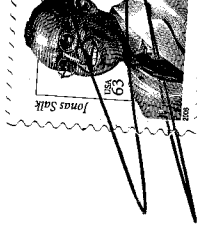


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April 2006



# **PERCEPT LANGUAGE**

**A TOOL FOR SELF-AWARENESS**

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1 -- WHAT ARE WE SAYING?

Percept language is a way of speaking the English language that enhances personal awareness and growth possibilities. It is the invention of John Weir, a clinical psychologist and theorist in personal growth. Weir uses percept language as a tool to reinforce the frame of reference that, "...each of us is continually perceiving and organizing his world in his unique way..." (1)

I learned percept language during Weir's personal growth laboratory, which he calls a Weirlab. During this laboratory Weir instructed the participants in the use of percept and asked us to speak it during laboratory sessions. The following rules and examples demonstrate how the language is spoken. (2) A more complete discussion will await a later section of this manual.

I behave. I sense me. So I must own my experience. There are no impersonal pronouns such as "it," "one," "you," "that," etc., in the percept language. For them, substitute "I," "me," "mine," etc.

NOT	BUT
It's frightening	I am frightened
It makes me angry	I make me angry
It's a pleasure	I'm a pleasure
One gets scared	I get scared

I am the agent responsible for my sensations and my behavior, therefore only verbs in the active mode can report my experience:

NOT	BUT
I am frightened	I frighten me
I make me angry	I anger me
I'm a pleasure	I pleasure me
I get scared	I scare me

I "know" external objects only by my perception of them. That perception always takes place "in" me. Therefore the only objects I know are the "objects-in-me." Similarly with people -- for me there is no "you" other than the "you-in-me."

NOT	BUT
You are beautiful	The you-in-me is beautiful
George is mistaken	The George-in-me is mistaken

I can't understand Ann	I can't understand Ann-in-me
You are lying I don't trust you	The you-in-me is lying I don't trust the you-in-me
He suspects me	The him-in-me suspects the me-in-him
I know you will like him	I know the you-in-me will like the him-in-me
You are angry at him	The you-in-me angers himself at the him- in-you
They don't like each other	The them-in-me don't like the other-in-each- of-them

After some practice in percept, which seemed at first to be a strange and cumbersome way of talking, I began to remind myself of certain notions with which I had acquainted myself through studying Gestalt psychology. (3) These notions include that projection is a potent force in my perceptual process, that I am responsible for creating my feelings, and that awareness of my own process is facilitative of personal change. As I lived in this new language during the Weirlab I convinced myself of its potency as a personal growth tool. I also gave myself many important self-discoveries.

After this experience I began to experiment with percept in growth laboratories which I facilitated for educators, and in training workshops for counselors in a variety of human services organizations. I also used it in a laboratory for recovering alcoholics and drug users. In all instances I pleased myself with a great deal of informal positive feedback from laboratory participants and saw what I believed to be important self-discoveries occurring in the workshops.

How might personal change occur as a result of using percept language? The answer to that question seems to rest in the relationship between the human perceptual process and the structure of the English language. A percept is the product of the process of perception. That process is exceedingly complex, beginning with sensory data and resulting in a percept.

For example, I see large white flakes falling to the ground outside my window and I perceive "snow." I hear a humming below me, I perceive "a functioning oil burning heater." I see a pattern on the wall before me, I perceive "wallpaper." My own process of forming the percepts "snow," "oil burning heater," and "wallpaper" is influenced by factors that are unique to me. If you were sitting with me now, you might hear the humming below us and perceive "automobile." The process of percept formation is mediated by a variety of factors that are specific to the perceiving person -- needs, past experiences, etc. The operation of these mediating factors produces the incongruities which occur between two individual's perceptions of the same event.

The percepts which you and I form are as unique as we are. Also, each of us is responsible for our unique percept in the sense that each percept is the result of our individual process of percept formation. Your percepts are yours and mine are mine. Examples of two or more people perceiving the same object, event, or individual in different ways are abundant in daily life. These differences in perception, which may result in arguments, legal confrontations, divorces, or the formation of rival political parties, among other things, provide constant reminders that each of us organizes our perceptual world differently. Because of these reminders, most of what I have just said about perceptual differences probably doesn't seem like news to anybody. Most people seem to agree, or to be quite easily convinced by rational argument, that their perceptions differ from those of others, that their perceptions are a function of their unique sensory apparatus, needs, and experiences, and that they are thus responsible for their perceptions. Yet most of us also behave as if we did not agree!

For example, when I insist that my way of life is the right or best way, I contradict my knowledge that you perceive things differently and so may want to live differently. When I insist that my perception of another person is accurate and that you should relate to that other person in some particular way, I contradict my knowledge that you perceive that person differently and may be able to relate differently. When I insist that my Saab automobile is "the best buy for the money," I contradict my knowledge that you may perceive automobiles differently, perceive money differently, and have different transportation needs than I. Whenever I insist that I have the truth of some matter, I contradict my knowledge that we are each responsible for our perceptions and that our perceptions are the result of unique processes. All of this is not to suggest that I should avoid attempting to influence you. What would be the point in this writing? What I do suggest is that if your perceptions are different as a result of our dialogue, it was you who changed them and not I. Also, we must both recognize that our eventual agreement, should it occur, is just that -- agreement -- and not truth. Some wise guru -- I don't recall who -- pointed out that truth is merely that which most people will agree to.

