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THE TREE AS A COGNITIVE MODEL IN SPEECH AND LITERATURE

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In several recent papers I tried to highlight the importance of the human (and to some extent also the animal) body as an auxiliary cognitive model (e.g. Krupa 1993 and 1995) in the vocabulary of widely divergent languages. The body (especially its outer and visible parts) incessantly enters into interaction with its surroundings, and is a major source of our elementary and fundamental knowledge. It is therefore not surprising that the body, with its complex internal design, often serves as a hypothetical blueprint or model for the interpretation and structuration of other conceptual domains, especially in those instances where functionally different and yet complementary (more important versus less important, central versus peripheral, superordinate versus subordinate) components ought to be distinguished and labelled.

The human body often furnishes the background and material for constructing models of hierarchization and for internal arrangement of other conceptual domains – whether it is space, a house or some kind of social unit. The question if personification is just a by-product in this transfer or if the communicants are aware of this connotation will remain open. After all, this may be a matter not only of the originator of a metaphor but also of the individual sensitivity and disposition of its recipients.

Alongside human or animal bodies, other analogous "bodies" exist in our surroundings. It is especially those in the realm of flora that are highly salient. The most ancient and stable lexical expression within the domain of plants is obviously that referring to trees, not those designating grass, weeds, lianas or bushes (cf. Brown 1980: 1). The chief value of the tree for the cognitive purposes of a perceptive mind lies in its impressive size and intricate articulation, perhaps distantly reminiscent of the human (or animal) body, except the former's seeming inertia behind which, however, mighty force is hidden.

Analogies between human (animal) body and tree find reflections on the lexical level in quite a few languages. For example, identical terms may be used to denote skin and bark. Thus Indonesian *kulit* means both human skin and tree bark (Echols – Shadily 1963: 203) and the same holds for Japanese *kawa* (Konrad 1970: I: 298). Along the same line, both hand (or arm) and branch may be

assigned the same lexeme, cf. Hawaiian *mana* meaning both branch and limb (Pukui – Elbert 1957: 217), just as the English lexeme *trunk* refers to the bulky part of both tree and human body (Hais – Hodek 1985: III: 2451) in a perfect analogy to the Maori term *tumu* (Williams 1957: 453). The basis of this lexical identity is obviously found in functional analogy in the case of *skin/bark* and *trunk* and in shape in the case of *branch/hand*. On the whole, however, the merits of the tree as a model are quite different from those of the human (animal) body.

The tree is, in addition to the human body, the most frequently employed model of a different type of the organization of its components. Thus, for example in the lexicon and oral literature, flower often symbolizes beautiful woman, cf. Indonesian *bunga desa*, literally the village flower, could be translated as the village beauty (Echols – Schadily 1963: 67), Japanese *shakókai no hana*, literally, the flower of the fashionable society, i.e., a beauty from the good society (Konrad 1970: II: 428). Likewise, fruit may also mean child, e.g. Hawaiian and Maori *hua* "fruit" and "progeny" (Pukui – Elbert 1957: 78; Williams 1957: 64).

The metaphorical usage of "tree" for cognitive purposes is widely known from literature. Wilhelm von Humboldt resorted to a botanical metaphor when he remarked that "... an individual is related to the nation as a leaf to the tree". Ranke in his turn compared mankind to a tree and Mommsen wrote that the Roman state of the imperial era is similar to a spreading tree (Demandt 1978: 107).

Archaic myths as well as metaphor-derived phraseology, and vocabulary confirm that the tree has attracted the "naive philosophers of language" (on the naive image of the world in language see Apresian 1995) in the first place thanks to the predominance of processual characteristics in its semantics, to its vital rhythm, in a word to such phenomena as growth, blooming, ripening, bringing fruits, falling of leaves, winter sleep and, at last, a seemingly miraculous rebirth. Some tree species are obviously more salient for purposes of this kind than other trees. Among the former ones are mentioned long-lived species such as maple, larix, sycamore, oak, etc. (Tokarev 1980: 396). The causes of cyclic changes undergone by tree are not necessarily obvious, which no doubt gives them a dose of mysticism and mysterious force, besides their significance as a donor of food and raw materials for construction and handicraft.

