

New Relation between a Symbol and Its concept

TAKANAGA Shigeru

1 Introduction

The perspective of the research in linguistics has been gradually extending to the sound, the phoneme, the morpheme, the word, the sentence, and discourse. And a new tendency in the area of study in recent years has been to focus on communication. The study of communication can be one which directly reveals the fundamental aspect of "Language". However, a new problem which has not been discussed has come into the study of communication. And this problem is related to the fact that "Communication is an action which takes place in social life." Thus, knowledge of linguistics is insufficient to study an objective in a language. Even though sociology has been taken as a technical term, the essence of its concept has not been examined enough in traditional language studies. The technical term is often used to compose a statement without having a clear definition. For instance, the concept of a "society" has not been defined in many studies so far. The definition of a "group" which preserves a certain dialect is also vague. In this study, the writer tries to clarify various concepts of a "society" and then discusses the problem of expressing meanings in our social life.

2 Relation between a cultural system and a social system

2.1 Difference between behavior and action

First of all, we should define some technical terms. The term 'action' is often confused with the term 'behavior'. In this study, actions in communication are mainly discussed; therefore it is necessary to clarify the difference between a behavior and an action.

(1) Definition of a behavior

1 the alteration, movement or response of any entity, person or system acting within a particular context.

2 the externally observable response of an animal or human organism to an environmental stimulus. (Jary *et al.*, 2000: 37-38)

(2) Definition of an action

Any unit or sequence of individual social activity which is intentional or purposive and involves conscious deliberation rather than merely being the result of a biological

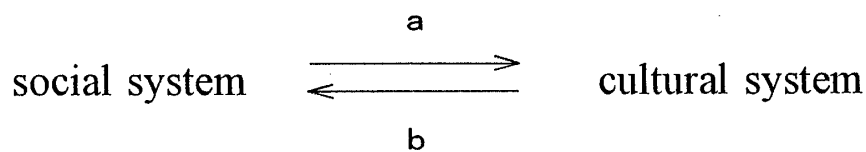
reflex (*ibid.*: 4).

2.2 Culture or its system

Because an event in which a person is involved extends to both his society and his culture, it is difficult to distinguish one from the other clearly. Therefore, it may be necessary to discuss the two systems uniformly using the technical term "socio-cultural". However, in this study the writer takes the view that a culture and a society are two separate systems. The concept of a culture traditionally contains the meaning of a group; however, we need to separate a behavioral style of the members within a group from the system and the social structure characterized by the members' behavioral styles. A culture is created by men's speculation, and it is described objectively by symbolic expression. And a culture is also independent of the doers who created it and the doers' acts, and it is possible to transfer it to others and teach it to others. (Tominaga, 1995: 41-42)

2.3 Cultural system and social system

In many studies, the direction of "a" (social system → cultural system) is employed. In these studies, a social system is treated as an independent variable and a cultural system as a dependent variable. A cultural variable changes correspondingly when a social variable changes. However, a language is not solely affected by a society. There is no society without a language. The language is indispensable for the existence of a society. It is necessary to study the system in the opposite direction, the direction of "b".



In sociology, the importance of a cultural system has been repeatedly discussed.

1 When a social system is accepted, a cultural system has a predominant influence (Nassehi *et al.*: 41).

2 The maintenance and continuance of a society can be achieved through absorption of a culture by the individual and formation of the personality (Honma *et al.*, 1988: 74).

3 A symbolic existence of a culture has to be one of the conditions for establishing a society, hence a culture should be a presupposition of establishing a society (Tominaga, 1995: 44).

These have the common feature of a social system that a cultural system creates. And the language takes an extremely important position in a cultural system. Hence it is necessary to study how a language takes part in establishing a society.

3 Communication plays a part in establishing a society

There are several key words which are important for carrying out a study in direction "b". They are verified in the following. There are several definitions of a society, and the definitions by three scholars are shown here.

Tominaga (1995) defines a society as a gathering of two or more people to fulfil a specific condition. It is possible to summarize these conditions into the following four points.

- (a) Communication in mutual action or communicative action must be done between the members.
- (b) A social relation must be formed by those mutual sequential actions or communicative actions.
- (c) Those people must be organized as a group in some degree.
- (d) The boundary between the members and the non-members must be explicit.

To establish a society, the most important requirement is that mutual action must be taken between the members individually. The definition of mutual action is that two people conduct actions mutually and affect each other, and then a change takes place among them. This mutual action is almost synonymous with the communicative action of (a). This is not a one-way transmission like mass communications.

