

Language as Human Essence

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言語を扱った大学用の英語テキストとしては、言語に関する個人的なエッセイというのではなく、言語学的裏付けのしっかりしていることが何よりも重要である。しかし、同時に豊富な具体例を用いた分かりやすい説明が求められる。この本の原書 *An Introduction to Language* はこうした要件を満たし、言語のあらゆる局面について考察する名著である。しかし、それぞれの言語的問題の扱いが詳細で分量が多いため、日本の学生が多くのテーマを読みこなそうとすると、週に3回の講義で2年でも足りない。専門課程での言語学原書購読にはこれでも良いだろうが、それでは限られた学生しかこの本に触れることができない。一般の学生にもそれぞれのテーマに興味を抱きながら、週に1回の講義で言語の全般的な局面についてエッセンスを把握してもらいたい。このためにはテーマの選択と原書の思い切った編集が欠かせない。また、日本人学生にとって関心の対象にならないような記述の削除も行う。こうして原著者の意図を阻害することなく、むしろ日本人学生が原書に近づきやすい形にまとめたのがこのテキストである。現代言語学の成果を取り入れた著書でありながら、極めて平明な英語で書かれているので、内容を正確に捉えた講読演習も可能だろう。

本書は、次のような構成になっている。1章の「言語とは何か」における言語の素描を通して、言語についての基本的な認識を持ってもらう。2章以下は各論になっているが、興味に応じてどの章を扱っても良い。注釈においては、各章のはじめに簡単な概要を載せているので、扱うテーマについての心構えができると思う。一般の辞書に載っている語彙表現は扱わないが、本文の用例として出ている類のものは不要な手間を省く意味で訳語を付けている。発音記号については、綴り字からではなかなか分からないものに限定しているが、原音と日本語の読みでズレが大きい語の場合、慣習的に確立したカタカナ表記を付けている。注釈は通常の説明のほかに、☆印の部分では詳しい説明をしており、興味があれば参考にして欲しい。なお、6章の文体論ではまとまった構造説明が必要なので、独立の枠を設けている。

本書は原文の編注だけではなく、本文で扱っている分野に関連する

いろいろなテーマについて解説事項を設けている。これは言語学の講読を踏まえさらに問題意識を広げてもらうためのもので、演習セミナーにおけるディスカッションの素材としても使えるだろう。なお、生成文法関連の解説は専門的な問題を扱っているので、整理用のメモとして利用していただきたい。手話関連の解説にあたっては、枚方市教育文化センターにおいて聴力障害児教育の取材を行なっているほか、日立製作所からも手話システムの資料をいただいている。また、個人的に言語研究の機械翻訳への応用に携わり、日本電子工業振興協会の「自然言語処理技術委員会」における活動などを通してこの領域に関わってきたことから、関連事項の解説を加えた。

81年夏から1年ほど文部省長期在外研究員としてUCLAの言語学科の大学院に客員研究員(Visiting Scholar)で在籍していた頃、原著者の一人フロムキンは大学院長(dean)の職にあった。私も教授の講義を受けていたが、10人足らずの院生がテーマごとに発表しこれを検討するというスタイルで、言い間違いや手話の言語的特性などを扱ったのを憶えている。ホームパーティーでは主婦としての素顔を覗かせていた。フロムキンはアメリカ言語学会会長も務めた有力な言語学者だが、音声学から文法論を中心に、言語運用など言語全般に渡る論文、著書が多数あり、こうした入門書を執筆するには最適任者である。共著者のロドマンはフロムキンとは師弟の関係にあり、執筆当時ノースカロライナ州立大学の助教授であった。米国の多くの大学で使われているこの名著を日本の学生に紹介できることを光栄に思う。この本の注釈にあたっては、大阪大学言語文化部の同僚ジェリー・ヨコタ-村上氏に確認した箇所もあり、ここに謝意を表したい。

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成田 一

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1. What Is Language?

When we study human language, we are approaching what some might call the "human essence," the distinctive qualities of mind that are, so far as we know, unique to man.

Noam Chomsky, *Language and Mind*

The possession of language, more than any other attribute, distinguishes humans from other animals. To understand our humanity one must understand the language that makes us human. According to the philosophy expressed in the myths and religions of many peoples, it is language that is the source of human life and power. To some people of Africa, a newborn child is a *kuntu*, a "thing," not yet a *muntu*, a "person." Only by the act of learning language does the child become a human being. Thus according to this tradition, we all become "human" because we all know at least one language. But what does it mean to "know" a language?

When you know a language, you can speak and be understood by others who know that language. This means you have the capacity to produce sounds that signify certain meanings and to understand or interpret the sounds produced by others. We are referring here to normal hearing

individuals. Deaf persons produce and understand sign languages just as hearing persons produce and understand spoken languages.

