

Logic and Language at the Mad Tea-Party

INAKI, Akiko and OKITA, Tomoko

I. Introduction

In Wonderland, Alice, the main character in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, experiences many curious, queer or out-of-the-way things, one after another. One of the most extreme case occurs at a tea-party, narrated in Chapter VII of the book. The tea-party is held by the March Hare with the Mad Hatter and the Dormouse. From the very beginning of the tea-party, everything goes wrong, which is triggered by the very minor conversational gap between Alice and them. And the party results in mad and stupid one to Alice.

According to the Cheshire Cat's advice, Alice walks up towards the house of the March Hare. Its chimneys are shaped like ears and the roof is thatched with fur. She thinks it must be the right house for the March Hare. Nibbling some pieces of mushroom, she raises herself to about two feet high in proportion to the house. Under a tree in front of the house, the March Hare and the Mad Hatter are having tea at one corner of a large table, using as a cushion the Dormouse, which sat sleeping deeply between them. When she approaches them, Alice is stopped by their crying out, "No room! No room!" Since they are crowded together at one corner of the table, she retorts firmly that there's plenty of room and forces herself to sit down in a large arm-chair at one end of the table.

Alice understands this "No room!" means there is no room for *her* sitting on and argues them down by telling there's plenty of vacant seats, actually, and sits down. She thinks that she is told the thing being present is as if not present. She simply takes the literary meaning of the phrase and contradicts them physically. She never thinks of inferring the intention of her conversational exchangers. She would have considered why they insisted that the thing being present was as if not present, or what was their implication. If she considered at this point why the March Hare said what was clearly false, she would not have been involved in the following mad situation. This very first conversational exchange suggests the situation, "insisting the thing present as if it is not present," which serves to foreshadow the underlying plot of the tea-party, "method in madness."

From this on, in return for her self-righteous insistence Alice is retorted and argued down thoroughly, according to the contrary situation of insisting the thing un-present as if it is present, which is, so to speak, insisting the thing of "mock" existence. This twisted and therefore illogical way of saying

appears in various forms one after another at the tea-party. Here we will reconstruct the story from the point of mock existence and investigate how language supports this theme, and how the party goes wrong and comes to the mad one.

2. Mock in Logic

2.1. Mock Wine

Alice is offered wine by the March Hare, saying “Have some wine.” She looks around, but cannot find any wine. She says, “I don’t see any wine.” To this saying is returned the serious saying, “There’s isn’t any.” It is quite natural that Alice doesn’t see any wine, because in the first place, there isn’t any wine at all. This is the first case of retaliation, serving “unpresent” wine as if it is present.

Offering the mock present thing as if it is the present thing fools the use of the word *some*, which is quite irritating to Alice. Then she remonstrates and scolds them, saying “Then it wasn’t very civil of you to offer it.” Her blaming is retorted by the March Hare, saying “It wasn’t very civil of you to sit down without being invited.” By the same sentence pattern of “it is very civil of you to,” she is blamed on her bleaching etiquette of sitting down without being told to do so. This indicates for them she is an impolite intruder who should receive due argument down.

Then Alice excuses herself saying, “I didn’t know it was *your* table, it’s laid for a great many more than three,” which means that she thinks the March Hare himself is one of the guests invited for the party. The Hatter who has been silent all the time, says suddenly, “Your hair wants cutting.” To his personal and impolite remark, she says, “You should learn not to (make personal remarks)”, which is the common pattern for a lecture.

2.2. Mock Guessing

To respond this lecture, the Hatter gives Alice a riddle. The riddle is “why is a raven like a writing-desk?” Alice is glad they have begun asking riddles, and feels some fun. She wants to challenge to answer it and tells that she believes she can guess that. The verb *guess* and the word *riddle* make the natural collocation, but this comes to a mock case of saying *guess* though it is impossible to guess.

