

LANGUAGES OF RELIGIONS AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION.  
A CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY  
OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE\*

by Hans-Jürgen Findeis

"Now the whole earth had one language and few words. And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. .. Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.' And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, 'Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.' So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city" (OLD TESTAMENT: Genesis XI: 1-2.4-8).<sup>1</sup>

*0. Introduction*

The mythological narration on the so-called "Tower of Babel" (Gen. XI: 1-9) belongs to the oldest theological tradition (the so-called Jahvistic source) in the Jewish Holy Scripture (the Old Testament of the Christian Bible).<sup>2</sup> About 950 B. C. a theologian living at Jerusalem – at that time the new political and religious centre of all Israelitic tribes – asked questions of that kind: "What was the reason that the unity of the created mankind has been destroyed so early after the creation? Why do the peoples live at different places with different political, social, and socio-religious systems? Why do they speak so different languages that they cannot any more communicate with each other?"

In his answer the ancient Israelitic religious thinker refers to an extraordinary symbol of urban civilization according to his knowledge of the oriental countries: the Mesopotamian city of Babylon (bab-ilu = God's gate),<sup>3</sup> and especially to the tower of the main temple (zikkurat) there, a real skyscraper at that time.<sup>4</sup> The building of the big city and of the temple-tower is not only mentioned as example of the famous Babylonian architecture, but it has been interpreted by the Jahvistic theological school as a symbol of mankind

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overestimating the capacity for creating the civilization without God or against him. The multiplication of the one original language<sup>5</sup> of communication into different languages did not symbolize for this early Israelitic thinker a positively understood evolution of the human intellect and culture. His theological horizon of interpretation reduced the contemporary phenomenon of multilingualistic communication to a fundamental and archetypical event of the history which can be seen in its consequences for the whole history of interlinguistic relations only by considering the theological categories of sin and punishment. The confusion of the language, the plurality of languages, and the lack of communication have been posed by the Jahvistic School of the 10th century B. C. already as a religio-philosophical problem, although formulated in a symbolic language of a dramatic and mythological tale. The answer implies the perspective that the abrogation of the sinful will can finally re-establish the unity of all peoples. Then they will be able to communicate with each other and with God in the right language. Centuries later, this eschatological vision is reflected in Act. 2:1-13 as partly a reinterpretation of the Jahvistic tradition. But this tradition is not the object of our study.

In our context it is more important to see that this type of a pre-philosophical reflection is not isolated. The Comparative Religion offers enough materials of mythological, theological, and also religio-philosophical traditions which demonstrate a deep reflection on language, for instance in interpretations of the Absolute, the creation, and of revelation. These various traditions of different religions are scarcely noticed and evaluated though they preserve a remarkable richness of speculation. In particular the traditions of Hinduism and Indian philosophy are of special value.

On the background of the close relationship between the history of religions and the history of languages this paper intends to investigate some philosophical aspects of the specific role which the languages of religions play in the development of intercultural communication. In doing so we have to take notice of what James I. Campbell emphasized: "Simplistic approaches to religious language . . . might lead some to consider that all such language is of the same type - a confusion that can easily lead to further problems in religion proper."<sup>6</sup> In contrast to that simplicity exegetical theories of text-analysis and interpretation and likewise the philosophy of religious language are referring to actual linguistic research, hermeneutics, and philosophy of language which show "that religious language is problematic, largely because of its complexity".<sup>7</sup>

### *1. The Correspondence between Religions and Languages*

Even if we cannot give a detailed specification of the correlation between religions and languages it may be useful to take into consideration some aspects, because every religion promoted the development of a language and of linguistic thinking in the environment where the religious ideas, institu-



tions, ethical and sociological standards could penetrate and influence the sociocultural context. It is beyond all questions that through the ages of mankind until now the religions represent an important factor in social and cultural life, even in secular and anti-religious societies of our days. In particular the norms and values of social and individual life participate still in ethical traditions of religious societies. And even in modern philosophies religious categories and ideas are reinterpreted in a secularizing manner.<sup>8</sup> Rarely, however, the contribution of the religions to the history and the philosophical understanding of languages has been appreciated.

### *1.1. The Social Context of Religious Communication and Linguistic Culture*

The investigation of the history of religions proves language to be an inherent and constitutive part of religious symbolic communication, and sacred or religious language as an essential element of literary culture. Prayers, rituals, doctrines, creeds, preaching and teaching, disputation and apologetics, systematical reflection as well as religious poetry, that is, all the different forms of symbolic communication need a language which is proper to articulate the religious faith and practice in various textual and non-textual contexts. The form-historical and formcritical research of scientific biblical exegesis could exhibit that the oral delivering and the literary formation of religious texts are connected with social performances of religion and with the diverse functions of religion in a society.<sup>9</sup> These socio-religious and socio-linguistic aspects of religious language are not only typical for the biblical scriptures and traditions but are of general importance. Mentioning another example one can refer also to the connection between the Vedic tradition and specific groups and their functions in the Vedic and post-Vedic society or to the Puranas and the corresponding main socio-religious contexts.

According to this socio-religious aspect of religious language and with regard to the historical and present development of religious language we have to ask how far religious language or the traditional articulation of a religion is affected by social and cultural change or how far religious language can be transformed (translated) in an actual communicative medium without loss of meaning. The delivering of religious or religious-philosophical texts was always influenced by the process of reinterpretation corresponding to the development of the religion, its self-understanding and social function. The same is true of the historical process of commentating and philosophical systematization.

### *1.2 Religio-Historical Aspects of Religious Languages*

Since the time of the ancient civilizations religious texts have been delivered as the earliest expression of linguistic culture. Apart from short texts like incantations, prayers, hymns or proverbs delivered sometimes only as literary fragments, we know more extensive linguistic productions in form of hymnic collections and myths, finally we can read even books of diverse religions which can be praised as documents of a high linguistic and aesthetic



standard. After millennia and centuries they are still basic texts of religious inspirations and impress on actual thinking and living. Parts of these traditions contain deep philosophical reflections exemplifying questions and answers of a searching and self-reflecting existence on the way forward to the limits of understandable utterances. And it is not unusual that religions of a high culture preserve an old linguistic tradition which cannot any more be understood in the ordinary communication. Therefore specific linguistic and exegetical studies are indispensable to probe into the meaning of such a tradition.

Sometimes the language of a Holy Scripture is considered to be identical with the language of the revealing Absolute so that it should not be translated into any other language,<sup>10</sup> likewise linguistic corrections or additions are not allowed when a text has been accepted once as the exclusive articulation of the divine truth. Nevertheless the researcher of religious traditions knows also the case that the translation of a Holy Scripture has been deemed as the true and unfailing word, and it succeeded in pushing away the original text out of the liturgical reading.<sup>11</sup>

In connection with Holy Scriptures religions generally differentiate texts representing the original and authentic revelations and then other texts classified as authoritative traditions which claim to be based on the authentic revelation and to continue the original religious impulse by commentating and actualizing the fundamental scriptures of a religion.<sup>12</sup> The authoritative traditions frequently contain texts of a later time, but sometimes they belong to the epoch of foundation, and they bring the religious message in various literary and linguistic forms. The change from later on canonized and generally accepted Holy Scriptures to the different periods of tradition is therefore not only important for the analyses of a developing religious thinking but also for the linguistic progress of religious articulation in relation to the evolution of a religion corresponding to the socio-cultural context and its historical changes.

Religious language can be sacralized and separated from the ordinary profane language. There are cultures where words with religious meaning have got a particular status in the common language. The Bantu-languages in Africa, for instance, attach religious words to a special class because of their specific power. Also in the Hindu tradition particular sounds, words or sentences have got the reputation of power in a spiritual sense so that some scholars interpret Sanskrit as an exclusively mantric language.

Thereby we touch another aspect: Some of the religions created a particular elaborated language (sometimes even an artificial and secret language only for an initiated class of members) which in the history could influence other languages and reach an extraordinary level of grammatical standard and richness of differentiated and creative vocabulary.<sup>13</sup>

The Science of Religion knows also as a matter of fact that religions differentiate between the language of the divinity and the language of the human beings. So it is the conviction of the Voodoo that the prayers to the laos (the deities) need a translator at the cross-point of the two communica-



tion-fields. This translator, Antibon Legba or Papa Legba, opens in his function as mediator of communication the barrier between the divine and the human world. On the other hand one can distinguish several levels of one and the same language so that the human language functions as a vehicle or medium of the divine word. But without a hermeneutical method or sense for the hidden transcendental dimension of the words it is impossible to disclose the signification beyond the concrete human expression.

