Bricolage as Manifested Linguistically : La Penesée Sauvage

Takashi UMEMOTO

In this paper I would like to claim to solve the skeptical problem of how we can employ language to apperceive the external world. What we can know about the external world is often filtered through and structured by how we use language. In other words we cannot know things as they are in themselves but at best only as they appear for us, subject to the activity of human consciousness, which is obviously reflected in language use.

I want to insist:

1-Language reflects our conscousness, that is, what we believe things to be, rather than what they really are, as 'objective' entities.

2-Linguistic manifestations of our consciousness suggest that we normally do not follow even basic logical axioms.

3-The idea, bricolage may be useful to illustrate these (1 and 2) notions of the embodiment of human understanding.

O Introduction

For centuries, following the Cartesian legacy, it is considered as legitimate and scientific to isolate a target for investigation ; to restrict a range of investigation as constituting the linguistic characterization. But the idea may well give only a poor explanation for the real linguistic practice.

In this paper it is suggested that postulating an idea of bricolage may be one step in elucidating the architecture of human conceptualization and its linguistic manifestations[1]. Another step is to describe the architecture of cognitive processes that give rise to concepts in it. Yet another step is to characterize the intrinsic organization of bricolage.

Bricolage is a type of knowledge or a way of thinking that cannot be described in more fundamantal concepts in everyday encounters, although its conceptual potential may nevertheless be structured. Basically similar ideas are suggested in Wierzbicka (e. g. 1996)[2]. She employs everyday words and expressions that express common ideas, or a set of semantic primitives, to virtually all languages, to see through the characteri-

zation of human concepts. It could be argued that some things are more intelligible in the sense of being more basic or more basic in the sense of being more intelligible. Semantic primitives are more basic in the sense that without them all descriptions or ideas are potentially circular and untenable.

Concepts require specifications for their characterization. For instance, the concept [TRIANGLE] in a strict mathematical sense may necessarily include a specification for shape ; three-corneredness, e.g. a musical percussion instrument shaped like triangle[3]. It also includes (abstract) specifications, e.g. the knowledge that an object that might be called *triangle* has edges so that it could hurt people, that the image the word invokes may be applied to a situation involving three people in which a certain complication lies, often concealed beneath the relationship, or to the idea of the Holy Trinity in Christian art[4]. Which of these specifications belong to the meaning of the lexical item *triangle?* Strictly speaking, it may be that [TRIANGLE] must always and/or only require specifications for shape ; three-corneredness with the three interior angles having to be equal to two right angles. But one may well doubt if a mathematical specification like this is always the only or most important specification for characterizing [TRIANGLE]. Rather, the lexical item *triangle* is often used without invoking the mathematical definitions. Consider a tiangle a child draws. It is often not closed. The lines may not be straight so that the interior angles are not equal to 180 degrees. But one can still call it a triangle : What else could it be called? If one must apply the mathematical definitions for [TRIANGLE], it can never be applied, for instance, to a musical instrument, since it is open at one angle (i.e. it is only two-cornered).

A possible reason to opt for scientific methodology in the discipline of linguistics is that it is good for seeking scientific or mathematical or algorismic rigidity. It is designed for natural sciences. Is liguistics one of natural sciences? There is no clear-cut answer ; some believe it is ; others think otherwise. My tentative position is to regard language as a multi-faceted entity : it is reasonable to think that language may well be examined through scientific methodology (esp. part of phonetics : sound should be treated, in some instances, as physical entity), but it is also reasonable to think that language must have facets that it is hard to categorize into natural sciences, facets that are more or less human science. This paper is a step to examine such facets.

To put the case in positve terms, bricolage type of conception of linguistic semantics sheds a littel light on human aspects of language and hopefully permits a natural and unified account of language structure that accommodates what we feel is natural. Think of a similar example besides a triangle example, from a somewhat different viewpoint. The concept of [CIRCLE] may, in a normal situation, not be conceptualized algorithmically as the total set of dots equidistant from a certain point. Rather, it may well be that the concept has risen through recurrent daily experiences ; seeing things that are round ; experience of drawing circles yourself. At least, one may say that the

concept [CIRCLE] is invariably based on some perception of similarity or association between the concept of circle and that of round-like entities.

The basis for this extension is obviously based on our ability to compare one thing to another. This seems to be a simple fact, quite apparent from our day-to-day experiences with what we perceive.

Quite naturally one could attribute this extension to factors intrinsic to us. But I will argue only that the bricolage type of way of thinking is such a pervasive and central phenomenon that one can legitimately question the wisdom of an approach to linguistics that fails to account for it in a unified way.

1 Examples of Bricolage

The idea of bricolage is concretely exemplified by several illustrations.

1.1 Lightning

Consider this sentence :

(1)Lightning forked down from the clouds.

Forked lightning does not necessarily have downward motion ; some forked lightnings come up from the top of mountains or from tall poles, having upward direction into the clouds[5]. But (2) are weird :

(2)Lightning forked*up/?upwards from the mountain.

Cf. (3)Lightning forked across the sky.

In a similar vein, in Japanese, consider also the following :

(4)(a) Kaminari-ga otiru.

