

*“It takes courage to think differently.”*

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**Refereed Paper**

*This map, this live picture of a portion of the ongoing world of processes, is not of the same order of existence as the territory, as the world of processes itself. It is something different, something brought into existence by our own activity.*

— J. Samuel Bois, *The Art of Awareness*, p.84

## **“STRUCTURING” TO MAKE SENSE OF OUR WORLD**

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### **A Definition of “Structure” as a Noun**

We tend to regard “structure” as a thing, *a structure*. In concrete terms “structure” can mean a physical entity, an assembly of parts, a bridge, or a building. In the abstract, we often use “structure” to indicate certain interrelationships: the structure of a novel or symphony, or the structure of language. Even if used in relation to a design, plan, or model, the word “structure” suggests something stable and *fixed*. Dictionaries define “structure” as both a verb and a noun, e.g., *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* defines <sup>1</sup>*structure* as a noun, and <sup>2</sup>*structure* as a verb.

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### A Definition of “Structure” as a Verb

It is this second definition, the dynamic, active, happening aspect of structuring, constructing, putting together, that I will explore in this paper — *structuring* as something we *do*. Our structuring, as an activity of our nervous systems, makes it possible for us to apprehend, comprehend, and understand our world. I have made the following definition:

*structuring* as verb (transitive). A proposed definition based on general semantics principles. A *self-conscious act* involving imaginative, verbal, graphic, manipulative, etc., ordering (arranging, visualizing) of a thing-situation-process into interrelated and interactive components — *with an awareness* that our structuring-process exists as only one of indefinitely many other possible structurings, and that our structurings are not, and cannot be the same as (identical with) whatever object of our ‘attention’ we are structuring.

We also note that:

w as a map is not the territory, so a structure is not the structure we have *structured*.

w structuring as presented here involves the assumption that all thing-processes ‘existing’ in different space-time frames are unique.

In *structuring mode*, we are aware that words, theories, opinions, explanations, mathematical formulae, news, gestures, and other forms of representation, are not the thing-processes-territories that they represent. In *structuring mode* we are aware of differences between what we think, feel, say, expect, etc., and what is going on. In *structuring*, we give the highest priority to our self-conscious awareness that there are limits to our representational (mapping) abilities, limits to the accuracy of our representations, and limits to what we can know. In *structuring*, we improve our communication as we become aware that our thoughts represent only one point of view, that there are many possible *points of viewing*, and that no one can think or say *all* about anything. When we do our *structuring* in this way, we can often avoid conflict, stress, and hostility.

If we are not being fanatic and obsessive, we can talk about and ‘map’ a situation from many points of viewing. Similarly, we can structure a situation from many different perspectives — psychological, political, scientific, techno-

logical, religious, economic, ethical, artistic, comedic, etc. (To avoid elementalism, we must remember that to some degree these activities are interrelated.)

### “Structuring” as an Activity

This paper will,

- (a) outline the benefits of developing awareness of the “structuring” we do
- (b) show how to improve awareness of “structuring” by
  - (i) using techniques based on the calculus
  - (ii) using the general semantics formulation of non-identity/identification (and other related formulations)
  - (iii) developing ongoing awareness of the space-time interval as related to non-identity/identification and “structuring.”

The following is intended to stimulate time-binding activities — with a hope that this might help in furthering our understanding of general semantics. The ideas expressed are presented heuristically as *premises and psychological tools*. I put emphasis on *structuring, non-identity, non-allness, consciousness of abstracting*, and other terms, not as words to be discussed, but as *activities to practice*. We can enhance the practice of “structuring” as an activity of our nervous systems by conscious application of other general semantics formulations/activities such as *non-elementalism*, and *self-conscious self-reflexiveness*.

### A World of Relationships

We can think of “structure” in terms of organization and relationship. We can differently structure what we say according to the order in which we use our words, e.g., “John loves Mary” does not necessarily mean “Mary loves John.” We live in a world where, as far as we know, every ‘thing’ is organized in some particular pattern, and exists in relationship with other things. What we see, hear, think, feel, say, do, understand, imagine, expect, etc., involves relationships and ‘construction.’ In our everyday situations, we tend to focus more on *things* as we relate them to us. We usually think and talk about *things*. We rarely think about *how we think and talk* about things. We rarely discuss with ourselves and/or others *how* we think. And if not involved in scientific activity, usually we don’t concern ourselves with structures as components of other structures — thing-processes in relationship with other thing-processes as *we relate* them (note that *we* do the relating, *we* create/perceive relationships).

