

PROMINENCE AND ITS PHONETIC NATURE

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(1) It is generally accepted that the essential quality of language is an association of fact, voice and meaning. If any one of these three elements is lacking there would be no words in the world (Fig. 1).

In Japanese, my native speech, it is happily suggested by our great ancestors, in their etymological trace, that means the association of those three – *koto* for fact, *koe* for voice, and *kokoro* for meaning – compose *kotoba* for word. The prefix *ko* represents the most original and proper Japanese, which meaning is presumed as “spirit” or “here” (Fig. 1). At present it should be “brain”.

Anyway, each natural language in the world is formed as a social custom, fixing those three elements together and conveying its formula through a long stream of history. And, it exists as a so-called cultural inheritance of mankind.

In this fixed formula, there is the primary benefit as the symbolic nature of language. For instance, if we consult with a dictionary the English word “water”, we find firstly the promised sounds to be pronounced [w ə: t ə].

And, as to its meaning we count at least five chief divisions, as follows:

- I = noun; uncountable and countable.
- II = H₂O; liquid.
- III = rains; eye-water; mouth water, etc.
- IV = liquid medicine; mineral waters, etc.
- V = sea; flood; tide.

Those meanings are common to all readers of the English language. And this is what is called RECEIVED MEANING, the field of semantics and the work of semasiologist.

Phoneticians do not only hesitate to appreciate the field and the work of semasiologists, but also esteem the importance of semantics itself. But, it must be noted, that phoneticians have their proper field of study on the meaning of speech, not of letters. The aim of my paper, this time, is to point out the field and give my brief explanations.

(2) Now, I like to begin the talk with the same example, the word “water”. For semantists the careful examination of spelling, word-form and etymological origin is entirely necessary, but it is needless for phoneticians and they have only to listen to the sounds and tones. That means the word “water” is nothing more than an acoustic existence.

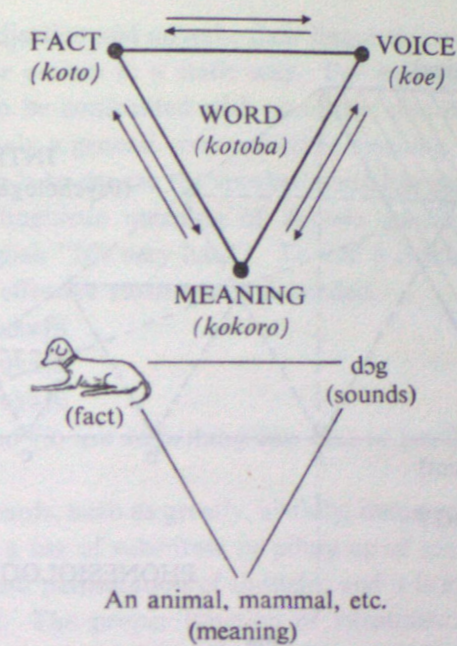


Fig. 1.

From this acoustic existence, I want to suppose the following three peculiarities in tonic phase:

- (1) w ə: t ə }
- (2) w ə: t ə }
- (3) w ə: ↘ t ə ↗

How the hearers feel, listening to each of those sound sequences, accompanied with proper tones? Do they feel only – “noun; H₂O; liquid, and so forth”? The answer would surely be “No” and “something much more”. Those three kinds of type are standing above the semantic response and conveying something like that of the following insistency:

- (1) Bring me water.
- (2) Do you want water?
- (3) Why is it water?! or You do want water?!

Those are not mere “semantics” so to speak. The complete sentences, “Bring me water”, “Do you want water?” and “Why is it water?!” may be within the sphere of semantics, but now I am treating only the single word “water” formed by the group of sound [w, ə, t, ə] and tones added to them; neither “Bring me”, nor “Do you want”, nor “Why it is” are needed here.

Semantists may have called them as “ellipses”, but there is no ellipses in phonetic activity at all. In auditory, “tone” in speech acts as a perfect compensation for the visual omission of word(s) or letter(s).