Luhmann's concept is continually quoted. Luhmann gets rid of a conventional "total-partial" diagram, and proposes the adoption of a "system-environment" diagram. Luhmann (1995) thought of a social system as an accumulation of the action systems. The action can be continued only for a very short time. The action is destined to disappear as soon as it is generated. When a momentary action is sequentially reproduced, a social system, as the action system, acquires certain real existence for the first time. Luhmann's study contributes to the elucidation of a communication process and the action in itself.

It is noted first how the action of a certain agent is related to another action of the same agent. In addition, it is necessary to consider how the action relates to others' actions. Thus for Luhmann (who started solving the problem of an action and the problem of social order at the same time), a problem of the communication has a definite meaning relating to the

composition of the action. This aspect of a social system is treated as a communication process by Luhmann, and the furthest range of the communication process with such an aspect is the boundary of the society.

Thirdly, Habermas's concept is quoted. Habermas insisted on understanding the society as being composed of two layers named "lifeworld" and "system" (Socialintegration and Systemintegration). Habermas expressed the present situation as the system world which distorts the lifeworld, "the internal colonization of the lifeworld by the system," and he denounced it (Habermas, 1985: 196-197). And, he tries to investigate a serious problem of contemporary society relating to this problem. What is the communicative action which Habermas means? It is an action in which "participants adjust the action plan through the action of communication without calculating an egocentric result."

Instrumental rationality has played the main role in the development of the society which produces contemporary society. However, not only instrumental rationality but also communicative rationality has been developed in this same process. The culture which permits individuals to criticize each other mutually, has been developed in the process of the social progress. A further expansion of such a communicative rationality becomes important in the development of the contemporary society.

For Habermas, the lifeworld is a background where the communicative action is achieved and is the base which supports the communicative action. Thus, the communicative action and the lifeworld are implicative. The lifeworld solely helps the communicative action to function, and the lifeworld itself is merely recreated by the communicative action. All of the definitions mentioned above contain the meaning of 'communication', and the fact that the society is composed by communication, can be perceived.

4 Communication and meaning

4.1 Langue and parole

In order to explain the mechanism of communication, it is necessary to discuss the concept of langue and parole introduced by Saussure (Saussure, 1949). The relation between langue and parole in the structuralist concept is as follows. When a certain piece of information is sent to the addressee by the sender and understood, both should have a common code (like the code table for the decipherment). The concept and the sound image unite in the sender (Figure 1) . When "Concept A" appears in the brain, and "Sound image A" corresponding to it

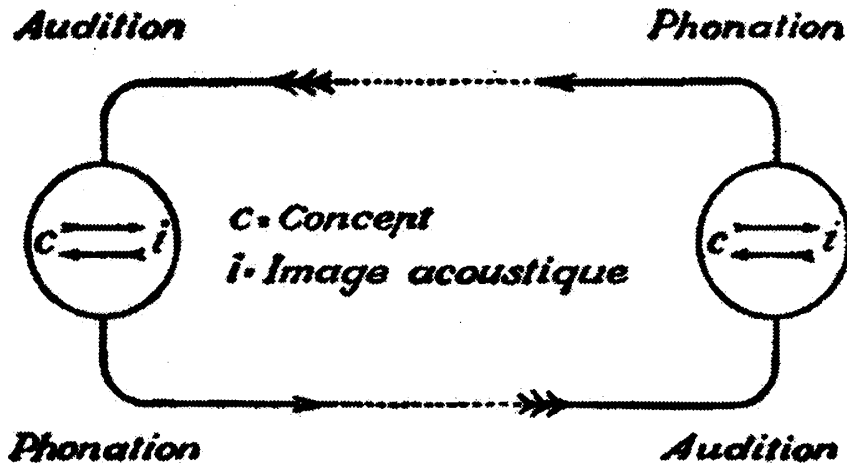


Figure 1 (Saussure, 1949: 28)

also appears at the same time, "Concept A" and "Sound image A" unite according to the code table. This can be titled "Sign A". Continuously the sound image is sent to the brain system to be made into phonemes, and a sound wave is transmitted from the sender to the addressee. When the sound wave reaches the addressee, it is heard and decoded into phonemes, and then recognized as "Sound image A". The sound image unites with the concept corresponding to it in accordance with the rule described in the code, and "Sign A" is restored. In brief, the sender encodes the message (voice and letters) based on the code, and the addressee deciphers it using the same code. "Sign A" is conveyed from the sender to the addressee through this process. This code is *langue*, and the encoded message is *parole*. *Parole* might be personal, momentary, and be accompanied by changing in quality of voice.

4.2 Two problems concerning *langue* and *parole*

Saussure's theory has at least two problems in explaining the system of communication. The two problems are the problems of "transmission as metaphor" and "noise".