### Structuring our Structurings

A structure exists as part of other structures. We can structure other structurings. From a psycho-grammatical viewpoint (1), a second structuring has the first as its object. As such, a second, or later structuring, cannot be the same as earlier structuring. Structuring our structuring provides us with one way to review, update, and improve earlier structuring. It allows an overview achieved through a semantic pause. Structuring provides us with one way to improve our creative impulses. If we recognize that a particular way of thinking about, understanding, and doing is not the only way, we are more likely to seek other ways, and to avoid habitual, unaware, unconscious responses when we encounter unusual and challenging situations. We live in a world of multi-dimensional relationships and multi-dimensional structures. We can use our intelligence more effectively when we ‘see’ things from multiple points of viewing.

Our maps have a profound influence on our attitudes and actions, the institutions and societies we create, our personal, societal, and international conflicts, etc. Mindful structuring can improve our mapping because when structuring, we create ‘maps’ *with awareness* of so doing.

We can evaluate our structuring in terms of its usefulness in helping us explain and improve our understanding of ourselves, situations, events, and ourselves-in-situations. We can look for degrees of mapping accuracy when applying our structurings to specific problems.

### Limits

There are physical, neurological, epistemological, time-related, and other limits to the extent and accuracy of our structuring. We cannot structure what we don’t know. Information coming to us through sound or light waves takes time to reach us. Nervous impulses take time to travel around our nervous system. We don’t see all and don’t hear all. We wink. We sleep. While talking we hear less. We daydream. The information we get about ourselves and our environments comes after the events. We are always late on the scene. We miss a great deal of information during these processes.

According to Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, at atomic levels, our knowledge is limited by our very act of seeking to know. (2) Bohr’s complementarity principle asserts that what we find depends on what we are looking for and how we look. (3) When we look for something, we will likely miss other things and other events. Other limits arise from our biases and prejudices — individual, group, cultural, etc.

One of the few activities evolving towards structuring as defined here are those we call “science.” In science, a theory is not considered to be identical with whatever the theory is about. A theory is not considered a final or complete explanation of a particular phenomenon. Many physicists accept that uncertainty and unpredictability are not properties of the processes under investigation, but they result from the limits of observers and their instruments.

According to Bohr, a measurement is not a property of the thing measured; it represents the result of an interaction between an observer and whatever is being ‘measured.’ (In measuring, we compare. We can generalize “measure” to include *criticizing, judging, agreeing/disagreeing, and generally what we think-feel or say about* someone or something, etc. When we criticize or judge, for instance, we make comparisons based on our own values, standards, expectations, and so on.)

To accelerate the progress of science towards structuring, we could usefully employ a generalization of Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, Bohr’s complementarity principle, and Korzybski’s principle of general uncertainty. This would emphasize (a) *the role and limits of the observer*, (b) the limits of verbal, mathematical, and other forms of representation, (c) the importance of thinking in terms of probabilities.

### **The Calculus: A Powerful Structuring Tool**

The calculus, a powerful technological tool, can also be seen as a powerful psychological tool and a powerful structuring tool. The calculus, among other things, is about relationships and changing relationships. I often use this definition:

*the calculus.* The study of a continuous function by following its development through indefinitely small steps. If the continuous function that we follow involves our own operations as a function of time, we have a link between calculus, self-awareness, and behavior. We can generalize the notion of the calculus and apply it to closely monitor and study what we do (not all), and *how* we do what we do. The calculus is about change of change, variables, differentiating, integrating, limits, and non-allness (approximation), time, relationships (interconnectedness), non-identity (incremental differences). We can translate these ideas, and apply them to everyday situations to develop a finely tuned awareness of, and a high level of attention to *some* of what’s going on, in and around us; and to *some* of our responses to what’s going on in and around us.

We live in a world of changing relationships. We have expectations, and develop habits (behavior patterns) to match familiar patterns of change in our homes, in the workplace, social situations, and so on. But patterns of change also change. Not being aware of, or ignoring, this change of change can result in less effective, less efficient efforts and responses; it can sometimes lead to confusion, injury, or even death. A finely tuned awareness can help us develop high levels of sensitivity to change and changing patterns of change.

