Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction

Yoshihiko IKEGAMI

1 . The Object of Linguistics: 'Language *per se*' or 'Language as used by the Speaker'?

Academic objects traditionally divided into 'natural' and 'cultural' objects – to be studied in natural science and in the humanities respectively.

'natural' objects exist independently of humans

'cultural' objects are created by humans (often by working on 'natural' objects and changing them into things that serve their purposes) – typical examples are 'tools' (which serve to extend the limited human capacities)

We say 'use language', just as we say 'use tools', implying that language is conceptualized as a kind of tool, hence language is a 'cultural' object.

We say 'make a tool [a bat, a chair]' but normally not 'make a language [Japanese, English]' (unless we have in mind an artificial, and not a natural, language), hence language is not a prototypically 'cultural' object – Language is something which evolves 'naturally', comparable to the 'natural' growth of a plant, without any purposeful intervention of humans – In its certain aspects, language certainly lends itself to being regarded as a 'natural' object, which evolves apparently by itself without any human intervention – cf. language change described as if 'led by God's invisible hand'.

(Another feature of language which makes it appear like a natural, rather than a cultural, object – one's native language as something thoroughly embodied and internalized vs. a non-native language as something not thoroughly embodied which can only be manipulated consciously and attentively – competence of using one's native language as part of human instinct? – cf. 'wild' animals as 'natural' objects vs. 'domesticated' animals as 'cultural' objects)

Concentrating solely on language *per se*, leaving human speakers out of account – humans, who think and behave on their own '*subjectively*' in spite of their limited capacities, are undependable, their behavior not being amenable to law-like generalizations:

> CAUSE → EFFECT (with natural objects and phenomena: the process can be described as a 'law', i.e. as 100% predictable, provided that a set of certain conditions are fulfilled)
>
> STIMULUS → RESPONSE (with living beings: the process cannot necessarily be described as 100% predictable, the predictability being the lower, the higher on the evolutionary scale the living beings in question are located – which means that the living beings higher on the evolutionary scale (typically human beings) behave 'subjectively' (i.e. on their own, and not 'mechanically')
>
> MOTIVATION → ACTION (with human beings: the norm is 'motivated, but not predictable' (cf. Lakoff 1987))

Humans are highly interesting and important objects for academic study in their own right, just as natural objects and phenomena are – instead of deploring the apparent lack of law-like regularity in the humans' behavior, we should address the question of how far and in what ways the humans act as agentive subjects *par excellence* – this applies to their linguistic behavior – the increasingly more focus on the speaker in linguistic study.

2. The Reinstatement of the Speaker --- the Speaker as Cognizing as well as Speaking Subject

The speaker is a person who speaks language or (more precisely) one who generates an infinite number of grammatical sentences and uses them appropriately in context – But whence come the (grammatically correct and contextually appropriate) sentences the speaker utters?

Whorf (1956[1940]) on the naïve image "every normal person" has of the speaker of language – the speaker going through two stages before uttering sentences: (i) the speaker "consults a common substratum of logic or reason" and "formulates his ideas", (ii) the speaker then "'expresses' what is essentially already formulated nonlinguistically", speaking thus being an "incidental process concerned strictly with communication, not with formulation of ideas".

> Structural linguistics: the speaker, not being amenable to rigorous scientific treatment, to be 'shelved for the moment' but actually totally left out of consideration – concentrating on the DESCRIPTION of language in terms of STRUCTURE – concerned with linguistic RELATIVITY: 'Languages may vary from each other in unpredictable ways'.

> Transformational-generative grammar: the task of linguistics is the EXPLANATION (i.e. a statement intended to describe how things work) of the human LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE (i.e. the speaker's ability of generating an infinite number of grammatical sentences) – to be specified 'formally' (i.e. in terms of explicit 'rules')) – concerned with linguistic 'universals' – positing, however, "an ideal speaker-listener", living "in a homogeneous speech-community", who "knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and errors … in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance" (Chomsky 1965) – the speaker idealized to the extent that her role is reduced to a set of formal rules.

> Transitional stage characterized by growing concern about linguistics alienating itself from the study of actual use of language and surging interest in pragmatics and discourse analysis: 'pragmatics', interested in the use of language in actual context, esp. in the exchange of meanings between the speaker and the hearer, where the meanings intended by the speaker and interpreted by the hearer may go well beyond the 'literal' meanings of the message conveyed linguistically – the need of taking into consideration the contribution of the speaker and the hearer as cognizing agents – 'discourse analysis', where 'discourse' is not simply 'a unit larger than a sentence' (as at first defined) but 'language in use' (which presupposes actual context with the presence of the speaker and the hearer) – in communication by means of language, the sum of the meanings conventionally associated with the words of a message serves only as a 'key' to inferring what is actually intended, and communication involves quite a lot of cognitive activity on the part of both the speaker and the hearer as 'cognizing subjects'.