How are we to account for the discrepancy between our knowledge of the perceptual process and behavior that contradicts that knowledge? The situation is somewhat like knowing that one is overweight and being aware of the dangers of being overweight, yet continuing to overeat; or knowing that smoking is dangerous to one's health, yet continuing to smoke heavily. We know that our perceptions are unique, and that we are each responsible for our perceptions, yet we frequently behave as if things looked the same to everyone, or should, and that external forces are responsible for our perceptions. Of course, the assumption that everything looks the same to all of

us has great practical value. I must, for example, assume that the words on this page look the same to you as they do to me, else why attempt to write. The danger lies not so much in making such an assumption as in the lack of awareness that I am assuming.

The discrepancy between knowledge of perceptual differences and our behavior seems partly to be the result of our habitual use of the English language. The manner in which language functions to influence experience has been the subject of study by philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, and semanticists. This function of language is described by anthropologist Dorothy Lee when she states the following assumption as basic to her work:

...that a member of a given society not only codifies experienced reality through the use of specific language and other behavior characteristics of his culture, but that he actually grasps reality only as it is presented to him in this code.(4)

The structure of the English language limits our grasp on the reality of our perceptual process. This consequence is, in some measure, the result of historical ties to ancient Greek traditions and philosophical perspectives. The rules of standard English reflect the structure of the world as it was perceived during the age of Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle. The Greek world perspective imposed an anthropomorphic structure on reality.(5) Thunder occurred because Zeus was angered. This structure is reflected in the subject-predicate form of language. It is expressed by frequent use of the verb "to be". We say, "The woods are lovely," or, "That painting is terrible," as if the qualities of loveliness or terribleness were inherent in the objects themselves and created by some intervention outside our own skin. Perhaps by the gods?

We speak as if we were not responsible for our own perceptions! Alfred Korzybski, founder of general semantics, says:

We reversed the natural order and imposed on the world the structure of our verbal forms, instead of the natural order of patterning the structure of our language after the structure of the world.(6)

We are in a strange position! We know, at least on an intellectual level, that we are responsible for our perceptions, yet our speech reminds us that what we know is false. It is as though we had continued to utilize the Roman numeral system, ignoring current knowledge of complex mathematical concepts. Korzybski proposes a way out of this predicament:

...we must study structural characteristics of this world first, and, then only, build languages of similar structure, instead of habitually ascribing to the world the primitive structure of our language.(7)

The question raised, then, is how to learn to speak in a manner that is structurally consistent with our knowledge of the perceptual process. Percept language is an answer to that question.

## 2 -- FROM PLATO TO PERCEPT

Percept language, while reinforcing the point of view that we are each responsible for our perceptions, also holds philosophical implications. It derives from solipsism, an epistemological variety of idealism. The solipsist view holds that the individual self is the whole of reality. The external world and other persons are representations of the self and have no independent existence.

The use of percept language implies the adoption of an idealist, rather than realist, epistemology. A realist is one who believes that man views a world which has an independent existence. The idealist believes that man views a world of his own making. The issue is as old as Democritus and Plato.

In modern philosophical thinking, realism is identified with John Locke, who, following the lead of Aristotle, saw mind as a "tabula rasa," or "white tablet," upon which sensations produce knowledge. Thus, sensations are the master of the mind. The idealist position found expression in the work of Immanuel Kant, who saw reality as a mental representation of an unknowable world. Thus, the mind is master of sensation. In practical, although somewhat oversimplified terms, this becomes a question of whether an apple is red because an apple is red, or whether an apple is red because I perceive it as red. The latter is the percept language view and is idealistic.

Within the preceding discussion are two notions that are important for understanding percept language. The first is the idealist view that the world which we see is of our individual making. This notion is most clearly expressed by Arthur Schopenhauer, who wrote, "The world is my idea." (1) The second notion is the solipsist view that what I know of reality is a representation of myself. This is expressed colloquially in statements like, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder."

In the realist view, then, the world is, and it shows itself to me as it is. In the percept view, the world is my idea and my idea is me, so the world is me. The position is also the basis for Schopenhauer's emphasis on inward perception as "the single narrow door to the truth." According to Schopenhauer, anyone can understand reality if he examines himself.

I do not wish to make an argument for solipsism, nor for the percept epistemology as a human necessity. I merely wish to



indicate the philosophical roots of percept language. I trust that you, after learning to speak and think in percept, will influence yourself toward your own unique perspective. At the very least, percept can be a useful tool for self-awareness. At the most, your use of percept may render an appreciation of the words of Benjamin Lee Whorf,

A change in language can transform  
our appreciation of the cosmos.(3)

### 3 -- RULES FOR SPEAKING PERCEPT

In this section I will indicate and discuss the few rules for speaking percept language. You probably will not wish to use these rules in everyday conversation. They will sound awkward and contrived to others, as, in fact, they may seem to you initially. Percept is not a conversational language, rather, it is intended to facilitate your awareness of yourself. You might use percept while thinking or writing about yourself, or within a personal growth group whose members know the language.

RULE 1 -- Use I or me in place of it, that, what, this, you, they, and other words that refer to external objects and people.

Examples:

CHANGE It doesn't matter.  
TO I don't matter.

CHANGE This is frightening.  
TO I am frightening.

CHANGE You upset me.  
TO I upset me.

