

# Context Change and Differentiation of Primitive Hundun Language

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**Abstract:** The external phenomenon can change into the external context. The internal context is constructed with internal phenomena. With the support of the external context, human speech voice changed into primitive hundun language, during which arbitrariness of language is revealed. The differentiation of primitive hundun language gave birth to language, which made the construction of internal context possible. With the support of the internal context, the language obtains the feature of displacement, which marks the change from primitive hundun language into human language.

## 1. Introduction

Hundun (undifferentiation) etymology theory suggests that, “the initial form of language is primitive hundun language (undifferential language); language originates from the differentiation of primitive hundun language”. [1] Primitive hundun language is “inseparable from the immediate context”; “with the development of primitive men’s cognition and the change of context (survival environment), primitive hundun language began to differentiate.” [1]

The change of context is supposed to be one of the important motivations leading to the differentiation of primitive hundun language. “Context change” mainly refers to the change from the external context to the internal context.

## 2. “Internal and External Phenomena” and Context

Saussure distinguishes two phenomena in language, internal or conscious phenomena, and external phenomena that can be grasped directly. [2] The context includes physical context, discourse context, and background knowledge of the speaker and the recipient. [3] The internal and external phenomena are both related to the context.

### 2.1 External Context

“The external phenomenon” refer to “objects outside of or irrelevant to language” and “can be directly grasped”, that is, they can be “directly perceived by human senses”. [1] “Physical context refers to the speaker and the recipient, the temporal-spatial situation of conversation, and all that exist in the situation.” [3]

Elements in physical context are objects that “can be directly grasped”, so the physical context can be regarded as the external phenomenon. The external phenomenon can change into the physical context when conversations occur within the context or the phenomenon. This kind of context is defined as the external context.

### 2.2 Internal Context

“The internal phenomenon” proposed by Saussure is “the conscious phenomenon” and is composed of “significations of all languages”, including the significations designating “concrete objects” or “subjective world”, and significations expressing “‘the inner spirit’ of mankind as a group”. [1] “The internal phenomenon” is an “inner spiritual or conscious phenomenon” and related to language. Signals and significations are intimately linked in signs. [2] The fact that “the internal phenomenon” is composed of significations means the internal phenomenon cannot be without signs.

The background knowledge of the speaker and the recipient is also one aspect of the context. “The background knowledge of the context can be very extensive, including common sense, social and cultural knowledge, as well as knowledge about language.” [3] The background knowledge obviously exists in the “inner spiritual realm” and can be regarded as “the conscious phenomenon”. The significations (concepts) in “the internal phenomenon” help constructing the background knowledge. The background knowledge of a context is constructed with the internal phenomena relevant to that context. This kind of context is defined as the internal context.

### **2.3 Summary**

The external phenomenon can change into the external context; its constituent elements exist before language and have nothing to do with language.

The internal context is constructed with internal phenomena; its constructing material cannot exist before language and is relevant to language.

In short, language is not a must for the external context, while it is indispensable to the internal context.

## **3. “Differentiation” and Context Change**

Primitive hundun language can function in external context. When primitive hundun language came into being, there were no signs yet to provide materials to construct internal context. The differentiation of primitive hundun language gave birth to language, which made the construction of internal context possible. The internal context is one of the results (or purposes) of the differentiation of primitive hundun language.

### **3.1 External Context and “Lundun Language”**

Primitive hundun language can designate objects in external context. Primitive hundun language, as the source and initial form of language, can fulfill the basic functions of language with the help of external context.

Interjections can be seen as a kind of primitive hundun language. The interjection is “the form of language prior to the full development of human cognition”, “the foundation” or “the bottom of human language” and “the original language form used by human ancestors”; it “share the same features with primitive hundun language”. [4] “Ah”, “oh” and the like, articulated by men, are similar to animal cries, “not like language”, and “express emotions or meanings” though “not very clear and sophisticated”. [5] Wang puts interjections somewhere between animal cry and human language, which reflects the nature of primitive lundun language as a transitional form between animal and men.

Since interjections can “express emotions or meanings”, which is the most basic social function of language. Interjections can function as signs. Interjections sometimes can be used to greet someone, or designate something, in which the relation between the form and the meaning is relatively arbitrary.

Interjections can function as signs or language in external context. With the help of external context and accompanying actions such as postures and so on (strictly speaking, these should also be included in the external context), primitive men without the ability to use language can use “hundun” voice to designate different objects so as to accomplish elementary communication and cooperation.

The mode of figure and ground plays an important role in using voice to designate external objects. Figure-ground model is a cognitive model of perception. “The figure refers to a prominent part of a cognitive concept or perception, that is, the focus of attention; ground is the part that highlights the figure”; “the figure can be perceived through gestalt perception”; figure and ground can convert into each other. [6] The object designated by voice can be taken as a figure, and other elements in the context constitute the ground. Successful designating an object in communication is like highlighting the figure against the ground. This can be seen as the differentiation of the reference from the hundun external context. This also reflects the duality or dichotomy of language.

The single-word exclamatory sentence can be found in modern languages. It is “the living fossil of the primitive hundun language” [4] The use of single-word exclamatory sentences varies between contexts, and its “relevant context” includes “on-site elements”, “cognitive psychology and cognitive abilities”, “paralanguage” and so on. [4] “On-site elements” and “paralanguage” that can be directly grasped by cognitive psychology and cognitive abilities of speakers and recipients construct external context. The same single-word exclamatory sentences express different emotions and meanings in different contexts. It is similar to the primitive men designating different objects with voices alike. Besides, pronouns (especially demonstrative pronouns and some personal pronouns) also have something to do with primitive hundun language.