> Cognitive linguistics: the speaker reinstated as positively and 'subjectively' acting agent (and not as merely mechanically responding 'rule-governed' agent (Chomsky (1964)) – the speaker not simply as 'speaking subject' (*sujet parlant*) in the narrowest sense but also and more importantly as 'cognizing subject', (who 'construes' the situation before proceeding to encode it linguistically).

> Humans and language engaging with each other constantly – language can't be (as traditionally surmised) an 'arbitrary' entity (i.e. 'language is as it is, because it is as it is', 'no particular reason for language being as it is now') – language is 'motivated': cf. the notion of 'iconicity' (i.e. similarity between form and content, structural parallelism between form and content) – 'motivated' because humans use language in their cognitive activity with specific goals in mind (cf. 'functionalism', which says 'function defines structure') – human cognitive activity as characterized both by genetically common features and culturally specific features – hence

both universalistic and relativistic features of human language – neither extreme relativism (as in structural linguistics) nor uniform universalism (as in transformational-generative grammar), but 'linguistic typology' (a finite number of types within a humanly possible range),
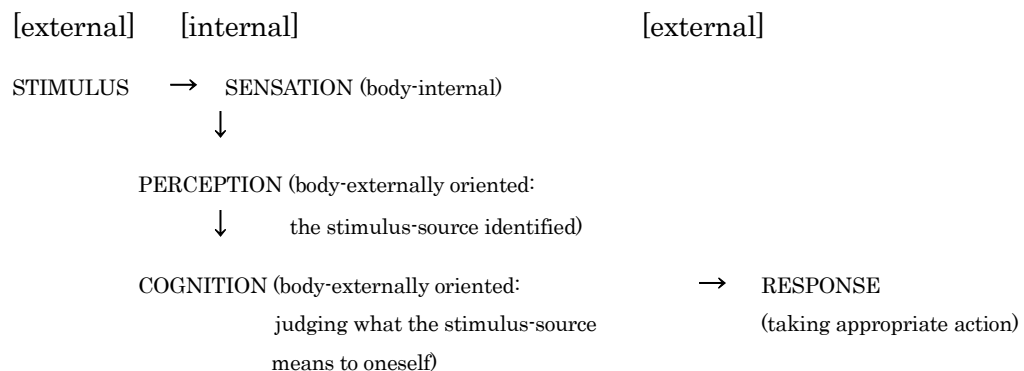
3. What is 'Cognition'?

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 6th ed. (2009) 'The process of knowing, understanding, and learning something'

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, 6th ed. (2000): 'The process by which knowledge and understanding is developed in the mind'

Cf. 5th ed. (1996): 'the action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience or the senses'

Common factors: (i) 'cognition' concerns such mental activities as 'knowing' and 'understanding'. If you know or understand X, you have information about X, in other words, you know what X means (to you). Questions of 'meaning' is deeply involved in the questions of 'cognition'. (ii) 'cognition' concerns a mental 'process', i.e. a process of getting to know/ understand the meaning of something, acquiring / developing knowledge / understanding – 'cognition' serving to build, modify and even replace our ways of knowing / understanding the world we live in – communication means giving and receiving information, and language is by far the most important means of communication for the humans, hence language is most deeply and importantly involved in human cognitive activities. (iii) OALDCE (5th ed.) on the sources of information: 'through thought, experience or the senses' – through the senses (for sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch) we have sensations arising in our bodies – what do sensations have to do with cognition?

[external]   [internal]   [external]

STIMULUS   →   SENSATION (body-internal)
                         ↓

            PERCEPTION (body-externally oriented:
                ↓   the stimulus-source identified)

            COGNITION (body-externally oriented: →   RESPONSE
                        judging what the stimulus-source   (taking appropriate action)
                        means to oneself)

Biosemiotic perspectives:

A creature lives in an environment – It receives a number of stimuli from the environment – The essential condition for the creature for staying alive in the environment is that it is able to distinguish between stimuli that are favorable to its staying alive and those that are unfavorable to its staying alive – It has to be able to judge unmistakably what the stimulus in question means to itself – "The question of meaning is, therefore, the crucial one to all living beings" (Uexküll 1934).