CHANGE That's beautiful.  
TO I'm beautiful.

"It" is outside of me. What I know of "it" is my perception. My perception is part of me, resulting from my sensing and organizing sensations in my own way. "Things" are frightening, beautiful, etc., because I make them so. When I use this rule I remind myself that I own my perceptions, that my world is my construction. Speaking this way enables me to be aware of my perceptual process at work and of different aspects of myself.

RULE 2 -- Verb yourself.

Examples:

CHANGE I am scared.  
TO I scare myself.

CHANGE I am a problem.  
TO I problem me.

CHANGE I'm getting tired.  
TO I tire myself.

CHANGE You make me angry.  
TO I anger me. (also employing RULE 1)

CHANGE I feel happy with you.  
TO I happy myself with me. (also employing RULE 1)

Normally I speak as if my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors simply happen to me, as if I were the passive recipient of my joy, anger, etc. With this rule, I remind myself that I am the active agent in the creation of my own state of being. For all of my experience, I am both the subject and the object. I am able to take responsibility for myself -- "I responsible me." I also realize that whatever state I have given myself, it is up to me to keep myself or change myself.

I have three ways of speaking in percept to accomplish the aim of RULE 2;

I upset me.  
I make me upset.  
I have me upset.

RULE 3 -- I know only the you-in-me.

Examples:

CHANGE You seem happy.  
TO I have the you-in-me be happy.

CHANGE I'm scared of him.  
TO I scare me with the him-in-me.

CHANGE I enjoy them.  
TO I enjoy the them-in-me.

CHANGE I get upset when you are angry with me.  
TO I upset me when I have the you-in-me angry with the me-in-you.

CHANGE They didn't seem to want to come with us.  
TO I have the them-in-me not wanting to come with the us-in-them.

CHANGE Bill wants to avoid Henry.  
TO I have the Bill-in-me wanting to avoid the Henry-in-me.

I know only my perception of you. My perception of you is my construction. It is in me. The only things I know are the

things-in-me. Thus,  
 me-in-me is my perception of me, for which I use the word "I"  
 you-in-you is your perception of you, for which you use the  
                   word "I"  
 me-in-you is your perception of me  
 you-in-me is my perception of you  
 me-in-you-in-me is my perception of your perception of me  
 tree-in-me is my perception of tree  
 Henry-in-me is my perception of Henry  
 etc.

RULE 4 -- The you-in-me is a part-of-me.

Examples:

CHANGE You seem sad.

TO I have the you-in-me be the sad part-of-me.

CHANGE That's a beautiful sunset.

TO I have the sunset-in-me be a beautiful part-of-me.

As the you-in-me is an aspect of myself, it is part-of-me. I could not have the particular you-in-me that I construct without having had experienced that particular you-in-me within myself. When I use RULE 4 I go beyond owning my perceptions to owning that what I perceive is myself, that what I see is a reflection of me.

The rules of percept language as outlined above allow several ways of saying the same thing. For example:

CHANGE Bill is difficult.

TO I difficult me.

OR I make me difficult with the Bill-in-me.

OR I have the Bill-in-me be a difficult-part-of-me.

CHANGE I feel glad when I see you.

TO I glad myself when I have me see the you-in-me.

OR I have the you-in-me glad when I see you.

I have alternative ways of saying the same thing because, in percept language, I have no fundamental difference between you, the you-in-me, the you-part-of-me, and me. I use all of these terms, however, because each allows a slightly different emphasis. I use "you" when I want to emphasize the distinction between my perceptions of the physical you and my conclusions about you, as in, "When you sat down, I had the you-in-me be tired." I use the term you-in-me when I want to emphasize the function of my perceptual process rather than emphasizing my ownership of the you-in-me as a part-of-me. I use part-of-me when I want to emphasize that what I perceive is me. Thus, percept language becomes a richer way of speaking.

## 4 -- BEYOND THE RULES

While the rules of percept language may seem simple, in practice they become complex and powerful. In this section I want to indicate some of that complexity and to discuss three aspects of the use of percept language that I have found particularly significant for personal growth.

First, I find it useful to examine my reactions to the you-in-me.

CHANGE When you ignore me, I get angry.

TO When I have the you-in-me ignore me, I anger myself.

OR When I ignore me I anger me.

The last of these statements allows me to use my observations about how I relate to the world "outside-of-me" as an analogy for becoming aware of how I relate to myself. Some further examples follow.

CHANGE I felt happy when you said you enjoy me.

TO I happy me when I enjoy me.

CHANGE When you seemed to reject me, I became upset.

TO I upset me when I reject me.

All of my relating, then, is me relating to me. A recognition of this allows me to become more aware of my own dynamics. With the last example above, for instance, I might begin to examine how I reject myself and how I upset me when I reject me. When I use percept language in this way; I am able to;

1 - be aware of my continual process of perceiving and organizing my world

2 - be aware that I create my experiencing and am responsible for myself

3 - understand my own dynamic processes by owning all of my experiencing as me doing me.

Second, in percept language I change the way in which I explain my experiences. When operating within the framework imposed by my use of standard English, I have three ways of explaining my experience. First, I have behavior that is consciously planned and decided upon, like ordering an egg salad sandwich for lunch. Second, I have my unplanned stumbling into situations, as when I find a coin on the street. Third, I have things seemingly happening to me out of sheer accident, as when my car was struck by another vehicle while I was passively waiting for a light to change. In the percept view, I have no distinction between these explanations, rather, they are all me doing me. The following translations may help to illustrate;

CHANGE I ordered an egg salad sandwich.

