Diagnosing Discrimination: A Tool to Disclose Hidden Prejudice and Assess Sensitivity Training

Howard Doughty (Seneca)

Words matter. If we do not define them well, we literally won't know what we are talking about. Twentieth-century logico-linguistic-analytic philosophers despaired of properly (denotatively) defining qualitative concepts such as beauty and justice according to the modern scientific standards. They deemed them emotive and cognitively meaningless, consigning them to linguistic limbo. Then, in 1956, political philosopher W. E. Gallie introduced the notion of "essentially contested concepts." Debates faltered or overheated as participants "talked past" one other because key words meant different things to different people. While Gallie hoped to find consensus on conclusive definitions of appraisive, complex, variously describable, and open-ended concepts, he acknowledged that, while correct definitions might remain elusive, the terms were vital parts of our language. Coincidentally, psychologist Charles Osgood developed the "semantic differential" technique. It revealed the multiple, hidden meanings of concepts in "semantic space" and allowed precise measurements of difference! Psychiatrists used it to investigate "dissociative personality disorder," psychologists to explore "cognitive dissonance," and sociologists to reveal concealed prejudices across class, gender, and ethno-racial divides. This paper links quantitative linguistic analysis to critical theories of communicative competence and shows how probing contested terms can disclose hidden prejudices among people who sincerely self-identify as tolerant of diversity. Administering simple sets of seven-point scales in questionnaires can help "diagnose" discrimination and lead people to recognize, confront, and resolve internal conflicts, achieve self-awareness, and engage in more rational discourse according to Habermas' "ideal speech situation" and neo-Kantian notions of "universal pragmatics" and can assess the efficacy of "sensitivity training."

Howard A. Doughty holds a BA from Glendon College (political science), plus advanced degrees in political science (University of Hawai'i and York University) as well as in history and philosophy of education (University of Toronto). He has taught at Seneca College since 1969, and has been a visiting professor/guest lecturer/keynote speaker at Capilano University, Grant MacEwan University, Kapiolani Community College (Hawai'i), Johnson County Community College (Kansas), McMaster University, Queen's University, St. Mary's University, University of Lethbridge, University of Toronto, and in the Department of Sociology and the MA program in International Studies at Hawai'i Pacific University. The founding editor of *The College Quarterly*, he has been an elected local, regional, and provincial official in OPSEU (CAAT-Academic) since 1975. He has published widely on democratic theory, critical pedagogy, and the political economy of higher education with a over a dozen books, 500 contributions to peer-reviewed journals from the *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* to *The Review of Radical Political Economics*, plus over 100 papers and keynote

speeches presented at professional and academic conferences including six previous presentations at the CALL.

Selected papers/publications:

2022   "Exercises in Quantitative Linguistics: Applications of the Semantic Differential in Exploring Mental Disorders, Diagnosing Discrimination, and Revitalizing Democracy," *International Journal of Adult Education and Technology* (forthcoming).

2013   "The Semantic Differential and the Assessment of Affective Learning Objectives," Council of Ontario Universities / Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance Symposium on Learning Objectives Assessment, Toronto ON.

2011   "Semantic Differential Analysis and the Exploration of Prejudice and Discrimination," *The SELS Review,* Vol. 1.

             "Semantic Differential Analysis: Diagnosing Discrimination," School of English and
Liberal Studies Research Symposium, Seneca College, Toronto ON.

1993   "Their Words Fail Them: Diagnosing Discrimination," with P. King, *The College Quarterly* 1(2).

1991   "Their Words Fail Them: How to Identify Unconscious Prejudice and Monitor Its Demise," ERASE ("Eliminating Racism and Sexism in Education") Conference, Seneca College, Toronto ON.

1986   "Discrimination: A Classroom Corrective," with P. King. *Bridges: Explorations in Science, Technology and Society* 4(1).