One important difference, however, between humans and other living beings: The process from receiving a stimulus to making a response mediated by 'cognition' (as well as 'instinct') in the case of humans, while the same process is mediated predominantly by 'instinct' in the case of animals other than humans – the idea of humans as 'subjects' (i.e. 'cognizing agents who act on their own').

4. 'Meaning' in Cognitive Linguistics

'meaning' as in dictionary definitions – 'a piece of information conventionally associated with the word when the speaker of the linguistic community uses it' – it is regarded as part of social 'convention' (i.e. 'behaviour and attitudes that most people in a society consider to be normal and right') and is,

as such, supposed to be something 'objective' (like a code of etiquette) to be observed by the member of the society – a notion of 'meaning' with no trace of the speaker's involvement

'construal' as a key-notion in cognitive linguistics – 'meaning' as created 'subjectively' by the speaker – in cognitive linguistics, the speaker is known to function as a 'cognizing subject' as well as 'speaking subject' (in the narrowest sense) – the speaker, before uttering a sentence, engages in a cognitive activity called 'construal'.

the speaker wants to linguistically encode a situation – clearly impossible for her to encode all and every piece of information involved in the situation – nor does she need to do so – what she has to do is to encode those pieces of information involved in the situation which she considers relevant to her communicative purposes in a way most relevant to the particular context of communication she is involved in: i.e.

> (i) she distinguishes those relevant features of the situation worth encoding from those to be safely ignored,
> (ii) she chooses an appropriate perspective forms which those relevant features are to be encoded, and
> (iii) she finds out 'symbolic' (i.e. meaningful) from in grammar and lexicon which closely match the cognitive image she has made of the situation.

The speaker thus makes sense of the situation in a way she considers most relevant to her. This whole process of cognitive activity, which the speaker undergoes before uttering a sentence, is called 'construal' in cognitive linguistics.

'Meaning' thus does not reside in the 'objective' reality; it is rather created 'subjectively' by the speaker who cognitively processes the latter. (Cf. the construction, 'construe X as Y' (e.g. 'construe her silence as acquiescence'), where the use of *as* implies that the act is 'subjective'.)

The thesis: 'different forms, different meanings' (Bolinger 1977):

'Meaning' is created by the speaker through her 'construal', i.e. through her cognitive engagement with the situation she intends to encode linguistically – One and the same situation can be construed by the speaker in a number of different ways and differently encoded accordingly – which means that different forms of encoding imply different construals and hence different meanings, even if they refer to one and the same situation – no absolute synonymy either in lexicon or in grammar.

5. 'Construal' in Cognitive Grammar: Its Universalistic and Relativistic Aspects

the universalistic aspect: the speaker of language has an ability to construe one and the same situation in a number of alternate ways. For example, "John loves Mary" – "Mary is loved by John", "I believe John honest" – "I believe that John is honest", "I showed Mary the picture" – "I showed the picture to Mary", "I struck Bill on the head" – "I struck Bill's head", "John gave a kick to the horse" – "John kicked the horse", "I saw the morning star" – "I saw Venus", etc., etc., different construals resulting in differences in meaning, testifying to the correctness of the dictum, 'Different forms, different meanings' (Bolinger 1977).

the relativistic aspect: being faced with one and the same situation, however, the speaker of one language may prefer to construe it in one way, while the speaker of another language may prefer to construe it in another way. For example:
[referring to a room with two windows] English: "This room has two windows" — Japanese: "IN THIS ROOM ARE TWO WINDOWS" ('HAVE-language' vs. 'BE-language')
[referring to someone who lost his life in the war] English: "He was killed in the war" — Japanese: "HE DIED IN THE WAR" ('transitive in the passive' vs. 'intransitive')
[referring to the heat which makes me feel languid] English: "The heat makes me feel languid" —

Japanese: "BEING HOT, (I) FEEL LANGUID" ['causative' vs. 'non-causative' ('spontaneity')] (Chamberlain 1891)

6. 'Subjective Construal' vs. 'Objective construal' in Cognitive Linguistics

A pair of examples by Langacker (1990: 17-21):

(1) Vanessa is sitting across the table from me.
(2) Vanessa is sitting across the table.

(1) will be uttered by the speaker when commenting on a photo in which she and Vanessa are shown sitting across the table from each other — the speaker (as a perceiving / cognizing subject) is detached from the object of her viewing / cognizing (i.e. the photo) — thus the subject and the object are maximally contrasted — 'objective construal'.

(2) will be uttered by the speaker when she finds Vanessa sitting across the same table — the speaker (as a perceiving / cognizing subject) is involved in the same scene in which the object of her viewing / cognizing (i.e. Vanessa) is involved — thus the subject and the object are integrated (rather than contrasted) — 'subjective construal'.