TO I had me order the egg-salad-sandwich-in-me.

OR I ordered myself.

CHANGE I found a coin.

TO I found the coin-in-me.

OR I found me.

CHANGE My car was struck by another car.  
 TO I have the car-in-me be struck by another-car-in-me.  
 OR I struck myself.

Referring to these examples, when I say "I ordered myself" after ordering an egg salad sandwich, I mean that I have ordered a part-of-me that is nourishing and inexpensive. When I say "I found me" after stumbling on a coin on the street, I mean that I have found a part-of-me that I have be valuable and easy to obtain. When I say "I struck me" after my car has been hit, I mean that I perceive that a valuable, expensive part-of-me has been damaged by an irresponsible, incompetent part-of-me. All of these events become aspects of me doing me. In this way, my decisions, stumblings, and accidents are material for making myself aware through percept language.

The third important aspect of using percept language involves the distinctions which I usually draw between dreams, fantasies, and everyday experience. In the percept view I make no such distinction; my dreams, my fantasies, and my experiences, are all me doing me.

If I dream that I am in a small boat lost at sea, I say, in percept, "I have me in a small-boat-in-me lost in the sea-in-me," meaning that I have myself in a precarious part-of-me. Saying it more simply, "I precarious myself." My dreams are my constructions, as are my fantasies, and my experiences. As I dream me, fantasize me, or experience me, I represent myself.

I can treat all my perceptions, whether in dreams, fantasy, or experience as symbols for some part-of-me. From a percept point of view I make no distinction between me dreaming about driving on the turnpike and me driving on the turnpike. It all happens in me. Rather, I make me happen in me.

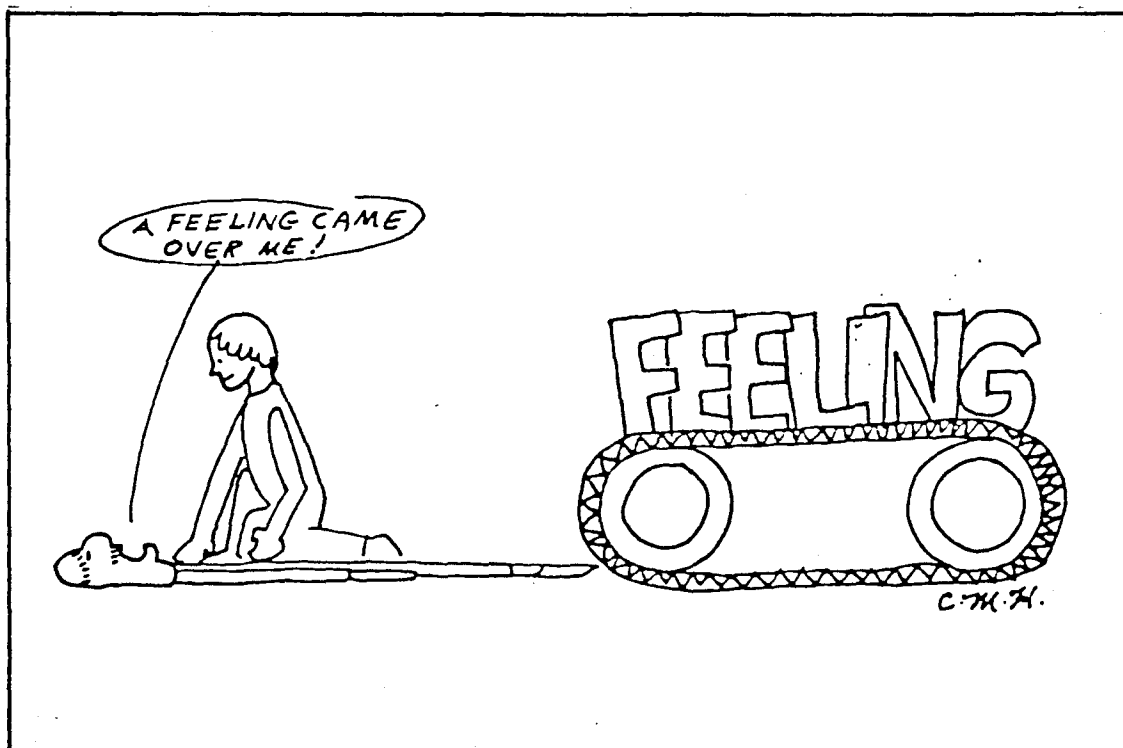
I know that I could not have developed my appreciation for the potency of percept language as a growth tool simply by reading about it. I suspect that this will be true for you. In a later section I will provide exercises and examples for practice in percept. My hope is that you will utilize them, recalling the rules for percept and the suggestions which I have made in this section, for a deeper understanding of both the language and yourself.

## 5 -- WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES?

In the context of my attempts at self-growth, percept language is more useful than the way in which I learned to speak English. My normal way of speaking English can be referred to as a concept language, as it is most useful in the development and communication of ideas. Percept, in contrast, is most useful in understanding and communicating myself. Speaking and thinking in the percept mode encourages different attitudes from those encouraged by my use of a concept mode. The following two column list explains some of these contrasting attitudes.

