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COEXISTENT SYSTEMS AND DIASYSTEMS OF CULTURE

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0. Sociolinguistics and Ethnolinguistics

The Japanese title of this conference would be, in English, "Problems of Linguistic Sociology as a Factor in Value System"--or more concretely "Contrastive Study of U.S.-Japan Linguistic Behavior". The term "linguistic sociology" (in Japanese, "shakai-gengogaku") is used here, though there are other expressions both in English and Japanese, i.e., "sociolinguistics" and "gengo-shakaigaku".

In these border-line disciplines there is always the possibility of shift of emphasis between two fields of study. So some argue that we should change the term too, according to the change of center of gravity. But sometimes the content of a discipline differs among countries (even among different scholars!) because of the difference in academic traditions. Therefore it is irrelevant and fruitless to discuss here the minute differences of meanings of these four (English and Japanese) terms. So let us regard these terms as representing almost the same discipline.

To define the field of sociolinguistics strictly would not do any good either. Considering the purpose of this conference, we should rather try to widen the field of study and point of view--and it is very natural and at the same time desirable to overstep the border of "sociolinguistics".

But it must be pointed out at least that the contrastive study of linguistic behavior properly belongs to ethnolinguistics, not to sociolinguistics. We can perhaps distinguish between the structure of culture and the

structure of society, though there are many border-line cases. Then sociolinguistics is mainly a study of the relation between language and society--between language and various social groups. Correlation between social strata and linguistic variability, problems relating to bilingualism or language-standardization and so on seem to be the major subjects of study in sociolinguistics. So, sociolinguistics concentrates more on the diversity within a community or a nation, while ethnolinguistics can be said to be more concerned with overall structure of a culture (or a nation). Accordingly ethnolinguists are supposed to be better equipped for the contrastive study of linguistic behavior which would be the main subject of this conference.

In this paper, the theoretical problems concerning how to deal with various and diverse phenomena of linguistic behaviour will be discussed.

1. Structural and Emic Treatment of Culture

Among disciplines dealing with human culture linguistics has experienced a very lucky development partly thanks to the characteristics of language itself--linguists have been able to describe the actually very complicated linguistic phenomena as beautiful, clean-cut structures or systems. So it is natural that many scholars tried to apply linguistic methods to the analysis of cultural phenomena.

We can point out (the) two major contributions of linguistics in this field. One concerns the method of description of actual cultural phenomena--for example the style of greetings--and the other concerns a more fundamental idea about the structure and system of cultural phenomena.

a. Description of actual phenomena

The generative grammarians tried to deny the existence of phonology (phonemics) which has been the most successful field of research in structural

linguistics. But it seems very probable that the basic idea of phonology has validity even now, especially in describing cultural phenomena. For example the hypothesis that one identical phoneme can appear as phonetically different sounds (allophones) according to respective environments must be applicable in the description of cultural phenomena too.

Also the hypothesis that one phoneme in one environment (i.e., one allophone) can be scattered widely phonetically (i.e., free variation) is useful for the study of culture. This means the "emic" and "etic" distinction of cultural phenomena coined by Pike by analogy with phonemics and phonetics. Pronunciation as well as gesture are kinds of action which are executed aiming at a socially or culturally determined standard. So metaphorically these actions can be considered as arrows which are shot toward an (emic) bull's-eye--the actual realization having a certain (etic) variety or scattering. To determine the typical (emic) behavior (bull's-eye), we can make use of the intuition or introspection of informants both in the case of phoneme and "behavioreme".

To discuss such a thing as "behavioreme," we should further consult the methodology of so-called "structural semantics" which has also gained much from analogy with phonology. For example, in the case of greetings, the precise description of gesture and voice corresponds to the description of the form of words. (As for the form of a word we can analyze it into a limited number of elements called phonemes. But it is not clear yet if the same can be said about such behavior as greetings.) On the other hand behaviors such as greetings have their own function within the whole structure of culture of customs, and we can study these as something corresponding to the meaning of words.

b. Culture as a structure or a system

Many scholars have discussed the possibility of regarding culture as structural or systematic, so there is no necessity of discussing this theme here. But important hypotheses underlying this thesis must be pointed out.

