

## Nishida's Philosophy and the Nature of Language

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In this symposium I will methodologically define that the function of language is polarized into either showing logic or expressing 'image or feeling'. These correspond to the logic of nominative and the logic of predicative in Nishida's philosophy. It has been pointed out that it is closely related to the Japanese language. It shows the property of the logic of predicative. However Nishida does not conclude it as either logic of nominative or logic of predicative. He advocates *logic of basho* 場所的論理 (is often translated as "logic of place") which is the basis of both.

Firstly, I will introduce the relationship between Nishida's philosophy and Japanese grammar. In the following argument, a certain contradiction or paradox emerges. Thereupon as a method I will illustrate the difference between the logic of nominative and the logic of predicative. Finally, I will briefly explain the *logic of basho*.

### Japanese Language and Nishida Philosophy

How did Nishida think about Japanese? As follows, he discusses it in a short essay 'Flexibility of the National Language'.

It is said that Latin suits Law and Greek suits Philosophy. Then what does Japanese suit? Although I have not thought about such a thing up to now, for example, haiku seems to be difficult to translate. The trait of Japanese view and thought is in the place we grasp infinite in reality. But don't stop only to being proud of Haiku's beauty. If we really think and grasp something profound, language expressions that cannot be expressed by other languages will emerge from it naturally.<sup>1</sup>

Although the basic line of argument is that thought decides language, it may also be accurate to say that both lines of argument are united. "We grasp infinite in the reality", that is, grasping something infinite with language as reality. The haiku shows abundant images and feelings in extremely few words. Therefore, we see that he thought the relation between language and thought is interactive.<sup>2</sup>

In the place that Nishida simply describe 'language' itself, he agrees totally with *Ludwig Noire*(1829-1889), accepting language as a tool. Nishida adds that naming something is already using the something. The topic of expression and *logic of place*, as direct topic of this presentation, underlies

this language-tool thought. Where he often rephrases expression as language, it is about practical concrete things like art or history. And he emphasizes interactive relation in that we make tools and are made by the made things. Moreover he adopts "language is body of thinking", holding body as tool. Hence he has also the clear idea that language gives birth to thought.

By just introducing Nishida's thought about language and expression, I can say that Nishida's philosophy is in harmony with Japanese thought such as Shinto.<sup>3</sup> Since ancient times, Japan had been called a "country where the nation does not presume to make words clear".<sup>4</sup> Related closely to this Shinto worship, is also the "Spirit of word 言霊 *kotodama*" worship that verbalization itself is spirit<sup>5</sup>. Nishida said the following about it:-

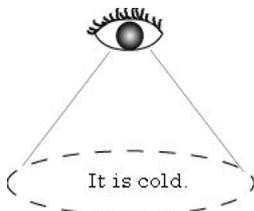
"Countries where they do not presume to make words clearly awed by Gods" means not to argue it for the argument, not to presume to use category for the categorization, like *Norinaga* said " That is to simply follow the way of things" (『direct correction of divine spirits』), it should be accepted as meaning going to the fact of things. Going to the truth of things doesn't mean the habits of obeying tradition from conventional habit, and acting on instinct subjectively. Going to the truth of things limitlessly contains a scientific spirit. It is obeying the truth of things, allowing ego negation, not to presume to make words clearly is not to make view by ego, it is a bowing with awe ahead of the truth.<sup>6</sup>

### The "Feature" of Japanese Language

Before introducing Nishida's thought, let me briefly describe the general property of Japanese language. It is said that it has a tendency of "subjective construal", for the speaker doesn't appear in the sentence, followed by many ellipsis of nominative.<sup>7</sup> The concept "construal" is an analytical method as a basic stance of cognitive linguistics. According to this, it is said that in a language requiring subject such as English the viewpoint is looking down, and on the contrary the viewpoint of a language which does not necessarily require a subject such as Japanese, is on the ground relatively speaking<sup>8</sup>. The latter is dissolved in the environment. One point which should be added is that the language requiring subject is rare compared to one not necessarily requiring subject, viewed from language

typology.

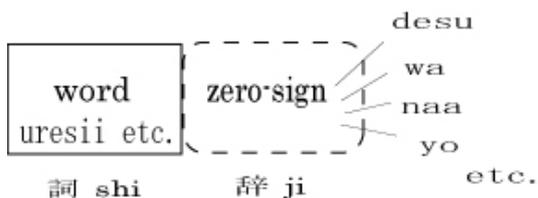
Language that needs grammatical subject,



Language that does **not need** grammatical subject



Thus from the viewpoint of cognitive linguistics, some researchers are reevaluating the theory of modern Japanese philology scholars, associating it with Nishida's philosophy at such times. *Motoki Tokieda* construed Japanese grammar as follows: There is a sign for expressing speaker's emotion in Japanese grammar. This sign is shown by "sign do not exist". Similarly *Akira Mikami* advocated abolishing the nominative from Japanese grammar.