1. The concept mode is used primarily to describe "the world outside of me." In concept language I assume the external world to have an existence independent of my senses. I say, "The sky is blue," as if the quality of blueness was inherent in the sky.

1. In percept language I talk only of "my world." The existence of an external reality independent of my senses is neither assumed nor denied. I say, "I have the sky be blue," recognizing that blueness is a function of my sensory apparatus.

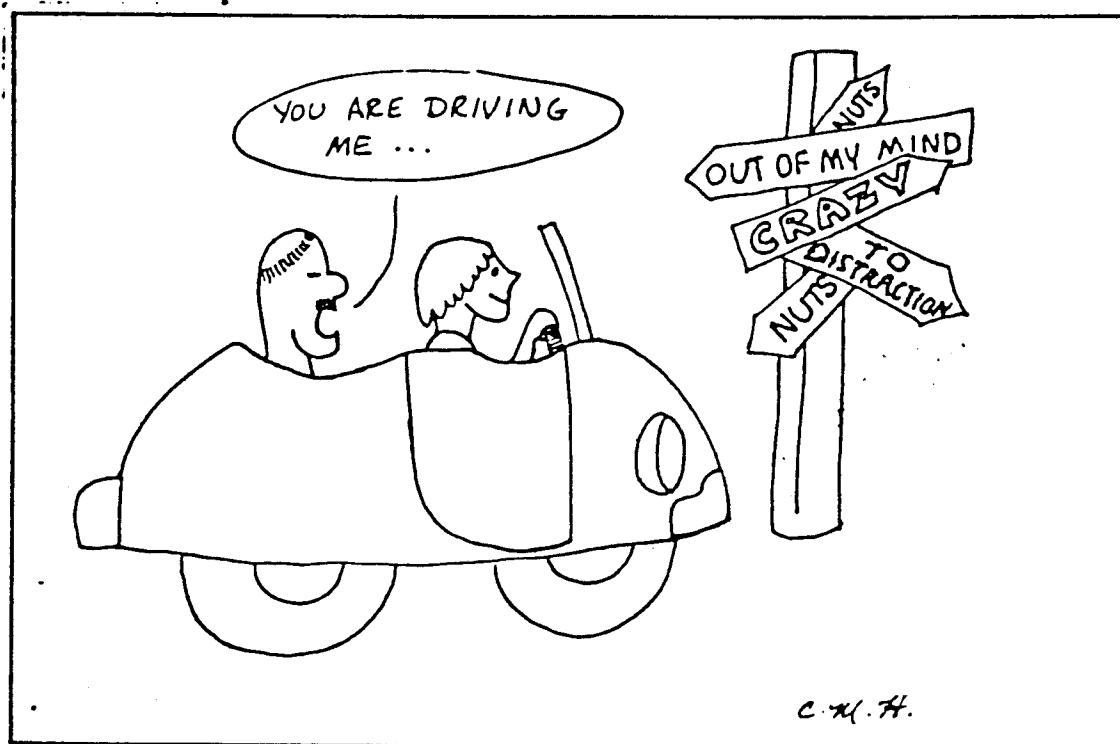


2. Concept language encourages me to place responsibility for my thoughts, feelings, perceptions, fantasies, dreams, evaluations, etc. on sources outside of me. I say, "you made me angry," as if my anger was a product solely of your behavior. I also say, "A thought occurred to me,"

2. In the percept mode I take full responsibility for creation of me. I say, "I anger me with the you-in-me," admitting that my anger is created by me. I also acknowledge that I am reacting to my perception of you rather than to you. I say, "I thought myself," "I upset me," "I felt me," recognizing that I am not

"You upset me," or, "A feeling came over me," as if thoughts and feelings were visited upon me from some external source. This orientation allows me to view myself as a victim of you, or of circumstances.

a victim but am responsible for creating my thoughts, feelings, perceptions, fantasies, dreams, evaluations, etc.



3. Since I am able to see myself as a victim in the concept mode, I often feel powerless and place the responsibility for change on others.

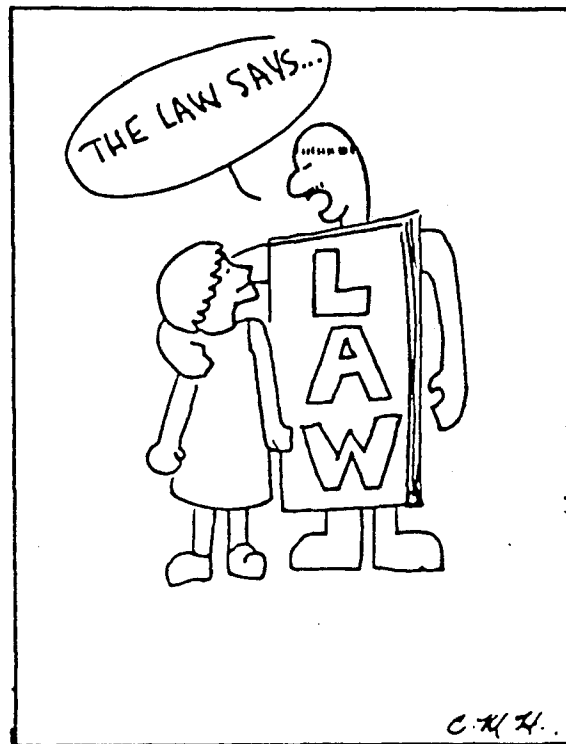
4. In the concept mode the process of projection is carried out with little or no awareness. Most often, I ignore the fact that all of my statements

3. In the percept mode, since I am aware that I create the perception of victimization and my feeling of powerlessness, I also know that it is I who let it stand or change it. Responsibility for my change is on me.

