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The Meaning of Reconciliation

Keep my words positive: Words become my behaviours.
 Keep my behaviours positive: Behaviours become my habits.
 Keep my habits positive: Habits become my values.
 Keep my values positive: Values become my destiny.
 There is no dress rehearsal: This is one day in your life.
 (Mahatma GANDHI)

Writing about some important words is like reaching a new fixation in the right disposition of time. Those who love peace as a way of life, use the word 'reconciliation' as a synonym for human relationships. Digging up the meanings of the words could be the same as creating new words and new relationships. Hanna Arendt gave the starting thought for my short search. She said that any interest and talking about a subject we do not really know, is dilettantism, but it is also strength to see the subjects in a different light and in a holistic context. Finding the meaning is a huge challenge, so I would be amateurish to do so.

To feel responsible for newer words, which emerge as recontextualisations of old ones, is to make sense of a new language, which describes it. Reconciliation, the word and the idea, springs up alongside the idea of the world becoming smaller and nearer. If we use the word 'reconciliation', should we not know the other meanings of it and the responsibility carried by it in different illuminations?

MAPPING MEANINGS

The quantity and creativity of word systems in the human mind are astonishing. Our brains can comprehend meanings, but they have to be simplified, grouped and generalised. Painters can count more colour nuances than an ordinary person can distinguish. A regular eye can discern ten to twenty shades of colour, while theoretically eyes would be capable to see hundreds of colour nuances. Here we stand in front of the countless meanings and nuances crossing our minds with abstract words and take the step of a child. The human mind uses general meanings in learning to discriminate from other meanings.

As children we copied what we heard from adults and transferred it into our own private dictionary, sometimes even in a mistaken way. Then we learnt the different meanings of the words. Psycholinguistic searches for aspects of pragmatic meaning of signs are saved in our memories as words. They concentrate on the semantic aspect and analyse the way the meaning of the words could be learned.

According to linguists, who made their findings in the fifties, sixties and seventies, meaning can be explained in associations (to things, events or objects), in presentation or imagery, or in containing more meaning components. For example, some semantic meanings of the word 'reconciliation' could lead us to find synonyms (like 'settlement', 'resolution', 'appeasement', 'compromise', 'cease-fire' or 'reunion'), to find antonyms ('indecisiveness', 'irresolution', 'vacillation', 'hesitation' or 'uncertainty') or to locate the word in a group of words (it might be 'a subject implicating solution' or maybe 'state of solution').

MAPPING MISTAKES

What happens to us when we use the word 'reconciliation' as the concept used in the political, religious or everyday relational discourse? Can we make a mistake without knowing it? Miscommunication appears in frequent company

with "awkward moments", "inherent ambiguities", "communication conflicts", "communication breakdowns" and "communicative failures." The idealistic position says that language can be perfect and "clean."

On the other hand, at least the ambiguity and indirectness, the difference between speech and intended meaning, and more generally, coherence and mutual knowledge do play a critical role in human speech. On top of all that comes our willingness to comprehend and to connect it with known or planned actions. Studies on intercultural communication use 'misunderstanding' as a central category. We can learn different nuances, we can choose different meanings and we can make different associations.

THE FORMATION HISTORY OF 'RECONCILIATION'

Many nations share the idea that we share a global history, and reconciliation is a word to express this common belief. The formation histories of European languages help to see those hidden connections.

We can find the meanings of the shared words in their past, in their etymology. English dictionaries say: 'reconciliation' is 'the act of reconciling', 'the condition of being reconciled' and 'the penance'. 'Reconciliatio' in Latin, 'reconciliation' in Old French, 'reconsiliacion' in Middle English: they all mean to re-establish a close relationship, to settle or resolve, to bring (oneself) to accept, to make compatible or consistent. The synonym of 'reconciliation' is 'adaptation'. 'To adapt' means 'to re-establish a close relationship', as in marriage, or 'to become compatible or consistent'.

'To conciliate' means 'to overcome the distrust or animosity', 'to appease', 'to regain or to try to regain a friendship or goodwill by pleasant behaviour', 'to make or to attempt to make compatible'. The synonym of 'to conciliate' is 'to pacify'. Dictionaries point out the connection between 'reconcile' and 'pacify'. 'To pacify' means 'to ease the anger or agitation', 'to end war, fighting, or violence'; or simply 'to establish peace'. In Middle English it was written as 'pacifier', in Old French as 'pacifier', in Latin as 'pacificare'.

Without a doubt, the translations of 'reconciliation' into other languages take one or the other aspect of the meaning or add some extra. In my native Lithuanian the same word 'susitaikymas' could also mean 'to reconcile with oneself to one's fate or lot' or 'to put up with a situation' and 'to accept discomfort'. Do we all, German, Spanish and Chinese, mean the same thing when we talk about reconciliation?