Another significant characteristic of the tree is given by the fact that it represents an intuitive vertical link between the basic cosmic spheres. The tree sprouts from the earth which is viewed as mother in many religions of the world – and grows toward the fatherly heaven. People live in the beneficial shadow of its crown and thanks to its fruits. Its branches reach toward heaven if not straight into it. And from this observation it is not too far to the idea that the heaven is actually supported by those branches. Birds sit and nest there, fly from them. The birds are a kind of natural mediators between earth and heaven and if we observe them from the ground, they sometimes soar to such a height that they disappear from our sight – and who knows if they do not even visit heaven? At other opportunities they are believed to bring us messages from the

higher spheres. From this idea it is not so far to the avian conception of the soul. Its home is no doubt in the heaven, at least according to many religions. And we know from the New Testament that the Holy Spirit appeared to Jesus in the shape of a dove (Matthew III, 16 but also elsewhere).

The opposite of the crown of the tree are its roots hidden in the depth and growing from the earth. The roots are inaccessible and mysterious just as the causes of so many things and that is why they so often become a rewarding subject for our contemplations and speculations. Thus the "cause" (origin or beginning) of the tree is hidden in the entrails of the earth – earth that receives the dead, their bodies return to it and it is far from surprising that the nether world is frequently situated somewhere in the depths. The world of the living people is localized somewhere in between, below the crown and above the roots. These two spheres (above and below) are external or at least remote to humans. Here the ternary conception (division) of the world overlaps with the binary conception. The latter may be characterized as the antithesis of the upper and lower worlds. The upper world is the realm of light, the lower world is the realm of darkness. The parallel of these two worlds with the opposition of day and night is far from perfect. The day may temporarily give way to darkness and, on the other hand, night has a light of its own – in the moon. The earth gives birth to plants and it is very easy to impute it a feminine, maternal essence. The earth which gives life, receives it back after the death. According to Maori phraseology, the dead body is put into the "belly of the earth" (*koopuu o te whenua*). The donor of life takes it back. On the contrary, the tree towers ever upwards to heaven and the light, to the sky which fertilizes the earth, being a male. Male is an escape to the heaven, being above while the earth is below. "Above" is a privileged characteristic even in the animal world, being associated with triumph, victory, majesty and power. This disengagement, however, is transient and is terminated by a return down.

The semantic domain of the tree comprises both metonymic links (tree – birds, tree – heaven, tree – nether world) and metaphoric relation (tree – male, tree – cosmos). Probably the most ancient reference to the tree is found in the Sumerian myth of Gilgamesh. This tree (maybe a weeping willow or an oak subspecies, cf. Epos o Gilgamešovi 1997) was growing in the vicinity of the Euphrates. At the time when the sky rose above the earth, a storm uprooted the tree by the river but the goddess Inanna carried it to Uruk, planted it again and took care of it. A snake was living in its roots and in its crown the storm bird Anzu.

In the Old Testament the tree of wisdom bore forbidden fruits (Genesis 2, 9). The symbolism of the tree is also familiar to Christianity. Christ's cross is an embodiment of the hope of salvation for mankind. In the text of a Slovak hymn the cross is metaphorized as a tree and bears fruit in the shape of the crucified Jesus: "Oh, holy cross, you sweet and precious tree bearing a splendid fruit, our dear Jesus Christ tortured for ourselves" (in Slovak: *"Ach, kríž svätý, ty strom vzácny, sladký nesieš plod prekrásny, Jezu Krista milého, pre nás umučeného"*). The fruit of this tree, Jesus Christ is a counterpoint to the perilous fruit of the paradisiacal tree. The cross of Golgotha is a means and its value resides in its

fruit, i.e., in Christ, who is suffering on it. The link connecting mankind with heaven is not the cross as a tree but Christ himself.

The symbolism of the tree is rich and varied. It exists in several varieties – as a tree of the world, of life, wisdom, etc. Its morphology consisting of a top, middle and base correlates with the morphology of the cosmos (heaven – the world of the living – the nether world). The plethora of other components including branches, flowers or fruits represents a basis for prospective functional analogies utilized in word formation and phraseology.