Alice is given the response by the March Hare which substitutes *find out* for *guess* cunningly, and says “Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?” The word *find out* implies making the hidden part clear, compared with the word *guess* with no guarantee of existence presupposition. The March Hare is tricky in knowing that this riddle has no answer, and yet using the word *find out*. She cannot, however, notice this cunning saying of the March Hare. She falls into a trap and gives a positive answer, saying, “Exactly so.”

2.3. Mock Watch

Taking the watch out of his pocket, the Hatter says to Alice, “What day of the month is it?” Hearing her response, the Hatter sighs and says, “Two days wrong!” He looks angrily at the March Hare, and reproaches him. The March Hare apologizes telling that it was the best butter. This explains why the Hatter is angry with the March Hare: he put the butter, instead of the watch-oil, in the watch with the bread knife and some crumbs got in as well. The watch does not work well, of course, though it was the best butter as the March Hare insisted. The March Hare dips the watch into his cup of tea, but the watch is still out of order.

Hearing “Two days wrong,” Alice is so curious that she looks at the watch, and finds out that his watch does not tell what o’clock it is, but tells the day of the month. The Hatter explains that as her watch does not tell what year it is, so is the case with his watch not telling what o’clock it is. Alice cannot imagine such a mechanism of his watch while she understands well that her watch stays the same year for such a long time together and it does not tell what year it is. His remark puzzles her, though he is sure to speak English.

Later the Hatter’s remark is clarified. He and his friend Time have quarreled since the great concert held by the Queen of Hearts, and Time won’t move and so it is always six o’clock. His watch stays the same time, which means it is of no use to tell what o’clock it is. So it tells what day of the month, which seems to be the active factor. Here the Hatter introduces a new and reversing idea that his watch tells markedly the day of the month which used to be unmarked as Alice’s.

If the time stops, actually, the day, the month, and also the year should keep the same. But here Time is particularly personified, and gains “his” identity free from the time hierarchy.

2.4. Mock Riddle and Mock Time

Suddenly the Hatter asks Alice, “Have you guessed the riddle yet?” Honestly confessing “No, I give it up,” Alice demands the answer. To this is returned “I haven’t the slightest idea.” from the Hatter and then the March Hare follows suit. The Hatter’s riddle turns out to be nothing but a mock riddle. This evades Alice who takes for granted that the riddle must have an appropriate answer. Here reveals a significance in the March Hare’s previous confirmation with *find out*, “Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?”

Disgusted at the mock riddle, Alice blames, “I think you might do something better with the time than wasting it in asking riddles that have no answers.” To this retorts the Hatter, “If you know Time as well as I do, you wouldn’t talk about wasting *it*. It’s *him*.” With the personification of time as capitalized Time, the Hatter introduces, so to speak, the mock Time, as if it were existing. He finds fault with

Logic and Language at the Mad Tea-Party

Alice's literal wording and demands the right pronoun *him* instead of *it*. Here matters how to deal with time or how to go around with Time.

Contrary to the Hatter's saying of "if you only kept on good terms with him, he'd do almost anything you liked with the clock," he confesses that they quarreled so that Time wouldn't do a thing he requested. The quarrel results in Time being always at 6 o'clock, tea-time. This is just the reverse of what the Hatter cited for advantage of being on good terms with Time; to skip the time for lessons to the time for dinner and keep it as long as he likes.

Their quarrel occurred at the great concert. To the Hatter's song, the Queen asserted "He's murdering the time!" *To murder the time* is a variation of *to kill the time* meaning *to sing out of rhythm*. Interpreting this expression with the personification invites a misunderstanding on the part of Time; the Hatter was going to murder him.

The revenge of Time is not to do what the Hatter likes with the clock and this explains an endless tea-party. Time goes on strike so for them it is always at the tea-time. With no chance to wash the tea things, they are compelled to keep moving round for clean cups, which gives advantage only for the Hatter taking the lead. There also arises a problem, as Alice points out, "what happens when you come to the beginning again?"

At this point Alice can understand the reason so many tea things are put out on the large table. Here we can also understand why they refused her in terms of "No room!" though plenty of room. Destined to keep always moving round for clean things, they could predict their second rounds with only used things so they could not help affording any room for her.

