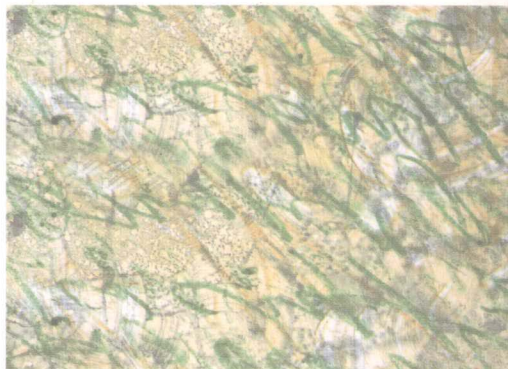


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认知语言学丛书 02



John Haiman / 著

自然句法

—— 像似性与磨损

Natural Syntax:

Iconicity and Erosion

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自然句法——像似性与磨损

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Preface

The iconic notion that the forms of language may imitate their meanings goes back (at least in the Western tradition) to Plato's *Cratylus*. Like all subsequent scholars, Plato rejected imitative iconicity as a descriptive account of the structure of most *words*. But words occur in larger-morphosyntactic-structures.

The earliest idea that may count as an ancestor of iconicity in syntax is the naïve and extremely widespread view of 17th and 18th century grammarians, debunked in Chomsky (1965: 6-8), that the sequence of words in a sentence "follows a natural order which conforms to the natural expression of our thoughts". This is of course equivalent to the notion that there is nothing specifically linguistic about syntax, and there is therefore no need for grammarians to bother with it. Chomsky's ridicule made this view notorious, and the vast majority of modern linguists have followed him in rejecting it completely, and espousing the diametrically opposed hypothesis of the "autonomy of grammar". In its extreme form, articulated most forcefully in Chomsky 1957, the autonomy hypothesis asserts that syntactic structure has nothing to do with (and certainly does not emerge from) any extralinguistic factors, including meaning (Chomsky 1957: chapter 9), communicative intent (Chomsky 1980: 239), or frequency (Chomsky 1957: 15).

Alone among Chomsky's contemporaries of comparable stature in the 1960s, Roman Jakobson (1965) suggested (in a playful essay written for a general audience) that there may be a lot of iconicity in the inflectional morphology and the syntax of human languages, basing his arguments on C. S. Peirce's idea of the diagram as a kind of icon (Peirce 1955). "Quest for the essence of language" is definitely not one of Jakobson's most widely cited works, and for decades it was pretty much ignored

(possibly as a pardonable *jeu d'esprit* of an elder statesman on vacation from serious linguistics).

In recent years, however, iconicity as a property of language has acquired some more visibility, as one of a number vaguely related “functionalist” or “naturalist” ideas:

- a) there may be nothing specifically linguistic about the cognition or the production of the categories of language (Givon 1979 and Langacker 2000 are prominent exponents of this view of natural syntax).
- b) morphosyntax does, however imperfectly, serve as an imitative picture of prelinguistic ideas (this book, and a number of recent collections and anthologies, among them Haiman (ed.) 1985 and Nänny & Fischer (eds.) 1998, are examples of that);
- c) the structure of utterances may reflect the conscious communicative intentions of their speakers (Lambrecht 1994);
- d) the frequency with which utterances are produced may affect both their form and their meaning (Bybee 2007, and a host of other scholars echoing Zipf 1935);
- e) language is embedded in gesture (Bolinger 1975), and may have evolved from gesture (Corballis 2002, Armstrong & Wilcox 2006, echoing Condillac);
- f) much of the arbitrary appearance of both spoken and gestured language as of other human institutions, is the consequence of routinization (Givon 1979: chapter 5, Lehmann 1995, Heine et al. 1991, Hopper & Traugott 1993, Haiman 1998, and others echoing Meillet 1912; the classic statement of routinization in sociology is Berger & Luckmann 1967).

That grammar is autonomous may still be the majority opinion, but it is no longer regarded as a truism. It is on the contrary hotly defended against the ideas above—all of which are attacks on the “autonomy of grammar”.