With regard to the historical correlation of religion and language I want to point out that there are several examples of a peculiar fact: foundation and reformation of religions are often connected with the departure from a linguistic tradition. In the context of the Western world and the Christian tradition some proofs can be found. The early Christian communities which started as a religious group in the midst of the Palestinian Jewish movements did not continue the Hebrew and Aramaic tradition of the orthodox Jews but used to communicate in the common language, the Koine-Greek of the Hellenistic world and the Hellenistic-Jewish communities. The different Christian churches accepted later the local or national languages. In the Middle Ages Latin was recognized as liturgical and theological as well as philosophical language by the Western church. Standing opposite to the dominating Latin universalism and centralism of papal Rome, the Bohemian reformation under the leadership of Jan Hus (1370–1415) started with using Czech, and Martin Luther's (1483–1546) reformation in Germany introduced German in liturgy and theological teaching, the reformation in the U. K. on the other hand made use of English.

Similar developments can be discovered in the history of Indian religions, if we take in consideration the writings of Buddhism and of Jainism in Pali and other Prakrits on the background of Sanskritic tradition. Mahavira and Buddha (both of them did not belong to the Brahmin) broke the Brahmin Sanskrit tradition and preached in the common language of the people. Not less important in this context is, for instance, the influence of Sanskrit and Pali outside India as a result of the spreading of Buddhism and Hinduism in Asia. Another example can be found in South-India where a multifold Bhakti-literature has been written especially in Tamil. Here it is not possible to mention more details of the long and complicated development of the Indo-Arian and Dravidian languages which is closely connected with the development of Hinduism since the early Vedic era, and which shows mutual influences in a process of Sanskritization and Dravidization. Moreover it would be necessary to investigate the formation and use of languages (like Urdu compared with the development of Hindi) in correlation to political, cultural and religious influences coming again and again from outside during the centuries of the Indian history or with regard to linguistic and socio-religious developments of post-colonial India.

Finally there is also the case that the religious perspective of one universal religion goes together with the hope that one language will be accepted by all humankind. The Holy Spirit Association for Unification of World



Christianity (or Unification Church), founded by San Myung Mun in Seoul 1954, expects, for instance, that Korean will be the language in the coming Kingdom of God starting from Korea. Even if there is not in any case an explicit conception of "one universal religion – one universal language" the extension of a religion or the strengthening of its socio-cultural and political power often brought about the spreading of a linguistic and literary culture (and vice versa).<sup>14</sup> The periods of colonisation and colonialism since the antiquity and in particular since the 15th century as well as intercultural and interreligious conflicts in a multireligious and multilingual society offer several proofs of that kind of intercultural relations.

### *1.3 Linguistic Aspects*

Formally religious language is nothing else than language which is used in speech and writing with the exception of those religious oral or written expressions which are not part of a linguistic system but only symbolic sounds (e. g. in ecstatic experiences) and signs. Therefore it is not easy to give a precise and abstract definition of the conception meant by "religious language".<sup>15</sup> Thus even representatives of Positivism and Critical Rationalism whose criticism of religious language is very rigorous do not give a differentiated definition but they content themselves with the classification of religious expressions under the rubric of metaphysical language. Less difficult is the way of description which relates the usage of a language to "religious" performances and to "religious" contents even if one has to be aware that it remains the problem of defining exactly "religion" and "religious" in view of the complicated and multifold phenomena classified as "religion".

From the viewpoint of general linguistics the systems of religious language are characterized by all linguistic aspects which can be named for every language. Therefore it can be analysed by the same methods as every ordinary profane language. The Hebrew of the Jewish Holy Scripture (TENAKH), the Koine-Greek of Hellenistic-Jewish translation of that scriptures and of Christian New Testament writings as well as the Sanskritic Vedas of the Hindu tradition or the Arabic Koran of the Muslims etc., all of the languages of the different religious oral or written traditions use grammar and vocabulary. They are constituted by phonetic or graphic, by syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic elements of human language. They represent the diachronical and synchronical dimensions of language. The speaker or writer needs the competence of the language for performing it rightly and for generating correctly meaningful expressions etc. – The general scientific approach of linguistics as such does not lead to an understanding of specific characteristics of religious languages as far as language as such in its formal structures is concerned. The normality of religious language makes it possible to employ the philological and exegetical methods for religious texts and to analyse them like secular texts based, for instance, on techniques of literary criticism, linguistics or of different Structuralistic schools. But to add two aspects one has to see that religious texts can create special literary



forms and that different religions elaborated some particular methods of interpretation to find out the deeper meaning. Noticeable is also the observation that the performance of religious language has its proper contextual framing and its proper logic which seems to be singular from the standpoint of ordinary and scientific language. This aspect is important for the discussion with Positivism and Critical Rationalism.

Analysing the functions of religious language articulated in different forms, all religious discourses cannot be reduced to one single type of function. Religious languages serve many purposes. It is possible to differentiate several types of statements. A religious statement can be historical, emotive, invocative, persuasive, descriptive, definitional etc. In different contexts a religious statement can change the function. All these aspects of a linguistic and a literary approach show the complexity of the religious language. It is important to pay attention to them in a process of communication, especially of interreligious communication in an intercultural context.

#### *1.4 Religious Languages and Philosophical Reflection*

In the context of philosophical discussions on language all aspects of the historical linguistic phenomenon cannot be discussed. Remarkable, however, is the fact of cultural history that the high standard of religious languages enabled mankind in different regions of civilization to reflect on fundamental questions of human existence and to locate human life in the cosmic, social and cultural context. The first interpretations of the essence and function of human beings and the oldest expressions of a transcendently oriented self-understanding have been formulated in symbolic languages influenced by religious use of language. Accordingly philosophical thinking started in the context of religious reflections and interpretations by using the same language and by spiritualizing the religious mythological conception, or the philosophical thinking began by criticizing the myths and the popular ideas of the divine world and the mythologico-realistic interaction of gods or divine powers and men. For the own need one developed new words and concepts by modifying and transforming the ordinary and religious terminology. But on the other hand philosophical thinking employed also mythological forms and produced new myths (e. g. the myths in Plato's dialogs). These procedures are known in the East and in the West. For the Western tradition of philosophy one can say that the criticism of mythology, and at the end of all forms of religious traditions, has been an inherent factor of important schools of the philosophical thinking since the beginning of the early Greek philosophy. The modern criticism of religious language continues this philosophical attitude. The concentration on language and the philosophical criticism characterizing modern philosophical trends are very important for the self-understanding of philosophy because the philosophical reflection on language concerns the fundamentals of human being as ens rationale which is related to the whole being. And one has to say that this process is inevitable, for the intellectual capacity as rational being requires as



consequence the examination of thinking, recognizing, and of communicating so that a philosopher has to ask for the fundamentals of knowledge especially with regard to the language as means of consciousness and self-consciousness as well as for the assurance of an effective communication.

Generally it is to say: no religion as symbolically communicating system exists without language, and no historical language without roots in religious traditions. But science and philosophy of the modern age, in particular if they are based on a positivist understanding of reality and language, have provoked a radical criticism of religious tradition and language.<sup>16</sup> The modern search for an ideal and universal language, the discussion on the theory of verification, the semantic and semiotic investigations of linguistics, the scientific use of artificial language with precise meaning, but also the destruction and abolition of language-communication in modern experimental poetry are indications of a change in the relation between religion and language in the socio-cultural context of secular societies in which sciences and technological progress impregnate the mind. The mathematization of language and the exact meaning of mathematical symbolism characterize the opposition to the indeterminate metaphors of metaphysical and religious language. By combining meaningful words for a meaningless text and neutralizing semantic relations, the computer-poetry more radically breaks the linguistic traditions than the symbolism of mystical visions.