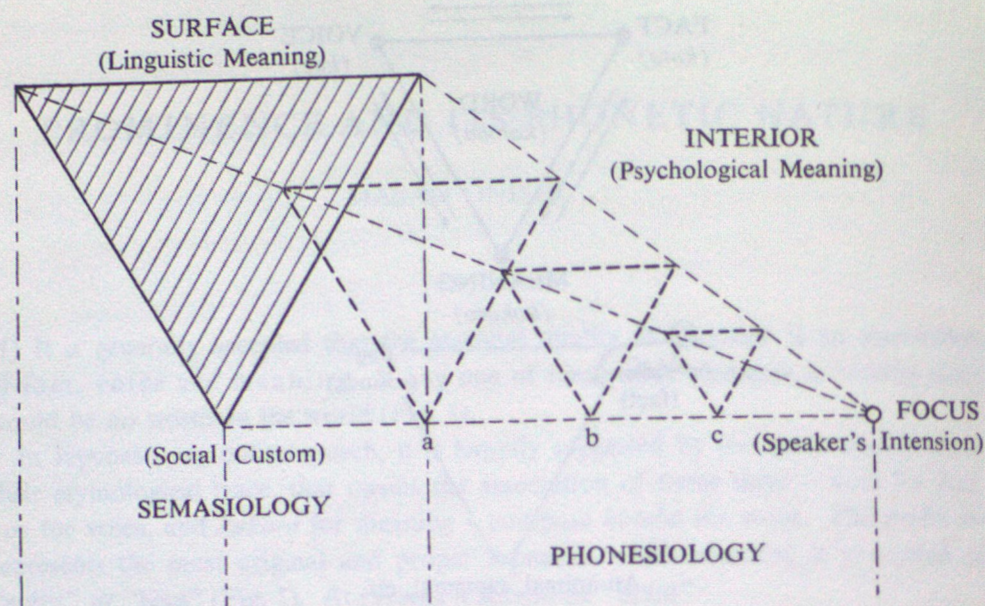


Fig. 2.

It must be noted that not only the "verb", but also "every part of speech" has the denoting capacity of *action*, accompanied with speaker's mind. Here, the author has to suggest that there are two kinds in MEANING, i.e. (1) Linguistic Meaning, and (2) Psychological Meaning.

The former is the problem of the SURFACE-field (Fig. 2) of word meaning so to speak, and the latter is the INTERIOR-volume and which depends on the speaker's individuality.

(3) It is worth paying attention that a single word such as "water" has the power to convey its speaker's intention, besides its own meaning. There is an ancient Chinese teaching, known in Japan as *Dokusho shihai ni tessuru*, in English: "Reading through the back of the paper". The same thing is mentioned by Englishmen also, since old times, that is, "Read between the lines". Of course, between line and line, there are only blanks, and there are no letters at all. But, there exists the writer's or speaker's intention.

For example, a question "What does this word mean?" is an asking of linguistic meaning or the SURFACE MEANING. On the other hand, a question "What is this meant for?" is an asking of speaker's intention; an INTERIOR MEANING or "psychological meaning" so to speak. In the phase of INTERIOR MEANING, there are varieties such as shallower (a), medium (b), and deeper (c) (Fig. 2) – according to the psychological situation of speakers. Those depths show the ultimate object of the speaker's, just as FOCUS in lens, contrasting with plain glass. The phonetic activity to establish FOCUS in speech is PROMINENCE, to use another expression.

(4) The function of adjective and adverb, their linguistic meaning, is to convey only the *nature of things or actions* in a static way. For example, little, beautiful, very, completely, etc. are to be confronted with non-little, non-beautiful, non-very, non-completely, etc., i.e. only a general common static meaning, and no more. For this, psychological meaning is to expose the speaker's mind or sentiment just as it is.

For example, the linguistic meaning of *Totemo mitsukashii* in Japanese shall be represented in English "It's very hard". To add a psychological meaning to the above expression, an effective PROMINENCE is needed.