Iconicity abounds, as (I hope) this book will illustrate. Given the observations of iconic structure here and elsewhere, it remains to ask about

their status. Perhaps iconicity is entirely accidental, like clouds that can look like whales or weasels. (It may then have as little to do with human language as flower arrangements have to do with botany.) Perhaps it reflects the state of affairs in earlier stages of human language. Perhaps it exists because iconic signs are easier to learn, to store, and to produce than arbitrary symbols. Or perhaps it exists as a form of artistic expression.

Here, the status of two different kinds of iconicity must be distinguished. The first, isomorphism, is that “likeness of form reflects likeness of meaning”. I do not think that recurrent examples such as the ones treated here can possibly be accidental. They are simply too frequent. It has been an unquestioned heuristic in comparative and typological studies of human language that recurrent similarity in form between different syntactic structures **MUST** reflect an (underlying) similarity in meaning. Conditional clauses have the morphology and/or the syntax of topic phrases because they **ARE** topics, for example. Some examples of this really hoary and uncontroversial principle are explored in chapter 1 of the present book.

The second kind of iconicity, motivation, is that “the form itself is a diagram of essential aspects of the meaning”. This principle, discussed in chapter 2, is more contentious. Reduction of form, for example, may be conceptually motivated (“less is less”), but it may also be motivated by frequency or familiarity (“what is known requires less expression”), as discussed in chapter 3. Sometimes iconicity and the reduction which is brought about by frequency may conflict, as in a variety of subordinate clause types discussed in chapter 4.

Recent studies by Haspelmath (1993, 2008) claim that not just some, but **ALL** cases of reduction, including most notably zero for unmarked forms, are motivated entirely by frequency, rather than meaning. This seems to me a mistake. For example, the reduction of reflexive and reciprocal forms discussed in chapter 2.2.5 may be conceptually motivated (it reflects lack of individual status), but it is also economically motivated as discussed in chapter 3.2 (it reflects

predictability). In the same way, the universal finding that personal pronouns have reduced expression compared to common nouns may be a Zipfian consequence of their greater frequency of occurrence in discourse. But it also reflects the fact that precisely because they have antecedents, they are reduced “copies” of those antecedents and it is their status as copies which is iconically reflected in their reduced form (Haiman 2009).

Most of optimality theory is a formalization of the competition between a kind of iconicity (named “faithfulness”, a similarity between superficial and underlying linguistic form) and economy (unmarkedness) (cf. Prince & Smolensky 2004: 3, 5; McCarthy 2002: 13).

But iconicity vs. economy is not the only kind of competition that may arise. Given that the one-dimensional medium of spoken language is reflecting a multi-dimensional conceptual world with various iconic motivations competing for expression, the results of such competitions are inevitably going to be less than perfect reflections of any single one of them; this is exemplified in chapter 6 where the iconic reflection of conceptual closeness competes with the iconic reflection of relative importance, as manifested in relative pronouns.

And there are many possible motivations for linguistic form other than both iconicity and economy. Symmetry of form may reflect conceptual symmetry, as argued in chapter 2.1 (cf. Lakoff & Peters 1970). But it may be also motivated by a totally different (esthetic?) drive: symmetry may exist for its own sake (Haiman & Ourn 2009).

Iconicity and erosion seem to conflict. This is not only the central thesis of optimality theory, as noted above, it is reflected in universal observations such as this: As chunks (of language or of art) get worn down, they may lose their similarity to what they once portrayed. The smaller, the more arbitrary. So, for example, the order of constituents within a word is more ritualized and arbitrary than the order of words in larger constructions; the order of constituents at the phrase level (the smallest multi-word unit) is not as iconic as the order of constituents at the clause level; the order of constituents at the clause level is not as iconic as the order of constituents at the paragraph level. At this topmost level,

indeed, all languages seem to agree: without explicit diacritic signals (such as the conjunctions “before” and “after”), the order of clauses in a narrative corresponds to the order of events. A consequence of this banal observation is that typologically, the iconicity of order at any level is greater in languages without elaborate inflectional morphology (like Pidgins, as argued in chapter 3.1, but also Chinese, cf. Tai 1985), than in languages which have such morphology, for transparent reasons. This raises the issue of a diachronic progression. Can languages become less iconic as they become more grammaticalized? This is very much the position that seems to follow from recent studies of routinization (a more general term) (item (f) in the list of functional approaches from above).

