Article

Anti-Chomskyans

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Abstract

A Japanese linguist, Katsuhiko Tanaka says that Noam Chomsky interprets meanings of words without considering contexts, in which words are used. Furthermore, he claims that Chomsky derives meanings of words from deep structures. But according to Tanaka, deep structures are determined by extra-linguistic factors such as culture, situations, expectations and so on. So if Tanaka is correct, we cannot interpret meanings only from deep structures. Moreover, Tanaka insists that grammar is in language and is derived from language although Chomsky claims that grammar generates language. Tanaka's thought about language is similar to Roy Harris's integrational linguistics, according to which language is a medium that enables linguistic communication to be successful among people in communities. Harris also insists that words do not have any meanings at all just as the Keynesians claim that money, whether coins or bills, does not have any value at all.

Key Words: meaning, context, deep structure, extra-linguistic factors, grammar, integrational linguistics, medium

Introduction

A Japanese linguist, Katsuhiko Tanaka says that Noam Chomsky interprets linguistic meanings without considering contexts, in which linguistic expressions are used. Also, according to Tanaka, Chomsky analyses only printed characters, excluding other factors. If we understand meanings by taking into account only printed characters, Chomsky's analysis will be correct. But if we take meanings to be something that is involved in contexts, his interpretation of meanings will not be correct. Furthermore, Tanaka goes on to point out the problem of deep structures. Chomsky derives meanings from deep structures, which are, according to Tanaka, decided by extra-linguistic factors such as culture, contexts, and so on. So meanings are closely connected with other things than language. Also, Tanaka takes up the relation between language

and grammar. Chomsky thinks that grammar generates language while Tanaka says that grammar is in language, that is, grammar is derived from language. Unlike Chomsky, Roy Harris insists that meanings include situations and contexts and that words do not have meanings, which are not determinate in advance. His insistence is similar to Tanaka's.

1. Interpretation of Meanings without Contexts

Tanaka points out that Chomsky interprets meanings of sentences without contexts:

Chomsky's theory of language treats language separated from other factors of human expressions [communication]. Chomsky's ambiguous sentences are intended for allowing ambiguities without considering any contexts. Furthermore, the sentences are interpreted in terms of printed materials [written lan-

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guage]. But in reality sentences are not interpreted only from themselves. They are connected with facial expressions, gestures, extra-linguistic situations based on the scene, and so on. It varies not only in structure of language but also in differences of cultural environment and social hierarchy whether deep structure is expressed in surface structure in visible form and at face value. (My translation)　　　(Tanaka 1990: 174)

Chomsky insists that children must have some form of structure related to language because they cannot learn complicated meanings of sentences from experience. As Tanaka says, Chomsky's line of logic or reasoning is based on interpretations of meanings from sentences without contexts. Chomsky is right if children can interpret meanings of sentences without contexts. But Chomsky is wrong if they can interpret meanings of sentences using extra-linguistic factors as Tanaka says. If Tanaka is right, we do not need Universal Grammar that Chomsky assumes to be programmed in our brain at birth.

By the way Tanaka's "deep structure" will need to be explained in more detail later. In some cases he uses the word "deep structure" as an equivalent of Universal Grammar, the existence of which Chomsky claims.

Returning to Tanaka's insistence, he refers to ancient Chinese, bearing Chomsky's theory of language in mind:

In ancient Chinese, one word functions as a noun, a verb, an adjective, or an adverb, etc., depending on contexts. Also, what is interpreted as a subject does not often appear. It is not a grammar but a meaning of each word that decides its grammatical role.

Ancient Chinese does not have grammatical elements but only meanings because its words do not have their morphology. Therefore grammar does not control words but meanings of words determines grammar. Furthermore the whole meaning of linguistic expression is determined by situations [scenes]. So in ancient Chinese, it is very difficult to derive only a form of sentence construction [syntax?] apart from its content. In other words, it is extremely hard to eliminate content of sentence and build its logical form (grammar = syntax). In short, ancient Chinese does

not have bare syntax that does not depend on semantic interpretation of each word. Grammar depends on words that conveys only their concepts but cannot be classified into parts of speech. (My translation)
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(Tanaka 1990: 177)

