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**Gesticulation (身态) as the integration (誠) of body and mind**

**-a semantics of nodding**

**Abstract**

Human mind and human body have been separated from each other as belonging to familiar different categories. But what if we are supposed to admit a category of bodily posture? This is a paper to advance a thesis that mental content in bodily posture is a basis to integrate mind and body. First, what is the basis to claim that there is such a thing as a bodily posture? We humans all communicate each other not only through an ordinary language but also through human postures. Often human postures are much more efficient ways of expressing of ourselves and of understanding each other. Affirmation of this is more natural than its denial. Second, human postures have a mental content. Nodding expresses an agreement to what is suggested where turning indicates disapproval or ignorance. Nodding and turning are physical acts. And so far as they are acts they carry mental contents. But it is important that we do correctly understand the mental contents in such acts. Often mental acts have been taken to be subjective or solipsistic. But contemporary discussions on mental content indicate that mental content carries a wide context rather than a narrow one. If so, this would help us to see how body and mind integrate themselves in the human conception of ourselves.

**I. Integration of body and mind in gesticulation: opening**

While Western philosophers speak of the relation between the mind and the body, philosophers in East Asia ponder the relation between the body and the mind. There is perhaps a reason for this difference. In the Western philosophical tradition, the idea of a person without a body is conceptually sound whereas the idea of a person without a mind is impossible. So in the West, mind takes precedence over body. However, in East Asian philosophy, there is the thought that one cannot be fully human without refining one’s own body(修身), which can be understood as suggesting that the body is more important than the mind.[[1]](#endnote-1) This sort of contrast can be seen also in a distinction between letter language and non-letter language. The West has entertained the idea that the language which is dictated by the human mind is properly genuine language[[2]](#endnote-2) whereas any language which is not controlled in such a way is a lower class of language, if there is such. The East Asian world view has a picture that refinement of one’s body is one of most important virtues in the human life, integrating not only one’s body and mind but also one’s own person and the world. What is here to note is that gesticulation is a form of the integration of one’s body and mind and that any form of gesticulation is an antithesis to the dualism of mind and body. I am ready to claim a thesis that letter language is the best means of the human intelligence as well as a thesis that gesticulation is a proper language to play its force and influence in human lives. The present paper is to celebrate the performance of gesticulation in daily lives and to offer that gesticulation is an integration of body and mind, another example of mystifying[[3]](#endnote-3) notion of integration[[4]](#endnote-4).

If a dance work is a system of gesticulation, any form of gesticulation in an individual would be an expression of a part of her system of thought. If a dance is a language[[5]](#endnote-5) then so is any piece of gesticulation. Langer would allow an art symbol of presentational dance move to have a significance of emotional symbol so far as they have an isomorphic structure. She defends dance as a language since they can have a designation relation though not a correspondence relation[[6]](#endnote-6). Goodman tries to construct a dance notation(舞譜)[[7]](#endnote-7) so that dance moves should satisfy the condition for it to be a language: a token sign should not belong to more than one type of letter and a token sign should be determinable as to which type of letter it belongs; a letter type is to be correlated to only one set of referents and a letter type is to be distinguished semantically from another type of letter; and conditions like these[[8]](#endnote-8). If a dance can be shown to be a language then any of gesticulations can be presumed to be one. Not only intended gesticulations but also any ‘natural’ gesticulations are parts of a language. A sudden burst of laughter, cry or moaning is a form of language. In the context of body language, mind-reading or gut-feeling is a process or element of natural communication.

Langer and Goodman, seeking to explain dance as a language, presuppose the traditional assumption that any language is based on truth theoretic semantics and referential realism. But the present paper would base a view of language rather on a broader perspective. The notion of fitting includes as its criteria some traditional elements like truth and reference but is open to entertain notions like language game and non-letter languages[[9]](#endnote-9). Theoretical languages are explained in terms of a structure which consists of truth and reference but these do not exhaust other languages human beings have been using. The notion of fitting provides criteria not only for theoretical languages but also for other languages like ordinary discourses. The present paper aims to explain the semantics of gesticulation and more concretely to concentrate on one special example of it, namely, a semantics of nodding. A contrast of two semantics of nodding would be helpful, namely, truth semantics and fitting semantics. Two semantics would agree on that nodding is a speech act but they would differ on explaining how the nodding becomes meaningful.