The history of visible semiotic systems with shallow histories such as writing (Gelb 1962) and sign language (Bellugi & Klima 1975) makes plausible the assertion that “every artificial or non-iconic system is founded on an antecedent iconic system” (for a recent statement, Grice 1989: 358, but the idea goes back to figures like Condillac and Tylor). Since all recorded natural languages exhibit a great deal of arbitrariness, this amounts to a seductive claim about the proto-language(s) from which they may have descended. “Human language was born iconic, and is everywhere conventional.” Nevertheless, given the speed with which conventionalization can occur (Bloom 1979), it is absolutely out of the question that the iconicity which is encountered in extant languages reflects the state of affairs in prehistoric stages of human language. For iconicity to exist at all, it must constantly be (re)created.

But if so, is this for cognitive reasons? Givón (1985: 189) suggests that iconic signs are easier to learn and remember than those that are arbitrary. No experimental evidence has yet been given for this plausible claim, and the very little bit of evidence provided from data on child language acquisition and sign language learning suggests that it is not true. Bellugi & Klima (1975) suggest that signs in American Sign Language, at least, are stored and retrieved largely on the basis of their formal relationships to other signs (their Saussurean *value*) rather than on the basis of their possibly iconic relationship to their meanings (their

Saussurean *signification*). Certainly people who share no common language will resort to iconic signs when they first meet (cf. Armstrong & Wilcox 2006) but this will not explain why established languages have as much of it as they apparently do.

A completely speculative proposal at this point is that one of the motivations for language, as for art, is purely aesthetic. Just as some presumably universal human aesthetic drive is responsible for both representative and decorative art (Dissanayake 1995), the same drive may be responsible for both representative (iconic) and decorative language. Iconicity may be created because human beings simply take a pleasure in “painting the thing as they see it”. As for decorative language, this book says nothing about it, since I was completely unaware of the considerable evidence for its existence (at least in many Southeast Asian languages like Khmer) in 1985.

I am very grateful to the Cambridge University Press for reissuing this book now. However, if I were to rewrite rather than to simply reissue *Natural Syntax* at this point, I would try to integrate iconicity into a more general account which treated language more like pictorial art in general. This would be an approach that took note of non-referential symmetry (including not only “twin forms” like *helter-skelter* and *jibberjabber* (cf. Haiman & Ourn 2009) but “paradigm coherence”) and other structural givens which are currently discussed only in terms of their cognitive referential motivation.

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前 言

语言的形式可以模仿语言的意义，这种像似性观念（至少在西方传统里）可追溯到柏拉图的《克拉底鲁篇》。跟其后的学者一样，柏拉图并不赞成将像似性视为对绝大多数词的结构的一种描写性解释。相反，词还可以出现在更大的形态句法结构之中。

早期有一种堪称句法像似性先驱而遭乔姆斯基（1965：6-8）诟病的观点认为，句中词的序列“遵循一个自然的顺序，它与我们思想的自然表达相一致”。这种观点虽然天真幼稚，但在17和18世纪的语法学家中却极为盛行。这种观点实际上等于宣称，句法在语言学意义上并无特别之处，因此语法学家也就不必为此费心。乔姆斯基的嘲讽使得这种观点“声名狼藉”，于是绝大部分当代语言学家彻底摒弃这种观点，赞成与之截然相反的“语法自主性”假说。乔姆斯基（1957）以一种极端的形式，强有力地阐述了其自主性假说：句法结构与语言之外的任何因素无关（当然也不会从中“浮现”），这些因素包括意义（Chomsky 1957：第9章）、交际意图（Chomsky 1980：239）或频率（Chomsky 1957：15）。