Language as Process theory by Motoki Tokieda [1941]

This description may be self defeating. Needless to say, this does not imply superiority or inferiority at all, because this is simply a discussion of "tendency" in human language. Grammatical subject enables us to discuss accurately, and expressing feeling is also the essential feature of any language. Nevertheless (and needles to say to) description and determination is power, even if we think that it is neutral as "fact". And then, saying that I am saying such a thing by language is contradictory to the aforesaid, in a sense. Actually, Nishida also uses the subjective (nominative). In fact the crux of the matter is the paradox of verbalization and existence rather than logical or practical incoherence.<sup>10</sup>

Regarding language and thought, I would like to presume that we humans use both tendencies of language. Next, I will survey the two judgment forms which Nishida grouped together.

Logic of nominative and Logic of Predicative

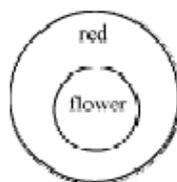
Now, I would like to illustrate the difference between logic of nominative and logic of predicative. Roughly

speaking, the former is logical side, and latter is the side conveying image and feeling of language.

Nishida proposed "logic of predicate" as a technical term. Looking for a way to explain awareness from pure experience, an inspiration of *basho* 場所(place) occurred to him radically. He tried to modify previous forms of logic in order to make 'basho' logical. In this process, "logic of predicative" was devised.

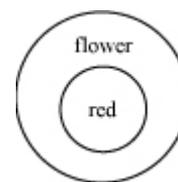
This logic is seen as "nominative is in the predicate", for instance; Please look at the illustration below.

Logic of predicative



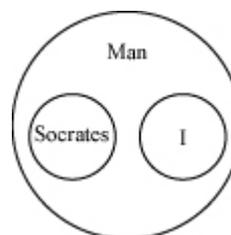
This flower is in red.

Logic of nominative



This flower is red.

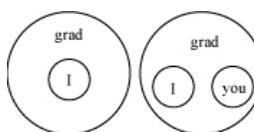
Also, hearing the term "logic of predicate", perhaps "predicate logic" that is mainstream in contemporary logic might be reminded. Nishida's logic is considered to be near to the one used by so-called "primitive tribes", schizophrenia<sup>11</sup>, and children. It is the same in that the nominative-identity is not assumed to be evident.



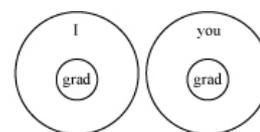
I am man. Socrates is man. Therefore, I am Socrates.

And moreover, it has been pointed out that the function of the metaphor, inference when an animal recognizes target, and joint consciousness is also formed by this logic<sup>12</sup>. Nishida himself mentioned "Mental concentration can be considered as determination of predicative side." "The world of the expression as the object field of consent is the world of mere joint consciousness." etc.

Logic of predicative



Logic of nominative



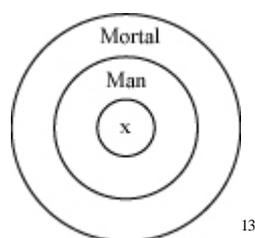
What is the difference between logic and general logic? Let's compare it with the predicate logic.

We can write syllogism simply on predicate logic as follows:-

$$\forall x \text{ Man}(x) \Rightarrow \text{Mortal}(x)$$

Man is mortal. x is man. Therefore, x is mortal.

Then we can illustrate logic of predicative as follows:-



Seen like this, "mistake" of the inference is dependent on whether the circle is overlapping. In other words, the "mistake" will be found in how to take the identity. The so-called "uncivilized" logic does not seem to draw concentric circle because of committing an 'error' in the point of identity of symbol. Incidentally, when Nishida also shows his own logic in the figure, the concentric circle is often drawn. As understood even if the example of the predicate logic is seen, a concentric circle having a one core indicates 'consecutive logic'.

How is it possible to judge the identity and the determination (the circumference)? Precisely, we can imagine that the circles are overlapping. Nishida describes it as follows.

Although they mention that primitive society is pre-logical<sup>14</sup>, since the society is human society, this should be already logical. (Malinowski said that there are already private individuals in primitive society.)

However the expressive side lives in consonance with intuitive side of historical body. It has not become symbolic expressive side. [...]Therefore it is not rational existence. However, when reason is separated from rational-body, it becomes a mere form of understanding.