One such hypothesis is that the cultural phenomena of a community have close structural correlations with one another. Therefore, to observe a given cultural phenomenon we should treat it in the whole network of the culture. Especially in the contrastive study of cultures, we should not lose sight of this structural correlation among elements of a culture, otherwise we tend to emphasize only the superficial differences among isolated small parts of two cultures. [Our first step should be the entire structural description of a culture, and contrast or comparison should come after that.]

If we go a step forward, we come across a hypothesis which maintains that the relations among cultural phenomena are orderly or systematic. This has been true especially on the level of phonology, and there have been similar arguments which start from analogy with phonology on other levels of linguistics, though problems are more complicated. Among them structural semantics is the most interesting field for us, as a field within linguistics which has direct relationship with methodology of linguistic behavior.

It may be difficult to find an orderly system in cultural phenomena other than language, but to keep this hypothesis as one of the fundamentals of study may be not only useful but necessary. As any scientific discipline has some kind of an axiom similar to "orderly system"--i.e., "the simple and clear one is the true one".

Besides, the areas of our study--the United States and Japan--are culturally full of diversities. Though the judgement on the selection of "typical" Japanese or American cultural characteristics has been done rather unconsciously

so far, theoretically it is very difficult to determine what is typical, especially when we consider the diversity according to areas, social classes, races, generations, time, and so on. The hypothesis of "orderly system" can be applied to establish the "typical cultural pattern": we regard those cultural phenomena as "typical" that form orderly systems together with other cultural phenomena. This means that we make use of the content or internal relations of culture, not the accompanying, external factors such as age, area, education or social class.

But to describe a culture properly, we need more steps. And here again we find that the experiences in the field of linguistics, especially phonology, give inspiration.

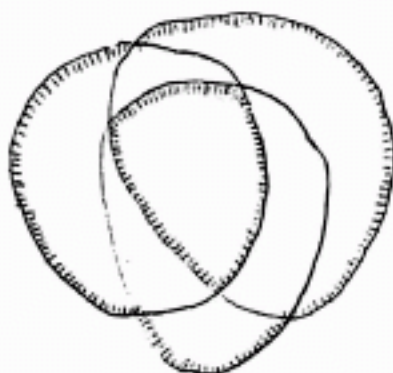
2. Coexistent Systems in Culture

The most effective method of treating the diversity within a culture is the hypothesis of coexistent systems. "Coexistent phonemic systems" were proposed by Fries and Pike (1949) to account for the loan words in an American Indian language. In so-called Standard Japanese, especially in the speech of intelligent people, it is possible to hypothesize two coexistent phonemic systems--one excluding recent loan words and the other concerned with them. It is also necessary to hypothesize two or more coexistent systems to describe the actual linguistic situation of most of the present Japanese dialects, because there is so much influence from Standard Japanese.

Phonologists have been trying to find "orderly systems" for about half a century. At first research was done by assuming tacitly the homogeneity of language of a community--neglecting the internal diversity. Later however it was noticed that the diversity within a community was too great to be neglected. To overcome this difficulty the study of "idiolect" (the speech of an individual at a given time) was proposed, though it was found later that

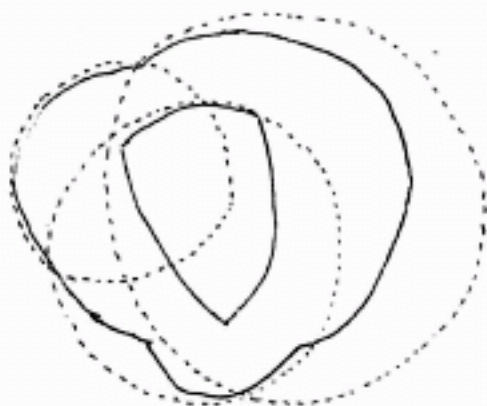
even the speech of an individual is not homogenous. (Moreover, the ultimate goal of linguistic analysis is not the description of the speech of an individual but that of a community as a whole.)