    (lit.) Lightning-Nom fall

    (b) raku-rai

    (lit.) falling-lightning

(5)(a) *Kaminari-ga   agaru.

    (lit.) Lightning-Nom rise

    (b)*shoo-rai

    (lit.) rising-lightning

The language structure is not so much based on physical reality as what we perceive and how, leading to our belief system. In other words, this provides a support to an idea that language is not based on a fact but, rather, on what we think is a fact.

1.2 Granularity

The problem of granularity also centers on relation between a fact and what we actually perceive. Granularity here is concerned with level of schematicity relevant for linguistic manifestation[6]. Think of English singular/plural system. Common nouns such as *desk, chair, table* are almost always common nouns and must be coded linguistically either one or more than one, i.e. a *desk* or *desks*. In a case of a narrative, however, in which a termite is talking to another termite, the concept [DESK] may be

manifested as a material noun and treated as such. Water is considered as a canonical material noun and normally treated as such. But when it comes to a molecular or atomic level, water is, at least, theoretically countable and must be treated as a common noun. The idea of linguistically manifested number, thus, cannot be determined algorithmically simply as a compositional value. In other words, how some concept is linguistically coded often goes beyond anything computable or predictable from objective physical values.

1.3 Objectivtity

The problem of objectivity and subjetivity has been a central concern and attracted much attention in the field of philosophy. But in linguistics it has not attracted as much attention and must have good reason for that. Think of a situation in which a table is below a lamp. This situation can be conceived in the other way, i.e. a lamp is above a table. It may be said that this is the case in which the situation is the same but the construals are different.

In other words, the situation is "objectively" identical, but conceptualized from the two opposite points of view. Some objection, however, is certain to be raised against this idea. It runs something like this : "Yes, the idea seems to be convincing at first, but a second thought makes us realize that no matter how some situation may be conceptualized, there always is a conceptualizer who conceptualize the situation." That is, any given situation is subjectively conceived to the extent that it is conceived by a conceptualizer. And this point is well taken, but it does not constitute a valid objection to bricolage. It simply and surely counters our intuition ; our intuition runs something like this : morning star and evening star are "objectively" one and the same entity, but "subjectively" different. This distinction is intuitively clear and worth making. To say that morning star and evening star are ultimately both "subjectively" construed same entity and thus does not show any sense of difference is gratuitous.

1.4 Folk Etymology

Folk etymology is a folk classification based mostly on our interaction with what we see and hear. For example, the concept [WEED] is not a scientifically defined concept. It is rather derived from daily necessity : weed is not necessary ; other plants are necessary. The concept must have emerged from recurrent interactions with various plants. Some plants are, custamarily food in some community ; others are not. Plants that are not eaten are not as important. And thus there is good reason to lump them together and to be regarded as one complex unit (no matter what its components might be). In a sense this type of specification achieved enough attention and linguistic singificance in a given culture.

The idea of folk etymology can also be applied to polysemy and homophony. Despite a long effort scholars made, clear criterion has not been (and probably will never be)

found to differenciate the two. The criterion that is said to be certain is an etymological criterion, i.e. difference of etymology should lead to homophony, but it surely happens that people in general feel that some pairs are polysemous despite the etymological difference. For example, *ear*1 (an organ by which we hear) and *ear*2 (the head part of corn or wheat). This particular example is embodied by the following saying : "There's ears in the cornfield." There are ears of corns in the cornfield, and there are also ears for hearing, so that the idea runs something like this : "Watch it. There are people (around here) who we don't want to listen to what we are talking about."

Folk etymology leads to this latter difference, i.e. a psychological difference. The other example that folk etymology is contributing to is what might be called pseudohomophony, i.e. the case in which the same origin of the words does not necessarily leads to psychologically or intuitively 'right' polysemy. For example, *flower* and *flour* were the same word sharing the same origin, same meaning, i.e. the best part. *Flour* was a variant spelling of *flower*[7]. Their meanings have become so distant that they are naturally felt to be two different words. This psychological difference must have necessitated the difference in spelling. In the case like this, given words are polysemous, only to the extent that the conception is shared by a community of speakers.

1.5 Riddle

Riddles are another example that demonstrate usefulness of the idea of bricoloage rather than mathematical logic. Consider the following riddles[8]:

(6) What is black and white and red all over?

(7) What gets wetter and wetter the more it dries?

These riddles violate the most basic three axioms of logic, i.e. law of identity, law of excluded middle, and law of contradiction.

Some of the suggested answers to (6) are (a) sunburned penguin, (b) embarrassed zebra, (c) skunk with diaper rash, and (d) newspaper. And to (7) is a towl. In passing, one has to take it into careful consideration that a towel, in fact, is not exactly the same object that gets wet and dries at the same time : When a towel gets wet, what is wiped out by a towel dries and when a towel dries, what is to be wiped out gets wet. Here is our intrinsic ability to associate one thing with another in terms of contiguity, i.e. metonymy. What counts here is not the fact that a wiper and a wipee are disparate but the fact that the riddle (7) and the suggested answer can naturally be accepted.