As you can see, both of these forms of logic are used by us. Logic of *basho* doesn't put the identity or oneness on only one side. According to Nishida, each side is only abstract.

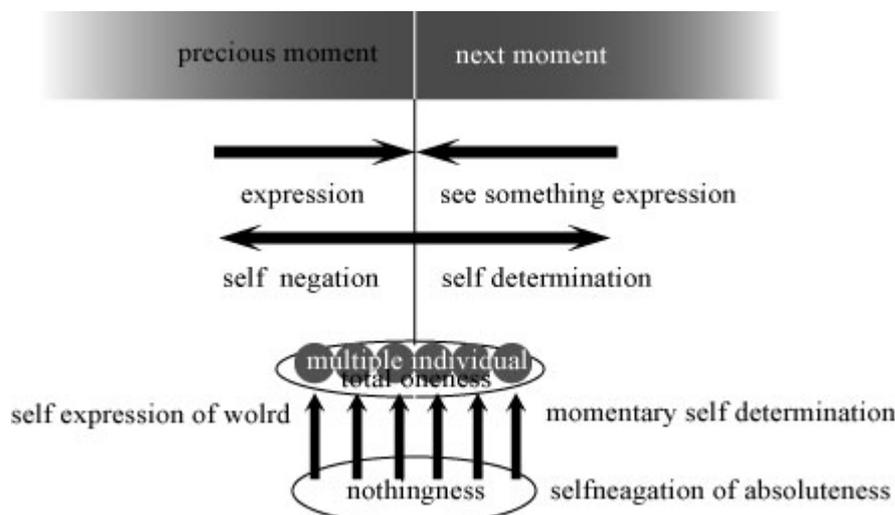
### Logic of Basho

Nishida set *basho* for the purpose of thinking from fact itself. Because the fact before the determination as nominative or objective is also already the determination of *basho*. The fact before viewing by ego is also already determination. There is already substance, consciousness, and life etc. before our viewing. Such facts don't have substance, ego, God etc. as agents for determination. Hence such determination is making determinate without something that is to be determinate, it is called determination of nothingness. Such absoluteness is not an object or a subject that we should believe or set. Even not believing is indebted to the absoluteness. "It is not that we should think like this. We think already like this."

Why can Nishida say such a thing? He does so on the grounds that logic of *basho* is 'concrete' logic.<sup>15</sup> The reason that it is concrete depends on the concept of the individual. Nishida thinks of individual as 'self' in a radical sense, and the logic contains 'self' as an extension of the logic, since it contains any individual. For example, an individual is thought in time, the viewpoint is here and now. Contrary things unite at each moment as individual determination. Vice versa, that is expression. It need not be in physical time and space, for the determination of the concept. When an individual is determined as an individual, the individual has already determined an abstract concept, it is being as the expression. For being concretely real individual, individual is not individual in this sense. So it is not only in the time. "To express self is to reflect self in external, seeing from there, getting out from continuous time". Individuals and expressions are two sides of the same coin, so to speak. And then the word "negation" means affirmation as something expressive. Then language emerges. Expression can never be the expressed thing itself, therefore it can express.<sup>16</sup>

In this sense, the expressive fact precedes any judgment<sup>17</sup>. Nishida said that *It is not that "we are alive" is known by thinking. We think since we are alive.*<sup>18</sup> This is quite ordinary reality. Nevertheless, ordinary reality indicates our "unspeakable" origin at each moment.

I have sketched roughly the structure below (I am not sure if it contributes towards your understanding):



*This is not simply the relation between one moment and the next, but an I-Thou relations*

Notes

1. [1936] 『西田幾多郎全集』 2003 7-p.333
2. Yujiro Nakamura[1987] said that "Nishida philosophy clarified a structure of Japanese language by chance". Makoto Asari[2000] said that "The Nishida philosophy had been unconsciously influenced by Japanese language". Moreover, Kojin Karatani[1997] pointed out "Nishida's philosophy influenced Japanese grammar theory". It shows different lines of argument: thought decides language, or language decides thought.
3. However we need further discussion, because Nishida adopts the idea (kakubutsuchichi) of Zhu Xi(1130-1200) whom Norinaga kept out as typical unnatural categorization(karagokoro). In his last writing, he wrote "with only language do we connect Good". Although I have not ascertained the reason, probably it can be understood by thinking that every phenomena is language. He wrote "mathematical sign is also language".
4. Nishida's first work "Inquiry into Good" described a state "without the least addition of deliberative discrimination". He thought of it as a primary fact, and addressed the problem all his life.
5. From the most ancient times, Japanese have thought that bird's voice, river's sound, and all phenomena are language. Touji Kamata pointed out that the nationalistic view of language is related to a clear sense of self. Moreover, he classifies language into ordinary, religious, poetic, and scientific, and judges its clarity or indication. Ordinary language has clarity and indication, scientific language has a relatively strong tendency of clarity, and poetic language has a relatively strong tendency of indication. That is, there is a common structure except for religious language. He shows that the Torah has a strong tendency of clarity, whereas Japanese religious language has a strong tendency of indication. Toji Kamata "Sign and Kotodama" 青土社 1990