Note that the speaker is explicitly encoded in (1), but not in (2).   In (1) the speaker sees herself as well as Vanessa (as they are shown in the photo); hence the speaker duly encodes herself as well as Vanessa in her utterance.   In (2), by contrast, the speaker sees Vanessa sitting across the table, but not herself (being located at the vantage point of observation); hence she is not encoded.

7. 'Subjective Construal' and 'Objective Construal' Reinterpreted in Terms of 'Subject-Object Merger' and 'Subject-Object Contrast'

Subjective construal: The speaker is located in the very same situation she is to construe and construes it as it is perceivable to her.   If she happens to be not located within the situation she is to construe, she may mentally displace herself into the situation she is to construe and construes it as it would be perceivable to her.   The speaker, who construes the situation, is embedded in the very same situation she is to construe and her stance here is characterizable as 'subject-object merger'.

Objective construal: the speaker is located outside the situation she is to construe and construes it as it is perceivable to her.   If she happens to be embedded in the very same situation she is to construe, she may mentally displace herself outside the situation she is to construe, leaving, however, her counterpart behind – in other words, the speaker undergoes a self-split here, herself stepping out of the situation but at the same time, leaving her counterpart behind in the situation.   The speaker, who construes the situation, is detached from the situation she is to construe and her stance here is characterizable as 'subject-object contrast'.

The speakers of different languages may differ in their preferential choice between subjective and objective construal.   For the Japanese speaker, linguistic encoding in terms of subjective construal is apparently a 'fashion of speaking' (Whorf 1956 and Ikegami 2008), while the English speaker (or for that matter, the speakers of Western languages in general) prefers encoding in terms of objective construal.

Zero encoding vs. explicit encoding of the speaker: Notice that in subjective construal, the speaker is located (or locates herself through self-projection) within the situation to be construed.   She sees around her but she does not see herself, because she stands at the vantage point of observation (i.e. the origin of the coordinates).   She herself is not within the scope of her observation and hence she may not be explicitly (i.e. linguistically) encoded (Ikegami 2007).   In objective construal, by contrast, the speaker is located (or locates herself by undergoing a self-split) outside the situation to be construed.   She sees her counterpart left behind in the situation to be construed and hence she may encode herself explicitly (i.e. linguistically).

Some further examples:

    (3) [being lost and asking the way] English: "Where am I?" — Japanese: "WHAT PLACE IS THIS PLACE?"

    (4) [reporting to someone by mobile phone that the room is empty] German: "Es ist niemand da ausser mir" (NOBODY IS HERE EXCEPT ME) — Japanese: "NOBODY IS HERE"

    (5) [going outside and noticing the moon shining] English: "Going out, I saw the moon shining" — Japanese: "GOING OUT, THE MOON WAS SHINING" (cf. Uehara 1998: 'perceiver-less sentence')

8. Problems in Translation

The initial sentence of the novel, *Snow Country*, by Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972), the winner of the 1968 Nobel Prize for literature and its four translations:

    [0] 国境   の   長い   トンネル   を   抜ける   と

         boundary   's   long   tunnel 'path' marker pass through and/when

        雪国   で   あった。

        snow country   'location' marker   was

        (literally, something like '[I] PASSED THROUGH [THE] LONG BOUNDARY-TUNNEL, AND [I] WAS IN / [THERE] WAS [THE] SNOW COUNTRY.')

    [1] The train came out of the long tunnel into the snow country. (E. Seidensticker, 1957)

    [2] Als der Zug aus dem langen Grenztunnel herauskroch, lag das Schneeland vor ihm weit ausgebreitet. (O. Benl, 1968) (AS THE TRAIN CRAWLED OUT OF THE LONG BOUNDARY-TUNNEL, THERE LAY BEFORE IT THE SNOW COUNTRY WIDE EXTENDED.)

    [3] Jenseits des langen Tunnels erschien das Schneeland. (T. Cheung, 2004) (BEYOND THE LONG TUNNEL EMERGED THE SNOW COUNTRY.)

    [4] Un long tunnel entre les deux régions et voici qu'on était dans le pays de neige. (B. Fujimori, 1960) (A LONG TUNNEL BETWEEN THE TWO REGIONS AND THEN ONE WAS IN THE SNOW COUNTRY.)

The scene to be linguistically encoded: 'The train, on which the hero of the novel is travelling, passes through the long tunnel which lies at the county-boundary and comes out to the snow-covered land.'