**II. Nodding: a truth semantics**

Semantics of nodding tries to show how the language of nodding can be objectively meaningful. A nodder, the one who speaks the language of nodding, is a first-person speaker, subjectively conditioned. Yet the nodder would need a semantics of nodding which should maintain stability of bodily meaning of communication which members of the community would like to share, and it is clear that this semantics should go beyond the subjectivity of the nodder and obtain what’s called ‘subjectless objectivity’. Truth semantics has been regarded as the preferred mechanism to secure such an objective grammar. Since languages could be distinguished into theoretic language and discourse language, truth semantics should have been seen to be the best fit for the theoretic language. Since mathematical language and science language have been a sample of the theoretic language, the success and contribution which truth semantics has achieved are worthy of compliment. Many philosophers have been tempted by the great hit of truth semantics to generalize it to areas of human experience other than mathematics and science. Therefore those philosophers are reluctant or negative to separate roles of theoretic language and discourse language. But if the truth semantics is obliged to offer a particular semantics of nodding, what would it be like? One would be interested in pursuing this curiosity.

Truth semantics is seen to be seeking ‘a subjectless objectivity’ at the start of analytic philosophy when Frege and Russell proposed ideas of reference excluding anything involved with speaker-hearer.[[10]](#endnote-10) As ‘the Morning Star’ denotes Venus (Lucifer), the relation between a referring expression and a referent should hold independently of any particular individual or a community. This theory dictates that the meaning of a referring expression is its referent and the objectivity of the meaning is obtained just in that relation between an expression and its referent. The meaning of an expression is seen there not from a particular point of view but from everywhere or from nowhere. It has the divine perspective if there is such a thing. This notion of reference leads to the view of truth as in the sentence, “The Morning Star is identical with the Evening Star”. The system which consists of such true sentences should be one and the only one true system by which humans interpret, understand and explain the world out there.

If the truth semantics should offer a semantics of nodding, what would it be like? It would take nodding as one sort of referring expression. Nodding will be taken as a simple bodily event, a space-temporal symbol like any letter sign. Then it will search for the referent of the symbol. Here are two possible approaches. First, it will list candidates for the referent like greeting, respecting, affirming, permitting, accepting, and it will choose one from the list as its referent. Second, it will reject a simple connection between a sign and its referent and will hunt for the meaning of the sign not from what is called ‘referent’ but a symbol. Then, events like greeting, respecting, affirming, permitting, accepting are not referent but symbols for the sign. But two approaches of truth semantics for the nodding are not satisfactory. They assume that they can allow a sign to have various referents or symbols. But this assumption is inconsistent with the basic tenet of the truth semantics which aims to establish ‘subjectless objectivity’. Perhaps because of this situation the truth semantics turn to take body language as a lowerclass language or to ignore it as a language.

**III. Nodding – fitting semantics**

Since there are insurmountable difficulties in truth semantics for nodding, a search for an alternative semantics is desired. And a fitting semantics can be one of those semantics[[11]](#endnote-11). If a gesticulation act such as nodding is a bodily sign, the fitting semantics can easily assign to the sign any one of greeting, respecting, affirming, permitting, or accepting as its meaning. But what is here perplexing is that the one same body move can be assigned, for an example, three similar but different meaning: bowing, greeting and saluting. How can this situation be clarified by the fitting semantics?

In order to prepare our discussions about a fitting semantics, we can be attentive at three characteristics of nodding. First, the semantics of nodding seem to come to pass not in the usual symmetric relation of an expression and its referent, but in the reflexive relation of nodding. Just as a dance language does not demand a separation of an expression (signifier, signifiant) from its referent (signified, signifie), nodding is itself a greeting or an acceptance, going beyond the dichotomy of sign and object. This is like a structure of the language of beating or of kissing which does not permit a distinction between a sign and object or an objectification of the act. This may be cited as a case of integration, integration of a signifier and its signified. This points to the integration of part of body and element of mind. Truth semantics had difficulties when it tried to search sign of nodding in a physical body move and meaning of nodding from the list of candidate symbols, the fitting semantics face no such problems as it rejects such a dichotomy. The reflexive relation of nodding calls for other than truth semantics.

The second characteristics of nodding is to be found in its structure where nodding reflects diversity as well as intimacy. On the one hand, nodding is a performance extended to anybody as an act of performing care or acceptance. It could be a bodily act toward persons of no previous acquaintance, without an introduction, or as an anonymous intercourse. Nodding can take place as an expression of care, like waving one’s hand, in passing or momentarily. Nodding is a universal language of positivity both in the West and the East. On the other hand, nodding can be performed between persons of intimately personal relation. It is an act of almost an enigmatic or secretive language. Furthermore, nodding is a communication only toward the second person, not to any third person. The dual structure of nodding’s diversity and intimacy entreats other than truth semantics.

