The Gender-Based Hierarchy Principle in U.S. English Compounded by the Tyranny of 'is'

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Four Primary Uses of 'Is'

Existence

There is (such a thing as) an apple.

Identity

An apple is a fruit.

Location

The apple is on the table.

Predicate-adjective

The apple is red.

(secondary uses include 'is' in the passive, and the progressive)

Is: it is possible 'to be' more than one thing at the same time:

- A person can 'be' both cruel and kind

- A person can 'be' both feminine and masculine

- A person can 'be' both happy and sad

What 'Is' Leads To…

❖ Any discussion of what 'is' inevitably leads to what 'is not'.

❖ This leads to value/ranking comparisons (Derivational Thinking).

❖ When compared, what 'is not' is typically found to be lacking.

'Ought to Be'/'should Be'

- ❖ "Issues of "ought to be" heighten the impact of is/is not assumptions…"
- ❖ 'Ought' and 'should' suggest rank.
- ❖ Both can be thought of as indirect commands.
- ❖ Works with DT to support privileging of male and male-identified matters.

Isness in science/ academia

- ❖ "Science is thought to be 'objective' hence burying the question of 'who thinks so?'."
- ❖ In the objective isness science language, we hardly find human perceptions, meanings, and measurings.
- ❖ Isness promises "truth," but science does not.

Isness in science/ academia

❖ Isness perpetuates the already established models/ categorizations.

Static Nature of 'is'

- ❖ Bourland notes that 'to be' freezes perceptions
- ❖ "…is and are create the effect of a frozen universe"
- ❖ The world however is not static
- ❖ Because of DT, 'is' leads us to think one dimensionally.

- If one 'is' female, one cannot also be male
- "You *are* either with us or against us"
  - President Bush 2001
- 'A is A' and cannot be not-A
- In English, we use binaries and dichotomies, because things *are* either one or the other.

- As Burke pointed out, we identify things by what they are and what they are not.
- For example, gender. A woman is not a man and a man is not a woman.
- This leads to ranking.
- A woman wants to become a man because to be man is to be.

The one dimension of isness

- The concept of "is" leads us to think in one dimension
  - English speakers can't think without concepts of number or ranking within a valuing system that prioritizes singular above plural
  - The hiding of multi-dimensionality is another bad effect of the commonality of *isness*
  - By using "is", we think we have described something when we have described one dimension of it

The problem with theories

- ❖ Preference for singularity comes out in our tendency to want to find "the" cause.
- ❖ There is anguish among our theorists because we have "too many theories."
- ❖ One could see this state as advantageous
- ❖ Do we find it a comfortable state having many theories? We CAN think outside our "isness," but we find it quite difficult.

Bourland Jr. & Korzybski.
The controversy

- Korzybski proposed a new system of thinking, one that did not employ the 'is' of identity.

- David Bourland Jr. (1953) attempted to extend the rejection of the 'is' of identity to the complete elimination of the verb 'to be'.

- He named what he was doing as writing in E-Prime (from the equation $E' = E - e$, where **E** represents the words of the English language, and **e** represents the inflected forms of 'to be').

Bourland's contribution

❖ By promoting complete elimination of "is",
Bourland drew much fire, friendly and
otherwise; he and contributors reached a
relatively wide and not specialized audience

Out of the mainstream

- ❖ Isness appears commonly in academic writing
- ❖ Whether one tries to follow Korzybski's prescriptions or use the E-Prime system, one works out of the mainstream.

What happens to ideas

❖ Important ideas get lost because they do not conform to the canon. Science claims that the reconstruction of ideas, via the proof of falseness, is the ongoing business of science

❖ The power of the patterns of one's native language, unless we make a specific effort, results in a bias toward reproducing existing patterns

❖ As we read new ideas, if we have no boxes for them, we do not remember what we read. Or we reformulate what we read to fit the boxes we have

Just keep in mind

❖ The verb "to be"

  – hides agents of actions

  – hides multi-dimensionality in favor of abstracting a single facet of an experience for attention, memory and response

  – hides hierarchy at work to undermine otherwise conscious intentions at behaving in an egalitarian fashion

  – sets up "objectivity" as an impossible goal; and turns actors into passive acted upon victims.