Why is it that translations [1] and [2] encode the train, while translations [3] and [4] do not? (The Japanese sentence in the original does not mention the train.) The translators of [3] and [4] as well as the author of the original work describe the scenes as observed by the protagonist travelling on the train, who sees the successive scenes that fly past outside the window of his train but sees neither himself nor his train. (The stance here is subjective construal.) The translators of [1] and [2], in contrast, locate themselves outside the train at a point considerably removed from the travelling train and describe the scenes as they would appear to them. (Their stance is objective construal.)

As I hear, there are more than a dozen translations of the work in Chinese, of which some have the sentence in question in subjective construal and others in objective construal. I am told that placed at the beginning of the novel, a Chinese translation in objective construal will sound more natural than one in subjective construal. Similar comments are also heard from Korean speakers about the Korean translation of the work. Apparently, however, Korean speakers are more tolerant towards a translation in subjective construal and in fact, the earliest Korean translation does not mention the train in the initial sentence of the work. A Thai translation does mention the train. I am told, however, that the Thai translation is from the English translation and not from the Japanese original. (The translations in Chinese, Korean, and Thai are given under (4) in the appendix.)

Cf. Kawabata (1921) on the two contrastive stances of the author when describing a lily linguistically: either 'I am inside the lily' (or 'The lily is inside me') or 'I and the lily are separated from each other.'

9. Subjective and Objective Construal in Decoding

'subjective/objective construal' primarily applied to the speaker's encoding process – applicable to the speaker's decoding process (i.e. in the role of hearer/reader) as well.

In encoding, the subjectively oriented speaker mentally projects herself onto the scene she is going to encode and construes it as if she herself were directly involved in what was going on in the scene.   In decoding, the subjectively oriented speaker mentally projects herself into the situation being described in the text, identifying herself with the author of the text or the protagonist of the story, as the case may be, and construes the situation as if she were directly involved in it or possibly, as the author or the protagonist in question is presumed to be construing it.   The objectively oriented speaker, by contrast, will tend to have a detached outlook on what is being described in the text, keeping herself distanced from the textual world.   Thus we may have different reader-responses to one and the same text.

> (6)　古池や蛙とびこむ水の音　　（芭蕉）　[literally, 'OLD POND, FROG JUMP IN, SOUND OF　WATER']
> (6a) The quiet pond
> 　　　A frog leaps in
> 　　　The sound of water.　（E. Seidensticker)
>
> (6b) The ancient pond
> 　　　A frog leaps in
> 　　　The sound of water.　（D. Keene)
>
> (6c) Into the calm old lake
> 　　　A frog with flying leap goes plop!
> 　　　The peaceful hush to break.

American students' response to (6a) and (6b): "So what?"
Japanese students' response to (6c): "This is mere paraphrase."

Haiku is a literary genre in which the reader's active participation in interpretative work is presupposed (cf. the notion of 'reader responsibility' as discussed by Hinds (1987)).   On reading a haiku piece like (6) — subjectively construed, and encoded, therefore, implying the invisible presence of the author on the scene — a Japanese reader will mentally project herself onto the scene being described and start asking herself, "This is the scene on which the author composed the piece.   Am I being moved as much as, or in the same way as, the author of the original text?   If so, I am at one with the great master, sharing the great moment in life," and so forth.

Through mental operations such as self-projection and empathy, Japanese speakers certainly seem to be markedly disposed to subjective construal (a type of construal, characterized by 'subject-object merger'), both in encoding and in decoding.   Most schoolchildren (aged around 10-15), on being asked "Where do you imagine yourself to be, when you read the initial sentence of the novel, *Yukiguni* (Snow Country)?" will answer, "I imagine myself sitting in the train, looking out of the window."   And some even add, "On the right / left side of the train, by the window"! (Michiyo Moriya: personal communication).

10. Homology between Linguistic Encoding and Pictorial Encoding

In the Japanese tradition, perspective in painting is known not normally to have been practiced in painting until its introduction from the West in the 18th century — Objects of the same size were painted in the same size irrespective of whether they were located near or far from the painter, their distances from the painter being suggested by cloud-like patterns intervening between objects in the neighbourhood and objects in the distance, which implies that the painters were not located in one

fixed position but mentally hopped around so that they always found themselves in the neighbourhood of (in other words, embedded in the same situation as) the objects of their painting.

This is parallel to the frequent use of non-past forms by Japanese speakers in talking about past events — They quite readily mentally displace themselves into the past and talk about past events as if they were witnessing them on the spot.

Thus in spatial as well as temporal dimension, Japanese speakers do quite easily displace themselves, mentally jumping over the distances (whether spatial or temporal) that separate them from the objects of their perception and achieving the state of 'subject-object merger'.

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