Charles Hockett (1958) proposed a useful distinction between "overall pattern" and "common core," admitting diversity among speakers within a community. This can be shown in the following figure (not the same as Hockett's). Each irregular circle represents one idiolect; the area surrounded by the innermost shaded line represents the common core; and the area surrounded



by the outermost shaded line represents the overall pattern. (In this paper the distinction between an individual's active and passive (productive and receptive) codes is ignored for simplicity's sake.)

It would be impractical to treat only the "common core" in the actual description of language. But it is difficult to set up an "orderly system" if we treat "overall pattern" as a whole, because there are too many individual differences and aberrant features in an "overall pattern." Therefore we turn to the ideas of "coexistent systems." Circles with dotted lines represent "coexistent orderly systems"; the area within the innermost solid line represents the common core; the area within the outermost solid line represents the overall pattern.



An orderly system does not necessarily have to coincide with the common core or the overall pattern; nor does it have to coincide with any "idiolect"--an idiolect may lack some part of a system, and it may often include parts which belong to other (coexistent) systems.

For simplicity's sake the figures here are modeled after a small community, but we can widen the view and treat the whole dialect or the whole language as consisting of many coexistent systems, some of which can be very far from each other in the figure (i.e., linguistically very different).

Similarly we can argue that a culture too consists of several coexistent (orderly) systems. By this way of thinking, it may be found out that the cultural diversity within a community stems actually from the (selective) acceptance of several cultural systems by different members of the community.

In contrastive study we generally try to make the phenomena for comparison as simple as possible. To emphasize the diversity may therefore sound rather destructive, but actually it is not; on the contrary it is a necessary step to treat culture structurally, because orderly systems can be found only after studying the "overall pattern", admitting the existence of diversity as a matter of fact.

Each orderly cultural system may have close correlation with social factors such as generation, social class, and so forth. And the study of this correlation will surely become one of the fruitful research fields of "culture-sociology." Geographical differences within a culture as well as differences according to generation or era show the processes of historical change of cultural systems.

It is worth noting here, that complete "orderly systems" can only be found out through abstract research by scholars, using various information and materials.

3. Diasystems in Contrastive Study of Culture

A method to describe a culture in an orderly way was thus found by hypothesizing "coexistent (orderly) systems." According to some linguists, setting up "system" means at the same time setting up another difficulty, because different systems are said to be incommensurable to each other. Therefore if this were the case, we could not compare parts of a system once we have set up a system--very inconvenient. But this must be called an empty argument because many contrastive studies have been done treating languages as systems.

Actually we can point out at least two methods for the contrastive study of language. One of them can be called for convenience's sake typological study, which compares systems as "forms", temporarily ignoring the "content." The other is a method which compares systems point by point, positing "content" of language as its basis. We can call this diasystemic study, borrowing a technical term from the study of language contact.

a. Typological study of language is mainly concerned with contrasting the number of phonemes, shape of phonological systems, various morphological distinctions and so on. Thanks to the development of generative grammar,

we now have some new methods for contrasting syntactic structure too. In typological study only the abstract elements are contrasted, after analyzing language formally.

Examples of typological treatment of culture are: the so-called "vertical society" of Professor Nakane, "oiko-centric" system of kinship terms of Professor Suzuki, "implicit" against "expressive" culture of Professor Kunihiro and so forth. -

We can easily understand the fundamental difference of cultures and discover similar examples by this kind of contrast, for only a small number of elements are used as catch-words for characterization. But this method also has defects because there is a possibility of overlooking other aspects of culture (it is difficult to explain away all aspects of a culture by only one or two catch-words), and sometimes of distorting the interpretation of facts; though by using many catch-words (i.e., characterizing a culture in many ways) we can hope to describe the whole structure of a culture.

b. Diasystemic approach is necessary to overcome and supplement these difficulties. But we must be cautious because there are two different ways to construct a diasystem in present linguistics.

