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LANGUAGE AS FLUID.
A Description of The Conduit Metaphor in Japanese

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Abstract: The aim of the present paper is to see how COMMUNICATION is metaphorized in Japanese and to contrast this metaphorization with Rody's (1974) conduit metaphor. I will claim that there is a strong tendency for Japanese to conceptualize WORD as FLUID and to fuse WORD and WRITING.

1. Introduction

Communication is an abstract domain of experience which can be metaphorized in terms of a more concrete domain of experience. Rody (1974) in his first detailed analysis of how our language about language is structured in terms of metaphor. He agreed that English expressions of COMMUNICATION are based on what he calls "the conduit metaphor," which consists of the following four components (ibid. 296):

(a) language functions like a conduit, transferring thoughts bodily from one person to another:
   c.e. Try to get your thoughts across better.
   b. in writing and speaking, people insert their thoughts and feelings in the words:
   c.e. Try to pack more thoughts into fewer words.
   d. words accomplish the transfer by containing the thoughts or feelings and conveying them to others:
   c.e. That thought is in practically every other word.
   d. The sentence was filled with emotion.
   c. in listening or reading, people extract the thoughts and feelings once again from the words:
   c.e. Can you actually extract coherent ideas from that prose?
   I don't get any feelings of anger out of his words.

In (b), the object of the act of transferring is "thoughts" or "feelings." Since words are containers for thoughts and feelings, as (a),(c),(d) suggest, it is

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possible for "words" to be objects of the act of transferring (though Ruddy himself did not give examples of this type):

(2) a. opens one's mouth for it.
    b. he could scarcely rate it the words.
    c. we exchanged a few words.
    d. he threw words at me.
    e. give him a word of advice, advice.
    f. I hear that words flowed between them.
    g. he sent word that
    h. you should never take his word just as they are.
    i. give a word to

The expressions in (2) suggest that WORD is conceptualized as an individual that people can give and take.

The aim of the present paper is to consider how Japanese exploits metaphors to talk about COMMUNICATION and to contrast this with Ruddy's "liquid metaphor". I will argue that there is a strong tendency for Japanese to conceptualize WORDS as fluid and COMMUNICATION as a movement of fluid from a speaker to a hearer.

2. Methodological Assumptions

I will make the following methodological assumptions:

(1) In some languages, there exists a set of predicates that specifically express the movement/state of fluid, e.g. "leak", "flow", "spill", "shower", "pour", "drum", "soak", etc.

(2) If such a predicate (hereafter "fluid predicate") is used in a more abstract sense (hereafter "fluid metaphor"), its relevant argument is being conceptualized as fluid or indeterminate mass.

English, which unlike Japanese has overt count/mass and singular/plural distinctions, provides indirect support for the assumption (1). The following examples suggest that a fluid metaphor can occur with either a plural noun or a mass noun on its relevant argument:

(3) a. Crows/people flew down the street.
    b. A boy flies down the street.
(6a). A lot of good ideas rolled up while reading this book.
(6b). A lot of good ideas rolled up while reading this book.
(6c). Anger/joy rolled up.

In light of the above assumptions, compare, as an illustration, the following pair of Japanese expressions which have roughly the same meaning, "cop at someone".

(7a). banesu kotoban o betateru
biting word ACC fling

(7b). banesu kotoba o abiseru
biting word ACC shower

Since Japanese lacks the singular/plural and the count/mass distinctions as grammatical categories, the noun "kotoba" has exactly the same form in (7a) and (7b). The noun "kotoba" in (7a), however, can be considered to reflect <individuals>, because the verb "betateru" (fling) typically takes an <individual> (e.g., "ima" (stone)) as its direct object. The same noun "kotoba" in (7b), on the other hand, can be considered to reflect the conceptualization of <fluids>, because (7b) involves a fluid predicate "abiseru" (shower) being used in a metaphorical sense.

In the next section, based on this methodology, I will analyze Japanese conventional expressions of communication and demonstrate the ubiquity of fluid metaphors in conceptualizing COMMUNICATION in Japanese.

3. The Conduit Metaphor in Japanese

Kotoba's conduit metaphor can be divided into two parts, (1a) and (1b-d). The former focuses on the movement of WORD, and the latter focuses on WORD as a container. In this section, I will discuss the movement aspect of the conduit metaphor and the container aspect of the conduit metaphor in this order.