In summary, with the support of external context and cognitive abilities, primitive men changed instinctive or unconscious voices or cries into primitive hundun language. The primitive hundun language, in turn, changed external phenomena into external context.

The primitive hundun language in external context is closer to animal instinct than human language. Like other social species, men shout to others to help them directly grasp something external. The communication is confined to external context. It occurs at the immediate time and space, with the sole purpose to perform or do actions. Unlike the case today, voice mainly supplement or assist postures or expressions in communication.

### **3.2 Internal Context and Differentiation**

When primitive men encountered unprecedented problems in communications, they might have discovered the function of voice to designate objects. They took advantage of the new discovery to solve new problems and cause primitive hundun language to “evolve” into real human language.

The object cannot always be grasped directly by both the speaker and the recipient at the same time in a communication. If the speaker directly grasps the object (that is, the object becomes part of the external phenomenon he can directly grasp), and designate the object with his voice, then the object changes into a component of his external context at that time. But if the recipient does not directly grasp the object (that is, it does not become part of the external phenomenon he can directly grasp), there is no such component in his external context, and he can hardly understand what the speaker is designating. If primitive men realized that there is no natural or intrinsic relation between voice and designated objects and the relation can be set up artificially, they can solve the new problem. They were aware that a symbol can arbitrarily represent something very different. To meet the specific needs of communication, people can use voice creatively. In other words, they discovered and revealed arbitrariness and creativity of language.

If the reference or designated object is not in the external context, it is in the internal context. Before language, primitive men already had “pre-concepts” or “potential significations” [7] The pre-concepts are adequate for the basic behaviors of primitive men. With the support of external context, pre-concepts are also adequate for elementary communication.

Pre-concepts are hundun or undifferentiated by nature; Meanings, Functions and emotions are mixed in one. Saussure believes that the thought before language is “vague” and “floating” like a nebula. [8] The sign separates the pre-concept from other pre-concepts in the recipient’s inner spirit. The separated pre-concept represents the object that does not show up in the external context, and becomes the object that the voice can designate. The relation between the object in the external context directly grasped by the speaker and the signification in the internal context of the recipient is established through speech voice. In other words, a semantic triangle therefore comes into being.

What the speaker designates with the voice in the external context does not necessarily correspond exactly to the signification in the recipient’s internal context. They are more relevant than correspond to each other. Because of the similar physiology and cognition, the external context directly grasped by the speaker and the recipient should be alike; they share the same external context to some extent. Due to the different personal experience, cognitive abilities, etc., there are many differences in their respective pre-concepts. Without the convention of language, it is difficult for both parties to share the internal context. The inner context originates and evolves along with language in every attempt to communicate. The development of language and the construction of

inner context happen simultaneously.

When both the speaker and the recipient in the communication use speech voice to signify objects that do not exist in the external context, they already perform the narrative function of language. With the support of internal phenomena, they make use of the displacement of language. The primitive hundun language in the external context is mainly to act or perform, while the language in the internal context can narrate. It is displacement that cause this change. When hundun language shows displacement, it becomes a relatively advanced form, and approaches real human language. From this point of view, displacement is a major feature that distinguishes human language from animal communication.

Although primitive men did not need to “talk” about “the past” often, as long as they want to communicate about things that are not in the immediate time and space, they will find the inconvenience of hundun or undifferential signs. As mentioned above, in communication occurring in external context, the speaker and the recipient can directly grasp the boundary separating the reference of the voice and other elements in the context as the ground. But in the internal context, this boundary cannot be directly grasped any more, and it is also difficult for the recipient to know the state of the object. However, the dichotomy of the figure-ground model still works. This enables us to artificially separate the reference from other elements as the ground in the pre-concepts.

More significations are required and created to clarify the state of the reference. The division of concepts is accomplished through the differentiation of primitive hundun language. The significations generated through differentiation are materials to construct the internal context. With increasing significations in the internal context, the voice can more precisely signify the signification and express the meaning. More significations means more signals and signs. Language serves as the motivation to generate internal phenomena. The differentiation of hundun language divides internal phenomena into smaller components. Internal phenomena provide materials to construct internal context. It also provides significations that can be signified by language signs. Internal phenomena and language promote each other in the process.

#### **4. Conclusion**

With the support of external context, human speech voice changed into primitive hundun language, during which arbitrariness of language is revealed. In order to meet the requirements of language communication in internal context, the differentiation of primitive hundun language leads to more significations. With the support of internal context, the language obtains the feature of displacement, which marks the change from primitive hundun language into real human language.

The differentiation of primitive hundun language is the process influenced by both the internal and external contexts. We can find these two contexts in pragmatic (especially spoken) context today, which proves that language is still undergoing the process of differentiation.

Some design features of human language originate from animal communication, such as arbitrariness. However, men take the full advantage of these features. The connection and transition between human language and animal communication proves that human language did not come out of thin air, it is the result of long term evolution. The initial form of language does not require high level of cognition. In order to use increasingly complex language, human cognition (which can be reflected in the richness of the internal phenomenon) develops along with language.

Displacement is a turning point. When men need to talk about objects and events that are not in the immediate time and space, they have to construct the internal context which leads to the differentiation of primitive hundun language. The construction and the differentiation promote each other and generate an endogenous force for language to develop. That is to say, from this moment on, language can grow as if it has life. Human cognition on the one hand are the soil from which this “life” grows, on the other hand, it is like the “fruit” this “life” bears.

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