Our knowledge is limited by our limited nervous systems. We can think of ‘truth’ as a limit we approach, a limit to knowing all the characteristics, activities, relationships, etc., about everything. We can think of ‘knowledge’ as a limit we approach, but also cannot reach, even with powerful scientific tools. We can structure the notion of ‘self’ as a limit we approach that consists of the ‘integration’ of our thoughts, feelings, ideas, experiences, beliefs, fears, activities, etc. Structuring includes a premise of non-allness and non-identity; we cannot know all about ourselves.

We can use the calculus to deal with dynamic and more complex situations by breaking them down to simpler and more manageable proportions. We can closely observe ourselves looking, listening, and giving meanings and values to what we see and hear. We can apply the notion of the calculus to help us keep in touch with our habitual way of labeling, defining, thinking, doing, and reacting. Much of what we do, we do automatically. With a finely tuned awareness of *how* we act and *what* we are involved in, we can improve our interactions. (For more on the calculus, see Reference 4.)

### **Identity/Identification**

“Identity” is defined by Korzybski in *Science and Sanity* (p.400) as “absolute sameness in all respects.” “Identifying,” in general semantics, means treating different things, situations, or people as if they are the same.

From a general semantics perspective, no two things are identical. Because things change, however “insignificantly,” from one moment to the next, a thing is not even identical with ‘itself.’

In many situations, differences and changes may not be important. In other situations these differences can have significant consequences. You may recall a situation in which a major problem resulted from ignoring differences that you considered unimportant, or from treating someone or something as if they were always exactly the same from one time to another.

If we observe two things to occupy separate space-time locations, they are not and cannot be the same. If two things were “identical,” they would occupy the same space-time and we could not tell them apart (this is, of course, a logi-

cal contradiction). We can only observe *similarity*, which is useful and necessary for categorizing, generalizing, etc.

From a general semantics perspective — *no two things are identical*. For example, apples are not identical to each other. At another level, our representations are not the things represented. Our theories, expectations, feelings, memories, beliefs, definitions, labels, etc., are not the same as the thing-processes, individuals, situations, etc., they represent. The map *is not* the territory.

You might feel inclined to think-feel-say “This is silly. No one behaves this way. No one confuses one thing as being the same as another.” I propose that with self-awareness and self-monitoring, paying close attention to what you do, you may discover that you do ‘identification’ more often than you expect.

### **Non-Identity and Self-Conscious Awareness**

We can use the formulation of non-identity to guide us towards more intelligent behaving. With a *non-identity* orientation, we practice a self-conscious awareness that one instant of awareness is not another instant of awareness.

To consciously divide our awareness into indefinitely small steps, we can use the calculus. In our awareness that one instant of awareness is not the same as another, we can label the interval between these instances of awareness as what I call “psychological time.” The higher the number of instances and intervals of awareness, as a function of chronological time, the more effectively we practice awareness. The higher these numbers, the more incremental, the smaller the units of our ‘psy-time’ (psychological time), the greater our potential for distinguishing one thing from another and behaving more appropriately.

### **We Cannot Not Identify**

We cannot not identify — but with practice, we can identify less.

If we were to attempt to be non-identifying humans, I propose that we would not be able to do anything — move about, eat, drink, and so on. In short, we could not live without identifying. Most of our identifications do not result in serious problems for us. But others could involve problems resulting in misery, injury, or even death. For instance, we usually don’t concern ourselves regarding the food we are about to eat — is it poisonous? As you read this article, you probably won’t be thinking about the soundness of the roof above you or the floor beneath you.