The third property of nodding may be seen in its performative action[[12]](#endnote-12). When you promised your mother to come to visit her next weekend, you did not describe a proposition which could be true or false but you performed an act of pledge and a commitment with your integrity. Likewise, when I nodded to greet you when I saw you this morning at a conference room, I did not have to convey a particular message to you but I just expressed that I am glad to see you. Yet there are differences between nodding to greet you and saying that I am glad to see you. Saying may be true or false but nodding can only be fully sincere or less sincere. The difference between verbal language and body language is based on the difference of two spaces. In the verbal space there is a human made gap or distance between a speaker and a hearer but in the body space they see or meet each other directly without a medium. Just as a dancer is living her own life personally with her body, a nodder is engaged, authentic, and performative when he is nodding.

**IV. nodding to understand by a fitting semantics**

I tried to show that a truth semantics has difficulties to explain the reflexivity of nodding and its duality of diversity-intimacy and its speech act attribute. But how persuasively could a fitting semantics deliver an explanation for the task? Let’s suppose that truth is neither descriptive nor real but epistemic and normative. Then, epistemic truth is open toward a use-semantics and a theory of fitting accepts epistemic truth as a mechanism of concretization of the use-semantics. Many tend to agree that language use is an execution of a language game and neither univocal nor incontestable. A fitting semantics should be able to explain the character of the intra-game of an individual game as well as character of inter-game of various language games. The notion of fitting has a task to explain in its entirety[[13]](#endnote-13) but can be summarized as follows.

‘Language’ has come a long way to denote natural languages like Korean and English as well as artificial languages such as communism, General Relativity theory and Buddhism; arts languages like Bach music, van Gogh’s paintings, and movies; and body languages such as hand shaking and gesticulations. A reason why the truth semantics has difficulty to explain these various languages together is that the notion of truth is neither basic nor radical. But the notion of fitting is basic enough to integrate certain two states of affairs, some two sentences, a sentence and a state of affairs, state of affairs and criteria, state of affairs and a theory, theory and interpretation, and to explain the relation of those two items. One presupposes a certain language in order to learn the conceptions of expressions like ‘true’, ‘correct’, ‘consistent’, ‘necessary’. But you need not to have any language in order to learn the concept of fitting. For fitting is a primitive notion, what is presupposed to learn any language. A baby cries when being situated to be hungry or wet. When the mother responds to the situation with a fitting measure the baby stops crying. Mother usually does not say “this is a fitting measure’ when she responds. The baby learns the concept of fitting even before the baby learns the word ‘fitting’. The baby’s learning the conception of fitting is natural and bodily.

Before babies can say ‘yes’ or ‘no’, they can express their positivity by head-nodding up-and-down or their negativity by head-turning right-and-left. Just as they learn to say ‘bye-bye’ by waving hand, they also learn what to mean by head-nodding or head-turning.[[14]](#endnote-14) How do babies learn head-nodding? One hypothesis for this question may be

presented. It is that babies learn head-nodding by being able to distinguish in what their mothers try to teach which is fitting from which is not fitting since babies already learnt the concept of fitting. Though truth semantics demand the distinction between signifier and signified for head-nodding in order to face the dead end eventually, fitting semantics can claim that babies can learn head-nodding by grasping integration of signifier and signified in head-nodding. Babies will express the positivity by head-nodding at the first stage, they will soon arrive to break down the positivity into various different positive forms to enrich meanings of head-nodding.

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1. Mencius (1970): one who does not mind on others in pain is not a human(無不 忍之心 非人也), <[http://hanja.naver.com/word?q=%E5%9B%9B%E7%AB%AF](http://hanja.naver.com/word%5C?q=%E5%9B%9B%E7%AB%AF)>. Since there was not a dichotomy in the East Asian tradition between mind and body it may not be appropriate to ask which is more important. It would be sufficient to say that if a body language is separable from a body language the former offers more transparent basis for interpersonal communication. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The Contrast between Brentano (1995) proposition (B) and Chisholm (1981) thesis (C) may be helpful for this. (B) Physical phenomena can be expressed in non-intentional sentences, but psychological phenomena are directed upon an object and related to content and cannot be expressed without intentional sentences; (C) An expression E is intentional ↔ For an indicative sentence E which uses a singular term, neither E nor its negation implies that what the singular term denotes exists or does not exist; and for an indicative sentence F which has a propositional clause, neither F nor its negation implies that the proposition is either true or false. Confer: Min, Chanhong (1997): 33-62. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The *Zhungyong* notion of integration is mystifying in various senses. One of them would be that the notion of the 5th century B.C. seems to foresee Davidson’s discussion of intentionality in 1980s. Donald Davidson (1980) was an advocate of physicalism. Yet, at the same time he famously insisted on the autonomy of the mental, stationing rationality and the holism of beliefs at the center of his philosophy of mind. If intentional sentences are grounded in the intentionality of mental representations as Chisholm wanted to move to, then it stands to reason that a proper response to Brentano's dualism would require us to turn back to the metaphysics of mind of some sort. An important attempt in this direction is Dadvidson's anomalous monism, Davidson maintained that there are no causal laws covering a psychophysical realm, thereby denying any relation between physical event types and mental event types. He believes that intentionality is a holistic property of beliefs and rationality, which is based on a weak supervenience of mental event tokens on physical event tokens. This is a proposal which departs from the tradition of dualistic intentionality.