Here Tanaka denies the autonomy of syntax from semantics that Chomsky claimed. In relation to this, Tanaka mentions subjects in ancient Chinese:

Jyunzo Nishi says, "It is a groundless excuse to say that Chinese has no grammatical subjects, which are often just omitted." After all, when we interpret Chinese applying a transformational rule that in Chinese, subjects, which should be in deep structure, are omitted in surface structure, this means that we make Chinese something else that is not Chinese. It cannot be a study of language itself to study such an operational rule, which is never a rule of language. (My translation)　　　(Tanaka 1990: 180–181)

According to Tanaka, Chomsky's theory of language is not a study of language when he insists that emergence of subjects is determined by setting of a null subject parameter of Universal Grammar. Tanaka criticizes Chomsky's theory of language, which resembles a Procrustean bed:

I will not accept that a prototype [Universal Grammar] is made to measure all other languages by a criterion of a specific dominant language [English], assuming universality of languages only by theory based on authority of traditional Western thought. The reason is that it leads to a way towards a terrible self-righteous attitude and rigid control of thought.

Chomsky says that it makes the USA good to "dispel all illusions of social sciences" participating in political policy of the USA. This criticism, which is directed towards various established disciplines, must be also directed towards Chomsky's theory of language itself. (My translation)　　　(Tanaka 1990: 204)

2. The Problem of Deep Structure

Tanaka regards "deep structure" as one of the devices in what is called Chomskyan revolution in linguistics:

Deep structure is one of the devices in Chomskyan revolution. Chomsky explains linguistic phenomena by setting another language [deep structure] outside of real language [surface structure] and then by returning linguistic phenomena to it or correlating them with it. (My translation)   (Tanaka 1990: 42)

Chomsky himself elucidates the relation between deep structure and surface structure as follows:

The central idea of transformational grammar is that they [deep and surface structures] are, in general, distinct and that the surface structure is determined by repeated application of certain formal operations called "grammatical transformations" to objects of a more elementary sort [deep structure].
(Chomsky 1965: 16–17)

The former [deep structure] is the underlying abstract structure that determines its semantic interpretation; the latter [surface structure], the superficial organization of units which determines the phonetic interpretation and which relates to the physical form of the actual utterance, to its perceived or intended form. In these terms, we can formulate a second fundamental conclusion of Cartesian linguistics, namely, that deep and surface structures need not be identical. The underlying organization of a sentence [deep structure] relevant to semantic interpretation is not necessarily revealed by the actual arrangement and phrasing of its given components [surface structure].
(Chomsky 1966: 33)

Here if Chomsky is right, we can assume whatever deep structures we like independently of surface structures.

According to Chomsky, a basic proposition, which consists of a deep structure, is equipped with a subject and a predicate:

The deep structure consists of a system of propositions, organized in various ways. The elementary propositions that constitute the deep structure are of the subject-predicate form, with simple subjects and predicate (i.e., categories instead of more complex phrases).   (Chomsky 1966: 40)

As an example, Chomsky takes up the sentence, "Invisible God created the visible world", referring to *General and Rational Grammar: The Port-Royal Grammar* (1660):

[…] the deep structure underlying the proposition *Dieu invisible a créé le monde visible* [Invisible God created the visible world] consists of three abstract propositions, each expressing a certain simple judgment, although its surface form expresses only the subject-attribute structure. Of course, this deep structure is implicit only; it is not expressed but is only represented in the mind: (Chomsky 1966: 34)

The following are the "three abstract propositions", of which the proposition "Invisible God created the visible world" consists:

God is visible.
He created the world.
The world is visible.