In opposition to that process of secularization excluding the meaningfulness of religious language a new philosophical movement in the West is starting and tries to overcome the positivist attitude. After the period of "demythologisation" and of dominating rationalism the post-modern philosophy and the partly anti-rational movements in Europa and North America discover again the pre-rational interpretation of human existence contained in the religious and philosophical traditions mainly in non-christian and in oral cultures. The process of "re-mythisation" promoted by psychological conceptions like that of C. G. Jung (1875-1961) started introducing a mythological language by borrowing from all kinds of religious languages and traditions. It is the intention to rediscover a fundamental symbolic orientation for the human existence which is able to analyse the deep-structure of the actual socio-cultural crisis and to realize a human life in the consequence of a new symbolic orientation.

This complicated situation is the context of a philosophy of religious language which is intended to reflect on the importance of religious languages for intercultural communication.

## *2. Philosophical Reflections on Religious Language in the Process of Intercultural and Interreligious Communication*

### *2.1 Philosophical Context and Orientation*

On the background of historical relations between religions and languages in general and religious language and philosophical thinking in particular, we



have now to concentrate the reflection on a special aspect of a theoretical discussion. We are directing our attention to the religious language (or languages) in the process of intercultural and interreligious communication. Hereby the interreligious communication is seen as a special moment of a wider intercultural process of communicating encounter and exchange. Therefore I do not explain separately an understanding of religious language and then another one of intercultural and interreligious communication. Irrespective of that it is not intended to refer to a particular religious tradition or theology. Likewise the following exposition will not represent a philosophical conception of one single school though it is very evident that my reflection in this paper is more impressed by an idealistic than by a positivistic or empiristic attitude. But it is my conviction that the complexity of phenomena like language, religion, and communication as well as the complexity of all essential religious and philosophical topics needs a plurality of scientific methods and different ways of philosophical investigations and interpretations which come on the way of interdisciplinary cooperation in relation to each other and because of it to a deeper and differentiated conception of reality. The main problem is, however, to put all elements of our knowledge together so that we see a network of them which allows to reformulate the reality in a vision of the whole. In the whole network which is going on to be constructed by science, philosophy and religion, everything exists only in relation to everything so that everything is defined because of its relationship to everything and the whole, and the whole of all is defined by wholeness and by all parts of the whole. This vision can grow up only in a process of permanent intellectual and spiritual transformation involving the historical existence of everyone, in particular of philosophically and religiously thinking people. With regard to that vision and to that process of transformation I want this contribution to be seen in the context of a conference on "Indian Philosophy of Language" which is as such already an extraordinary example of intercultural and interreligious communication, in the past and also in the present.

Already at the beginning we would like to insist on the communicative aspect of every language and on the communicative community to which every communicator belongs as partner of an intersubjective communicative action. In that sense my topic is not the language as such or the religious language as isolated aspect of human language, rather the (inter-)linguistic communication in intercultural and interreligious relations. Therefore this reflection searches the points of contact in the theoretical discussion on communication, without neglecting the problems which are well-known in the traditional and actual controversy concerning the relation of language and knowledge etc.

Following the contemporary philosophy of language the discussion was concentrated on problems of semantics. The main challenge for a philosophy of religious language comes from the side of verificationists whose criterion of empirical verification excludes the religious statements, besides



the ethical and metaphysical, as meaningless. The debates about that position have weakened the rigid exclusion of religious statements because an emotive value has been conceded. But this concession allows only to say that religious statements are not totally meaningless, even though the meaning is strictly limited to an expression of feeling evoking a corresponding or certain feeling on the other side. This conception transfers the former tendency to interpret the religious belief psychologically into the context of a critical philosophy of language.<sup>17</sup> Similarly some hermeneutical conceptions are required for the process of congenial understanding, the attitude of sympathy with the original author or with the hero etc. of a textual tradition.

During the last two decades particularly Western theologians and some philosophers who connect the philosophical analysis of language with sociology or sociological theories try to extend the research by investigating the pragmatic or sociological dimension of religious language. They pay attention to the process of communication in a socio-religious or socio-political context. The religious communication contains not only informations about a transcendental world or about the relation of the world in time and space with the eternal and constitutive fundamentals beyond time and space. They intend a response from the side of the human listener or reader, a verbal or non-verbal reaction, so that the human being becomes a communicative part of the transcendental ground of the being but always entangled in the social context. Therefore the religious language cannot be reduced to a mere monological use of language. Religious language is intentionally directed to the process of communicative interaction which implicates a mutual understanding and a social consensus with the aim of transforming the situation of existence and of society.

This conception of religious communication is based on a practice-oriented philosophy and theology following the position of a Critical Social Theory represented by the Frankfurter Schule (School of Frankfurt [West Germany]) with M. Horkheimer, Th. W. Adorno and J. Habermas as main representatives.

## *2.2 Aspects of a universal Consensus-Oriented Communication*

Criticizing sociological and socio-philosophical theories of society which are concentrated on social systems and do not integrate the questions of intersubjectivity and do not analyse the types of communicative acts, the West-German philosopher Jürgen Habermas develops a theory of communicative acting. It is not possible and also not necessary to investigate his conception in all details but some aspects can be mentioned because they offer important elements for a reflection on intercultural and interreligious communication. Habermas himself does not elaborate this perspective.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless his considerations are very suggestive for our topic.

In confrontation with Wittgenstein's theory of "Sprachspiel" (language-game) Jürgen Habermas<sup>19</sup> emphasizes particularly the competence which enables one to use the linguistic rules (esp. the grammar of language) in a



spontaneous and creative way. The competence is understood as a generative faculty so that the cognitive understanding of rules can be realized by practically using the rule of a "Sprachspiel". Consequently the grammar and the semantic dimension of language are no more isolated from the interaction of communication. The coherence of language and practice implicates that every utterance of language is part of an act of communication. Only the participation in the communication is proof of the consensus concerning the rules. The experience that a concrete communication in the framework of a "Sprachspiel" does not function refers to a disturbed consensus in a communicating group. The consensus is basically disturbed not because of differences in meaning but because of differences in the "form of life", that means, that there is not an intersubjective validity of the rules of a communicative habit.

One more aspect of Wittgenstein's model seems for Habermas to be relevant and problematical. He refers to Wittgenstein's conception that the rules of a game are arbitrary, and a modification of some rules effects a new game. In opposition to the arbitrariness of a game the communication in a traditionally used language is fixed by the grammatical structure. But on the other hand the grammar of a "Sprachspiel" and the communicative competence of a languageuser are changed in the course of cultural transmission and in the process of socialization. Also the strategy of communication can be discussed and modified in a metacommunicative reflection which takes place during the communication. To act competently the communicating subjects need, however, an anticipating understanding of the situation in which the communication is going on. Against Wittgenstein's standpoint, Habermas insists that the structure of communication cannot be understood without regard to the communicators who respect the rules of communication and expect from the partner in the communicative interaction that the respect of the rules and the identity of meaning will be mutually criticized. These few aspects of the reflection on the communicative Universalpragmatics corresponding to Wittgenstein's philosophical analysis are mentioned here because they open the discussion also for a wider conception of religious language in a process of communication.

The criticism of religious language in the frame of empirical or logical positivism, in the analysis of language or linguistic philosophy leads to reflection within theology about the connection between language and meaning in the limits of language or about meaningfulness (truth) and experience. Similarly the philosophy of religious language explains the special aspects of religious language with regard to the criticism of religious meaning. But this discussion remains on the level of semantics, being especially relevant for the rationally reflected self-interpretation of a religion, and does not consider the whole communicative process. Habermas' contribution develops some aspects which are very useful for an intercultural and interreligious conception of communication because he combines linguistic and philosophical analyses in his perspective of a universal consensus-community in a process of continuous meta-communicative reflection about the rules of equal communicative interaction and identity of meaning.



Following Jürgen Habermas, we see the importance of that continuous meta-communicative reflection as an integrated factor of interreligious communication intending mutual acceptance and understanding. Equally entitled to communicate, everybody of an interreligious communicative group must have the right to explain his own standpoint of a confident and competent communication in which not only religions as belief-systems or as sociological systems are explicitly related to each other, but in which partners experiencing religion in its proper social context have the competence of using the language corresponding respectively to their own religion as theological or religio-philosophical and also as social system. The trust in mutual acceptance and in the possibility of mutual understanding is the presupposition and the base of every form of communicative interaction, but even more important for a communicative relationship of partners belonging to different social and philosophical forms of religion. For stabilizing that confidence, the meta-communicative self-reflection of the communicators has to be a part of the interaction from the outset.