Mythological conceptions of the world sometimes enforce modifications of the image of the tree. Its roots in the earth may seem mythologically inadequate and therefore they may be turned over so that they sprout from heaven, not from the earth – if the cause of being is looked for in heaven and not in the earth, this metamorphosis may seem logical within this framework of thinking. This reversal is supported by the apparent symmetry of the tree along its vertical: A well developed crown of most trees is reminiscent of their root system and both take their nutrients from outside – the roots from the earth, the branches from the air and sun.

The cult of trees is linked to their symbolic charge and the range of eligible trees may include not only lime tree or oak known to us but many other trees as well, just as for example in Mongolia (Ujiyediin 1997) where the cult of trees has survived till this day. Sacred trees are also familiar to the Slavs. One such trees is the lime. Could we speculate about the motivation of this cult? Is it to be looked for in the fragrance of its blooms? Or in the mysterious hum of the insects that sounds as an enigmatic voice of that tree or of the gods residing in it?

The tree is an important object in the realm of Oceania too. Among the Australian aborigines the tree was viewed as a kind of ladder leading from the earth to the sky world (Mudrooroo 1994: 163) where the ancestors departed. That is why corpses were placed in the branches of trees in Australia (or, for that matter, on elevations of other kind as in Iran, Tibet, etc.) and the souls departed to the sky world via the trees. Man made poles sometimes serve as substitution trees or, as in the Arnhem Land, wooden coffins containing the remains of the dead are not interred but set up vertically upon the ground.

In Polynesia, the tree is usually viewed upon as a link between the different vertical levels of the cosmos connecting the world of humans with the nether world and the sky, that is, the world of the living with that of the deceased and the gods.

The genealogical tree is no doubt the tree linking the ancestors with their subsequent generations of descendants, a tree that is ever alive. It grows from the past where it is hard to distinguish the ancestors from gods and the living descendants are its last offshoots. In Kiribati myth, Nareau created a tree of ancestors from the backbone of his father. Its branches represent the individual ancestors, which is a symbolism known from many parts of the world.

The tree may be integrated into the cosmic creation process. According to the Yapese a huge tree grew in the beginning of the world. It was rooted in heaven and its branches touched the ground. In the crown of the tree a woman was

born. She got sand from the goddes Jelafaz and when she dispersed it in the sea, land was created (Dixon 1964: 248- 250). The awareness of the unity of creation is supported by the myths of the origin of man from a tree occurring in Indonesia (in Wetar, in northern Sulawesi, with the Kayans in Borneo) but also outside the Austronesian realm, for example in Mongolia (Ujiyediin 1997).

Cosmogonic myths recorded by W. W. Gill in the Cook archipelago mention the soul leaving the human body shortly before the death, and travelling to the cliffs at the western shore of the island where there is a marae of the god *Rongo* and the *pua* tree rooted deep in *'Avaiki* (Gill 1876). *'Avaiki* (in other Polynesian islands *Hawaiki, Havaiki, Hawai'i*, etc.) is both the nether world and the ancient homeland of the ancestors – and thus the souls of the deceased seem to be destined to return to their forefathers.

A tree is part of the scene in the Tongan myth about the celestial origin of the rulers of Tonga (quoted from Gifford 1924: 25-27):

"A large casuarina tree grew on the island of Toonangakava, between the islands of Mataaho and Talakite in the lagoon of Tongatabu. This great casuarina tree reached to the sky, and a god came down from the sky by this great tree. This god was Tangaloa Eitumatupua (correctly 'Eitumatupu'a).

When he came down there was a woman fishing. Her name was Ilaheva and also Vaepopua. The god from the sky came to her and caught her, and they cohabited. Their sleeping place was called Mohenga...

The god returned to the sky, but came back to the woman and they cohabited. The woman Ilaheva became pregnant and gave birth to a male child...

The god returned to the sky, while the woman and child remained on earth... The woman and son lived together until the child Ahoeitu ('Aho'eitu) was big...

One day he told his mother: "I want to go to the sky, so that I can see my father..." His mother instructed him: "Go and climb the great casuarina, for that is the road to the sky; and see your father."