1. Diasystem in the study of language contact. When bilinguals identify a sound of a language with a sound of another language, this is called a "diaphone." And the system of these identified sounds is called a diasystem. Research has been done mainly on the level of phonology. In semantics almost the same research has been done often to illustrate the semantic differences between languages, but the term "diasystem" has not been used on this level.

The most important fact here is that the sphere of "content" of language, not the sphere of "form" is used as a frame of reference to construct systems; the "content" in this case means actual sounds in phonology, and actual things and matters of this world in semantics.

ii. In structural dialectology, another kind of "diasystem" is used, and maintained by some to be the main purpose of this field. In setting up a diasystem between dialects, often sounds of a common ancestral dialect are used as a basis of comparison. In this case we are actually dealing with the results of historical development of sounds. This is just the opposite of the method used in comparative linguistics to reconstruct the parent language (proto-language) from materials of daughter languages. Actually there is an argument that diasystem in this sense shows the system of parent language; and using diasystem as means for reconstruction seems fruitful, though we need some reservation.

But in structural dialectology the first kind of "diasystem" (as in language contact) is also applied. So we can characterize the second kind of "diasystem" as historical, and the first kind as contrastive--both kinds being used concurrently in structural dialectology.

For contrastive study of culture, we can ignore the historical diasystem and concentrate on the contrastive one.

In phonology, the contrastive diasystemic study has been applied to the whole system because it is the simpler level of language. But the similar study in semantics has been done only in small semantic fields, partly because it is difficult to include a whole vocabulary in a diasystem, but mainly because it is possible to treat a part of vocabulary as a system. By analogy it seems possible to hypothesize several behavior fields in which several behavioremic systems can be set up.

Abundant material for this kind of study can be found in popular manuals of foreign etiquette and customs for travellers and language learners. All we must do for diasystemic study is to describe these phenomena more accurately and systematically, and to contrast each item of cultures faithfully--to know more accurately what is different and what is shared between two cultures.

Terse characterizations as used in "typological study" will result from this steady and sober line of approach. So this "diasystemic approach" is a method to arrange materials properly which would be worthwhile to develop as a basic method of contrastive study.

The last but the most important problem to be discussed is the combination of "coexistent systems" and "diasystemic approach." It is theoretically possible to contrast systems of both cultures one by one. But practically it is not only superfluous but sometimes impossible because of complexity. We have argued that there are correlations between cultural systems and social structure. By the same token and using also internal information--that is, the orderliness or completeness of systems--we can find a definite order among systems. After determining the order, the next step is to compare the first and the most complete system between two cultures. And after that, subsidiary systems are to be contrasted. By this procedure we can not only contrast the typical cultural structures but include other inconspicuous features of culture in investigation. So we can perhaps maintain that this is theoretically one of the most efficient procedures for the contrastive study of culture as a whole.

Let us consider a concrete example such as greetings. First we regard the part of culture related to greetings as constituting a system. Though the patterns of greetings are diverse because of differences according to style or social groups, we include all these in an overall pattern. And after this we abstract and describe several coexistent systems, according to the hypothesis that elements of culture constitute "orderly systems" with each other. Next we determine the order among systems by internal evidence. (We can further study the relative status of greeting systems in social structure, and sometimes the process and cause of historical change.)

For contrastive study, we do the same for the culture to be contrasted. Then we compare first the most orderly and typical systems of each culture, by using the "content" of greetings (i.e., functions in culture) as a frame of reference. (Though it is possible also to contrast greetings by comparing functions using "forms" or greetings as a frame of reference.) The same will be done about subsidiary systems too. Thus not only the system of greetings itself but accompanying factors for greetings can be subjects of contrastive study (e.g., the relation between social strata and various greetings).

What has been described above is meant to be a contribution to the methodology of contrasting cultures. Some may call this a desk theory. The important point is to check this hypothesis with actual cultural phenomena. This U.S.-Japan Conference would be a suitable ground to test the validity of the theory.