2.5. Mock Awakening

The Dormouse has been fast asleep with a few exceptions which seems "to be talking in its sleep." The Hatter and the March Hare pinch the Dormouse from both sides demanding for a change of subject. The Dormouse, slowly opening its eyes, says, "I wasn't asleep. I heard every word you fellows were saying." A story he tells, however, involves careless substitution of words or meanings which leads to the nonsense world. This indicates that he is talking half asleep which might be called mock awakening. To the Dormouse itself, awakening is the unmarked so that he might be seemed in mock asleep; to others, sleeping is the unmarked for him though he insists himself awake which suggests mock awakening. Then his nonsense story reinforces that he is in mock awakening. It follows that the story told in mock awakening is a mock talk with no coherence.

In the meantime are introduced some curious episodes, implying mock. The first is mock tea. The March Hare offers "some more tea" to Alice who hasn't had nothing yet. Alice retorts back in offended

tone to this hypocritical offering, pointing there could not be another helping of what is not at all.

The second is the case of mock personal remarks. To the nonsense interruption of the Hatter, Alice retorts “Nobody asked *your* opinion.” Particular about her wording *your*, the Hatter in return blames her, “Who’s making personal remarks now?” He makes it up into a personal remark only because of the use of *your*. Her utterance is not, needless to say, the personal remark as he insists, though somewhat reproachful. The Hatter over-generalizes her expression with *your* into personal remarks and makes up mock personal remarks.

The third is the case of mock clean things. The Hatter demands “I want a clean cup, let’s all move one place on.” The Hatter who takes the lead in the move, however, is “the only one who got any advantage from the change.” The rest are compelled to make do with used things because of the circular move throughout the tea-time.

2.6. Mock Remarks

To the puzzling question, “did you ever see such a thing as a drawing of a muchness?”, Alice begins to answer, collecting her thoughts, “Really, now you ask me, I don’t think—” The Hatter does not miss her hesitation and fires “Then you shouldn’t talk.” Ignoring her pending intonation and what will follow, the Hatter takes her remarks with period, “I don’t think,” which brings unusual implication that she is not the thinker at all. Based on this implication comes a further counterattack; if you don’t think, then you shouldn’t speak. This is too much to her, and she gets up in great disgust, and walks off. This situation is just the contrary to the beginning of this chapter when she sat down without invitation, ignoring their suggestion, “No room!”

Such a mock world makes Alice disgusted and say, “It’s the stupidest tea-party I ever was at in all my life.”

3. Language for Mock in Logic

3.1. Language and Presupposition

From the following conversational exchange starts the method in madness of the story.

(1) “Have some wine,” the March Hare said in an encouraging tone.

Alice looked all round the table, but there was nothing on it but tea. I don’t see any wine, she remarked.

There isn’t any,” said the March Hare.

The word *some* presupposes the existence of something, which the March Hare neglects. The word is used cunningly to support mock logically. It may be said that this part is the first landmark. Then this way of wording will be more complicated in the later example with *some more*, where *some* is combined with comparison.

3.2. Language in Saying and Meaning

The March Hare finds fault with Alice's wording and gives her advice concerning her saying and meaning.

(2) "Come, we shall have some fun now!" thought Alice. "I'm glad they've begun asking riddles—I believe I can guess that," she added aloud.

"Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?" said the March Hare.

"Exactly so," said Alice.

"Then you should say what you mean," the March Hare went on.

"I do," Alice hastily replied; "at least —at least I mean what I say—that's the same thing, you know."

"Not the same thing a bit!" said the Hatter. "Why, you might just as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see'!"

"You might just as well say," added the March Hare, "that 'I like what I get' is the same thing as 'I get what I like'!"

"You might just as well say," added the Dormouse, which seemed to be talking in its sleep, "that 'I breathe when I sleep' is the same thing as 'I sleep when I breathe'!"

Alice's responding to them causes another trouble. Her point is that even if the order of *say* and *mean* is changed, her proposition of utterance remains the same. But she gets counterattacks from three of them. Their points are if her saying is true, they might as well say like the following.