Probably, we do not mean the same thing. How do we learn about reconciliation? What associations, what meanings does it carry? How do we deal with the natural misunderstandings of the meaning we could not know? Where does the word come from? Can the way I understand reconciliation connect me with the meaning other people have and be implemented into practice?



POLITICAL HISTORY AND ECOLOGY

The meaning of the word 'reconciliation' can be connected and associated with many factors, fields and emotions. The next examples are just sporadically chosen ones about the usage of 'reconciliation' in politics and culture, in linguistics, in theology, in psychoanalysis, in pedagogy.

Aborigines in Australia or First Nations in North America claim back their cultural inheritance and their socio-political dignity, and respond to the promotion of land rights, protection of indigenous sacred lands and ethics. Who could provide us – and on what basis – with the right answer when we pose the question: what does reconciliation with the newcomer nations mean in these very lands and in this context?

Moving toward the approaches of ecological reconciliation we must take a broader scope. It promotes the adoption of life support systems reconciled with the mutual benefit of the country and their own life together with other beings.

We remember the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC) in the South African Republic, the reconciliation with the Two-Thirds World and the reconciliation of democratic social politics, which support the collective decision taking into consideration the individual at the same time.

LINGUISTICS AND PEDAGOGY

Linguists talk about the reconciliation of language and about finding a common etymology in deliberately developed alphabets in neighbouring or opposed languages, which were developed purposefully in order to show cultural and political differences. Itamar EVEN-ZOHAR describes the case of the *Urdu* language. Urdu became a vehicle for separate Muslim national ideology, a vehicle of struggle for national identity in Northern India against the Hindi and Hindustani speakers and Hindu religionists.

Hindi adopted more and more elements from Sanskrit, invented new words, "purified" itself from Arabic and Persian elements. Urdu went the other way around: it adopted more and more Arabic and Persian glosses and "purified" itself from Sanskrit as much as possible. Hindi has deliberately coined new words, current words, in order not to be identical with Urdu.

In reconciling pedagogies, teachers speak about learning to be focused less on language in case of children of non-native speakers in the class, and to be focused less on limitations, but on interaction or action in the class.

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THEOLOGY

Psychoanalysis teaches, for example, diplomats and politicians participating in various types of negotiations to consider the shared trauma in conflict situations, which can be shaped by different intended or unintended disasters, their scope ranging from serious earthquakes to bloody terror attacks. All these phenomena are connected to the wide area of the *reconciliation* of our memory mechanisms in identity and identity building.

Roman Catholic and Orthodox theological thinking talks about the *sacrament of reconciliation* among the seven sacraments. That means the

reconciliation with God in rediscovering the compassionate heart of God and reliving a serious commitment to charity and love. "*Be reconciled to God... Behold, now is the acceptable time*" (2 Corinthians 5, 20 and 6, 2).

MANY MEANINGS AND ONE IDEA

It seems that our generation creates more universal words or internationalisms than any other generations. Misunderstanding is one of the main creative engines of ideas. The exchange between individuals and the change every individual carries subscribe to the meaning in cooperation, negotiation and perhaps not in a primarily instinctive agreement, but at least an intention to consensus.

The word 'reconciliation' is not simple, it has endless implications we could not all discover and we cannot imagine to portray what it means to anybody else unless someone tells us and tries to continue to reflect on it in her or his own language and culture. Reconciliation is a concept, which can be described and should be learnt from different perspectives, from different associations and from the dictionaries of rare languages.

The idea of reconciliation does not lose its strength and value if we get to know more and more meanings of this word. Nonetheless the idea becomes more imaginary, more connective, and more associative. This expression creates more projects and justifies the time we spent delving in our dictionary.

UNIFICATION, FORGIVENESS AND PEACE

We cannot easily change that we select meanings due to the capacity of our brains. Mistakes in the circumstances of a conflict are some natural facts of communication, which we realise in accepting the path of negotiating and willingness to agreement. Every culture develops the trajectory of language through history, through its ethics on ecology.

The way we understand education describes the way we accept the continuous lifelong learning process. Every person individually chooses the meanings they learned in questioning their identity and religious beliefs. The meaning of 'reconciliation' associates different things to each member of our community, depending on the knowledge and memory of the individual on history, language and psychology.

Consequently, the formation of the word 'reconciliation' is very far from our conscious understanding of it. But the feeling tells us the truth. There is a single idea behind the feeling of the word 'reconciliation' – the idea of the process of unification, forgiveness and peace. It is a very new idea in the history of our modern civilisation, therefore it has to be discussed, questioned and developed meaningfully.

Suggested Reading

- KATZ J. J., *The Philosophy of the Language*. New York – London, 1966.
 ALPHER Joseph (ed.), *Nationalism and Modernity: A Mediterranean Perspective*. New York, 1986.
 ECO Umberto, *Serendipities: Language and Lunacy*. Columbia, 1998.
 CHOMSKY Noam, *Language and Thought*. Rhode Island, 1993.

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