Everyone knows a language. Why write an entire book on what appears to be so simple a phenomenon? After all, five-year-old children are almost as proficient at speaking and understanding as are their parents. Yet the ability to carry out the simplest conversation requires profound knowledge that speakers are unaware of. This is as true of speakers of Japanese as of English speakers, of Eskimos as of Navajos. The fact that we may know something unconsciously is not unique to language. A speaker of English can produce a sentence with two relative clauses like

My goddaughter who lives in Sweden is named Disa, which was the name of a Viking queen.

without knowing what a relative clause is. This is parallel to knowing how to walk without understanding or being able to explain the neurophysiological control mechanisms that permit one to do so.


What, then, do you know if you know English or Quechua or French or Mohawk or Arabic?

Probably without being aware of it, you know the sounds that are part of your language as well as those that are not. This knowledge is often revealed by the way speakers of one language pronounce words from another language. If you speak only English, for example, you may (and usually do) substitute an English sound for a non-English

sound when pronouncing "foreign" words. How many of you pronounce the name *Bach* with a final *k* sound? This is not the German pronunciation. The sound represented by the letters *ch* in German is not an English sound. If
5 you pronounce it as the Germans do, you are using a sound outside of the English sound system. Have you noticed that French people speaking English often pronounce words like *this* and *that* as if they were spelled *zis* and *zat*? This is because the English sound represented by the initial
10 letters *th* is not part of the French sound system, and the French mispronunciation reveals the speakers' unconscious knowledge of this fact.

Knowledge of the sound patterns of a language also includes knowing which sounds may start a word, end a
15 word, and follow each other. The name of a former president of Ghana was *Nkrumah*. Ghanaians pronounce this name with an initial sound identical to the sound ending the English word *sing* (for most Americans). But most speakers of English would mispronounce it (by Ghanaian
20 standards) by inserting a short vowel before or after the *n* sound. Similarly, *Ngaio Marsh*, the Australian mystery story writer's first name, is usually mispronounced in this way. There is a good reason for these "errors." No word in English begins with the *ng* sound. Children who learn
25 English discover this fact about our language, just as Ghanaian and Australian aboriginal children learn that words in their language may begin with the *ng* sound.

Knowing the sounds and sound patterns in one's language constitutes only one part of our linguistic knowledge. A most important part of knowing a language is

knowing that certain sounds or sound sequences signify or represent different concepts or "meanings." That is, if you know English, you know that *boy* means something different from *toy* or *girl* or *pterodactyl*. Knowing a language is therefore knowing the system that relates sounds and meanings. If you don't know a language, the sounds spoken to you will be pretty much incomprehensible. This is because the relationship between speech sounds and the meanings they represent is, for the most part, an *arbitrary* one. You have to learn (when you are acquiring the language) that the sounds represented by the letters *house* (in the written form of the language) signify the concept ; if you know French, this same "meaning" is represented by *maison*; if you know Twi, it is represented by — *ɔdaŋ* — ; if you know Russian, by *дом*; if you know Spanish, by *casa*.

This arbitrary relationship between the form (sounds) and meaning of a word in spoken language is also true of the sign languages used by the deaf. This is easy to prove. If you watch a sign interpreter on television with the audio turned off, it is highly doubtful that you will understand the message being conveyed (unless of course you know American Sign Language — ASL — or Signed English). A nonhearing user of Chinese Sign Language would also find it difficult to understand a user of ASL. Many signs, of course, may originate as visual imitations of their referents; they may be *mimetic* (similar to miming) or *iconic* (with a nonarbitrary relationship between form and meaning) to begin with. But signs change historically as do words, and the iconicity is lost. These signs become con-

ventional; in the same sense that knowing the sounds of words does not reveal their meaning, so knowing the shape or movement of the hands does not reveal the meaning of the gestures in sign languages.

5 Thus, the *conventional* and *arbitrary* nature of form-meaning relationships in languages — spoken and sign — is universal.

There is, however, some "sound symbolism" in language. That is, there are words whose pronunciation suggests the
10 meaning. A small group of words in the vocabulary of most languages is "onomatopoeic" — the sounds of the words "imitate" the sounds of "nature." Even here, the sounds differ from one language to another, reflecting the particular sound system of the language. In English we
15 say *cockadoodledoo* and in Russian they say *kukuriku* to represent the rooster's crow.

One also finds particular sound sequences that seem to relate to a particular concept. In English many of the words beginning with *gl* have to do with sight, such as
20 *glare, glint, gleam, glitter, glossy, glaze, glance, glimmer, glimpse, and glisten*. Many rhyming word pairs begin with *h*: *hoity-toity, harum-scarum, hotsy-totsy, higgledy-piggledy*. But these are a very small part of any language, and *gl* may have nothing to do with "sight" words in an-
25 other language.

When you know English you know these *gl* words, the onomatopoeic words, and all the words in the basic vocabulary of the language. You know their sounds and you know their meanings. It's extremely unlikely, of course, that there are any speakers of English who know the