- (1) to te mo mitsukashii
- (2) to t:e mo mitsukashii
- (3) to: t:e mo mitsukashii

Nos. (1) and (2) and (3) are something like that of [veri], [ve: ri] and [v:e :ri] in English.

In rhetoric, other words, such as greatly, awfully, immensely, unusually, extremely, etc., are employed as a use of substitute or piling up of sense. After all, it is a rhetorical exaggeration and permutation of thought, and it is entirely different from the phonetic PROMINENCE. The proper function of PROMINENCE is to add *deepness or degree* to a certain expression-unit, without giving any shift or change to it.

(5) Important to notice in PROMINENCE is the FOCUS of the speaker's intention, namely, the position to pay attention. For example, "You are an ass" is represented in Japanese by "Omae wa roba da", "Sinä olet aasi" in Finnish, "Er ist ein Esel" in German and "Il est un âne" in French. These are a SURFACE meaning of languages. For this, if we add a dynamic phase to the speaker's intention, the following two types should be expected. (Bold indicates prominence.)

- (1) You are an **ASS**.
- (2) **YOU** are an ass.

From those different exposures by prominence, I suppose the hearer catches something more than linguistic meaning, i.e. in (1) it is mentioned about an animal *ass* itself and it is a matter of course, but in (2) it is to sound to the hearer *you* and it is an uncommon case.

Prominence has a power to change word-meaning. For example, please suppose that a stranger asks someone to show the way, and the man may answer simply:

"Go **straight** along this road,"

putting an extraordinary stress or enlargement on "straight". In this case, as a matter of fact, the objective straightness is not the problem to the hearer as it shows in ordinary linguistic meaning. Here, this speaker's intention is very honest to his mind and the word "straight" is used as an easy suggestion in the meaning of "Go along without entering into any alley (even if there are any)".

Prominence in TONE also has a power to change the linguistic meaning. For example, during a visit and in the course of a meeting should it occur to hear from his host the following tone of utterance, the visitor had better leave there at once:

kΛm: ↘ ə ↗ gei ↘ n ↗ n (Pause between two words and rising-falling-rising tone in final.)

Because it only means "Go home, to-day, anyway", which is entirely reversed to the original linguistic meaning. If the host is heartily inviting that visitor he would have used another type of tone, i.e.

—kΛm ↗ ə gei ↗ (Beginning with high-pitch and ending in semi-rising.)

Being the former is the typical type of "unwillingness", the latter is that of "good humour", corresponding to the speaker's INTERIOR-meaning.

In our Japanese expressions of speech, there are these examples:

A. —ma ta iraʃ:ai ↗ (in good humour)

B. ma ↗ ta ↘ a: iraʃ:ai ↘ (in unwillingness)

The one who is unable to catch those INTERIOR-meaning is called *Onchi* (tone deaf) and amounts to "an illiteracy" for the student of linguistic meaning.

(6) For the last, prominence is the product of the psychological situations of both the speaker and hearer, and the ultimate object is to be attained by those people's co-operative works. For example, one asks an intimate friend, with the hope of borrowing money, saying "Have you any money?" Then, the friend answers, "Yes, I have some". The linguistic meaning for the word "some" is quite indefinite and obscure, but, between those intimate friends, the contents are clear enough, by their common psychological meaning; the phase of PROMINENCE.

jes ai həv { (1) m →
(2) ə m ↘
(3) ʌ : m ↘

According to their richness or poorness, and by those types of tone and stress, the amount of money is easily communicated between them.

It is good that semantics keeps the SURFACE-meaning from the standpoint of "language as symbol", but we phoneticians have to develop the study of INTERIOR-meaning, from the standpoint of "language as psychology". And, the PROMINENCE itself is the key holder to open this new field, I believe. If any name is needed for it, I may recommend **PHONESIOLOGY** setting up in opposition of SEMASIOLOGY.

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