4. In percept language, projection occurs with full awareness. I understand that all of my statements are about me. I evaluate my statements on the basis

carry information about me. The degree to which my statements carry information about me is ignored in evaluating the significance of what I say.

of what they communicate about me, as in, "I have the you-in-me be the uncomfortable part-of-me," instead of, "You seem uncomfortable."



5. In a concept orientation, I tend to "ventriloquize" -- to speak as though with the voice of another. Examples of ventriloquizing usually begin something like, "As the law states...", or, "Freud said....".

6. Concept language is especially potent in the communication of ideas and is, therefore, a mechanism for dialogue between people.

5. A percept orientation does not permit me to ventriloquize. The voice of the law, for example is recognized as my own perception of the law, and I say, "The Freud-in-me said....".

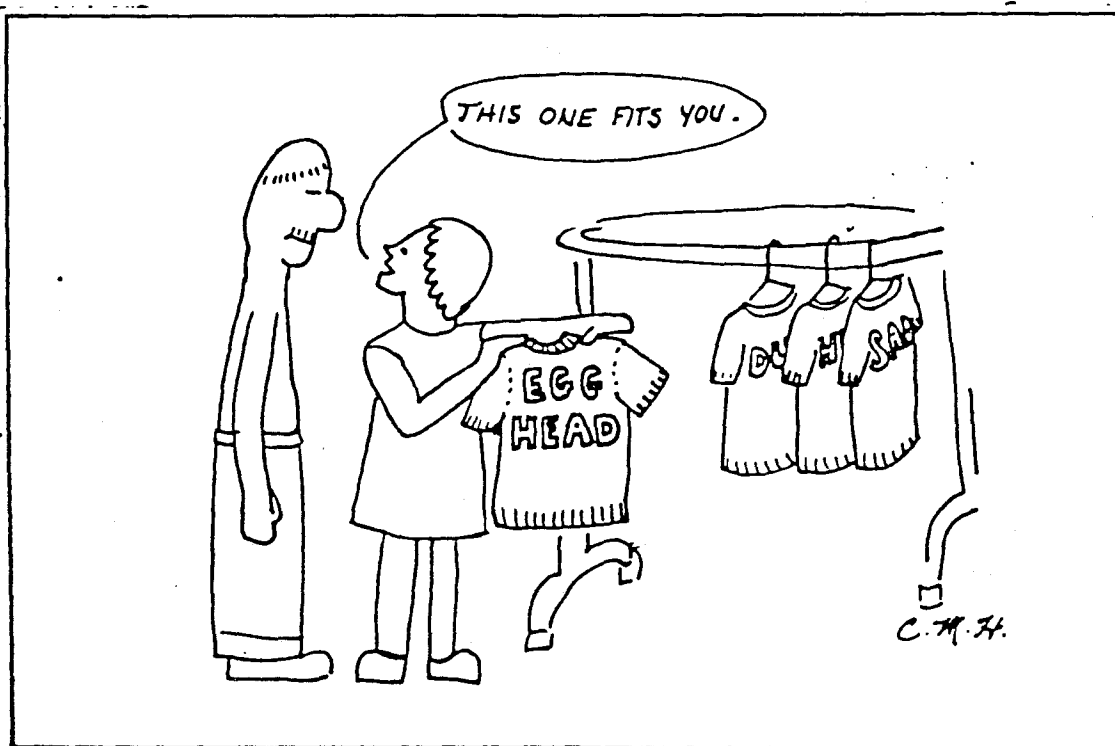
6. In the percept mode I speak only about me -- I public myself. Another person's publicing of himself in response to me requires a recognition that he is acting in response to his perception of me rather than to me. Percept



7. The concept mode encourages judgementalism. People, events, and objects "are bad," or they "are useful," implying that the judgements that I make are "true."

language is, thus, not conducive to dialogue. It is conducive to two or more people publicizing themselves together.

7. Percept language does not encourage judgementalism. When speaking percept, I am aware that it is the object-in-me that I judge. "I make the object-in-me bad," so the quality of badness is in me rather than in the object. I recognize that I judge only myself.



8. Speaking and thinking in the concept mode allows me to maintain the illusion of certainty. I do this through repeated use of the various forms of the verb "to be" and through labeling and categorizing, as in, "He is an egg-head,"

8. Operating in the percept mode requires giving up certainty. I say, "I have the him-in-me be intelligent," "I make the Republican-in-me be the conservative part-of-me," and, "I happy me," realizing that my judgements and

"Republicans are conservative," "I am a happy person." I believe that what "is" is, and can feel quite sure of myself.

9. Within the concept framework others help me. I make others responsible for whether I am helped or not. I may praise you for helping me or blame you for not helping me.

10. The concept mode being primarily a form for discussion of ideas, encourages rationalization and intellectualization, and encourages me to pay less attention to my experience.

labels are only as certain as my current perceptions and may be modified if I allow myself to form new perceptions. What "is" is only because "I have it be."

9. In percept language I form a perception of the "helper" and respond in ways that may be helpful to me. As I am responsible for both my perception and response, it is I who help me. "I help myself with the helper-in-me." I can neither praise you for "helping" me, nor blame you for "not helping" me.