Movement of WORD

I will examine fluid predicates one by one to see how they are used to metaphorize the movement aspect of COMMUNICATION.

(A) morasu/moteru (blow(v.t.)/blow(v.i.))
The transitive verb "morazu" (leak) typically takes a direct object:

(8) *wata/kunaki o morazu
    water/air ACC leak
    "leak water/air"

Hence the following example indicates that wata is conceptualized as (fluid) and the speaker as a container for (fluid):

(9) koto o morazu
    word ACC leak
    "utter words in spite of oneself"

Furthermore, the verb "morazu" has developed a usage as a speech verb, taking a complementizer "to":

(10) Taro no Jiro no zu no zu no zu
    Taro of Jiro of zu of zu of zu
    Taro said that Jiro has zu.

The verb "morazu" can be combined with "kiki" (hear) and "ii" (say) to form a compound verb meaning "fail to hear/say some words" ("kiki" and "ii" are conjunctive forms of "kiku" and "i" respectively):

(11) daizaimo koto o kiki-morazu
    important thing ACC hear-leak
    "miss the important parts"

(12) daizaimo koto o ji-morazu
    important thing ACC say leak
    "forget to mention/let out an important thing"

The image behind these expressions would be that wata as (fluid) leaks from the conduit and loses some portion of it then it should flow to the larger in toki. Interestingly, the compound verb "ii-morazu" has two seemingly incompatible interpretations, namely, "forget to mention" and "let out". The latter interpretation seems to be related to the fact that the verb "morazu" itself implies "to say something secretly", as seen in (9).

The intransitive verb "morazu", which is morphologically related to
"morera", is used to express the situation where one utters words despite oneself.

(1) Jūmu-no kōto-ba-ga kore no kuti kōto morera
complaint-GEN word-MOR be-GEN mouth from leak
"Words of complaint escape his lips"

The verb "morera" combines with "kiki" (hear) to make up a compound verb.

(1) Taro no himenō morera-qo kiki
Taro-NO get married rumor-ACC leak-hear
"(1) hear the rumor that Taro will get married"

The image behind this combination would presumably be that one hears WORD as ⟨fluid ⟩ leaking from some source of information.

(8) nagasu (pour, let flow)

The transitive verb "nagasu" (pour, let flow) typically takes a ⟨fluid⟩ argument as its direct object:

(15) mizu-t/mawashi-o nagasu
water/blood/one-ACC pour
pour water/blood/shed tears

This verb "nagasu" combines with the receptive verbs "kiki" (hear) and "yomi" (read) to make up a compound verb meaning "listen/read intently":

(16) Taro wa Jiro no kōto-ba kiki-nagasu
Taro TOP Jiro-OWN word-ACC hear-let flow
"Taro listens to Jiro's words go in one ear and out the other"

(17) hon-o yomi nagasu
book ACC read-let flow
"read a book "attentively, skim through a book"

I surmise that the image behind these expressions is that the listener/reader lets WORD "flow", without stopping and accepting it.

When the verb "nagasu" combines with the productive verb "hakai" (write), the compound verb "hakai nagasu" means "write smoothly, dash off something".
This meaning is motivated by the image that one writes smoothly and quickly as if pouring water. For some unknown reason, the combination "ni magu" (may-let flow) is not commonly used.

(C) kobou (spill)

The verb "kobou" (spill) typically takes a (fluid) and occasionally a mass like (solid) direct object.

(i) miru/makou/tempu  o kobou
water/rice/pencil ACC spill
"spill water/rice/pencil(s)"

This verb can metaphorically be used with a noun meaning "complaint":

(ii) huma no koto o kobou
complaint GEN word ACC spill
"to complain"

Furthermore, the verb has developed a usage as a speech verb:

(20) Taro- wa jiroya umai to kobou
Taro-GEN Jiro SWEET COMP spill
"Taro complains that Jiro is sweet"

The verb "kobou" implies that one spills something which should have been contained. The reason that "kobou" is normally associated with the notion of "complaint" might be that "complaint" is understood in Japanese as something to be contained and not let out.

