

## **GSI Caravan**

### **Project Title**

Research on linguistic theory exploring the possibilities for mutual understanding in society

### **Principal Investigator**

Mori Yoshiki

### **Project Overview**

What is true and what is not true is by no means self-evident as we see from events in contemporary society. Yet, if we fail to recognize obvious falsehoods, then our acts of communication and speech come to nothing. This situation poses a fundamental problem for society as well as for the social sciences and theoretical linguistics. Today's tools of communication impact not only the ways in which we communicate but also the relationship between people's knowledge and beliefs. While paying close attention to how these changes are affecting communication and language, this project will conduct linguistic analyses and develop new theories concerning the relationship between a person's knowledge and their beliefs. Within the context of global studies, this research will seek to reexamine the foundations of communication, that is, what makes communication possible and what causes it to fail.

This problem can be approached through a variety of methodologies. In the area of linguistics, for example, a collaborative study is possible with research on actual language use in society, communication research in new media, investigation of the mechanisms of language change, and rhetoric and stylistics research on "persuasiveness." In this context, to tackle the problem from a theoretical linguistic perspective means to clarify how the "relationship between knowledge and belief" is localized and expressed in language, and how knowledge and belief are exchanged in communication. This project divides the problem into two main categories: the "Self" of discourse participants, and formation and maintenance of a "Common Ground" in discourse (which I will hereafter refer to as the operation or management of a common ground).

If we try to further clarify the direction of the problem within the framework of theoretical linguistics, we can say that it is a problem of the interface between discourse and "sentence" (or "proposition"). According to the mantra of theoretical linguistics, the sentence becomes the shelled core of communication, its interior is governed by its own rules and conventions that form its "structure," including its "meaning," while at the same time taking on operational meaning through context and conceptual reasoning. However, recent studies have shown that

not only are adjustments made in the periphery of sentences regarding the treatment of each sentence in the discourse, but also that sentences contain mechanisms that induce many inferences that are not included in the “meaning of the sentence” while the “meaning of the sentence” itself may be influenced by such inferences. Therefore, in this project, we will examine the influence the relationship between knowledge and beliefs has on linguistic expression, as well as the mutual interference among knowledge-beliefs relationships, linguistic structures, and modes of communication.

Communication is, in most cases, believed to be multimodal. While this directly implies a multiplicity of mediating means and circuits, it naturally means that the “content” being conveyed will also be complex. Language is a particularly prominent medium for humans, that, from the perspective of information, accurately conveys many things. In considering the characteristics of the information handled by language, this project will consider the aspects of determining “truth” from correspondence with the real world, the aspects of the operation or management of a “common ground” through “connection” to communication and discourse, and above all, the aspects that express the “mental attitudes” of discourse participants.

This project will focus on the ways in which language is transformed by contact with external information (“context,” “conceptual reasoning”) while simultaneously adjusting its internal form, and will attempt to expand on the semantics, pragmatics, and syntax of theoretical linguistics with respect to these modes of contact, as well as to empirically clarify and theorize how the above three aspects interact with related linguistic phenomena. We believe that past studies have made it clear that these aspects are not treated uniformly across languages, even for similar expressions. It is therefore necessary to conduct cross-linguistic research, including language comparison and language contrast. We are fortunate to have both European and East Asian language specialists in the project, so will be able to carry out cross-linguistic research within the scope of their specialties.

At the same time, there is the developmental issue of discourse coherence and discourse structuring. The lexical items and syntax in a sentence trigger the formation of discourse cohesion and structuring. In recent years, it has become clear that this coherence is not a simple functional nodal relationship from sentence to sentence, but rather a complex nodal relationship between sentences, with multiple inferences emanating from a single sentence. This is a view that is consistent with the view of the formation of multi-layered inferences in each sentence. Building on the theories of information structure related to the question under discussion, this project will address focus, take-up, and cleft sentences, not only from the perspective of sentence-communication contact, but also from the perspective of discourse coherence and structuring.

Successful communication is not the same thing as a speaker's successful act of speech. This project will reconsider the nature and relationship between language and language use with a focus on authenticity, the mental attitudes of discourse participants, the operation and management of a common ground, and how language is structured in communication. This research is positioned as a fundamental part of our efforts to gain a global perspective and to understand the diversity of cultures and societies in various regions of the world.

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