In this way, Chomsky explains a relation between deep structure and surface structure. Furthermore, Chomsky insists that "deep structure" is the same across all languages:

The deep structure that expresses the meaning is common to all languages, so it is claimed, being a simple reflection of the forms of thought. The transformational rules that convert deep to surface structure may differ from language to language. The surface structure resulting from these transformations does not directly express the meaning relations of the words, of course, except in the simplest cases. It is the deep structure underlying the actual utterance, a structure that is purely mental, that conveys the semantic content of the sentence. This deep structure is, nevertheless, related to actual sentences in that each of its component abstract propositions (in the cases just discussed) could be directly realized as a simple propositional judgment.   (Chomsky 1966: 35)

Here Chomsky clearly declares that deep structures are the same across all languages, explaining that surface structures differ from language to lan-

guage because transformational rules, which relate deep structures to surface structures, are not the same across all language. According to Chomsky, for example, "classical cases" are incorporated in deep structures of every language (including Latin or Greek) although "the means for their expression" may be different in languages with no (case) inflections:

It is important to realize that the use of the names of classical cases for languages with no inflections implies only a belief in the uniformity of the grammatical relations involved, a belief that deep structures are fundamentally the same across languages, although the means for their expression may be quite diverse. This claim is not obviously true—it is, in other words, a nontrivial hypothesis. So far as I know, however, modern linguistics offers no data that challenge it [a belief that deep structures are fundamentally the same across languages] in any serious way.

(Chomsky 1966: 45)

However, about ten years later Chomsky denies his insistence that deep structures are the same across all languages:

More or less. I have continued to use the term [deep structure] for the structure generated by the base, which is transformed into well-formed surface structure. The source of confusion lies in the fact that we employ the same term in two different senses.

However, the greatest confusion comes from people working at the periphery of the field, for example, some literary critics who use the term [deep structure] in a vaguely Wittgeinsteinian sense. Many people have attributed the word *deep* to grammar itself, perhaps identifying "deep structure" and "universal grammar."

I have read many criticisms saying how ill-conceived it is to postulate innate deep structures. I never said that, and nothing I have written suggests anything of the sort, though such a view has been maintained by others.

Similarly, I have often read that what I am proposing is that deep structures do not vary from one language to another, that all languages have the same deep structure: people have apparently been misled by

the word *deep* and confuse it with *invariant*. Once again, the only thing I claim to be "invariant" is universal grammar.   (Chomsky 1979: 171–172)

Chomsky might have forgotten that he himself wrote above:

The deep structure […] is common to all languages,   (Chomsky 1966: 35)

[…], a belief that deep structures are fundamentally the same across languages, […]

(Chomsky 1966: 45)

Tanaka mentions about the fact that Chomsky has changed his principles to fit in with his system:

Where does misunderstanding lie in our reading of Chomsky? That is not misunderstanding, but is it not the truth that ten years [from 1966 to 1977] of development of his research have made Chomsky change his declaration (in 1966)? (My translation)

(Tanaka 1990: 55)

In fact, surprisingly enough, Chomsky admits that we are very likely to change our ideas on something in some period of time:

Anybody who teaches at age fifty what he was teaching at age twenty-five had better find another profession. If in twenty-five years nothing has happened which proves to you that your ideas were wrong, it means that you are not in a living field, or perhaps are part of a religious sect.

(Chomsky 1979: 177–178)

Here if Chomsky is right, then does it mean that what Chomsky claims to be true now in 2018, turns out to be wrong in "twenty-five years" later in 2043? Or if in "twenty-five years" later in 2002 from 1977 nothing happened which proved to him that his ideas were wrong, then does it mean that he was not in a living field, or perhaps was part of a religious sect? We cannot avoid thinking that Chomsky assumes a defiant attitude here. Tanaka comments on Chomsky's attitude:

We could agree with what Chomsky says as a generalization. But it is just ad hoc replacement rather than fast-advancing development that an important concept like "deep structure" collapses or is distorted in only as short as ten years. (My translation)

(Tanaka 1990: 55–56)

Then, even if deep structures exist as Chomsky insists, are there not any problems with them?

3. Deep Structures and Extra-Linguistic Factors

Tanaka says that if there are deep structures, then what deep structures can we postulate for the following phrases?

(3) cooking of fox
(4) cooking of kitten

We cannot postulate deep structures of (3) cooking of fox or (4) cooking of kitten so easily as before. In a fairy tale or something like that, a fox or a kitten might cook some food and serve it to other animals. Or in some community, some people might prefer to eat fox or kitten.

