

CULTURAL VALUE OF GRAMMATICAL ELEMENTS.

In the cases that we have so far discussed the cultural content of the word has been borne by its radical portion, the stem. In some of the typically polysynthetic languages of America, however, non-radical elements, that is affixes, which are often possessed of very concrete significance, may imply a reference to some element of culture. As the process which turns an originally independent stem into a derivative affix is necessarily a slow one, the presence of such affixes, particularly when there is no longer an etymologic relation between them and any of the independent stems of the language, is generally good evidence of their age and, by inference, of that of the culture concept it embodies. Owing to the specialized character of the affix, as compared with the independent stem, the former has an even greater *a priori* claim to antiquity than the non-descriptive stem. Naturally the caution as to transfer of meaning, which we have already dealt with in the case of independent stems, is equally operative here; indeed, we may quite generally suspect the specific cultural application of an affix to be due to the turning over of an element of originally wider range of meaning to the exclusive use of a culture concept of growing importance (thus, we might easily conceive the gradual loss in the future of the wider agentive and instrumental function of English *-er* and its specialization into a cultural affix denoting "complex piece of machinery" on the basis of such forms as *typewriter*, *receiver*, *smelter*, *reaper*, and *developer*). Such a caution, however, would not seriously invalidate the use of our linguistic criterion, as a considerable period must be assumed to have elapsed before such specialization could be effected; it merely lessens somewhat the remoteness of cultural perspective implied by the existence of the affix.

One of the most interesting types of elements of this sort is constituted by such numeral classifiers as refer to objects of cultural interest. The presence in Yurok, *e.g.*, of numeral classifiers referring specifically to woodpecker-scalps and obsidian blades is in a high degree symptomatic of the great age of the custom of prizing these objects as valuable forms of property and further implies that the keen sense of property evinced by