Furthermore Habermas' socio-theoretical conception of Universal Pragmatics implies the relation of communication to the social context which is not understood as a static system. Like the process of communicative interaction as model of social acting, the society itself is in a process of change. Therefore the communicative interaction functions as a very important factor of constructing and changing the society. These aspects give a wider horizon to the intercultural and interreligious communication because they refer to the social responsibility of an interaction crossing traditional limits of social groups. Consequently one is invited to reflect the interreligious and intercultural communication as intersocial communication. That is very significant with regard to a society which includes several societies with specific religious and socio-cultural characteristics.

### *2.3 Language-Games and Interreligious Communication*

The modification of the social theory elaborated as Critical Theory by the School of Frankfurt must be seen as reaction to some sociophilosophical models as well as to the Positivism and other modern theories of language and communication. Although the position of Positivism was characterized by the negation of meaningfulness especially with regard to the religious or metaphysical language, nevertheless the discussions on the positivistic criticism elaborated worthwhile aspects for a better understanding of religious language. In particular Wittgenstein's later view of language (published in his "Philosophical Investigations") does justice to the religious language in so far as his theory of "language-games" clarifies that the languages we use are as various as the games we play.<sup>20</sup> Already by using one single language we are participating in different language-games, and therefore we are changing in the process of communication from one language-game to another. Each language-game has its own rules, moves, and objectives, and they are like and unlike each other in differing degrees and often in terms of differing



elements. "As there are various games, each differing in some degree from all others but all connected by a hot of interwoven likenesses, so there are various languages, each differing from every other but all nevertheless connected by a network of intertwining similarities" (J. I. Campbell). Thus the language of description, praise, blame and others are grouped into the family of varying language-activities.

In his theory of language-game Wittgenstein does not claim an ideal or pragmatic model as standard for a particular language-game. Wittgenstein denied rather that there is any normative language-game against which other language-games could be mesured and judged. Contrary to the position of the empiristic positivism the language of positive sciences (as a language-game) is not the criterion of meaningfulness. The terms "meaningful" and "meaningless" cannot be defined in an absolute or normative sense, but will have various meanings depending on the language-game in which they operate. For the benefit of the religious language Wittgenstein's later philosophy of language differenciates many and various functions of language. Besides the primary function in the uses of language there may be a specific way of using language. In terms of the game-model, language is an interconnected series of activities, each with its own rules. No single language, or function of language, is normative for all others, and each language-game is as such a form of life. It may be stressed that no language-game can be condemned because of its failure to mesure up to the requirements of some other language-game. That also implicates on the other hand that the religious language-game (or games of religious language) cannot be the measure of other languages. It is to accept that religious language and scientific language differ in their relationships to facts. And it is to respect that in its regulative and interpretative functions the language of religious belief suggests a connection of religious statements (dogma etc.) with pictures which are different of the pictures of a non-believer, and the referred pictures have different degrees of importance in the language and life of the believer and of the non-believer. In every case a statement possesses its religious character from the total context in which it operates. "It is probable that the language of religion is similar in some respects to other language-games. But this does not necessarily imply that religious discourse can be reduced in toto to some other language or group of languages. Examination may reveal that it has some irreducible element or even elements, all of which are found in other languages but are present here in some unique, differentiating combination" (J. I. Campbell).

Wittgenstein's "Investigations" represent a differentiated approach to language, including religious language. The philosophical analysis of the "complicated network" elaborated by Wittgenstein proposes a less rigid conception of language which allows an understanding of religious language and discourse without minimizing the problematic and difficult character of religious statements. At the same time some aspects of his investigations invite to further differentiation with regard to the communication of different religions. In particular the model of language-game allows to focus



on the functions and character of a language in the context of different religious beliefs. If the religious character of a statement depends on the total context, and every religious belief expressed by religious language is associated with pictures, the communication between different religious beliefs has to reconstruct the total context of every religious statement on one hand and the associated pictures on the other hand.

In this perspective interreligious communication as a kind of intercultural communication realizes a specific language-game consisting of different language-games which differ in their content and context, in their relationships to historical facts, in their way of thinking, in their regulative and interpretative function. Not only the believer differs from the non-believer in the named aspect but also the believer from the other believers of the same religious tradition and in particular from those of various religions. That cannot be overseen especially in that case that the participants of an interreligious communication belong to diverse orientations of the same fundamental religious conviction (like Christians of different churches or theological schools as well as Hindus of the several main theological and philosophical forms of Hinduism or Muslims of the different traditions etc.) or, for instance, they follow religions of a different kind whose differences are the result of their historical origin from different religious streams. I may remember only some examples of the degrees of historical and theological affinities between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (all together can be classified as Abrahamic religions) on one hand or Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism on the other hand without naming the variety and the differences in every religio-historical string.

Beliefs in God or in creation of the world and of man are connected with pictures as Wittgenstein pointed out, but the pictures are very different, to some extent in one and the same religion.<sup>21</sup> And even the same religious statements involve pictures having different degrees of importance in the languages and lives of the believers belonging to different religious traditions with their own socio-cultural contexts as well as in the languages and lives of believers of a common tradition.

If it can be said, in line with Wittgenstein's thought, that religious language can be a collection of languages including ethical language, the language of attitude formation or of personal commitment, and others, and that these languages in one religious language may have different values and standings in the life of believers, the interreligious communication becomes more complicated. As in that sense religious language as a language-game is composed of different sub-language-games, and every religion articulates the belief in a specific language-game with sub-language-games, the interreligious communication has to start with the examination of the language-games asking for similarities and differences in consideration of the types of religious use of language. These procedures are integrated parts of communication between different religious languages on the level of metacommunicative reflections about the presupposition and the realization of a communicative interaction. If the language-game is not specified, the com-



munication about a content of religious belief fails because the intended identity of meaning includes the context of religious belief expressed by an interconnected series of activities in the frame of the language-game. Following Habermas' conception of communicative pragmatics the definition of the common language-game prepares the successful progress of communicative interaction in mutual understanding. The mutual confirmation of the right understanding implicates a consensus about the value of a sentence in the context of communication as well as the anticipation of understanding. Both aspects demand the acceptance of the language-game performed by an interreligious communication of different types of religious languages.

#### *2.4 First Results*

Summing up this section, we can say that the first two steps of our reflection on the understanding of religious languages in the context of interreligious and intercultural communication tried to examine the problem with regard to Habermas' conception of universal pragmatics of communication and to Wittgenstein's theory of language-game. Habermas' conception of the ideal process of communication constitutes the framework for a communicative interaction of partners having equal rights so that the communicators define by a metacommunicative reflection the situation, the rules, the aim, the proceedings of interaction. The identity of meaning has to be clarified by mutual criticism. Secondly the intercultural and interreligious communicative interaction was connected with Wittgenstein's theory of language-game so that the communicative interaction can be understood as a communicative game in which every communicator belongs to a unity of language-game and "form of life". As every religious language-game consists of different sub-language-games, the intercultural and interreligious communication needs a metacommunicative decision about the language-game of the communicative interaction itself and about the sub-language-games with their specific religious contents and expressions as references of the interreligious communicative interaction.

### *3. Religious Languages and World-View*

Religious language as language of communicative interaction and as a concrete language-game participates also in the experience of reality. For there is no other way in which a human being can experience the world than by an experience mediated through language. This thesis was the fundamental result of Wilhelm von Humboldt's research on languages.<sup>22</sup> For him language is not only a medium or vehicle for expressing or communicating the contents of thinking. Thinking and speaking or human awareness and human language are connected in an inseparable unity. According to this unity the language is the expression of the mind and of the world-view ("Weltansicht") of the speaker. The human being recognizes the world, the



objects, the differences, qualities, and relations with the help of a concrete language in a specific manner which corresponds to the language used by him. Every language implies therefore its characteristic view of the world including an appropriate idea of the world and its structure. Hence one can say that every language contains an ontology proper. Consequently Wilhelm von Humboldt analyses the differences of languages as follows: "The difference of languages is not one of sounds and signs, but it is a difference of world-view itself."<sup>23</sup> This world-view of a concrete language is a transindividual understanding which is individually concretized by the articulation of one's thinking. Only by using the language, human beings can explain the already known world and discover the still unknown world. Through language the thinking forms the world and transforms it into language.<sup>24</sup>

As every language implicates a specific world-view corresponding to the world experienced by the language-user, every language in itself is a self-sufficient system in relation to the culture of the communicating community. According to the practice of the 19th century Humboldt identified this communicating community with "nation". Consequently every communicating community can realize its specific cultural identity only by using and developing its own language. At this point the communicating community seems to be a monad, completely functioning in itself and yet limited by language and world-view. But Humboldt is convinced that a clear and distinct definition of the world-view in rational terms results from the passage through a foreign thinking.