6. [1940] 『西田幾多郎全集』 岩波書店 2004 9-p.4
7. Yoshihiko Ikegami is famous in relative linguistics.  
By the same token:  
-There are many passive expressions that often accompany active expression.  
-The tendency to depend on the context is strongest in the other language.  
Arimasa Mori(1911-1976)pointed out that Japanese does not a have logical structure.
8. Takehiro Kanaya "Japanese Language need not Subject" 講談社 2002  
"English also had not Subject" 講談社 2004
9. Tomoyuki Oka 2003 "There is Basho, There are not Subjective—A suggestion for Theory of Japanese Subject by Topological Ontology" *Bulletin of Tokyo Gakugei University. Humanities and social sciences. 1*
10. "The true self-identity of the self cannot be conceived of from the standpoint of subjective logic. Self identity does not mean to take the self as center and attribute the other to it. This too would merely be a repetition of the same words. The self-identity of the self involves the self differing from itself in one respect. Moreover, there is the true meaning of the principle of self-identity when it functions as a self, i.e. when it becomes one with an absolute other. Even if something grasped subjectively as a point of unity cannot exist, it neither means that there is no unity at all, nor does it mean a mere synthesis of diverse things. It has the meaning of a unity, for it has the meaning of contraries-qua-synthesis, i.e. the determination of something indeterminate.  
The self-identity is not 'A is A', as is usually thought, but rather the unity of contradictories."  
"A Preface of Metaphysics" [1933] "Fundamental Problems of Philosophy" 1970 p.16 『西田幾多郎全集』 2003 6-p.27

11. It called *Pleologic or Von Domarus's principle*  
Yujiro Nakamura "Nishida Kitaro" 2001  
Silvano Arieti, *Creativity: The Magic Synthesis*, 1976  
Eilhard Von Domarus, *The Specific Laws of Logic in Schizophrenia*, 1944
12. Sesshou Kido "Philosophy of Basho : Existence and Basho"  
文芸社 2003
13. However, there is a significant problem on the transformation. It seems to ignore the difference between predicate and individual. Nevertheless it is able to say that the logic of predicative is a mental function theory.
14. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl
15. *In order for there to be a world in which man acts and creates, the determination of the universal must become absolute nothingness. But when some merely determining non-entity is conceived, the creative individual ceases to be. Therefore, what is it which determines self-determining individuals? It is expression. When the individual attempts to determine itself as the determination of the undetermined it becomes infinite desire. Desire can neither be considered to be simply a physical force nor simply biological life. The object of desire is not yet in the present. The ego and the object of desire are not yet in the present. The ego and the object of desire do not oppose each other as two things oppose each other in simultaneous existence. We may say that the self's desire for a certain things is a seeing of non-being. [...] And for there to be impulse there must already be some actual dissatisfaction, or something which transcends actuality. If not, consciousness could not avoid being mechanized. But a things, as object of desire, must be regarded as simultaneous existence, for mere non-being cannot be the object of desire. If this were not the case, desire would merely be fancy. It must also oppose the self in simultaneous existence, i.e. be a thing. In such a sense, it already has a meaning over and above the content of an existing thing. It may be called expression which has being over and above the content of an existing things.* "The logical Structure of the Actual World" [1934] *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy*" Sophia University 1970 p146-147 『西田幾多郎全集』岩波書店 20036-p.215
16. *Therein each moment of time passes to the next moment through the self-negation of itself, thus constituting the unity of time.[...] If this is so, what is it that unites the individual moments of time? This raises the concept of the unity of meaning. Meaning is non-temporal; it transcends time. Each moment is dissolved into eternity, never to return again. But the consciousness of each individual moment intends meaning or possesses meaning, and meaning synthesizes before and after. This is the reason why a phenomenon of consciousness is an existence of meaning.* Ibid, p.141 6-p.210
17. Nishida "Objectivity of Knowledge" [1941] etc. 『西田幾多郎全集』岩波書店 2004 9-p.
18. Nishida "Logic and Life" [1936] 『西田幾多郎全集』岩波書店 2002 8-p.6

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