

adjectives *long* and *short*. *long* is the unmarked because it may be used as the direct opposite of *short* (*I want a long piece of rope not a short one*) and because it may be used as the carrier of the whole category (*how long would you like that piece of rope cut?* — cf. Jakobson 1975). (3) When philosophers/logicians talk about truth value, they can, of course, say *With respect to truth value, this proposition is false* — *truth*, in this sense, stands for the whole dimension (zero-interpretation) as well as for one of the choices within the dimension (*truth* in the minus-interpretation versus *falsity* [marked]). (4) In many cultures, the name of the tribe (e.g., *Maidu*) is used both as a general term meaning 'human being' (zero-interpretation) and as a term for the 'Maidu' as against all other human beings (minus-interpretation): *Maidu* then is unmarked as against the special (marked) term for 'non-Maidu' (cf. Greenberg 1966). (5) *Day ~ night*: that *day* is unmarked may be shown through such examples as *each day lasts 24 hours, there are 7 days in a week* (zero-interpretation), and *I work during the day and relax and sleep during the night* (minus-interpretation). It should be noted that there is also another lexical item (the morphologically complex *daytime*) that specifies what is given by the minus-interpretation. The creation of a specific lexical item (through various morphological processes) for the minus-interpretation is common in lexical meaning but not at all common in grammatical meaning and tends to make the interrelation of lexical items more complex.

If we look at the much studied difference between "spoken" and "written" language,⁸ it would seem that in the context of the history of humanity as a whole, "spoken" language is the unmarked term and "written" language the marked term. "Written" language is more specialized in many ways than "spoken" language. We can see that quite clearly through the distribution of written and spoken language over different cultures: spoken language is universal, written language nonuniversal; there are many cultures with no written language, while all human communities have a spoken language. Phylogenetically, spoken language arose (and in fact helped to distinguish *homo sapiens*) long before written language developed. In children, spoken language develops long before written language (if the latter ever develops) and in fact is necessary for that development. Literacy is the gain of but a minority of the world's peoples and, despite the efforts of UNESCO, illiteracy has risen in the last few years. And even in our own culture, where it might have seemed a while ago that written language was gaining the ascendancy, the upsurge of TV and radio, of records and tapes, of telephonic communication, of sound film, etc. attests to the power of spoken language. In fact, when using the term *language*, linguists use it either in the zero-interpretation, meaning

'language in whatever form it has', or in the minus-interpretation, meaning 'spoken language', since the mark is carried by *written language*. Of course, the creation of the phrase *spoken language* is akin to *daytime* mentioned above: this term specifies the minus-interpretation. To say then that "written language" is marked vis-à-vis "spoken language" is not to deny that written language may have properties of its own and even a structure that differs significantly from the structure of the spoken language of the given community; written language obviously does have certain features of its own. It is in this sense that one can say that to claim an element is marked is not to say it is derivative but rather to say there is a hierarchical relation with the marked term being lower on the hierarchy (see Jakobson and Waugh 1979: cf. Derrida 1967).

Examples from other semiotic systems

If we turn to other semiotic systems, the same principle applies — many semiotic relations are based on an opposition between two mutually implicating terms that are in a marked ~ unmarked relationship vis-à-vis one another. For example, if we look at cultural systems as discussed by Lévi-Strauss (1958, 1963, 1969), Needham (1973), and others, and especially if we look at American culture today, the following (heterogeneous collection of) relations are oppositional, it seems to me, where the marked term is the more narrowly specified and delimited conceptual item and the unmarked term is the nonfocused item, that seen as nonspecialized (the marked term is given first): "barrenness" ~ "fertility", "homosexuality" ~ "heterosexuality", "black (person)" ~ "white (person)", "blindness" ~ "seeing", "deafness" ~ "hearing", "death" ~ "life", "left-handedness" ~ "right-handedness", "persons of the opposite sex living together and not married" ~ "persons of opposite sex living together and married", "use of Jr. on name" ~ "no use of Jr. on name" (see also the examples given in the quote from Jakobson above).⁹

What remains to be clarified in all of this is the status of the unmarked term with respect to its potential for the two main interpretations: is it the case that, e.g., a "white person" is used to stand for any individual in the culture or for some subgroup within the culture not defined in terms of race? I think so. A "black person" is normally seen as standing for the black community only, and rarely for the culture as a whole. It is only very recently, for example, that advertisements using blacks are meant to reach both blacks and whites equally.

In some of the cases listed here, one could also study the dynamic synchrony of our culture from the point of view of markedness. For