The phrases above, which have the same syntactic structure at the level of "surface structure," sometimes can allow different interpretations. It is not language itself […] but life in each community, in short, cultural environment that determines each interpretation. […] In any case, these phrases are usually interpreted in environment and context where they are used. In other words, linguistic activities never happen without taking into account environment or situations. (My translation)   (Tanaka 1990: 138–140)

According to Tanaka, deep structures are related not only to language (surface structures) itself but also to extra-linguistic situations:

The so-called deep structures […] are not originally related to language itself in the least but to extra-linguistic situations. When a situation is expressed by language, we have a lot of options because there are a lot of interconnections of elements that consist of a situation. We say the minimum amount of words, thinking about present situations, hearers' background knowledge and so on, and omitting unnecessary lin-

guistic expressions. (My translation)

(Tanaka 1990: 141)

If Tanaka is right, then "deep structures" created by Chomsky are based on just one pattern of logic that is derived from only one language, English. So such "deep structures" are just like the Procrustean bed. In other words, every logic is based on some language. This means that we cannot think about anything without language. Thought and language are closely interconnected with each other. Tanaka explains this point:

The device called "deep structure" is made possible by assuming a situation behind "surface structure" and clarifies hidden items. But the situation itself can be grasped only by language. So the relation between the situation and language is dialectic in this case. That is to say, language is involved in setting deep structures and languages have a lot of different parts from other languages. (My translation)

(Tanaka 1990: 148)

Therefore "deep structures" are prescribed by some specific language (English?) and they cannot be universal to all languages. If so, the same is true of Universal Grammar. Does this mean that Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is correct? Can logic based on English (Universal Grammar) deduce all languages on the earth? Furthermore, Tanaka refers to another characteristic of deep structures:

I said that deep structures are close to logic before. But there are a lot of phenomena in which we need to think that deep structures are not one-layered but multi-layered. This characteristic of deep structures will be one of the causes by which Chomsky's transformational grammar produced various schools he himself did not expect. (My translation)

(Tanaka 1990: 148–149)

As Tanaka points out, there have spread a lot of schools from Chomsky's original theory of language.

It is thought that Chomsky is searching for Universal Grammar, which is the Procrustean bed based on one of the languages in the world, English. Tanaka points out contradiction involved in grammar:

As we have seen, here is an essential contradiction involved in grammar. Linguistic activities by humans are not independent of other factors, but in some cases they appear, accompanying more important and more essential extra-linguistic activities or they are employed to supplement those activities. Generally speaking, words are always used in situations. From a pragmatic standpoint, language is not used independently of human behavior or the whole situation mentioned above. Returning to the examples above, the phrases, "cooking of fox" and "cooking of kitten" are not separated from context of a story and not used by themselves unless they appear on the menu of a restaurant. (My translation)

(Tanaka 1990: 143)

4. Language and Grammar

Tanaka lays bare his thoughts about language:

Modern linguistics, empirical linguistics in Chomsky's term, which does not *a priori* start from the "general", does not allow itself to postulate a medium with an assumption [deep structure] between languages. In it, eternal grammar is a contradiction in terms. The reason is that grammar should be valid only in a specific synchrony. That is to say, what precedes real language [deep structure] is not grammar because grammar exists only in existent particular language. The reason is that grammar does not make language but language makes grammar. Linguistics does not call grammar that precedes and transcends language [deep structure] by the name of grammar. It is general grammar that is repeatedly insisted on by Beauzée and Chomsky. Grammar which is formless in reality, is incorporated in a container called deep structure. General grammar is incorporated in deep structure because it is in there. (My translation)

(Tanaka 1990: 92)

Furthermore Tanaka criticizes Chomsky's mentalism, quoting the following passage from Twaddle:

Science has never tried to explain clearer things (sound) using something more ambiguous (mind). In other words, even though mind has an aspect that can be explained by sound, it is a reversal of logic to try to explain sound using mind. Therefore it was a common idea among American linguists to stop explaining phenomena called language including sound, using a concept like mind. In 1939, W. F. Twaddle wrote about this matter:

[…] Because we do not have any right to guess linguistic function of mind, which we cannot touch […] and we cannot gain any profit from such a guess. We cannot observe something like linguistic process of mind, and something like introspection of linguistic process can be compared to burning in a wooden stove. The only information concerning mind can be derived only from behavior of a person who has the mind [the motto of behaviorism]. If we explain the behavior using mind, then we will make a logical mistake in which we give a name to an unknown cause and take up the name again as a cause of a fact, that is, we try to explain something using the unknown cause. Mind is the name that contains the unknown cause of human behavior. (On Definition of Phonemes)