在20世纪60年代与乔姆斯基地位相当的时贤中，只有雅柯布逊（Jakobson 1965）（在一篇为普通读者所写的随笔中）指出，人类语言的屈折形态和句法结构存在很多的像似性，其立论基础是皮尔斯的“图示是一种像似符号”的思想（Peirce 1955）。《探索语言的本质》（Jakobson 1965）肯定不是雅柯布逊被引用最广的著作之一，它几十年来几乎被人忽略（可能被当做一位年长的政治家在研究严肃的语言学之余说出的一句不必见怪的妙语）。

不过，近些年来，像似性作为语言的一种属性得到了更多的关注，成为那些多少有点联系的“功能主义”或“自然主义”的思想之一：

（a）认知或语言范畴的产物在语言学意义上似无特别之处

- (Givón 1979 和 Langacker 2000 是这种自然句法观的杰出代表);
- (b) 形态句法确实可以但并不完善地充当“前语言思想”(prelinguistic ideas)的模拟图(本书及 Haiman 主编 1985、Nänny & Fischer 主编 1998 等最近的一些论文集都代表了上述观点);
- (c) 语句的结构可能反映了说话人有意识的交际意图(Lambrecht 1994);
- (d) 语句产出的频率可能影响语句的形式和意义(Bybee 2007 以及响应 Zipf 1935 的其他一些学者);
- (e) 语言深嵌于手势(gesture)之中(Bolinger 1975),并可能源于手势(如响应 Condillac 的 Corballis 2002, Armstrong & Wilcox 2006);
- (f) 与人类的其他行为习惯(institutions)一样,口语和手势语中大量的任意性表象实际上是“惯例化”(routinization)的结果(Givón 1979: 第 5 章, Lehmann 1995, Heine 等 1991, Hopper & Traugott 1993, Haiman 1998, 以及响应 Meillet 1912 的其他学者;社会学领域中对惯例化的经典论述是 Berger & Luckmann 1967)。

语法自主或许仍然是多数人的观点,但已不再被视为自明之理。相反,针对上述思想,许多人为句法自主观进行了激烈辩护——而上述思想无疑都是对“语法自主”的抨击。

就像本书所阐明的,像似性大量存在于语言之中。有了本书以及其他著作对像似结构的研究成果,尚待讨论的则是像似性的地位问题。或许像似性完全是偶然的,就像云朵看起来如鲸亦如鼬(那样,像似性之于人类语言好比花朵排列之于植物学,无甚关联);或许它反映的是人类语言早期阶段的情形;或许其存在的原因在于像似的记号(sign)比任意的符号(symbol)更易学习、储存和产出;或许它的存在是一种艺术表达的形式等等。

这里要区分两种不同类型的像似性的地位。第一种是同构(isomorphism),指“形式的相像反映了意义的相似”。我认为诸如本书所讨论的那些反复提及的例子或许不能视为偶然,它们出现得简

直太频繁了。在人类语言的比较一类型研究传统里有个不争的启示：不同句法结构之间反复出现的形式相似性一定反映了（底层的）意义相似性。例如，条件小句具有话题性短语的形态和/或句法，因为它们就是话题。本书第1章将讨论这种确实古老而又无争议的原则的一些实例。

第二种是动因（motivation）像似，指的是“形式本身就是意义本质方面的图示”。这条原则颇有争议，本书第2章将予讨论。比如，形式的缩减（reduction）可能是概念促动的（“概念少，形式少”），但也可能是频率或熟悉度（familiarity）促动的（“熟悉的东西要求较少的表达形式”），这个问题会在第3章予以讨论。有时，像似性与频率引发的缩减可能有抵触，比如第4章讨论的各种从句（subordinate clause）类型。

