

On the Identification of Phonemic Entities

422) emission of consonants presents an infinity of degrees and shades with regard to voice (and other features as well).

423) where nature presents an indefinite number of varieties, the intervention of culture extracts pairs of opposite terms (he means here: the cultural, biological, social phenomenon of language). It is human thought, conscious or unconscious, which draws from this sound matter the binary opposition..

As music imposes upon sound a graduated scale, languages imposes the dichotomous scale, a corollary of the purely differential role played by phonemic entities.

424) the dichotomy... is a logical operation, one of the primary logical operations performed by the child and by mankind.

Note the closeness here to Chomsky's later theory of the innateness of the "language organ."

425) linguistics converges with modern physics, which has revealed the granular structure of matter as composed of elementary particles.

This is 1949 – how far has physics come since! Language, too, now talks more about waves and continuums and strata. But the phoneme as a bundle of dichotomous features – essence of the paradigmatic (simultaneous choice) axis, the axis of similarity, was one of J.'s basic ideas.