4.2.1 Problem of "Transmission as metaphor"

The concept of *langue* can be expressed by a metaphor. The process in which sign A is transmitted from the sender to the addressee can be called "transmission as metaphor" (Luhmann 1995: 139-140). It is possible to say that this is a process in which "Sign A" newly moves from the place of the sender to the place of the addressee. (However, the same information may exist at the two places simultaneously.) The metaphorical transmission presumes the sender's information to be the same as the addressee's information. The entire

metaphor of possessing, having, giving, and receiving, the entire "thing metaphoric" is unsuitable for understanding communication (*ibid.*: 139).

The problems can be summarized in the following three points (Komatsu, 1997: 299-301).

- (1) The impression that the sender passes something to the addressee as if a "Thing" is handed to the addressee by the sender and is received by the addressee.
- (2) It is presupposed that the transmissive action by the sender is the main process of communication. And only the transmissive activity of the sender is important. However, it is not right to pay attention only to the transmissive activity of the sender when we consider the system of communication, because the addressee understands the transmissive activity of the sender in a certain way and the communicational process is completed. It is also very important how the addressee understands the information.
- (3) The concept only takes the view that transmissive sign is the same between the sender and the addressee. Thus, it is often misunderstood as meaning that the sender's transmissive information is equal to the addressee's one.

4.2.2 Problem of "Noise"

It can be interpreted that various noises mix with parole, although Saussure did not clearly mention this point in the structuralist linguistics. The meaning of a message can be misunderstood, or incomprehensible due to the influence of the situation, while the meaning can be transmitted as it is intended. Such a situation is often observed.

In such cases, an existence of "noise" explains the misunderstanding of the meaning between the sender and the addressee. Because there is a disturbance by noise, a distortion of information, a misunderstanding or adding of extra information can occur as a result.

In an actual conversation, physical noise, improper pronunciation, or multiple voices might disturb our listening. When we check the tape after recording dialects for study, we often have experienced this problem. However, when neither the meaning nor the intention are transmitted to the addressee, is it possible to say that this problem in communication is caused by a noise? To define the "noise source" between the sender and the addressee is difficult even if we consider the abstract meaning of "noise". The classical explanation by Shannon, that is, that a communicational problem is related to an existence of noise, has simplified the problem too much (Ikeda, 2000: 11).

4.2.3 Approach from linguistics —Sense-making Theory—

(1) The technical terms of Sense-making Theory

The feature of Sense-making Theory is its focus on the problem of the meaning-formation process, "how a meaning is expressed in a certain way." That is, this theory pays attention to the process of sense-making, the process which forms meanings for the individual and communication with an interaction of sense-making. "Sense-making" is a psychological process. It is for a person to comprehend the situation and to think his correspondence (Fukaya *et al.*, 1996).

This theory uses the technical term of "Kotoba" as a special concept. "Kotoba" written in katakana is a sign in the semiotics. That is, when a sign is recognized as "Expression-content" or "Signifiant-signifi", "Kotoba" expresses only the left half of the concept of the sign. When "Kotoba" is combined with sense, it becomes a word. So, content of () which corresponds to the right half of the expression -(content) is supplemented with sense-making by the person who defines it. Uniting the expression and the content is achieved by relating memories, which are activated mutually in the sense-making process, and then the "Word" which provides a meaning can function. "Kotoba" is an abstract concept which separates the meaning from the sign. "Kotoba" does not originally have a meaning, although "Kotoba" becomes a word after the sense-making process is completed. Sense-making theory differs from traditional semantics, and it only focuses on the theory concerning the process of sense-making.

(2) Psychological process of "Sense-making"

The sense organs of our eyes, ears, skins, etc. receive some information as a stimulus. Then, aspects of one's external world can be realized. In communication, the stimulation that the subject receives from the external world is others' "Kotoba". When stimulation is received, various kinds of memory in one's mind are activated. The activated memories form a chain process, and unite mutually to intensify or weaken each other. Other memories are activated one after another with the process of unitization, and this activity can be controlled forward or backward..

When the memories unite, the relation is formed mutually with a dynamic balance. The relation of memories formed by this process leads to the movement of the body as an external behavior. The process from the receipt of stimulation to the conducting of the behavior is the "Sense-making" process. In other words, we receive various stimuli from our circumstances, perceive them, feel them, consider them, evaluate them, pass judgment on something, and then act. The event in the mind from the receipt of stimulation immediately before conducting

behavior is the "Sense-making" process among the series of processes.

A simple experiment is conducted as in follows.¹⁾

To imagine a scene, three cards are presented in the order of 1, 2, and 3 increasing the number of characters.