The objectivity of a subjective use of language which intends to give the conceptualization of a being and objective terminological expression, needs the encounter with others who express the concept of a being in a different but analogical way according to their own thinking and individual use of the common language. Because of the inherent tendency to limit the community of communication and to bind the speaker of a concrete language in the net-work of an in itself sufficient language-world, one has to go over the limits of one historical language with its corresponding world-view. Only by crossing the borders of the "language - world-view - culture - unity" one can reach the understanding of the reality in its universal objectivity. The way proper for opening a language-world of a communicating community is the learning of different languages of diverse language-families. Every new language brings one in contact with a new world-view and a particular linguistic and cultural tradition, with a new totality and universality of a language which can be more or less related to the language of the first world-experience. The definition of the specific character of a language, the comparison of different languages, and the analysis of the role of a concrete language in the process of a creative production of language are only possible if the common sources of a language-tradition and the organical whole of languages can be found.

As already mentioned Wilhelm von Humboldt, one of the very important linguists and at the same time a philosopher of culture, developed his understanding of the coherency of language and world-view with regard to



the nation.<sup>25</sup> It is typical for nation-oriented thinking of the last century that we find sentences like this: "Fundamentally a language is . . . the nation itself, and properly speaking the nation." – ". . . the certain national force can only come to an inner development and to an external communication in a certain national language." This aspect of the historical and communicative connection between language and the socio-cultural reality suggests a very important problem also in our days of a linguistic and cultural nationalism. But it belongs to another discourse. Here we want only to discuss the relevance of Humboldt's conception for the understanding of religious languages in the process of intercultural and interreligious communication but we have to consider that the national aspect of language can be a factor of disturbance because the interreligious communication as intersocial action is connected with the social context. And that can be influenced by national attitudes and interests.

*The following perspectives seem to be noteworthy:*

Firstly, Humboldt's interpretation of language confirms the close relationship of religious language to a certain system of religious meanings which takes part in the general relation between language and world-view. Accordingly every religion is connected with a language which implies already a synthesis of common religious experiences. Therefore it can be expected that a certain linguistic tradition of a religion determines the way of experience and the communication about it. At the same time the continuity in the linguistic tradition is the best guarantee for a continuity of the symbolic system of religion. With the continuity of a self-sufficient system of the language and the world-view (e. g. theology or philosophy of a concrete religion), however, the tendency is forced to limit the creative innovation of language and world-interpretation to a reinterpretation of textual tradition without regard to the change of experience and its transformation in a modified language-world. The self-limitation of a religious tradition which is on the one hand necessary for the identity with the original sources of a religious inspiration prevents on the other hand the communication with external symbolic systems of a different world-view formulated by the same or a diverse language.

Secondly, Humboldt emphasizes the importance of a cross-cultural and multi-linguistic experience. Because of the linguistic penetration into another "language – world-view – unity" this experience opens the understanding of the similarities and differences which characterize the relation between "language – world-view – unities". The main purpose finally lies in the discovering of the fundamental sources. With regard to the intercultural and interreligious communication of different unities of language and religious beliefs this aspect stresses the connection between interreligious communicative experience, the clarification of special religious "language – world-view – unity" and the interreligious re-enquiry of the fundamental source. Interreligious communication does not weaken a religious "language – world-view – unity" if it enables the objectivization of the religious identity and reaches the



meta-religious basis experienced and articulated by every historical religion in a proper language.

Thirdly, Humboldt's conception of language implies that the universality of the reality can only be recognized and articulated by different languages with their specific world-view. In contrast to an idea of reductive unification of the world-languages Humboldt defends the plurality of existing languages. The loss of one single language is the loss of a whole world-view, and that means the loss of an aspect of the universal reality. In the context of religious languages the unity of language with belief is equally close. Also there is a multifold differentiation of the one absolute reality in diverse symbolic languages with specific "pictures" of the transcendental reality. Every symbolic system of religious "language - world-view - unity" is in itself a self-sufficient and universal system and as such an authentic expression of the human transcendental attitude.

From the philosophical standpoint of a fundamental connection between religious language, religious experience and religiously interpreted world-view we have to say on the other hand: under the condition of imperfect realization of transcendental consciousness the totality and universality of the Absolute cannot be reflected by one single system of a universal religion or by the universalization of one historically concretized religion. Only the continuous interreligious and cross-cultural communication of equal partners being rooted existentially in their proper socio-religious contexts prepares the way for a communicative interaction which opens the limitation of the historical connection between a specific religious language and religious experience. That kind of communication makes accessible an unknown world of experience and sets free from exclusive self-concentration in the meaning of religiocentrism. It opens the consciousness impressed by the own religio-cultural tradition for the approximate recognition of the other religio-cultural tradition and the common anthropological and ontological fundamentals so far as language can function as mediator to become conscious of it.

#### *4. Final Remarks and Outlook*

This paper was intended to investigate some aspects of a philosophy of religious language on the background of linguistic and philosophical reflections represented by one of the founders of the Comparative Science of language, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), by one modern philosopher with great influence upon the Neopositivism of the School of Vienna and of Great Britain, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), and another contemporary philosopher of the School of Frankfurt, Jürgen Habermas. It is my conviction that the contributions of these philosophers - although everyone of them belongs to a different philosophical orientation - enable a better understanding of religious language than the rigid Positivism which has been more generally discussed in modern Indian philosophy, probably because of the



closer connection to the Anglo-Saxon philosophy.<sup>26</sup> But that does not mean that the positivist criticism did not introduce very relevant aspects for a differentiated understanding of what language is able to say in the framework of a scientific verification. And there is no question about the contribution of Positivism in particular to a critical self-reflection of the theological and religio-philosophical speech on God and other religious topics.

As a special point of view I reflected the interreligious communicative interaction which is a part of the general intercultural communication. Therefore the communicative interaction of different religious traditions includes also the socio-cultural context in all its historical and contemporary aspects which has to be taken in consideration. Not only the religious language and communication is a socio-cultural and also an intercultural and interreligious phenomenon but in particular the intercultural and interreligious communicators themselves as well as the intercultural and interreligious communicative interaction participate in socio-cultural systems so that it is a misunderstanding of great consequences if one thinks it may be possible to communicate abstractly on nothing but on ideas, contents, and conceptions.<sup>27</sup> In so far as the intercultural and interreligious communication is performed in a social context and in so far as it functions as an intersocial communicative process, the interaction is not only involved in the existing society or societies but even more it can be an important factor in a process of social change which also influences the socio-religious structures and the traditional values of a socio-cultural system.

It is granted that the exposition does not offer a complete and perfect philosophical system of an intercultural philosophy of religious language. Important aspects of Western and Indian philosophical reflections are not considered. I remember only the contributions which come from the side of Phenomenology succeeding Edmund Husserl or from investigations of Comparative Linguistics and Cultural Anthropology. In spite of the confinement of some aspects I tried to trace out perspectives of a theoretical framework for a philosophical reflection on intercultural and interreligious communication which are not influenced by a particular religious tradition. Reflecting upon presuppositions and conditions for the possibility of intercultural and interreligious communication the statement is only relying on the philosophical ratio.<sup>28</sup>

At the end I want to open the discussion by connecting the reflection with some aspects of traditional Indian philosophies of language where India has as much to offer as the West, if not more.<sup>29</sup> With regard to the religious communicative interaction the point of reference is not the philosophical theory of logical argumentation or the epistemology but rather the aesthetic theory of language.