Now, think about some instances of identification that you do in your life from moment to moment, and do some structuring of these. Here are some examples. Do you check if the door to your home or car is locked, after you have

turned the key? You are waiting to cross a busy intersection — the sign ‘says’ “Walk” — What do you do? After parking the car, do you push the door open without checking first? At an intersection, waiting in the car for the lights to change, you get the green — what do you do? Have you ever tried to open the door of another car that looked like yours? Have you ever come out of the elevator on the ‘wrong’ floor? Have you ever been in an elevator with other folks, and after some moments realized the elevator had not moved? Have you ever questioned any of your beliefs? How upset do you get when someone doesn’t keep a promise? Have you ever felt insulted? Have you ever said — “I know exactly what you mean”? How often does your communication include the following words and phrases? — *The important thing is; what is at issue here; only; always; it’s because; there is no other explanation; this could only mean; what this means is; there’s nothing more to say.*

### “Is-of-Identity”

We instinctively identify. “Identifying” in general semantics refers to a situation where we are not aware of talking about, relating to, and treating one thing, one person, as if it, him, or her were no different from another. Most of our identification takes place without words; but by paying attention to our use of “is,” “are,” “was,” and “were,” we can lessen, to some degree, our tendency to think and behave as if a “this” was the same as a “that.” I do not suggest that we never use “is” in our speaking and writing (although we could use E-Prime, the use of English without any form of the verb *to be*. (5)). We can label our use of “is” in many ways: examples include “is-of-identity, is-of-existence, is-of-predication, is-as-auxiliary-verb.” In many situations, our identifying behavior, and our use of “is-of-identity” does little harm. But in other situations, it can — and sometimes the resulting actions may lead to injury and death. Examples of “is-of-identity” include: *They are unbelievers. He is a nigger. He is a Jew. She is a prostitute. They are liberals. He is a communist. They are Americans. He (she) is an abortionist. Abortion is murder. This is a safe car. This is no threat. This is a safe weapon.* (For practice, you might do some structuring related to these examples.) A great deal of our personal, professional, societal, and international conflicts can be attributed (as simplistic as this might sound) to our lack of awareness that what’s going on in our heads is not the same as what’s going on outside. I think it worth emphasizing: We cannot not identify — *But we can practice to identify less.*



### **The Space-Time Interval**

When we *do* identifying, we are not aware of the space-time interval between the things identified — especially the interval between ourselves and whatever we are talking or thinking about. Our awareness of having identified comes *after* the act. We can develop awareness of this space-time interval. We can encourage such habits as paying more attention to what’s going on and noticing *differences and changes* in the things we see as similar — and noticing *similarities* in things we see as different.

Thinking in terms of speculations, ‘theories,’ and probabilities also can help. We can qualify our ideas, opinions, feelings, etc., with such phrases as *it seems to me, in my opinion, as far as I know, as I presently understand this*. We do not need to say such phrases aloud. The awareness counts more than the verbalizing, which might be evaluated by others as “fence sitters,” “unsure of ourselves,” “indecisive,” even “elitist,” etc.

It takes courage to think differently. In our efforts to improve our thinking-evaluating, we may go against the *culturally expected way of thinking*, (which I call “cewt”). We can expect some people to regard us as not belonging to the tribe. (6)

### **Self-Evaluating our Structuring**

We have discussed the benefits of awareness of the “structuring” we do. We have seen how to improve awareness of “structuring” by using the calculus, and by developing consciousness of identification and of the space-time interval, which means that we get information after things have already happened.

Our awareness of structuring represents *one* orientation to our inner and outer environments — *one way* of relating with ourselves, others, and the world around us. We can practice our structuring and evaluate the results in terms of their usefulness in improving our relationships and our lives.

Remember the reference to “heuristic” earlier in this paper. You can apply what you understand, observe the results, evaluate for yourself, and make improvements.

### NOTES

1. For more on “psycho-grammatics” see my article, “A Grammar of Consciousness” at <http://dfwcgs.net/milton/index.html>.
2. Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle holds that the more precisely the position is determined, the less precisely the momentum is known in this instant, and vice versa; that it is physically impossible to measure both the exact position and the exact momentum of a particle at the same time.
3. Niels Bohr’s complementarity principle says that objects can have wave and particle properties, but not both at the same time.
4. See my article, “Calculus and Everyday Living” at <http://dfwcgs.net/milton/index.htm>.
5. For more on E-Prime, see E. W. Kellogg III, “Speaking in E-Prime: An Experimental Method for Integrating General Semantics into Daily Life.” *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 44, no. 2. Also available at [www.generalsemantics.org](http://www.generalsemantics.org).
6. For more on “cewt,” see my article, “Conscious Abstracting and a Consciousness of Abstracting” at <http://dfwcgs.net/milton/index.html>.