1. Ka (カ)
2. Kama (カマ)
3. Kamasu (カマス)

It might be possible to experience that the comprehensive meaning has been changed looking at each card in that order. In addition, the comprehensive meaning in the mind can be different for each person.

The mosquito will be imagined as a meaning for card 1.

For instance, card 2 makes us imagine one of the following four comprehensive meanings.

- a. Sickle like a weeding sickle.
- b. Kiln which fires earthenware.
- c. Boiler which boils hot water in tea ceremony.
- d. Chest part of fish following fish's gills.

And watching card 3 makes us imagine either of "e" or "f".

- e. Barracuda (fish).
- f. Bag made with straw mat.

It might also be understandable through this experiment that neither the letters nor the voices carry the meanings. In the process of communication, the addressee makes sense of Kotoba while the speaker makes sense of it, too. Therefore, a gap can exist between the comprehensive meanings of the two.

4.2.4 Approach from social psychology —Ikeda's model—

One of the functions of communication is to convey information to others, and to persuade others. Ikeda presumes that the purpose of communication is to share information, experience, and feelings with others (Ikeda, 2000). It is necessary for assumptions to be shared between the sender and the addressee in order for the contained message to be used as information. The assumption is an indispensable requirement for communication to be achieved. The following points are suggested as the "Communicative assumption" (Ikeda, 2000: 9-10).

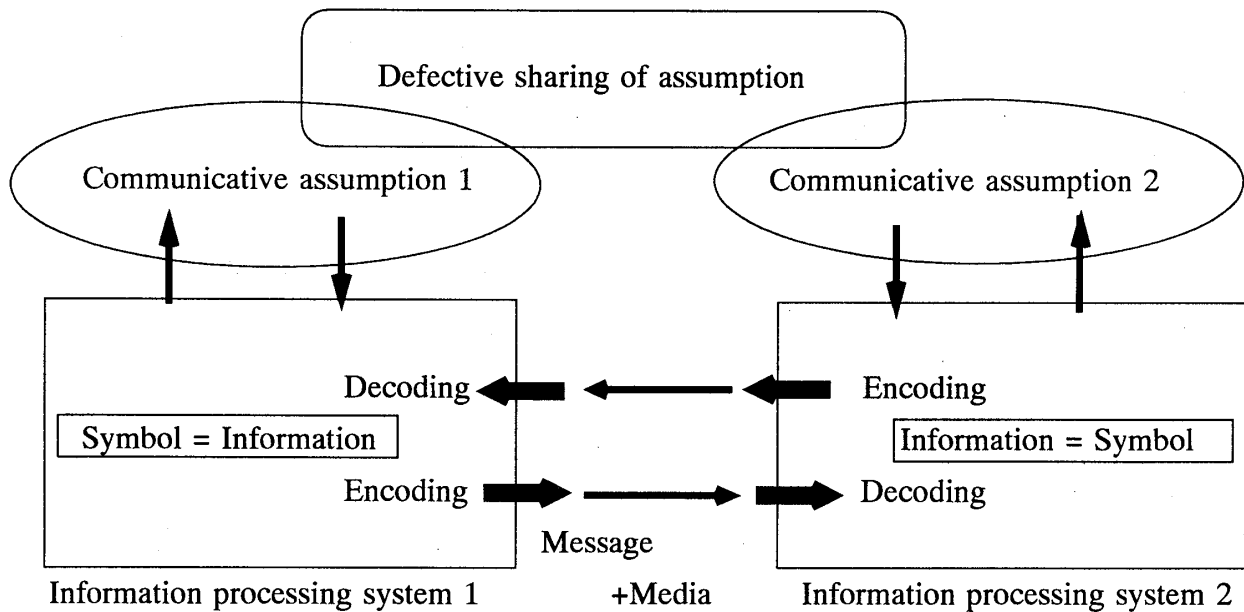


Figure 2 Basic model of communication (Ikeda, 2000: 8)

- System of meanings (semantics)
- System of syntax (syntax)
- Pragmatics (pragmatics)
- Code related to role in society, position, norm, and place, etc.
- Shared knowledge between communication partners
- Goal of communication

However, it is not quite acceptable that this communicative assumption can explain the shared information between the sender and addressees. Although the sender and the addressee have a lot of the assumptions in common, it is not realistic to believe that the assumptions between the two are totally equal, like sharing copies of a document. Moreover, the communicative assumption is not a static one, but a dynamic one. A message is collated with the communicative assumption, interpreted, and then a meaning is created. With the influence of circumstances, the interpreted meaning might become a part of the communicative assumption. Ikeda expresses the communication model (Figure 2) between two people from his view as it is described above.