As the ancient commentators of literary traditions in the Hellenistic world and the Christian commentators of biblical scriptures, the Indian aesthetic theory of *dhvani* and *rasa-dhvani* differentiates several levels of literary communication which are also relevant for the religious communication.<sup>30</sup> At



least the Indian theory of language tries to discover the deeper dimensions of language. According to that aesthetic analysis of literary language, the interreligious communication has not only to refer to the content-oriented aspects of language. The aim of language is – according to the Indian theory – the experience of the emotive and aesthetic values through which human understanding is opened for the transcendental or ontological level of language and the corresponding reality. The theory of *dhvani* also includes the perspective of the recipient, in modern terms the pragmatic dimension. These aspects of an aesthetic theory of language can be integrated in a philosophy of religious language so that the aim and the proceedings of the interreligious communication can be clarified in an intercultural philosophical context.

The classical Indian philosophy of language and the aesthetic theory recognize the ontological foundation and the transcendental perspective of language. This point of view is normally not integrated in modern Western philosophy of language and communication.<sup>31</sup> The ontological foundation and the transcendental perspective of language include for the interreligious communication that every articulation of religious language has to start with the silent experience of the ontological origin of the word and that silent interaction has to cross the limits of language in the silent community participating in the transcendental perspective of language.

In the silent relation to the unnamed mystery of the unspoken word man will be aware of the unfinite word, the ground of all word-manifestations in the articulated and therefore limited language.<sup>32</sup> Interreligious communication as process of verification leads to the central experience by destroying the limitations of language and picture. This central experience will finally have one transcendental and all-including orientation so that one can communicate by using one language and probably only few words unifying the scattered mankind. – But one has to admit directly that this outlook touches the mystical sphere which is seen especially from some Indian authors as the fundamental dimension unifying all religions.<sup>33</sup> As spiritual experience of the essential ground of being and word-thinking it withdraws, however, from communication-techniques, rational discourses, and methodical analysis of instrumental rationality. It produces proper metaphorical language and logic so that mystical speech is characterized by extreme symbolism. Consequently the critical attitude of philosophy (perhaps not only of Western philosophy like Positivism and Analytical Philosophy) will evoke the question whether that experience of individuals, formed by religious and socio-cultural patterns of their historical contexts, will not be different and multifold just in that moment when one becomes conscious of such a transcendental horizon.<sup>34</sup> And it is to expect that the differences will increase when one starts to find right words out of the quantity of ambiguous or traditionally determinated words which can express the truth once experienced. In view of such problems the spiritual and mystical traditions in East and West developed specific manners to articulate the deep-experience just at the extreme point of intellectually discerning know-



legde and transconsciously awareness reconciling und unifying the human and the divine realities. That is the negative and paradoxal formulation of verbal expressions which cannot any more be interpreted according to the literal sense of the linguistic surface-structure.

Every preliminary final step in this process of unifying communication needs the experience of meaning without words, the risk of forgotten words in the perspective of Tao: "Words are used for expressing their meaning. If the meaning is understood, one can forget the words. Where can I find a man who forgets the words so that I can talk to him? – There are things one can speak about, and other ones which one can understand by heart. The more one speaks, the farther one removes from the meaning."<sup>55</sup>

These commentating remarks of Chuang-tse (died about 275 B. C.) can be understood as an associative synopsis of two sentences delivered as heritage of a Chinese wise man, named Lao-tse (6th or 4th century B. C.). I want to mention the sentences because their content seems fundamental for a self-critical reflection on linguistic communication as concretisation of word-communication in relation to the intended meaning of the transcendental reality beyond the word. Therefore the sentences are particularly relevant for the understanding and for the performing of interreligious communication of equal partners going together on the way to the deep-structure of the word in the historically formulated words:

"The Tao about which one can speak  
is not the absolute Tao.

The names which one can give  
are not the absolute name" (1).

"True words are not euphonious.

Euphonious words are not true.

A good man does not fight with words.

Who fights with words, is not a good man" (81).

At the end we are reaching the starting-point of a further reflection on intercultural and interreligious communication by using religious languages or by speaking on the meaning of religious traditions in an intercultural context. Being aware of the limits, possibility, and the need of intercultural and interreligious communication my reflection sights the openness of a wordless communicative interaction. In this openness the mutual communication is concentrated on the common centre and medium, that is the Spirit in and beyond the words. It is the spirit as the dynamic source and the inner truth and criterion of every word and every communicative encounter if it is really an encounter in the truth beyond all and transcending all. An interreligious communication using the different religious languages and crossing the limits of every language will experience the transrational meeting-point of the rational reflections. Then it will be able to integrate the absolute ground of verbal and symbolic communication into the variety of religious and interreligious language-games, and it can deliver from anxiety and prejudice, from self-concentration, intolerance, and aggression, because related to this unifying communicative centre every participant of an in-



terreligious communicative interaction is invited to promote the communion of communicators.<sup>36</sup>

And he can do that while he is existentially engaged in the process of mutual understanding of common existential questions of mankind, discovering the importance of the specific contribution which is presented by every unity of religious language and world-view, but also accepting the need of mutual help and correction because of the knowledge of misusing the words, the religious language, and the religious world-view. Finally the communicators have to take heed of a continuous peril which is part of every process of recognizing and communicating: the knowledge can be erroneous, and the communication of the knowledge by using the medium of language can be erroneous.<sup>37</sup> Viewing these problems, it is indispensable to emphasize the promoting and correcting function of an intercultural philosophy of religious language and of intercultural communication especially for the meta-communicative reflection on the problems posed by the different languages, the complexity of meaning and of communicative forms corresponding to diverse "forms of life", and by the performance of intercultural and interreligious encounters and exchanges. But in spite of the problems the intercultural philosophy as such and particularly the intercultural philosophy of religious language need the practice of intercultural and interreligious communication. The practice-oriented theory will be verified or will be modified and corrected in the intercultural and interreligious experience of communicative interaction crossing the limits of language, of religions and philosophy as well as the limits of socio-cultural systems. Only thus – experience being an integral part of the critical meta-communicative self-reflection – a project of an intercultural and interreligious philosophy corresponds to the proper criteria.

<sup>1</sup> We use the translation of The Revised Standard Version (1971) which does not philologically reproduce exactly the original text in any case. Gen. XI:1 says that all human beings used the same language and the same words (or sounds).

<sup>2</sup> The tradition of the narration will explain the name of the city in the context of Israelitic etymology and theology. – In difference to our analysis, G. Fohrer attaches the text to the elder tradition of the so-called "nomadic source".

<sup>3</sup> The Jawhist interpreted *hab-ilu* in the context of his own language (Hebrew) so that he associated "*balal*" in the sense of "to throw into disorder, to confuse". This popular etymological method allowed the pseudo-historical realism of a mythological narration at a time when the reign of Babylon had already lost its hegemony.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. P. Scheil, *Esagil ou le Temple de Bel Mardouk à Babylone*. Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres XXXIX (1913) 293–372. A. Parrot, *Ziggurat et Tour de Babel*, 1949; – *Der Turm von Babel*. Bibel und Archäologie I, 1955, 63–108. W. von Soden, *Etemenanki vor Asarhaddon nach der Erzählung vom Turmbau zu Babel und dem Erra-Mythos*. Ugarit-Forschungen 3 (1971) 253–264. – The temple of Babylon was composed of two main parts, the *Esagila* and the *zikkurat* (*zikkuratu* from the root *zakaru* = to be high). The temple-tower of Babylon was called *E-te-men-an-ki*. That means: "House of the fundament of Heaven and Earth" or "House



that is the fundament of Heaven and Earth". The zikkurat of Larsa had the name E-dur-an-ki, i.e. "House of Connection of Heaven and Earth". – Besides of Gen. XI, we have other historical documents which describe the buildings of zikkurats: Herodot, Hist. I, 178–187; Diodor, Bibl. II, 7–10; and Strabon, Geogr. XVI, 1.5–7.

<sup>5</sup> But here in this text of Gen. XI it is not asked for the origin of the first and common language. The preceding narration of creation and paradise (Gen. II:4b–25 J) implies that the first man was capable to use the language in harmony with the creator. The later priestly tradition thought that the creation was evoked out of the chaotic tohu-wa-bohu by the creative word of God who gave the names to the main parts of the realities (Gen. II:1–II:4a). In this theological context we have to understand the philosophical thesis of J. P. Süßmilch (1754) that the first language originated in the creator (cf. already Plato's *Kratylos*). See the general critical remarks of F. Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*. Vol. 2: *Zur Sprachwissenschaft* (Ullstein Materialien. Ullstein Buch nr. 35146) 340f (with reference to the critical standpoints of J. Herder and Jacob Grimm) – Cf. *Vākyapadiya* I,1: "That beginningless and endless One, that imperishable Brahman of which the essential nature is the Word, which manifests itself into objects and from which is the creation of the Universe."

