, in order to taste or sense food, it must be put inside the mouth. Charity (toward-below-love) is love toward people in need, in lower health or economic conditions. In general, the meanings of Language of Space words are described by short-cut definitions of the word's essence.

If one is looking for ambiguity in language, one may be better off looking at English (or most any conventional language). What you say about word encoding, I think, can be applied more accurately to a conventional language: "one person's encoding [or usage] of a word .. will not always correspond to another person's decoding [or understanding] of the same .. word". This is due to the presence of implicit, hidden meanings of which the speaker himself usually isn't even conscious, and, of course, because of the more obvious, but nonetheless confusing, polysemes. Your inclusion of the 'apocryphal story' of the Russian/English language translation computer is indeed unfortunate and unfair – mistranslation from one language to another due to homonyms and polysemes is exactly what the Language of Space is designed to prevent!

Is not the "use of [a] dictionary .. essential if ambiguity is to be avoided" also true (more so) in a conventional language? Or could a person learn a foreign language, or get the vaguest idea of a word's meaning, by learning just the alphabet? My point is that if a person learning the Language of Space doesn't define a word exactly as someone else and so must consult the Language of Space dictionary of irreplacable standard words to prevent confusion at the outset, this is no different than is required in learning a conventional foreign language.

In the case of the Language of Space, however, the differences in word definitions possible between people reflect not only the individual conceptions people have of the same word and the polysemous nature of most conventional words, but are a by-product of the freedom of creative expression which the Language of Space provides. Thus, it can be used in two ways: for communication, and for individual expression. For quick communication the standard vocabulary is needed. For expressing one's unique individuality each person can create his own words. The newly-created word 'kryvO' (above-good-passive-feeling) conveys a feeling of passive awe such as when beholding the stars above.