There are few examples by such a vivid metaphor like this passage above where it is opposed for mind to intervene in the study of language, that is, it is declared that mind is invalid. Also this passage will remain as a famous quotation where behaviorism for linguistics was announced scrupulously without an affected attitude. (My translation)

(Tanaka 1990: 36–37)

I would like Chomsky to read this passage if he did not. But probably he would argue against Twaddle's idea. In any case, Twaddle was forgotten and history repeats itself, first as a tragedy, but second as a farce:

About thirty years after it was decidedly declared that we should eliminate mind [by Twaddle], Chomsky bases foundation of his linguistics on mind and tries to derive principles of language from mind but not language itself that is material. (My translation)

(Tanaka 1990: 37)

What a big change from Twaddle to Chomsky

regarding the method of linguistics! These two linguists are like oil and water:

Chomsky and his followers have been devoting their efforts to reducing temporary phenomena called diversity to the general because they are concerned with a property of language as a general class above all. Their devotion seemed to appear encouraged by not language itself but something other than language. Traditionally linguists, although they are concerned with generality or universality, have a behavior of earnestly searching for details of exotic and nameless languages and of getting satisfaction from finding humanity or a connection between language and culture. They do not usually attempt to reduce language to something other than language [logic?]. (My translation) (Tanaka 1990: 39–40)

So there lies so great a gap between Chomskyans and non-Chomskyans that we can never bury it (jump over it) so easily.

5. Roy Harris's Integrational Linguistics

Here is another linguist, who is skeptical about Chomsky's theory of language.

Roy Harris criticizes the orthodox linguistics and proposes his integrational linguistics, which integrates verbal and non-verbal communication:

By rejecting a telementational model of communication [proposed by Saussure] and substituting an integrationalist model (i.e. one in which the sign is not given in advance of the communication situation but is itself constituted in the context of that situation by virtue of the integrational role it fulfils) the foundation is laid for an entirely new approach to the study of language. It becomes possible to treat linguistic communication as a continuum of interaction which may be manifested both verbally and non-verbally.

(Harris 1990: 45)

Then, what is the telementational model of communication by Saussure? According to Harris, Saussure explains human linguistic communication as the transference of thoughts from one person to another:

Saussure adopted telementation as his theory of communication, although he does not designate it by that term. Nevertheless, the adoption is explicitly spelled out in Saussure's account of what he calls the 'speech circuit'. (Harris 1990: 26)

How, then, does Saussure explain human linguistic communication using the speech circuit?

In order to separate from the whole of speech the part that belongs to language, we must examine the individual act from which the speaking-circuit [speech circuit] can be reconstructed. The act requires the presence of at least two persons; that is the minimum number necessary to complete the circuit. Suppose that two people, A and B, are conversing with each other […] (Saussure 1959: 11)

Saussure continues his explanation, showing an illustration where two persons are facing each other:

Suppose that the opening of the circuit is in A's brain, where mental facts (concepts) are associated with representations of the linguistic sounds (sound-images) that are used for their expression. A given concept unlocks a corresponding sound-image in the brain; this purely *psychological* phenomenon is followed in turn by a *physiological* process: the brain transmits an impulse corresponding to the image to the organs used in producing sounds. Then the sound waves travel from the mouth of A to the ear of B: a purely *physical* process. Next, the circuit continues in B, but the order is reversed: from the ear to the brain, the physiological transmission of the sound-image; in the brain, the psychological association of the image of the corresponding concept. If B then speaks, the new act will follow—from his brain to A's—exactly the same course as the first act and pass through the same successive phases […] (Saussure 1959: 11–12)

After the passage above, a diagram is shown to illustrate what is explained above by Saussure. According to Harris, speech communication, for Saussure, is a process of telementation, or thought-transference. In other words, the same thoughts are transferred from A's mind to B's or from B's mind to A's via exactly the

same linguistic procedures laid down by and constitutive of the same language:

This simple scenario [speech circuit by Saussure] assumes that A and B are speaking the same language. If the only language known by A were Catalan and the only language known by B were Cantonese, this exchange would not constitute a speech circuit in Saussure's sense, regardless of how A and B eked out their oral utterances and their mutual tolerance with gestures, facial expressions and other varieties of non-verbal communication.   (Harris 1990: 26)

Here Harris insists that Saussure's telementational theory of communication is based on the idea that language is a fixed code shared by people in a speech community. Chomsky regards this fixed code as a specific grammar (I-language) deduced from his Universal Grammar:

[…] once any theorist adopts a telementational theory of communication, […] the inevitable result is that it leaves only one option open for explaining what a language is. The only option open is to construe a language as a fixed code, the fixed code known to both A and B.   (Harris 1990: 28–29)

Then, are languages fixed codes? According to Harris, the idea that languages are fixed codes is a logical conclusion that human communication is a process of telementation:

[…] construing a language as a fixed code is demanded by the internal logic of Saussure's speech circuit. Unless the code is fixed, then invoking linguistic knowledge simply does not explain how speech communication works. Given any utterance by A, it is essential that B must not only recognize this utterance as an example of the words A intended to pronounce, but must also attach to those words the same meaning as A does. Otherwise speech communication between A and B necessarily breaks down. This in turn follows from the telementational theory of communication, according to which it is both a necessary and sufficient condition of communication that the ideas which A intends to convey are identical with those which B

receives as a result of hearing what A said. Just as in chess, A and B must be following the same rules in order to guarantee that each correctly understands what the other is doing.   (Harris 1990: 29)

So according to Harris, Saussure assumes that forms and meanings of languages need to be determinate in advance. This is also true of Chomsky's individual grammar (I-language):

[…] the expressions of a language have to be determinate both in respect of 'form' and in respect of 'meaning'.   (Harris 1990: 46)

Furthermore Harris insists that his integrational linguistics bears a striking similarity to Keynesian economics, comparing orthodox linguistics with economics attacked by the Keynesians:

Just as orthodox linguistics treats sounds as having meanings by standing for concepts or for objects and persons in the external world, so the basic idea of economic theory which the Keynesians called in question was the idea that a pound note had a value by standing for a quantity of gold.   (Harris 1990: 51)

Then, what did the Keynesians insist on?

The Keynesians strategy is to point out that the assumption that currency notes are pieces of paper standing for quantities of precious metals fails to make sense of economic reality, where in practice money functions as a complex of mechanisms which facilitates the distribution of goods and services. Money does not in addition need to 'stand for' anything. Analogously in the linguistic case, once we see that language can be treated as a complex of mechanisms for facilitating communication there is no need to insist that linguistic signs 'stand for' anything else in addition.   (Harris 1990: 52)

Then, what is integrational linguistics, which Harris insists on?

Integrationalism redefines linguistics as a mode of inquiry into the construction and articulation of our

linguistic experience. It enquires not into the hypothetical structure of abstract linguistic systems [proposed by Saussure], nor into their even more hypothetical representations in the human brain [proposed by Chomsky], but into the everyday integrational mechanisms by means of which the reality of the linguistic sign as a fact of life is established.

(Harris 1990: 50)

So Harris's linguistics is quite different from orthodox linguistics including Saussure's and Chomsky's.

Conclusion

Tanaka insists that Chomsky interprets meanings without taking contexts into account because meanings can be derived from deep structures, which were once thought to be common across all languages. But according to Tanaka, we cannot assume deep structures without contexts because meanings are connected with non-linguistic factors such as culture, gestures, contexts, or expectations. This means that grammar (deep structures) does not generate language (linguistic expressions) but grammar can be derived from language unlike Chomsky's insistence.

Harris insists on the same idea as Tanaka's, proposing the integrational approach to language. According to Harris, a fixed code is assumed for Saussure's telementation theory of communication. The fixed code determines meanings and forms of language in advance of utterances just as Chomsky's deep structures did. But words do not have determinate meanings beforehand but they are a medium that works as part of what we call communication. Harris compares his integrational linguistics to Keynesian economics, which insists that money, whether coins or bills, does not have its value but functions as a medium for facilitating the distribution of goods and services. In the same way, words do not have meanings but work as a medium for making communication successful between people in their community.

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