<sup>6</sup> James I. Campbell: *The Language of Religion*, 1971, p. 162–163.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>8</sup> An example is given by the Marxian philosophers interpreting prophetic and apocalyptic ideas of the history and the final transformation of the unjust society in which the poor people are oppressed and looted. A modern Marxian re-interpretation of those old-israelitic and Jewish traditions was presented by Ernst Bloch.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. the category of "Sitz im Leben" (H. Gunkel) of the form-historical analysis and the investigations of the sociological factors which characterize the context and the development of Judaism and Early Christianity.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Arabic of the Koran, Sanskrit of Vedas. – Already in the old oriental history we know cases that one continued to deliver religious texts and to read them during ritual performances although the original religion and linguistic culture had not survived. The language of the Sumerians (the oldest written language of human culture documented since 4th millennium B. C.) died out about 1800 B. C., but the texts were copied and modified yet until the Hellenistic time (cf. the epos of Gilgamesh).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the translation of the Hebrew Holy Scriptures into Greek, the so-called Septuaginta, and the use of this translation in the early Christian communities.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *śruti* (or *Veda*) and *smṛti* in Hinduism, *Tora* and tradition in different Jewish schools, gospel and tradition in Christianity etc. – S. Radhakrishnan, *Recovery of Faith* (1955), ch. VI.3.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Sanskrit as language of religion, science and literary culture.

<sup>14</sup> It may be noteworthy at this point that even foreign religions did not only bring their own languages in the linguistic and cultural context of India. There are also missionaries which are highly respected by Indian linguists because of their research on Indian language and linguistic traditions. I want to mention the contribution of the German Hermann Gundert (1814–1893) to Malayalam grammar and lexicography. He is well known because he used the modern linguistic methods of the 19th century for his analysis of this Dravidian language. Cf. M. M. Purushothaman Nair, *Contribution of Christian Missionaries to the Grammatical Theories in Malayalam: Christian Heritage of Kerala*. Ed. by K. J. John, 1981, 138: "Gundert's grammar is the first and only authentic grammar of Malayalam language composed by foreign and native missionaries. It excels all the other grammatical works in all respects. Later, Gundert's grammar rendered a lot of help to the native grammarians . . . In spite of the minute drawbacks from the 20th century point of view, Dr. Gundert's Malayalam



Grammar is an important reference-source for any one who is interested in the history of our language." See also S. Velayudhan, *Foreign Missionaries and Malayalam Lexicography*: l.c. 145–147.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. P. Winch, *Trying to Make Sense*, 1987, 107–131.

<sup>16</sup> With regard to Logical Positivism and Critical Rationalism cf. W.-D. Just, *Religiöse Sprache und analytische Philosophie. Sinn und Unsinn religiöser Aussagen*, 1975. – F. Ferre, *Language, Logic, and God*, 1961. – J. T. Ramsey, *Religious Language – an Empirical Placing of Theological Phrases*, 1963. – J. Hick (ed.), *The Existence of God*, 1964. – J. A. Martin, *The New Dialogue between Philosophy and Theology*, 1966. – A. Flew, *God and Philosophy*, 1969.

<sup>17</sup> Kant's philosophical reflection on religion which identified religion with the knowledge of the moral obligations as divine precepts has effected different theories of religion connecting it with ethics. But even Neo-Kantian concepts of religion as realization of the moral idea (like that of H. Cohen, *Religion und Sittlichkeit*, 1907) are finally concerned by positivistic criticism including ethical statements. The escape out of that dilemma is also hindered even if one interprets religion as sentiment of relation to the Absolute (Fr. Schleiermacher) or as sentiment of the unfinality of feeling (P. Natorp). But it is rightly seen by those models of philosophical or religio-psychological interpretations that religion cannot be reduced to a rational form of doctrine and that the sentiment is an important factor of religion. It is, however, not sufficient with regard to the complexity of religion to say that certainty of faith roots in the religious (i.e. psychic) experience of the divine Absolute as it was the theory of H. Scholz (*Religionsphilosophie*, 1912) and others. The limits of that interpretations have been unmasked by psychoanalytical criticism of religion as well as by Positivism and Rationalism.

<sup>18</sup> But he shows that his reflection implicates a critical theory of religion on the base of an evolutionary interpretation of the history of religion. This aspect cannot be discussed in our context.

<sup>19</sup> Habermas' development and his elaborated conception of Universal Pragmatics cannot be exposed. In the final result one can say that Habermas has opened the original framework of the socio-philosophical School of Frankfurt by introducing the theory of communication in discussion with linguistic and sociological theories. The theory of communicative acting essentially promotes a language-theoretical foundation of sociology. Cf. G. Kiss, *Paradigmawechsel in der Kritischen Theorie: Jürgen Habermas' intersubjektiver Ansatz*, 1987. – The development of Habermas' socio-theoretical concept can be seen in his following publications: *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, 1968. – *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften*, 1971 (2nd ed.). – *Was heißt Universalpragmatik?: Sprachpragmatik und Philosophie*. Ed. by K.-O. Apel, 1976, 174–272. – *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, 2 Vols., 1981. – *Moralbewußtsein und kommunikatives Handeln*, 1983. – Cf. A. Honneth – H. Jonas (eds.), *Kommunikatives Handeln. Beiträge zu Jürgen Habermas' „Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns“*, 1986. – R. Danielzyk – F. R. Volz (eds.), *Parabel. Vernunft der Moderne? Zu Habermas' Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, 1987 (2nd ed.).

<sup>20</sup> *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1921. – *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953. – *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*. Ed. by C. Barrett, 1966. – There is a common opinion that Wittgenstein changed some important aspects between the *Tractatus* (= Wittgenstein I) and the *Investigations* (= Wittgenstein II). Both lines of his thinking influenced the analytic, linguistic, and semantic philosophies of our days. – Cf. N. Malcolm (ed.), *Ludwig Wittgenstein – A Memoir*, 1958. – G. Pitcher, *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, 1964. – G. Pitcher (ed.), *Wittgenstein – The Philosophical Investigations*, 1966. – J. M. Copi – R. W.



Beard (eds.), *Essays on Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, 1966. – G. Hallet, *Wittgenstein's Definition of Meaning as Use*, 1967. – J. Hartnack, *Wittgenstein und die moderne Philosophie*, 1968 (2nd ed.). – W. D. Hudson, *Ludwig Wittgenstein. The Bearing of his Philosophy upon Religious Belief*, 1968. – G. Vasey (ed.), *Understanding Wittgenstein*, 1974. – A. Keightley, *Wittgenstein, Grammar and God*, 1976 (with an informative bibliography). – P. Winch, *Trying to Make Sense*, 1987.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the understanding of God or Gods and Goddesses in various traditions and writings of Hinduism, or the different names of God and theological concepts of God's acting in history which we find in the traditions of Judaism etc. Already the first chapters of the Old Testament contains two theological interpretations of creation originating in different theological traditions. Similarly we find in the Christian New Testament an evolution of theological motifs and, for instance, of christological and soteriological interpretations of Jesus, his work, passion and death. Already the writings of one religion document the plurality of theological and philosophical categories and interpretations in the historical development of a religion but also at the same epoch. A very important subject may be the philosophical and theological categories in comparison with pictures of myths and other narrations and with artistic representations (cf. Wittgenstein's reflection on Michelangelo). – See P. Winch, *Trying to Make Sense*, 1987, 64–81 ("Wittgenstein, Picture and Representation").

<sup>22</sup> The relevant language-philosophical writings are collected in: Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Schriften zur Sprachphilosophie. Werke in fünf Bänden. Vol III*. Ed. by A. Flitner – K. Giel, Darmstadt 1972 (4th ed.). The great edition of *Gesammelte Schriften* is edited by Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften (cf. especially Vols. III, IV, and VII).

