

KARL BÜHLER
SEMIOTIC FOUNDATIONS
OF LANGUAGE THEORY

TOPICS IN CONTEMPORARY SEMIOTICS

Series Editors: Thomas A. Sebeok and Jean Umiker-Sebeok
Indiana University

SPEAKING OF APES

Edited by Thomas A. Sebeok and Jean Umiker-Sebeok

KARL BÜHLER: Semiotic Foundations of Language Theory

Robert E. Innis

KARL BÜHLER
SEMIOTIC FOUNDATIONS
OF LANGUAGE THEORY

ROBERT E. INNIS

University of Lowell
Lowell, Massachusetts

SPRINGER SCIENCE+BUSINESS MEDIA, LLC

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Innis, Robert E.

Karl Bühler, semiotic foundations of language theory.

(Topics in contemporary semiotics)

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Bühler, Karl, 1899-1963. 2 Language and languages—Addresses, essays, lectures. 3. Linguistics—Addresses, essays, lectures. 4. Semiotics—Addresses, essays, lectures. I. Title. II. Series.

P85.B8156

401'.41

81-19958

ISBN 978-1-4757-0925-4

ISBN 978-1-4757-0923-0 (eBook)

AACR2

DOI 10.1007/978-1-4757-0923-0

© 1982 Springer Science+Business Media New York
Originally published by Plenum Press New York in 1982

All rights reserved

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, microfilming, recording, or otherwise, without written permission from the Publisher

PREFACE

In 1933, Karl Bühler, then professor of psychology at the University of Vienna and director of the Psychological Institute, published in *Kant-Studien* a seminal methodological work under the title “The Axiomatization of the Language Sciences.” Bühler was primarily concerned with establishing an ultimate set of categories and principles which, taken together, would give us a semiotically derived model of language. This model did not spring complete from Bühler’s head; it involved a patient attempt to synthesize elements from the whole philosophical and linguistic tradition into a coherent account of the semiotic foundations and specificity of language. In particular, there is an extensive reliance on the discoveries of phonology, the implications of which Bühler was one of the first to exploit; on the work of Stumpf, Husserl, and Meinong, specifically their discussions of acts and structures; on the work of Plato, in whose *Cratylus* Bühler saw anticipated his organon model of language; and on the work of many others, ranging from Aristotle to Cassirer, whose names appear throughout the monograph and throughout Bühler’s masterwork *Sprachtheorie*.

The “Axiomatization” essay was taken up in slightly altered form as the first part of *Sprachtheorie* under the title “Principles of Linguistic Research,” and its main themes were expanded and developed in the body of that large work. Through this monograph, and the book to which it led, Bühler has wielded a profound but relatively unnoticed influence on later thinkers. He had a strong impact on the epistemological work of such men as Karl Popper, Michael Polanyi, and Ernst Cassirer, and two central figures of the Prague Linguistic Circle, Roman Jakobson and Jan Mukařovský, were heavily indebted to him. Moreover, Bühler’s critical confrontation with de Saussure and Husserl is still challenging and illuminating. Bühler’s insights into language, and into ourselves as language animals, remain of permanent interest and importance for semiotic and language theory. They intersect with many topics and areas of concern in contemporary semiotic research and in the philosophy of language, anticipating, grounding, and criticizing this work. A marvelous combination of synthesis and original thought, Bühler’s work on the foundations of language theory has managed to

develop a matrix of pivotal notions and categories of continuing relevance for our own attempts to understand the scope, foundations, and implications of language theory.

The present book consists of a long critical essay focusing in a highly selective and dialectical way on the scope, methodological power, and heuristic fertility of Bühler's language theory, principally as found in *Sprachtheorie*, and of a translation of the "Axiomatization" essay. I have included Elisabeth Ströker's 'Introduction' to the German student edition, published by Vittorio Klostermann, but not her 'Commentary.' My thanks once again to Professor H.A.T. Reiche, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, for help with ambiguities in the German, and to my wife Marianne for forbearance and help with the proofs. I am especially indebted to Professor Thomas Sebeok for his encouragement and interest in this book.

ROBERT E. INNIS

Lowell, Massachusetts

CONTENTS

Preface v

PART I: KEY THEMES IN BÜHLER'S LANGUAGE THEORY 1
by Robert E. Innis

1. Bühler's Axiomatic Project 3
2. Phonology, Diacrisis, and Abstraction 11
3. The Two-Field Theory of Language 19
4. From Perception to Metaphor 43
5. Clarifying Language by Contrast 55
6. Conclusion: Some Open Questions 67

References 71

**PART II: THE AXIOMATIZATION OF THE LANGUAGE
SCIENCES** 75
by Karl Bühler

Introduction 77
by Elisabeth Ströker

- A. The Key Principle: The Sign Character of Language 91
- B. Speech Action and Language Structure 109

C.	The Structural Model of Language	131
D.	The Schema of Language Functions	147
Name Index		165
Subject Index		167