



BLISS IS INTERVIEWED AT THE RADIO
UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

In December 1965 the Manager of the Radio University of New South Wales Mr. R.J. McKenzie rang me up and requested an interview. He came soon with his taperecorder and proceeded to interview me. I had never spoken into a microphone, and I got so nervous that I started to stammer, could not find the right words, and made a mess of the whole interview. Though Mr. McKenzie promised to straighten out my difficulties by editing the tape, the result was far from satisfying. For this reason, I am giving here a corrected version of the interview.

Interviewer: Well Mr. Bliss, I would like you to tell us something about your work on your Semantography. What does this word mean?

Bliss: Semantography is a combination of two words both Greek in origin. Semantics means significant meaning and graphein means to write. Together they mean "A meaningful writing" and this is true if you consider that anything written in my Semantography can be read in all languages, surely no mean feat.

However, this is not the whole story. The word semantics is used today to signify a new scientific discipline, the study of the meaning of words and their influence on human behaviour. And this deals also with the way a word is pronounced.

Int: Can you give me an example?

B: Yes. From my pronunciation of the English words you have already realised that I am an immigrant and that English is not my mother tongue. Consequently I speak with a foreign accent. And some Australians, hearing my voice, will immediately realise that I am a foreigner, and this will influence their behaviour against or for me, all depending whether some of them like or dislike foreigners. Perhaps a Greek example will explain this better. The Greeks of old could of course not understand people who speak other languages. To them, their babble meant utter gibberish. And they imitated it by blabbering "Bar bar bar bar!" From this came the word Barbar, and in the end the word meant not only a foreigner, but even an uncultured foreigner. And this meaning is still with us today.

Int: Very well explained. I shall not think of you being an uncultured foreigner. Now, in the telephone directory the word Semantography is followed up by a second word Blissymbolics. What does this word mean?

B: This is rather a sorry story. Once a man has invented something new, other men appear who either downgrade his achievement or who try to copy and plagiarise it. The first they did to my word Semantography (which denotes only my system) was to generalise it. They began to speak about all the "semantographies" - yet to come. And they went even to scientific foundations and asked for much money for doing research into symbols in order to find a better system than mine. Today I am glad to say that they haven't been able to find any better symbols and system of symbols. Indeed, they haven't found anything, because the few thousand dollars they got were just enough to blabber about the possibilities and then to ask for a million dollars and more for 5 years research. They didn't get the money and hence stopped doing any research. In order to distinguish my work from the "Semantographies yet to come" I gave it a second name Blissymbolics. This they cannot copy.

Int: Very interesting. What then is the scope of your work which you call Semantography-Blissymbolics?

B: Well, a writing in symbols is not exactly new. We have picture writings developed in the past by many people. But my pictorial symbols have something which all other picture writings never had, and this is, my symbols can be used in a simple symbolic logic.

Int: Can you give me an example?

B: Yes. We have all learned in school the symbols of mathematics. They are not pictorial. They are abstract symbols, and it took us years of learning to handle them intelligently. Now here is a statement $1 + 2 = 3$. Being written in symbols it can be read in all languages of the world. At the same time we have learned in school that this statement contains the truth. It is not a lie. But a statement $1 + 2 = 4$ will be recognised by any school child as being a lie.

Int: I understand. But how can a truth or a lie be found out with your pictorial symbols?

B: I shall give you here an example. There are a lot of people around who take a devilish delight to throw little children into turmoil by posing a dilemma for them which they are unable to resolve logically. For instance, a well-meaning aunt may ask a child - and often she may even do it in front of the parents - the following question: "Whom do you love more, Dad or Mum?" The child realises that whatever answer it may give, may offend either Mum or Dad. Some girls will love dad more. Some boys will love mum more.

Int: Well, the best in such a dilemma would be for the parents to tell their children to, answer: "I love them both equally well."

B: Yes, but this may be a lie with some children who may love one parent more than another. Furthermore, such love may wax or wane. Mum may smack a child because it was naughty, and the child may retort: "I don't love you anymore." Tomorrow all may be different, and the child may think that she said yesterday a lie to mum. But yesterday it seemed to her as being the truth.

Int: Well, how do you resolve such a dilemma with your symbols?

B: Very simply. The meaning of love is pictured in my system with the outline of a heart. And just as in mathematics where we must learn how to operate the symbols 1 or 3 or 5 or 0, we must learn how to operate my symbol of the heart. First it means not the heart as such, the organ within our body. It means our emotions, what love is all about. And if you remember your algebra you will know that certain mathematical meanings expressed by $f(x)$ mean variables. And such a variable is the emotion of love. Sometimes we love more a person, sometimes less. In short, the aunt could have asked the child whether $2 + 2 = 5$ or 7 . The answer would be and should be a laugh and the child should say that the question is illogical and meaningless. This would not please the aunt, but it would please the parents and the child too.

Int: Very well explained. Give me another example.

B: Just now there is a stupid debate going on in the Sydney newspapers. It started with an article titled "Do our hospitals care for their patients?" If we try to symbolise this statement we will realise that the patients are symbolised by pictures of men and women. But the meaning of the word hospital should not be pictured by the buildings which constitute a hospital. The bricks and the mortar cannot "care". Consequently, we must "translate" the word hospital into the administrators, and the nurses. They are all human beings, and they are all men and women. They only can "care". But care means again emotion to be for or against something. And we have already learned the Blissymbols for this meaning: the heart, and we have already learned how to operate it, namely as a variable. Some nurses, and some administrators, and even some doctors are careless - sometimes, and careful some other times. And it depends also on the patients. Some are real monsters who make hell for the nurses and the doctors. So, as you see the newspaper heading is utterly illogical, and any child who knows only a smattering of my logical symbols could point it out to the editor to stop printing nonsense.

Int: Very well, but how do you think that children should learn Blissymbolics?

B: Now you have put the finger on a very sore spot. It must be taught to the children in the primary school, and it can be taught already in the kindergarten.

Int: And did the school authorities in Australia and elsewhere take notice?

B: No, Sir, my late wife and I have written over 6000 pleading letters with all information to over 6000 educators in all parts of the world. What is happening with my idea has happened many times during the centuries. One thousand year ago some Arab mathematicians have used the Hindu letters for the meanings 1 2 3 4 etc. How long do you think did the professors and teachers in European schools and universities refuse to teach the new symbols, preferring to pester their pupils with multiplying MDCCCVIII by CCCLIV? Not very long. Only 600 years. And I can cite more examples to illustrate what the Professor of Education Dr. Carleton Washburne of New York said over the Australian National Network as "Guest of Honour". He said

"We educators resist any change we even pride ourselves with the antiquity of our educational innovations." And when leaving Australia he said as a parting statement: "I have seen that in Australia the cane is still one of the main tools of education."

I have answered many more questions about my publication difficulties, about my chief source of making a living through my hotel, and about my discovery of ethics in cells and ethics in animals, and why there is no ethics in our human world where we destroy each other first with words and then with weapons. But I must stop this issue here. The interested researcher may request the original text taken from the tape recording and put down on paper by my secretary. It is preserved with all other originals of the Semantography Series in the Bliss Semantography Collection of the National Library of Australia in Canberra.

The End