If you observe Fig. 2 more carefully, it is noticeable that this model does not contain noise. The noise which interferes during the transmission process does not affect the settling of the issue. Using the communicative assumption in Ikeda's model can explain the reality of communication well. This model indicates the following fact. That is, if the communicative

assumption is changed, the sense-making process of a message is changed accordingly. After all, the meaning-gap between a sender and an addressee can exist, as long as the communicative assumptions of both do not completely match.

Please construe the following expressions.²⁾

ningen'ni	umaretekite	ikatta	omo:monowa	tfo: age:
<i>human being (dat.)</i>	<i>was born</i>	<i>was happy</i>	<i>person (sub.) who thinks</i>	<i>raise your hand</i>
ju:tara	zen'in	tfo: agemafita.		
<i>when I said</i>	<i>all (children)</i>	<i>raise their hands</i>		

Most interpreters might not have completely understood these expressions. Because they are not informed of enough assumptions to interpret the expressions. To understand the expressions, the following conditions have to be stated.

(1) Situation when uttered

These expressions were stated when the speaker was invited to an elementary school two years ago, and he spoke of his experiences in front of the school children, and taught them the lesson. The speaker is a native of Seranishi-cho in Kamo-gun in Hiroshima Prefecture.

(2) Syntax system

Knowledge of the syntax rules is necessary to understand the expressions — in particular, that the particle "To"-deletion occurs just before verb "Omou", "Iu" and so on.

(3) Phonological rule

Knowledge of the phonological rules which are used in the Hiroshima dialect is also necessary: [eo] changes into [jo:]. Therefore, [tfo:] corresponds to [te o].

(4) Common sense

It is common to raise one's hand when one agrees with others' opinions at elementary schools in Japan.

As an analysis of the expressions, they can be interpreted as follows. The sentence expresses the fact that all of the students raised their hands when the speaker asked, "Please raise your hands if you feel happy being born as a human being." The reason why the expressions could not be interpreted enough is that the communicative assumptions are not clearly indicated. "The influence of noise" cannot completely explain the reason for the imperfect interpretation.

4.2.5 Approach from sociology —Communication theory of Luhmann—

Luhmann viewed communication as a process of selection. Communication must be viewed, not as consisting of a two-part, but as a three-part selection process (Luhmann, 1995: 140). It includes the selection of the information, the selection of the utterance, and the distinction between information and its utterance.

Each selection is explained as follows.

1. Information is a selection from a (known or unknown) repertoire of possibility (*ibid.*: 140).
What becomes information is decided depending on the system which handles it as information.
2. It is necessary for someone to choose a behavior that expresses this information (a communicative behavior).
3. The difference between information and the act of utterance already establishes far-reaching possibilities for analysis (*ibid.*: 141). The communication is approved for the first time by selecting one interpretation from among several possibilities when the addressee understands. The addressee understands what the speaker tries to convey, from the content of the information. The "Understanding" by the addressee is an indispensable moment when the communication is completed. However, understanding the information is not equal to understanding the speaker's real intention. The aspect of comprehension in this case involves comprehending a communicative intention of the speaker solely on the side of the addressee.

Considering the above process, what is uttered may be distorted through the three selections. Therefore, it is exceptional in a social situation that the utterance or the gesture of the speaker is interpreted according to his expectation.

5 Conclusion

To study communication, we should escape from the classic concept of "Sign" in structuralism. We must not limit the discussion to the relation between the sound image and its meaning, only paying attention to the speaker as is seen in Chapter 4. The important point is that the addressee is also required to make sense of the sound image. As a result, the difference of the sense-making process between two persons (a speaker and an addressee) becomes the gap of the meaning comprehension. For this reason, the metaphor of transmission can not exist in the process of communication. Moreover, the noise device need not be purposely set to explain the

gap of the meaning comprehension. The utterance is collated with knowledge through various experiences, and the experiences help to make sense in meaning comprehension. Each individual's experiences differ in everyday life and the difference of the sense-making process in communication is explained by this fact.

At the same time, I want to refer to the necessity of communication here. An addressee cannot understand the real intention of a speaker. However, we should not consider that communication is not successful because we cannot understand what the other person thinks. This point is especially important. The communication is not completed by perfect comprehension of the speaker's real intention. However, because the speaker's real intention is obscure, the action of understanding the intention of the speaker is indispensable. The process of making such an effort should be called "Communication".

Notes

- 1) Takanaga designed this experiment.
- 2) The age of this informant is 91. His sex is male. Takanaga interviewed him on August 8, 2001.

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