10. In percept language I speak only of my own process. Thus, I am more directly connected to my experiencing and discourage myself from intellectualizing and rationalizing.

It seems to me, based on my experience in using and teaching percept language, that the degree to which an individual allows himself to learn and use percept effectively rests largely upon his ability to adopt the attitudes expressed in the right hand column above.

## 6 -- FLIRTING WITH UNCERTAINTY

Like any other tool, percept language can be, and is, used effectively and ineffectively. The effectiveness of percept for any individual depends largely upon the user's openness to the percept point of view. I have heard the language used in ways that subvert its intent. One example, and this seems to be a common misuse of percept, involved an attempt on the part of the speaker to communicate negative feedback to another person. The speaker said, in an apparently accusatory tone, "I have the you-in-me be domineering and hostile." It seemed that the speaker's intent was to judge and express anger toward the other person, rather than to own the "domineering-part-of-me," "the hostile-part-of-me," and the process of "angering myself." The speaker in this example had learned to use percept language, but spoke it, at least in this situation, from a concept consciousness.

There are several levels at which a speaker of percept language may have integrated the corresponding percept

consciousness. That consciousness requires, at its highest level of integration, a full awareness that all of my experience of what is called reality is me experiencing myself. John Weir outlined his notion of these levels, or stages, of integrating percept, during a discussion held in the Fall of 1977. (1) I will quote him from my tape of that discussion.

I have us born and raised in a concept epistemology and I have English, as we speak it, being a concept language. So I have one reinforcing the other. The first stage of integrating percept would be to speak in the percept language but still live in a concept mode. The second stage -- to me it's more profound -- would be to live somewhat in a percept mode and still speak concept and not know that you are in the percept epistemology. So you speak the concept, you think you are speaking the truth, even though the percept person listening to you speaking the concept language would hear the percept background.

Stage three would be to live in a percept language with great facility and have inklings of a percept epistemology. The fourth stage would be to fully percept epistemologically conscious. In the second stage you are unconscious, now it becomes totally conscious and you speak the percept language with it. That would be the complete switch from concept background and concept language to percept background and percept language.

And then maybe a higher stage still, would be to live a percept orientation and speak the concept language, but never speak it from a concept point of view. In a pure state it wouldn't matter what the language was. You would always be speaking from the percept mode.

Thus, the speaker in the example above seems to be speaking from the first level of integration of percept, having spoken percept language from a concept epistemology. At the highest level, the speaker might have said, "When I engage in behavior that I see as similar to the behavior that I believe you are engaging in, I label myself domineering and hostile, and I make myself angry with me."

Integration of percept consciousness at this highest level seems no simple matter. It requires that conclusions are held tentatively, that strong cultural norms are resisted, that habitual language usage is changed, and that traditional beliefs are re-examined. We seem to have a choice between the certainty of a concept mode and the uncertainty of a percept mode. The former is grounded in lack of awareness of our own processes, while the latter rests upon full awareness of ourselves. We can be either unaware and feel certain or aware and feel uncertain. During the same conversation quoted above, John Weir told me:

When you move from concept to percept it's a big jolt. You have to give up a lot of certainties and take a lot of uncertainties and a lot of maybes. To me that's the barrier. People have trouble learning percept language, but I don't have it be because the language is difficult, but because to learn the language you are flirting with uncertainty.

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## NOTES

### SECTION 1

- 1- Weir, J. The personal growth laboratory. In Benne, K. et al. The Laboratory Method of Changing and Learning. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books, 1975, p. 304.
- 2- Ibid., p. 306-307.
- 3- Perls, F., Hefferline, R., and Goodman, P. Gestalt Therapy. New York: Dell Publishing, 1951.
- 4- Lee, D. Codification of reality: lineal and non-lineal. In Ornstein, R., The Nature of Human Consciousness. San Fransisco: W.H. Freeman, 1973, p. 128.
- 5- Korzybski, A. Science and Sanity. Lakeville, Connecticut: The International Non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Company, 1933, p. 89.
- 6- Ibid., p. 172.
- 7- Ibid., p. 59.

### SECTION 2

- 1- Gardiner, P. Scopenhauer. Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1963, p. 55.
- 2- Ibid., p. 82.
- 3- Whorf, B. L. Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf. Edited by John B. Carrol. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1956, p. 263.

### SECTION 6

- 1- The interview quoted here was held with John Weir on August 25, 1977 at Kirkridge Retreat Center, Bangor, Pennsylvania.

JOHN WEIR'S PERCEPT LANGUAGE  
by an anonymous learner

I grew up speaking English, which, for me, has proved to be a rich and flexible tongue, but I have had only one way of using my language, one mode in which I speak. I have discovered that in order to differentiate myself further, to grow me, I need to give myself more choices in my use of language. If I try out speaking myself in a different way — John Weir's way — I find that I improve my awareness of myself; heighten my sensitivity to my feelings, images, tones; and take fuller "ownership" of my actions and perceptions. With this way of speaking I also center myself more fully in my internal experience, am more often non-judgmental, achieve a greater degree of internal-external congruence and therefore become more transparent to others.