(b) siboru (squeeze, wring)

The verb "siboru" (squeeze) takes as its direct object either a (fluid) or an object containing a (fluid):

(21) a. supun  o siboru
sponge ACC squeeze
"squeeze the sponge"

b. miru  o (supun o hata) siboru
water ACC (sponge-firm) squeeze
"squeeze the water"
"squeeze the water (out of the sponge)"

When the verb "dash" (let out) is added to "sibori", making a compound verb "sibori dash", only a (fluid) can be its direct object:

(22)a. sbspash-o sibiri dash
    water-ACC squeeze-out

b. mis-o sibori dash
    water ACC squeeze-out

"squeeze the water out"

Thus, the following expression suggests that MIS is conceptualized as a (fluid):

(23) koto-ga sibori dash
    words ACC squeeze-out

"force out one's words"

(1) abiru/shiri (shower/be showered with)

The verbs "abiru" (shower) and "abiru" (be showered with) typically take a (fluid) direct object:

(24) mizo- o abiru
    water ACC shower

"pour water on"

(25) mizo- o abiru
    water ACC be showered with

"pour water over oneself"

When uttering words to the hearer, these two verbs can be used:

(26) hina-syouna- o koto-ga abiru/abiru
    blame/praise GEN word ACC shower

"be showered with/shower someone with words of blame/praise"

(27) sminisuma koto-ga abisery
    biting word ACC shower

"shower someone with biting remarks"

(28) hakari (exhale, vomit)
The verb "haku"(exhale, vomit) can be said to typically take a (fluid) direct object:

(31) ikisute haku
    breath/blood-ACC exhale,vomit
    "exhale, vomit blood"

The following expressions show that WORD is viewed as (fluid):

(32a) hito no kotoba o haku
      grievous word-ACC vomit,exhale
      "utter grievous words"

(32b) kanekoso ikemo o haku
      radical opinion-ACC vomit,exhale
      "express a radical opinion"

(32c) boku no haku
      real intention-ACC vomit,exhale
      "tell one’s real intentions"

(4) yodome (stagnate), nigou (make (water) turbid)

The verbs "yodome"(stagnate) and "nigou"(make (water) turbid) typically take a (fluid) argument:

(33a) mizu/kamiki no yodome
      water/air NOM stagnate
      "The water/air stagnates"

(33b) mizu/kamiki o nigou
      water/air ACC make turbid
      "make water turbid/make air foul"

WORD as (fluid) moves from a speaker toward a hearer, but it is not always the case that WORD moves smoothly: sometimes WORD as (fluid) can stagnate or get turbid, resulting in unsuccessful communication:

(34a) yodome-naku banasu
      stagnation without speak
      "speak fluently?"

(34b) yodome-naku
      stagnate
"hesitate to say"

(33a) koto-ba o nisora
word ACC make turbid
"speak ambiguously"

b. hemi o nisora
answer ACC make turbid
"give a vague answer"

(8) nisora (soak into), kumu (draw (water))

Lastly, let us consider some expressions used from the hearer’s viewpoint. The verbs “nisora” (soak into) and “kumu” (draw (water)) typically take a (fluid) argument:

(34) mizu no mizu ni nisora
water NOM water BAT soak
"the water soaks the cloth"

(35) mizu o into horo kumu
water ACC well from draw
"draw water from the well"

When WORD as (fluid) issued from the speaker is not accepted by the hearer, the compound verb “niki moyasu” (listen-float) is used, as we saw in (16). Then it is accepted. WORD as (fluid) “soaks into” the hearer.

(36) kore no koto-ba ga koko ni nisora
she-GEN word NOM heart-BAT soak into
"her words sink into my heart"

Then the hearer wants to take in WORD as (fluid) of his/her own accord, the verb “kumu” (draw (water)) is used:

(37) koto-ba o kumu
word ACC draw (water)
"take someone's words into consideration"

Container aspect of WORD

Compared with the variety of English expressions, Reddy (1979) save for the WORD AS A CONTAINER part of the conduit metaphor (which corresponds to (b)
(1d)), there are only a few corresponding expressions in Japanese that concern the relationship between WORD and MEANING. I assume that MEANING corresponds to 'thoughts/feelings' in Rood's formulation. Here are some examples:

(38) kotoha ni imi-o korne
  word-DAT meaning ACC load
(39) kotoha ni imi-o tabaru
  word-DAT meaning ACC transmit
(40) kotoha-go ni imi o hokuma
  word NOM meaning ACC contain
(41) kotoha ni no imi-o toryu
  word GEN meaning ACC take