For clarification of the notion of supervenience, one may like to compare weak and strong superveniences. The weak supervenience Davidson (2001) chooses is that necessarily for any event which has a mental property, the event has a particular physical property and if any event has this physical property then this event has that mental property: ℎ(x)(M)[Mx ⟶ (∃P)[{Px & (y)(Py ⟶ My)}], whereas the strong supervenience Jaegwon Kim (1989) favors is that necessarily for any event which has a mental property, the event has a particular physical property and necessarily if any event has this physical property then this event has that mental property: ℎ(x)(M)[Mx ⟶ (∃P) [{Px & ℎ(y)(Py ⟶ My)}]. Cf. Chung, D. “Intentionality of integration(誠)-from dualistic intentionality to yinyang intentionality” (in Korean), *Sogang Journal of Philosophy,* 9(March 2005) pp. 73-88. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Zisi. *Zhongyong* (*The Doctrine of the Mean* 『中庸』), translated by James Legge. The U. of Adelaide, 2014, <<https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/c/confucius/c748d/>>. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Margolis (1938: 376-389) offers at least two arguments against the thesis that dance is a language. The first one is ‘the narrow view of language’ which says that whereas a language is a system of conventions which govern vocabularies, sentences, grammar and so on the dance is short of meeting the condition. The second argument is ‘the causal expression theory’ which states what a dance is. A dancer constructs her emotion into a correlate to express as a dance work where the correlate is not a conventional sign but a natural sign. The dancer tries to use the natural sign to cause a viewer’s emotion to coincide with her own. Her dance works is merely a starting point for the causal chain and not an agent to represent her emotions in accordance with certain rules. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Langer, Susan K. *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (1942), Third Edition, Harvard University Press, 1957. Some may object to Langer by saying that the alleged isomorphic structure between the occurrent emotion and the manifested symbol could not guarantee the sufficient condition for each other. But Lanager’s notion of isomorphism may be taken not to subscribe a correspondence relation but not to deny a designation relation. It is like the fact that when parents name their baby with “Hasong” the relation between the baby and the name is neither that of correspondence nor that of sufficiency, but of designation. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Ziff (1981) claims that it would be difficult to construct a sound dance notation and that dance is not a language. He allows dance to have expressive values but does not discuss how these expressive values are conveyed to audiences or critics. Obviously he assumes that expressive values are transmitted intuitively’. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Goodman (1976). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Chung\_2008\_”Fitting\_A Case of Cheng(誠) Intentionality”; Daihyun Chung*. Philosophy of Fitting-Toward a Theory of Truth and Meaning* (in Korean). Seoul: Chulhakgwahyunsilsa, 1997. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Chung (1996): 53-74. Frege’s notion of sense was neither intentional nor communal but Platonic and Russell’s reduction of singular terms into predicates indicated his desire to go back to physical things in the world. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. The truth conditional semantics faced many challenges, one of which was how to relate a sentence with the corresponding fact without using the sentence, the clarification of the meaning of which was the task of the truth conditional semantics. Since Wittgenstein there were various ideas for an alternative approach such as conceptions of use, verification, pragmatics. I offered another alternative in the idea of fitting, by suggesting one rough generalization that the intellectual tradition of the West was influenced by metaphysical externalism which led to the notion of truth whereas the intellectual heritage of the East Asia was dominated by universal internalism which has prioritized values such as circulation (通), mean (中), way (道) in Confucianism and all-in-one-mind (和淨) in Buddhism, all of which may be summed up in the notion of fitting for the purpose of an alternative semantics. Daihyun Chung, Fitting Semantics, summary [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. The notion of nodding as a performative action is not new. It was originated in L. Wittgenstein’s idea of meaning as use and discussed by Austin and Searle as a speech act. Wittgenstein, L. Philosophical Investigations, Oxford, 1953: §§ 201-202, 217, 241; Austin, J.L., 1962. How To Do Things With Words, 2nd Edition, ed. J.O. Urmson and M. Sbisá. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Searle, J., *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Chung (1997): pp. 291-439. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. <<https://www.parentlane.com/baby/baby-development/your-little-one-will-nod>-her-head -for-a-yes>.

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