In the pages that follow I present a sort of Berlitz to the way of speaking which John Weir introduced me to. Here is a brief guide, complete with examples, comparing my two ways of speaking English. This Berlitz, like the original, contains some common phrases and a few rules by which I translate myself from the everyday English I learned as I grew up to this special mode I now use to aware myself, to differentiate me, and to better manage and "own " me. This newer mode is known as John Weir's "Percept Language", while the everyday speech will be referred to as "Concept Language" (since everyday English is used to develop concepts and is most powerful in such use.)

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Percept Language is one of the many ideas of Dr. John Weir, who is a clinical psychologist and a theoretician and practitioner in the area of personal growth. His work has been seminal in the area of laboratory education. He has written one rather brief article describing his work, The Personal Growth Laboratory in The Laboratory Method of Changing and Learning, edited by Benne, Bradford, et al, Science and Behavior Books, Inc., Palo Alto, California 1975.

### CONCEPT LANGUAGE

is my familiar language, with which I feel comfortable; it is English as I learned it, a taken-for-granted, easily-used, unthought-about part of me. A language of certainty, definiteness in which I sometimes hide myself from me. Excellent for making judgments, conceptualizing, asking questions, giving directions, getting things done. Rather poor for expressing my experience (except in poetry). Almost exclusively a function of my dominant cerebral hemisphere. The language of everyday life.

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Easy for others to listen to.

### PERCEPT LANGUAGE

is my unfamiliar and often clumsy language; a part of me with which I am not entirely comfortable, cannot easily take for granted, and that I use with some difficulty; a thoughtful part of me. A language of ambiguity and "no praise, no blame" which helps reveal me to myself. Excellent for expressing my experience in detail so that I can see, hear, and feel it (me); useless for conceptualizing, asking questions, giving directions, or making poetry. A function of the connection between my dominant and non-dominant cerebral hemispheres. A language of creativity and personal growth.

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Difficult and sometimes annoying for others to listen to.

Concept Language

“That’s what’s wrong with me.”

“This is really nice.”

“I don’t know what to say.”

“It doesn’t seem to matter.”

Percept Language

“I’m what’s wrong with me.”

“I’m really nice.”

“I don’t know how to say me.”

“I don’t seem to matter.”

To move from Concept Language to Percept Language I drop it, that, what, this and substitute I, or sometimes me. Most of the time my meaning is clearer to me.

Concept Language

Percept Language

“I caught a fever.”

“I fevered me.”

“I don’t know why I get these headaches.”

“I don’t know why I  
ache my head.”

“I’m bored.”

“I bore me.”

“You bore me.”

“I bore me (with the  
you-in-me).” (see later)

“You make me angry.”

“I anger me.”

In concept language I can speak of myself as the passive object of some verb – “things happen to me”. In percept language I actively verb me, i.e., I turn my speech into a mirror of my doing me. I am always the subject (whether or not I am also the object) of any of my behavior. I am always doing me, and only I can do me.



Concept Language

Percept Language

"A thought just occurred  
to me."

"I had me think..." or  
"I thought me..."

"I got turned around."

"I had me be turned around."

"It confuses me."

"I confuse me."

In concept language I speak as though events, feelings, dreams, and thoughts all were visited upon me, while in percept language I acknowledge to the world that I visit all these states upon myself. I take responsibility for me. One way to make sure I am being responsible is to use the form - "I have me...."

• Concept Language

"When you came in I knew  
you were sad."

"I know you don't think  
I'm funny."

"When you bumped me, you  
made me angry."

Percept Language

"When you came in I had the  
you-in-me be sad."

"I have the you-in-me think  
the me-in-you is not funny."

"When you and I touched, I  
had the you-in-me bump me  
and I angered myself."

There is you - out there - an article of faith on my part, I have no way of knowing. There is you-in-me -- in here -- my only version of you, the you-in-me includes the complex stimulus pattern impinging on my sense receptors, all my experiences of you and others, my perceptions, transferences, projections, hopes, fears, etc,etc. And there is a you-part-of-me -- in here -- those characteristics I recognize in myself which I also have be in the you-in-me., e.g., if I have the you-in-me be strong -- then the you-part-of-me might be the strong part of me.

Concept Language

"When you came in I knew  
you were sad."

"When you spoke to her in  
that arrogant way you really  
made me angry."

"You're beautiful."

Percept Language

"When you came in I had the  
you-in-me be the sad part of me

"When you spoke to her, I had  
the you-in-me be the arrogant  
part of me, and I angered my-  
self."

"I have the you-in-me be the  
beautiful part of me."

The only way that I can attribute characteristics to the you-in-me is if I have experience with those characteristics within myself. Thus, I can aware myself, and speak myself completely straight if I own those characteristics in my characterizations of the you-in-me. (Parenthetically, I find, when others so own their characteristics in their characterizations of me, I free myself to examine their characterization for whatever I can tell me about me.

## DREAMS AND FANTASIES

### Concept Language

"I dreamt that I walked down a long hall with my brother beside me. I had a dog on a leash. Then I woke up. I can't remember the rest."

### Percept Language

"I have me dreaming. I have me walking down a long part-of-me, hall part-of-me. I have my brother part-of-me beside me and I have a dog part-of-me on a leash part-of-me. I wake myself and I have me not be able to remember the rest of me." ..

In telling fantasies or dreams in the percept language: I stay in the present tense; I take responsibility for all actions, ( here the use of the words "I have" is often very important), I own each part of the dream by using the phrase "part-of-me" after each thing, person, pronoun, ( except me), or adjective.