It is very odd for Japanese to explicitly code the insertion/extraction aspect of the conduit metaphor:

(42) ??kotoha-ni imi o irena/komeyou
  word-DAT meaning ACC put into
(43) ??kotoha-kara imi o toridousu/tekisou
  word from meaning ACC take out

This seems to indicate that in Japanese, unlike in English, WORD and MEANING are fused, rather than separated. Part of the reason for this might be that in classical Japanese there was a folk model where 'kohoro' (heart, meaning) grew into 'kotoha' (word) (see Inogami 1938, 1939). In other words, heart, meaning, and word were considered to form a continuum. On the other hand, if WORD is conceptualized as (fluid) as we saw above, then it follows, by the nature of (fluid), that it is difficult to have clear cut container/content separation in WORD. Thus, in this sense, it seems natural that there is no clear separation of WORD and MEANING in Japanese. 11

4. Some Qualifications

The above analysis of Japanese conventional expressions of communication suggests that WORD tends to be conceptualized as (fluid) and COMMUNICATION as a movement of fluid from a speaker toward a hearer. This contrasts with Rood's conduit metaphor where WORD is conceptualized as an (individual) and COMMUNICATION as its movement.

This does not, however, mean that Japanese never conceives WORD as an
or that English never construes WORD as (fluid). Human beings can conceptualize the same objective scene in different ways. The fact that Japanese prefers (fluid) and English prefers (individual) to conceptualize WORD is a matter of tendency.

In fact, it is not uncommon for WORD to be conceptualized as (individual) in Japanese. The following expressions exemplify this:

(44) kotoha o okuru/okasu/kasesu/doketa
word-ACC send/exchange/return/accept

(45) kaseu/watatsu
say return/give
return/order

(46) kagesho kotoha o hetsumu/mahyomateru
biting word ACC fling
"sleep at (someone)"

(47) kotoha ga mini ni kubikome/yadobari/kaire
word NOM cut PAT jump into/coach/enter
"bear"

What is important is that in Japanese the conceptualization of WORD as (fluid) is, at least, no less common than the conceptualization of WORD as (individual).

Here are, on the other hand, some English examples where WORD is conceptualized as (fluid):

(48)a. pour out (a stream of) words
b. words leak out from CEA
c. rush over/about (one’s) baby
d. a flood of words

e. a rapid flow of speech
f. Her verse flows magically. Her talk flowed on.
g. fluxus (< Latin: fluxere "to flow")

It may, however, safely be said that the conceptualization of WORD as (fluid) is much less common in English than in Japanese.
5. Concluding Remarks

To summarize our discussion, we have seen the following contrast between Japanese and English:

- **Japanese:** Word as (fluid). Fusion of Word and Meaning
- **English:** Word as (individual). Separation of Word and Meaning

As Lakoff and Johnson (1980 Ch.3) correctly point out, metaphor can highlight one aspect of a concept but hide other aspects of the concept. The conduit metaphor is so deeply rooted in English that it is virtually impossible to talk about language without using it. The way of "relativizing" the conduit metaphor is to see how other languages metaphorize WORD and COMMUNICATION, which will hopefully reveal to what respects Every's conduit metaphor is universal and in what respects it is language specific. The present paper is only a small attempt at this.

Finally, I would like to mention a possibility that the distinction between non-fluid metaphor and fluid metaphor might parallel the distinctions between count/non-count nouns and perfective verbs/inperfective verbs (cf. Langacker 1987). These distinctions may be the different manifestations of the same cognitive capacity.

