

What's in a name?

The vagaries of describing things about people

When choosing a word to describe a facet of personality, we have the same privilege as Humpty Dumpty: 'It means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.'

In psychology one possesses nothing unless one has experienced it in reality. Hence a purely intellectual insight is not enough, because one knows only the words and not the substance of the thing from inside.

—C G Jung

Call it anything you want

—David Freiberg

I am a lonely man
My solitude is true
My eyes have born stark witness
And now my knights are numbered, too

—Peter Hammill

Names are funny. You're given one, and you can't do much about it, at least early in life. Even if you change it, part of who you were or how you were described remains, even if you are then 'Dylan' or 'Lenin.' The past, or other meanings, are still there for examination in some way.

A wide range of connections, wanted or otherwise, true, false or misleading, come with a name. If you came up to me in the street, or met me at a gathering, or even spoke to me on the phone, the discovery of my name (a fairly unusual one, in my experience) could bring up various scenarios as to who I am, where I come from, who I'm related to, and so forth. Those scenarios would relate to your own experience, knowledge and context.

An interest in popular music could lead you to Renee Geyer (a different pronunciation) or, in the sports field, the rugby league player Matt Geyer. A Wagner aficionado might want to talk about Ludwig Geyer, his suspected father; an historian, Florian Geyer, a Franconian knight who featured in the 1525 Peasants' Revolt—and so forth.

But none of these associations are connections to who I am, or my origins. Florian Geyer appeals to me; Matt Geyer for my father in some way, which I still find faintly embarrassing, but that's the nature of difference ...

Some name connections can be startling. My father, a signaller in the Australian Army in the

last World War, was on an American ship in the Sulu Sea in 1945 when he was intrigued to hear calls from the bridge for Able Seaman Geyer. The Able Seaman later came into view, and he was (in my father's words) black.

What's uncommon in one place may, of course, be common in another. In South Australia, German names are less unusual: and so, driving to Adelaide last August, somewhat synchronistically I came upon a truck emblazoned 'Peter Geyer—Contractor.'

This personal story has relevance for type. If I know you prefer ENFJ, for instance, and know something of that type, then I can listen to and respond to a number of factors relating to that type. But I have to be aware of stereotyping of activities, experiences and relationships, because what I presume may not necessarily be the case for *your* version of ENFJ. Ronald Reagan may be an ENFJ, as some have claimed, but it doesn't follow that the lives of other ENFJs resemble his.

In my personal example, you might know 'Geyer' as a construct, or 'INTP', but if you associate me with constructs or ideas that don't relate to me, then you don't know *me*, Peter Geyer, INTP, at all.

If you receive data about others indicating that your presuppositions are wrong (direct feedback, say), but still persist with them, then there's the prospect of severe damage to people. It's important to be fluid and open in your observations and assessments. For many people, generalisations about males and females can be dangerous like that, even notions of depression, or marriage. The list goes on ...

The world is full of names. You can name things that don't exist, even describe or measure them. Physics and psychology are full of such things. Some things intended to be simply a name or a symbol can be interpreted as real.

For instance Adam, the Biblical first man, clearly isn't intended to be a real person, if the linguistic origins of the name are taken into account. Robert Alter's translation of the Book of Genesis is a more than readable attempt to return Biblical language into the forms and meanings of its writers (1996). In fact, he says:

A translation that respects the literary precision of the biblical story must strive to reproduce its nice discrimination of terms, and cannot be free to translate a word here one way or there another, for the sake of variety or the sake of context. (xxix)

This is quite a different enterprise from the translation of the King James Bible where, for contemporary political and social reasons, variety was a byword (McGrath, 2001).

Alter's prescription has much to recommend itself when interpreting Jung's psychological types and the MBTI—two overlapping enterprises that share a mutual language, but yet not quite the same

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interpretation. Isabel Myers' decision to use Jung's terms 'judgement' and 'perception' for the fourth scale of the MBTI is confusing to some, who wonder why she didn't choose different terms. However, if you're going to implement Jung's theory of psychological types, then it's natural to want to use his terminology. If Isabel invents different words, then she's not using his ideas.

Jung himself was mindful of the limitations of words. Michael Fordham (1968) suggests that this was a distrust, quoting him as saying:

It is not the concept that matters; the concept is only a word, a counter, and it has meaning and use only because it stands for a certain sum of experience.

