

名古屋大学大学院人文学研究科英語学分野公開講演会

共催：言語学分野, 日本語教育学分野

後援：「人文学研究科で言語を研究する院生のための最先端研究紹介・キャリア形成支援プロジェクト」

There is nothing arbitrary about the linguistic sign

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Abstract: Humans are natural-born communicators, using a rich communicative toolkit spanning multiple modalities, including speech, writing, sign, and gesture. Iconicity — the resemblance between form and meaning — is one important part of this toolkit. Examples of iconic communication include iconic gestures, such as pinching the fingers together to depict a small object, and onomatopoeias, such as using the English words “bang” and “beep” to imitate sounds. Traditionally, iconicity has been marginalized to the fringes of language, said to be the exception, rather than the rule. I will give an overview of exciting new experimental, corpus, and typological research from our lab that demonstrates how language makes much more use of iconicity than traditionally assumed. This research also shows that iconicity performs important functions in language learning and language evolution. After this empirical part of my talk, I will critique the notion of “arbitrariness,” the traditional opponent of iconicity. It is clear that languages conventionalize many non-iconic words, but it turns out that we can reference this important fact without having to speak about language being arbitrary. Doing so is problematic because, as I will explain in my talk, there are multiple different notions of arbitrariness in the literature that conflate logically distinct properties of linguistic signs. For example, arbitrariness is most often negatively defined as non-iconicity, but it sometimes equated with conventionalization, even though conventionalized forms can also be iconic. I will argue that those properties of the language system usually ascribed to a “principle of arbitrariness” can be derived from our capacity to form conventions, which frees linguistic signs from having to rely on iconicity to be understood.

- 日時：2023年2月9日 (木) 17:30-19:00 (February 9, 2023 – 8:30-10:00 UTC)
- 場所：オンライン
- 使用言語：英語
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