NOTES

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1. By the term (fluid), I mean both (liquid) and (gas). Since (liquid) is more basic (in terms of visibility, tangibility, usefulness, etc.) to human experience, I suppose those predicates prototypically take a (liquid) argument, and that this prototype is semantically extended to a (gas) argument. Fluid predicates are sometimes further extended to take a mass like (solid) argument. Compare the following pair:
   (i)谋事の/めざめ—gerace
       sand/stone ACC leak
   2. This assumption is based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980:6) view of metaphor: "Metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system." It is perfectly possible, however, that for some people fluid metaphors may be "dead" metaphors which do not evoke the conceptualization of (fluid).
   3. For conceptual basis of the mass/count distinction, see Langacker (1987, 1991, Ch.2).
   4. The existence of the "conduit" through which word travels is supported by the following expressions:
      (i) shōbo/hanjarai/mototogotuzuru
          word/idea/feeling MOW to through
          "make oneself understood/get one's [thoughts/feelings] across"
      (ii) bungyo-omō
          conduit-mov through
          "information" leak
   5. It is not the case that the verb "horasu" can combine with any kind of action verb to constitute a compound verb meaning "forget to do something":
      (i) 
          kari/son-morusu
          write/read leak
          "forget to write/read"
      (ii) iki/kunrenai/haraoni-myagon
          go/study/skill leak
      It may be the case that (a) is possible, because the verbs "write" and "read" have something to do with language.
   6. The verb "muganu" can take an (individual) direct object when it means "to float something in the stream of water":
      (i) varishkara-ni muganu
log ACC river DAT float

'float a timber in the river'

This usage, however, does not mean that an <individuum> object is conceptualized as an <fluid>; in (i), "aimake o naganu" can never mean "pour logs".

7. To express "fail to hear/say", the verbs "otosu"(drop) and "nogasa" (let escape, miss) are used to make a compound verb:

(i) a. kiki i-otosu
    hear/say drop
    "fail to hear/say"

    b. kiki i-i nogasa
    hear/say-let escape
    "fail to hear/say"

The verbs "otosu" and "nogasa" typically take an <individuum> direct object:

(ii)a. chihitu o otosu
    pencil-CC drop
    "drop a pencil"

    b. okami makim o nogasum
    big fish-ACC let escape
    "see a big fish"

Thus, we may say that NOD is conceptualized as an <individuum> in the expressions in (i). Interestingly, the verb "miru"(see) cannot combine with "nogusaj"(let flow), but it can combine with "otosu"(drop) and "nogasu"(let escape), to mean "fail to see"

(iii)a. mi-nogusaj/nogasum
    see-let flow

b. mi otosu/nogasum
    see-drop/let escape
    "fail to see"

The reason that metaphors like (iii) are not used might be that we have a folk model according to which our visual field is occupied by clearly demarcated, discrete objects.

8. The verb "hakaru" is known for its polysemy (hang, cover, wear, sit, etc.). One of its meanings is similar to "akaru"; to sprinkle, throw (water). It takes a <fluid> or a mass-like <solid> direct object:

(i) mixu/sio o hakaru
    water/salt ACC sprinkle
    "pour water over/sprinkle salt on"

The following expression might be related to the above use of "hakaru"
9. The expression (37) is quite different from the English equivalent Reddy (1979) gives, namely, "Can you actually extract coherent ideas from that prose?". The verb "extract" can take a (fluid) direct object (e.g., extract juice from lemon) as well as an (individual) direct object (e.g., extract a tooth). I suspect, however, that Reddy's intended sense is that "ideas" are discrete objects taken out of a container.

10. [Koyama (1988) quotes a passage from the preface to Kojin-gakusei (a collection of waka poetry compiled in the tenth century), where "kokoro" (heart) is compared to a seed and "kotoba" (words) to its buds or leaves.

11. The fusion of WORD and MEANING in Japanese is best observed in examples (36) and (37), where "kotoba" (WORD) is used to mean MEANING—thoughts/feelings.

(36) kanpyo no simete ga kudari su
she-GEN kindness NOW heart DAT sink into
"Her kindness sinks into my heart"

(37) kannpon kimi no kokoro no iu wa
thought/feeling/heart/meaning ACC draw (water)
"take into consideration someone's thought/feeling/heart/attention"

Recall, in this connection, that, in Reddy's concept metaphor (1a), that moves is "thoughts/feelings", instead of "words".

12. From this viewpoint, the following cliche makes sense:

(i) tate ni a ga kago no yomu
vertical wooden board DAT water ACC por (as if talk
"We) speak fast and fluently"

13. In the following examples, WORD is conceptualized as FOOD/DRINK.

(i) kotoba no omoi kara dekakattiru
word NOW; thought from be just about to come out
"words are on the tip of one's tongue"
(ii) *kore o noyōmu*

word ACC swallow, drink

"swallow one's words"

14. For the various problems entailed by the conduit metaphor, see Lakoff and Johnson (1980: Ch. 3) and Langacker (1991: 508).

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