It follows from that, in my view, that the concept and the related experiences, as described and defined, are linked together in clear ways. You can't 'call it anything you want', unless you also keep consistent with the associated facts of the experience: otherwise, you're talking about something else. If we interpret type language from this perspective, we can see the need for careful use of the terms, and for proper and informed feedback on MBTI results.

Extraversion, for instance, is a different concept from the more common term *extroversion* (a word that seems to have originated in a transcription or typographical error, given Jung's original formulation), and yet our language is crammed with the presumptions of the latter, not the former. The difference is in the idea that extraversion and introversion are associated with a person's *energy*.

The debate about feeling and emotion, whether they are the same or different, arises out of language difficulties and differing definitions of the words. Jung was well aware of that, as are other researchers and commentators from a variety of perspectives (Geyer 2001). The terms are not the same in type, because the definition of feeling specifically excludes emotion. Another definition might incorporate it, but it would not be a *type* definition.

So, even from this brief discussion of two type concepts, it's clear there's a need for accurate use of terminology when using type. But it's not only in feedback that words are important; the whole realm of psychological instruments is one of words and definitions.

Traits, for instance, are essentially nouns and adverbs taken from extensive forays into dictionaries and thesauruses looking for words that seem to describe or define aspects of human behaviour. This method seems fair enough at one level, but on another, there are problems with it: one, that dictionaries and thesauruses aren't the only way of doing this; another, the reservations expressed by some researchers about the worth of some of the texts, and the changing of meanings over time.

In recent times Simon Winchester has criticised the method, structure and presuppositions behind Roget's, the most well-known thesaurus, in terms of both accuracy and utility (2001). Roget's highly idiosyncratic classification system is particularly under fire. Antonyms are rarely exact opposites, so it helps to know some English in order to know something about what you're evaluating. This point seems to escape some who search for information without the knowledge to evaluate what they've gathered, but talk about it nonetheless.

Even for educated people skilled in type, words can be a minefield. Isabel Myers found that the words and phrases that best discriminated type preferences were *psychological* opposites, not necessarily antonyms.

Naomi Quenk states that the key words to describe the subscales (now 'facets') of MBTI Step II were found by consulting dictionaries and thesauruses. One presumes that a similar process was followed to generate new items for MBTI Form M. For new items there's a statistical assessment to ascertain their validity, but with words describing subscales or facets of a preference, it's a different thing altogether.

Two examples come to mind.

In his research on Form J, which subsequently also produced Form K, David Saunders used the terms 'Participative-Reflective' to describe one subscale of EI (1986). A similar subscale on Form K's Expanded Analysis Report came to be called 'Auditory-Visual' (1992). Presumably that was confusing for those familiar with those words as used in neuro-linguistic programming, even though the definitions were different. So, when Form K became Step II and its Expanded Interpretive Report came out, the subscale name had returned to the original 'Participative-Reflective.' The new Form Q (with different items) names it 'Active-Reflective.'

Saunders also came up with a 'Firm-Warm' subscale of TF, which appears in his draft work and in the research edition of the TDI manual. This seems analogous to the 'Tough-Tender' subscale or facet in the published Form J TDI report, Form K (both EAR and EIR), and Form Q. It's a similar construct (in some cases the same), but a different definition.

What's important in these cases is not so much the word itself, but the description that underpins it, so you know what 'active', for instance, means in this context. What it means in another context is not going to be accurate. 'Warm' and 'tender' might mean different things to different people, but in the context of describing a facet of a preference, it's still much the same.

As time goes on, experts in type get a better idea of what these things mean, and want to refine and define the words. It's important here to realise that the terms are still describing the same thing.

Type, in a very real sense, is about names, and therefore categories. Words describing categories appear and disappear. The King James Bible has many words that are no longer in use today—indeed, some that weren't even in use when it was published in 1611. Translation is fraught with difficulty and nuances: the best translators grasp the meaning and communicate it to others.

When people communicate type ideas to others, the *actual*, rather than the *individual*, meaning is paramount. Sometimes this is less clear than we would like: but it's important that we get the name as right as possible, so that we know we're addressing the person and the construct with dignity, accuracy and respect. ❖



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