Logical rigidity is thus, at least, in some cases we have diagnosed, inappropriate in the sense that our actual practice cannot be determined so algorithmically. Rather, it might be said that bricolage or pensée sauvage is an intrinsic property to our linguistic practice, and this is well demonstrated in the next section, oxymoron.

1.6 Oxymoron

In Webster (1986 : 1614), oxymoron is defined as : "a combination for epigrammatic effect of contradictory or incongruous words." Examples abound : *sweet sorron, cruel kindness, laborious idleness, an open secret, harmonious discord, to make haste slowly.* Proverbs whose contents contradict each other can further articulate this conception. For instance, the proverb, *sometimes the best gain is to lose* by itself obviously constitutes a contradictory meaning[9]. And another proverb, *might is right* (the following proverbs are roughly the same meaning : *successful sin passes for virtue, thief passes for a gentleman when stealing has made him rich*) constitutes a clear contradiction with *sometimes the best gain is to lose.* The basic axioms of logic again are gratuitous to achieve real linguistic entrenched practice.

2 Concluding Remarks

Although extremely sketchy, the idea, i.e. bricolage described thus far might provide (hopefully) a sufficient frame of reference for exploring, and a point of access to a more formulated picture of, the way we, as a human being, think and act.

References

(4) Gove, P.B. et al (eds.), Webster's third New International Dictionary, Merriam-Webster Inc. (1986), 2440, 1614.

(3)(6) Langacker, R.W., Foundations of Cognitive Grammar vol.1, Stanford University Press (1987), 132-137.

(1) Lévi-Strauss, C., La Pensée Sauvage, Librairie Plon (1962), [translated into Japanese by Ohashi Yasuo, as Yasei no Shikoo, Misuzu Shobo, (1976)]

(9) Otsuka, T. and S. Takase (eds.), Eigo Kotowaza Jiten (Sanseido's Dictionary of English Proverbs), Sanseido (1976).

(8) Shibata, T. et al (eds.), Sekai Nazonazo Jiten (World Encyclopedia of Riddles), Taishukan Publishing Company (1984), 922-930.

(2) Wierzbicka, A. Semantics Primes and Universals, Oxford University Press (1996), 9-16.

(5) The Encyclopedia Americana, Grolier Incorporated (1986) 473.

(7) Otsuka, T. and Fumio Nakajima (eds.) Shin Eigogaku Jiten (The Kenkyusha Dictionary of English Linguistics and Philology), Kenkyusha (1987) 538.

　ブリコラージュはフランス語で「素人仕事」などと訳されることばですが、人類学の世界でレヴィーストロースが「野生の思考」の中で専門用語として使っています。ブリコラージュは誤解を恐れずに言えば、近代科学に対する原始的科学、あるいは、科学に対する非科学、数学のような自然科学に対する文学のような人文科学、科学的分類に対する非科学的分類などと大いに関係を持っています。もっと単純化して言えばブリコラージュは「専門家ではない素人の（一見）単純な、素直な発想の仕方」と言えます。日本語や英語のこ

とば使いを見る限り、このブリコラージュの発想法、或は、発想のレベルが専門家の発想法よりも大事なことがあります。以下にいくつか、その発想と関係がある例を挙げます。

１－雷は上がらないで、「落ちる」。

雷は実際には雲から発生した放電が地面に近づき、開けた平地では地面から２、３メートルの高さになったときに地面から上向きの放電が飛び出してくることが多いと言うことです。つまり、地表近くでは、雷は「落ちる」のではなく、「上がる」。しかし、「落雷」とは言っても「昇雷」などとは冗談でない限り言わない。このことから言えることは、言語は事実に基いているというよりは事実だと思っていることに基いていると考えるべきだということです。

２－民間分類

「雑草」などという分類の仕方は植物学の専門家が厳密な分類法に基いて、したものではないようです。そんな、項目は植物学の本には載っていません。。しかし、実際には「雑草」ということばはあるし、この項目は人々の生活の中で、有効な項目であると言えます。一般に科学的と言われる分類よりもこういった分類の仕方の方が、生活の役に立つこともあるし、直感に合っていることもあります。くじらはいわゆる科学的分類では魚の仲間ではないにも拘わらず、「さかな偏（へん）」を使っていることなどが思い起こされます。

３－なぞなぞ

（ア）「黒と白で、その上全体が赤いものなあに？」

（イ）「かわけばかわくほどぬれるものなあに？」

２つとも論理的に考えれば答えが見つかるはずがありません。しかし、論理的に考えてすぐ答えが見つかるようでは、なぞなぞとは言えません。又、なぞなぞというものを持ち出さなくとも、ことばの上で矛盾した使い方はいくらでも見つかります。例えば、「負けるが勝ち」、「甘い苦味」など。更に、諺（或はその類）どうしが矛盾することもよくあります。例えば、「渡る世間は鬼ばかり」と「渡る世間に鬼はなし」など。こういったことを考えあわせると、人間の認識の仕方や、それを反映していると考えられることばの使い方は理詰めで考えていくことは寧ろ、害になることがあります。