Ahoeitu climbed the great casuarina tree and reached the sky."

The two-way traffic between heaven (or the nether world) and earth is only considered feasible just in exceptional cases. Mortals can proceed along it only in one direction. According to the beliefs of the Mangaiians the souls of the dying leave the body before the last breath and travel to the western coast of the island, to the cliff at Araia near the marae Orongo. If a friendly spirit meets the soul and tells it to go back and live, the joyful soul at once returns home, again enters the abandoned body and the person awakens. If the soul does not meet with a good ghost, it walks on to the cliff. A huge wave rises and at the same moment a gigantic *pua* tree (Beslaria laurifolia), covered with fragrant blossom springs up from *'Avaiki* or the nether world and receives on its far-reaching branches human souls. Then the *pua* goes down and when the horrified soul looks down, it sees a large net spread out to catch the souls of the deceased. When the soul falls down to the net, it is at once submerged in a lake of freshwater right below the pua tree. The captive souls exhaust themselves wriggling like fish and then the net is pulled up and the souls enter the presence of the inexpressibly ugly Miru, the master of the nether world. Her four daughters give

the souls stupefying *kava* and then their victims are brought to a burning oven and cooked (Gill 1876: 161-162).

A similar motif is known from New Zealand. Above the cliff at the northernmost cape of the North Island an old *pohutukawa* tree was growing. The souls climbed the branches of this huge tree with red blossoms, looked down and waited. As soon as the waves ebbed and the entrance to an underwater cave opened, the souls leapt down from the "leaping-stone" (Orbell 1985: 77-83). In New Zealand, just as in Mangaiia, the souls enter into the nether world after having climbed down the tree. It is reminiscent of the tree of life; the downward movement leads to death, for death is the opposite of life and of growth. Maui himself tried to obtain immortality for mankind by retracing the passage of birth – and his attempt was abortive. However, he managed to descend to the nether world and even to return back.

Above the western shore of the island of 'Upolu in the archipelago of Samoa there was a so-called leaping-stone. From this stone the spirits in their course lept into the sea, swam to the island of Manono, lept from a stone on that island again, crossed to Savai'i and went overland to the Fafá (at the village of Falealupo), the entrance to Hades. Near the entrance there was a coconut tree called Leosia (literally "watcher"). If the soul struck against it, it could return to its body. Before entering Pulotu, the exhausted souls took a bath in the lake of Vaiola (literally "living water") to freshen themselves. This is a widespread motif known also from New Zealand. The Maori of Rotorua believed that the souls had to cross a stream called Te Wai Ora o Táne, "the living water of Tane" on its way to the nether world (Orbell 1985: 83).

The tree is an important cognitive model for the Maori cosmogonic genealogies. According to one version the world can be traced back to the state labelled Te Kore ("nothing") which possibly has the meaning of chaos. "Nothingness" is followed by Te Pú ("root"), Te More ("The chief Root"), Te Take ("Root"), and Te Weu ("thin root"). All of them are parts of the cosmogonic or cosmic tree. The genealogical tree has roots in the past (in the case of Polynesia in the ancient homeland, i.e. East Polynesian Hawaiki and West Polynesian Pulotu) and has been growing into the present/future and territorially into the various archipelagoes and islands inhabited by Polynesians today.

The function of the tree as a link joining various spheres of the cosmos is encoded in the Maori mythical episode of raising the sky from the earth when this feat is achieved by a tree personified as the god Tane. Less conspicuous is this function of the tree in the Promethean story of Maui who has managed to acquire fire for mankind. It is true that the grandmother Mahuike has granted fire to Maui but he deliberately extinguished it several times. Mahuike has luckily concealed several sparks in a tree and wood has become both source and food of fire. The tree mediates between gods and people as a metaphorical angling rod. In accordance with a widespread Polynesian custom (e.g. in the Marquesas, Society islands), a human sacrifice, typically called a fish ("ika") was hung in a tree near the cult place – this metaphorical fish was caught with the

metaphorical angling rod = tree, connecting the world of mortals with that of gods, but also the world of living people with that of the deceased.

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