

Translator's Preface

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**Theory of Language: The representational function of
language**

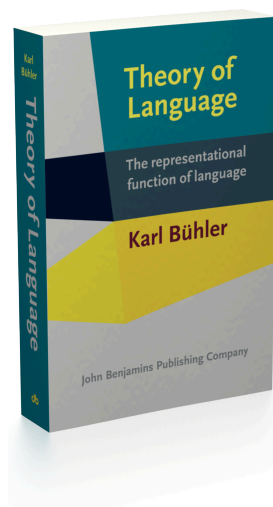
Karl Bühler

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Translator's Preface

Bühler's *Theory of Language* was not written for a homogeneous audience. The work contributes to the various sciences of language, to philosophy of language, to psychology of language and to philosophy of science. The consequent complications for us as contemporary readers are compounded by the fact that it is an historical work in two senses, written in the past and addressed to past thinkers; they are further compounded by the fact that the disciplines involved have not remained static, and have in some respects lost contact with older traditions; in his Introduction, Achim Eschbach has amply illustrated this point. In translating Bühler's treatise, I have kept its original openness in mind and tried to preserve it, for the translator's task is not to make a work inaccessible to a part of its intended audience. The problems of translation are akin to the problems of reading; the confluence of disciplines and traditions in this work is a difficulty and a challenge to both reader and translator, and each will have to be aware of cross-currents and tolerant of intermingling.

Though it is an historical work and must be read as such, in translating the *Theory of Language*, I have hoped that it will become a contemporary work as well, for it addresses topics of considerable contemporary relevance. It was written before the "refutation" of behaviourism, for example, and displays a willingness to learn lessons from behaviourism which may be surprising to us now: that behaviourism shows that there cannot be an unproductive participant in speech. It can thus serve as a reflection on and a criticism of what is now perhaps accepted as a matter of course. — But perhaps its greatest merit lies in the fact that it does not merely present results (which would have a short half-life) but primarily reflections on the foundations of science; in this respect it is a philosophical work.

Respect for the heterogeneity of Bühler's (real and potential) audience sometimes involves some disrespect for the terminological shibboleths of some parts of the audience. There is in philosophy, for example, a tradition of making very heavy weather with the translation of certain German

terms, sometimes equipping the English word “moment” with a German meaning; similarly, *Anschauung* is usually translated with “intuition”, which is then supposed to mean something like a sense of perceptual content — I am sure much to the puzzlement and consternation of the educated non-specialist. These conventions may well have a point in specialist circles, but when circles and disciplines intersect, it must be realized that outside of its own province such usage can only have a cold dictionary meaning. In the glossary I have stated why I have felt free to deviate from some of these conventions.

Still, not all terminological strains could be avoided. “Evidence” and “intention” are so inconspicuous in the text that their philosophical use may pass by unnoticed; but it should cause no great misunderstanding. But it is something of a misfortune, for example, that there is no avoiding the term “speech act” in the translation, for Bühler’s speech acts have little in common with those of speech act theory. This sort of strain is sometimes compounded by interference from third languages. The simplest example is the interference of Saussure’s *concept*, which is translated into English with “concept”, and into German with *Vorstellung*, which in turn yields “idea” in English. On a rather more refined level, there was no choice but to translate Bühler’s *Gebilde* with “structure”; but it would be a misfortune if, to the detriment of his view of the openness of language and its structures, Bühler were to be mistaken for a structuralist.

There is no denying that Bühler’s style takes getting used to; but I think it is possible — and perhaps rewarding — to get used to it. I willingly acknowledge that there may be much virtue to accommodating the style of translated works to contemporary tastes; but I will not do it. A reduction of Bühler’s style would almost certainly have involved a reduction of content. In his style he works in accordance with his theoretical convictions: he does not aim at the highest possible degree of completeness in his discussions, leading the reader on a short leash, as he puts it, but expects the reader to work productively with the text. It would be a fundamental mistake to translate this style in accordance with an ideal of pellucidity and completeness. — But a modernizing translation would not only be untrue to Bühler; it would also obscure the fact that this work is neither purely contemporary nor purely historical; in a sense it is our more distant heritage, a broken line of tradition, and provides a standpoint for commenting on and perhaps criticizing our more recent heritage.

It is probably a generally recognized ideal that a translator should be as inobtrusive as possible; but *everything* he does is interference with the text, and it is his duty to change the text. He is thus subject to two conflicting ideals and must respect both equally. The translator must not speak for himself, but the author cannot speak without him. Respect for the reader and the author requires that the translator's procedure should be as transparent as possible.

A glossary is provided to this end, among others: Bühler uses several terms that are quite unusual in English or which may be unfamiliar to some readers; the glossary should then serve to make the work more easily accessible. In other cases, Bühler's comments on certain terms in other works are quoted to make his particular usage or views clear. I have also taken the opportunity to justify or comment on some of my translations. The glossary makes no pretence of completeness.

Translator's insertions into the text are enclosed in square brackets and serve a variety of purposes. Sometimes I have thought it appropriate to make a point less obscure, sometimes I have offered an example that I have thought might be more enlightening to the English speaking reader, sometimes I have explained literary allusions that may not be familiar to the English speaking reader. Translator's footnotes perform similar functions, and are enclosed in square brackets, but not further marked. In general, I have made marked insertions into the text when I have judged the remark compact enough not to distract and am certain that it does not misrepresent Bühler's views, and used footnotes for longer digressions. Bühler's own insertions in quotations are indicated by braces.

The German page numbers are indicated in the outside margin in square brackets; note that the Preface was repaginated for the second edition to accommodate Kainz's introduction; adding eighteen to the number indicated yields the pagination of the Preface in the second edition. It might facilitate international communication if the German pagination were used for standard reference. — The numbering of all divisions has been retained in the translation, whereas the divisions themselves have been elevated to the next higher level. Thus, what I have called "Parts" in translation are called *Kapitel* in German; the renaming follows the logic that a "chapter" of almost two hundred pages would defy credibility. The word "chapter" was not used for the next lower level (*Paragraph*, §, in German) so as to avoid confusion with the *Kapitel* in international communication. In accordance with the general elevation of the divisions, the translation has been rather

more generously laid out than the original. The headings of the subsections are drawn from the table of contents of the original, which has almost the nature of a summary; they are printed in the text of the translation to improve orientation.

In keeping with the habits of the time, Bühler's references are often quite vague, and sometimes inaccurate. Although I did not view translating as a bibliographical exercise, I have made a considerable effort to trace the literature; I cannot, however, guarantee the highest standards of completeness. The reference in the text is sometimes simply to "a study by . . ."; I have not tried to follow up all of these cases, but if I have found a likely candidate, I have included it in the bibliography, but have retained the vagueness of the reference in the text. For the more exact references in the text I have chosen a hybrid technique: titles are treated both as names and as text, so that, wherever Bühler mentions the name in the original, the title of the publication concerned is stated in the original language with an appended translation in square brackets. The full identification is given only in the bibliography, references are made in accordance with modern practice by naming the author and the year of publication; I have made an exception for more literary references to particular translations of classics, which are also given in full in footnotes.

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