<sup>23</sup> W. von Humboldt, *Gesammelte Schriften. Vol. IV*, 27.20.6ff.293. – Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) follows this opinion by saying that every language includes a "not translatable world" although it can be translated "up to a certain degree" (*Die Sprache. München* 1964, p. 9–10). – An informative summary of Humboldt's language-philosophical standpoint is given by F. Kutschera, *Sprachphilosophie* (UTB 80), 1975 (2nd ed.), 288–299. Kutschera refers also to Edward Sapir (1884–1935) and Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897–1941). See here particularly E. Sapir, *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir*. Ed. by D. G. Mandelbaum, 1949, and B. L. Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality*. Ed. by J. B. Carroll, 1956. – Sapir and Whorf elaborated some more aspects with regard to American-Indian languages which are important for a philosophy of intercultural communication as far as the connection between language and world-view is concerned. Cf. H. Hoijer (ed.), *Language in Culture*, 1954. – P. Henle (ed.), *Language, Thought and Culture*, 1965 (2nd ed.) – Humboldt's language-philosophical reflections did not find direct successors during the 19th century although his works has been admired. At the beginning of the 20th century, several linguistic and philosophical investigations demonstrated a change. Franz Nikolaus Fink (1867–1910), for instance, analysed language as expression of a world-view ("Weltanschauung") and interpreted the inner form of language as an expression of the specific spirituality which characterizes a people as language-community. Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920) integrated an extensive reflection on language in his "Psychology of Peoples" and explained language as mirror of the idea-world. The change of meaning corresponds to a change of idea in relation to the conditions of culture which dominate in a community of language. Later on we can find an increasing Neo-Humboldtianism. One of the representatives was Leo Weisgerber (cf. *Von den Kräften der deutschen Sprache. 4 Vols.*, 1950ff. – *Die vier Stufen in der Erforschung der Sprachen. Sprache und Gemeinschaft. Grundlegung* 2, 1963. – *Die geistige Seite der Sprache und ihre Erforschung*, 1917. – See also P. Hartmann, *Wesen und Wirkung der Sprache im*



Spiegel der Theorie Leo Weisgerbers, 1958). But the influence of Humboldtian tradition has been interrupted because one paid more attention to different linguistic schools, specially those of Structuralism.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. W. v. Humboldt, *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. VI.28 (Werke. Vol. III.141). With reason it is said by Karl Jaspers that language is more than only "empirical facts": Language as such is the appearance of the all-embracing consciousness.

<sup>25</sup> Humboldt wrote, for instance, a fragment on the topic of the "national character of languages" but there was not yet a nationalist attitude in his expositions (cf. *Gesammelte Schriften* VI 134 = *Werke* III 170). On the contrary, on his cosmopolitical background „nation“ was rather comprehended as an idea including all social and cultural dimensions of a society as language-community. The nation unifies the transindividual context of the individual use of grammar and lexicon, and defines the relation to other languages and language-communities in multiple manners. It would be interesting to see how far Humboldt's view of interrelationship between nation and language has been differentiated by himself and in the later linguistic and philosophical investigations. I may point only to his distinction between a more static relation of a nation to its language and a more dynamic and evolutive use. Humboldt is convinced that the peculiarity of a nation corresponds to the characteristics of its language.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. R. Choudhury (ed.), *Philosophy and Language*, 1984. – M. Chatterjee, *Philosophical Enquiries*, 1988 (2nd ed.), 16–63.

<sup>27</sup> The customary "Dialogue of Religions" discussing religious doctrines makes often use of the comparative method but it takes rarely up the sociological problems of interreligious and intersocial relationship. And one cannot say that the task to participate in the peaceful solution of social and political conflicts is really noticed though the religions are sometimes involved in the situation (but see the example of WCRP). It seems to me also that an all-including spirituality as essential fundament of a brotherlike communication is not yet developed. Tolerance is a necessary precondition but it does not yet accomplish the cooperative spirituality of brotherlike solidarity.

<sup>28</sup> A theoretical reflection on interreligious and intercultural communication as it is understood in this contribution on a philosophical level resists the tendency of interpreting exclusively a single cultural and religious tradition so that it seems to be in a prevalent position. It prevents also to idealize the spiritual heritage proper and to criticise the other one without respect and without readiness to learn and to change opinions, attitudes and practices. Therefore I cannot accept a meaning like that of Christopher Dawson who said in "The Movement of World Revolution" (1959) that the "panasian society" being in making will not be based on a "religious or philosophical synthesis" of Asian traditions but on the general secular civilization of the modern world, i.e. the civilization of the West. However, in our days there is an inevitable discussion about limits and perilous consequences of even that civilization. And especially several German philosophers have criticized the dominance of technological and economical orientations in the modern society since last century. But on the other hand it seems to me that it is historically and philosophically not justified to oppose the spirituality of the East to the materialism of the West. Every form of schematic opposition simplifies characteristics of cultural and religious traditions and is finally not useful to preserve the own identity in a process of cultural and social change.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. S. B. P. Sinha, *Indian Philosophy, Linguistic Analysis and Metaphysics: Philosophy and Language*. Ed. by R. Choudhury, 1984, 13–23. – P. K. Mazumdar, *Philosophy of Language in the Light of Paninian and the Mimamsaka Schools of Indian Philosophy*, 1977. – I may remember that the encounter of the Western linguists with



Sanskrit initiated a very fruitful development of linguistic investigations and of philosophy of language.

<sup>30</sup> J. L. Masson – M. V. Pathwardhan, *Santarasa and Abhinavagupta's Philosophy of Aesthetics*, 1969. – A. Amaladass, *Philosophical Implications of Dhvani. Experience of Symbol Language in Indian Aesthetics*, 1984 (esp. Ch. 6: "Dhvani as Hermeneutics").

<sup>31</sup> But we can refer to philosophers like Martin Heidegger whose contribution to a philosophy of language demonstrates the relevance of a metaphysical foundation prepared by traditions of Heraclitos, Stoa, Neoplatonism, and Mystics. Heidegger is also aware of the silence as fundamental dimension of language. Generally it may be very fruitful to take Heidegger's reflections into consideration for an intercultural philosophy of language mediating Asian and Western philosophies. Cf. M. Heidegger, *Brief über den Humanismus*, 1947. – *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 1959 (1960, 2nd ed.). – In the context of Western philosophy, however, we cannot evade the question for the historical dimension of language, communication, and understanding. The reflections on transcendental conditions and fundaments of language, communication, and understanding have to be linked with the historical side but that does not only mean the individual life-history of the language-user. The historical framework of society as language-community, of social and symbolic interaction and finally of the Universal-history with all aspects have to be considered and mediated with standpoints like that of M. Heidegger, or with hermeneutical theories like that of H.-G. Gadamer (*Wahrheit und Methode*, 1960). It seems to me that only a differentiated and complicated reflection will finally effect a real intercultural theory of communication as fundament of a critically controlled communicative interaction.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Vākyapadiya I. 12–22.38. – B. Welte, a German philosopher of religion, characterized once the silence as "the respiration of the language" (*Sprache, Wahrheit und Geschichte: Zwischen Zeit und Ewigkeit*, 1982, 212). This is, indeed, an imaginative aspect in which Welte rightly sees a connecting point of Western mystical traditions and Buddhism. It would be easy to find references also in Hinduism.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan– *Recovery of Faith* (1955), ch. VIII.1.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. S. Radhakrishnan, *Recovery of Faith* (1955), Ch. VI.

<sup>35</sup> Lin Yutang (ed.), *Laose*, 1958, 201. – Chuang-tse's text and the following quotations of Tao-te-Ching have been translated from German into English by the author.

<sup>36</sup> Interreligious communication is always performed in the tension between sociological, psychological, linguistic, or generally anthropological limitations and delimitations. Every articulation of the reality transcending the limits of human articulation cannot get off the limits of language, but using the possibilities of multidimensional language (esp. of metaphorical or symbolic language) the language is capable to disclose the fundamentally transcending orientation of human being and to open the horizon of transcendental experience. The disclosing function of religious language has been exposed by W. A. de Pater (*Theologische Sprachlogik*, 1971) following the examples and the theory of J. T. Ramsey (*Freedom and Immortality*, 1960) and others.

<sup>37</sup> The starting-point of European philosophy of language is the scepticism of philosophers like Gorgias!