Haspelmath（1993, 2008）最近的研究声称，不只是某些，而是所有缩减的例子，包括最显著的零形式用做无标记形式，都完全由频率而非意义促动的。我觉得这是一个错误。比如2.2.5节讨论的反身和交互（reciprocal）形式的缩减，可能是概念促动的（它反映了个体身份的缺失），但又如3.2节所论，这也是经济动因促动的（它反映了可预测性）。同样，与普通名词相比，人称代词的表达形式更为缩减，这个普遍的发现或许是因其在话语中出现频率更高所致，这就是齐夫式后果（Zipfian consequence）。但它也反映了一个事实：正因为它们具有先行语，它们才是其先行语的缩减式“复制”；而其缩减的形式正像似地反映了其复制的身份（Haiman 2009）。

大多数优选论都是像似性（名为“忠实性”，即表层语言形式和底层语言形式之间的相似性）和经济性（无标记性）之间竞争的形式化表征（参看 Prince & Smolensky 2004: 3, 5; McCarthy 2002: 13）。

但像似性和经济性的竞争并不是唯一可能出现的竞争。既然口头语言的一维媒介在反映多维概念世界时，会有多种像似动因参与竞争表达，那么这些竞争的结果就必然不如其中任何单个竞争的结果那样完全地反映概念世界：第6章将对此举例说明，譬如关系代词所示，概念紧密度的像似反映与相对重要性的像似反映产生竞争。

除了像似性和经济性，语言形式还有许多可能的竞争。如2.1节所论，形式的对称可能反映了概念的对称（参看 Lakoff & Peters

1970), 但语言形式还有可能由一个完全不同的 (审美的?) 动力所促动: 对称可能因自身而存在 (Haiman & Ourn 2009)。

像似性与磨损似乎相抵触。这不仅是优选论的中心论题 (如上所述), 它还在下面的普遍观察结果中得到反映: 随着 (语言或艺术的) 组块逐渐磨损, 它们可能丧失与所曾描绘事物的相似性。形式越小, 任意性越强。比如, 词内成分的顺序比词在更大结构中的顺序更为仪式化、更具任意性; 短语层面 (最小的多词单位) 成分顺序的像似性程度不如小句层面的成分顺序; 小句层面成分顺序的像似性程度不及段落层面的成分顺序。实际上, 在这个最高层面, 似乎所有语言都一致: 如果没有明确的区别性标志 (如连词 *before* 和 *after*), 描述性语体中小句的顺序对应于事件的顺序。这一平凡的观察结果告诉我们: 从类型学的角度看, 缺少精细复杂的屈折形态的语言 (如 3.1 节所述的洋泾浜, 以及汉语, 参看 Tai 1985), 较之具有这种形态的语言, 其任何层面上成分顺序的像似程度都要高。这就引发了一个历时发展的问题。随着语言语法化程度的加深, 它们的像似性程度会越来越低吗? 这正是沿袭惯例化 (一个更概括的术语) 最新研究成果所持的立场 (上述功能研究方法列表的 (f) 条)。

具有短浅历史的可视符号系统, 如书面语 (Gelb 1962) 和手势语 (Bellugi & Klima 1975), 其历史似乎可以证实下面的断言: “每种人造的或非像似的系统都建立在早先像似的系统之上” (最新表述见 Grice 1989: 358, 但这种思想可以追溯到 Condillac 和 Tylor 等名人)。因为所有有记录的自然语言都呈现大量的任意性, 这就容易使人们认为存在原始语言, 那些自然语言可能源自原始语言。“人类语言生来像似, 如今却到处都是约定俗成。”但是, 从规约化进程的速度来看 (Bloom 1979), 现存语言中所发现的像似性绝对不可能反映人类语言在史前阶段的状况。像似性要想存在, 就必须不断地 (再) 产生。

果真如此, 那会是认知的原因吗? Givón (1985: 189) 指出, 像似的记号比任意的记号更容易学习和记忆。这种看似有理的观点尚未得到任何实验证据的支持, 儿童语言习得和手势语学习的研究材料所提供的少之又少的证据却表明这种观点是不对的。Bellugi & Klima (1975) 指出, 至少美国手势语中记号的储存和恢复, 很大程度上是基于它们同其他记号之间的形式关系 (即索绪尔所说的 “价