Alice: "I say what I mean" is the same thing as "I mean what I say."

the Hatter: "I see what I eat" is the same thing as "I eat what I see."

the March Hare: "I like what I get" is the same thing as "I get what I like."

the Dormouse: "I breathe when I sleep" is the same thing as "I sleep when I breathe."

Though following the same pattern as Alice's, [I (V₁) what I (V₂).], the three choose two unrelated verbs, make up the sentences, and insinuate that if her saying is true, theirs should be also true. But they all cannot say to be true, and so her point will come to be cancelled.

Alice wants to say that even if replacing *mean* with *say* or replacing *say* with *mean*, the total meaning of the sentences, “I mean what I say” and “I say what I mean,” are the same, because saying equals to meaning, at least to her. She always says what she means, and her saying is her meaning. To her, saying and meaning should be the same thing in the true sense of interlocution. This is the sincerity condition in the ideal state of talk exchange, though. It follows that she can freely take either expression of *meaning what one says* or *saying what one means*.

To make the situation more definite, there are two possibilities in interpreting *what*, one of which is to interpret it as *that which* meaning (definite interpretation), and the other one is to interpret it as *whatever* meaning (indefinite interpretation). The former one is for Alice, to be sure.

The Hatter and the March Hare choose two arbitrary and unrelated verbs, make sentences, and tease Alice. They are sure to intend to use *what* in indefinite meaning, *whatever*, and make her believe “I see whatever I eat” is the same thing as “I eat whatever I see” and “I like what I get” is the same thing as “I get what I like.” So their replacing two verbs produces the unexpected but rather convincing story of a heavy eater and a greedy person.

Alice simply explains, metalinguistically, the ideal state of speech act, where there is no gap in implication and occurrence between “saying” and “meaning.” While they aim at making fun of her, choosing unrelated verbs and reversing time relation between two verbs, which produces graver gap in implication and occurrence.

The gap will become more curious between Alice and the Dormouse. In the case of the Dormouse, verbs are also chosen arbitrarily, with the conjunction *when*, which this time suggests the concurrence in two verbs. But cynically this last saying fits the Dormouse thoroughly. Being a night animal, it is between asleep and awake, mock awakening during the tea-party. So whether the expression is “I breathe when I sleep” or “I sleep when I breathe,” it is true all the time with the Dormouse, which comes to support her argument of duality unexpectedly.

The following is the sentence pattern of the four.

Alice	I (say) what I (mean) = I (mean) what I (say)	definite
Hatter	I (see) what I (eat) ≠ I (eat) what I (see)	indefinite
March Hare	I (like) what I (get) ≠ I (get) what I (like)	indefinite
Dormouse	I (breathe) when I (sleep) = I (sleep) when I (breathe)	concurrent

At this point, we should remember the setting up that the main character, Alice, is an innocent, 7-year-old child. Her proposition shows her sincere propositional attitude, so this is true with her all the time. But this may be the only ideal state in the conversational exchange. Actually, there is the gap between meaning and saying, and in the extreme case, meaning contradicts saying, or saying contradicts meaning. Participants involved in the conversational exchange usually notice this situation and manage to interpret the appropriate meaning. In this case they take advantage of Alice’s innocence and makes up a teasing.

3.3. Language with Personified Time

The Hatter has his own way to personify time as Time with a capital letter and describes Time as a reality with full emotion. The treatment of Time, he insists, requires the third personal pronoun and moreover thoughtfulness for him. Hereafter follows word plays owing to different interpretations of time expressions between Alice and the Hatter. She literally interprets the idiomatic time expressions; the Hatter interprets Time literally as the object, which might be called the Mock Time expressions; in *waste*, *speak to*, *beat*, and *murder*.

	Alice	the Hatter
waste	waste it	waste him
speak to	?	speak to him
beat	keep time to a beat	beat him
murder	sing out of rhythm	murder him

Notice that *murder* in “He’s murdering Time.” is an achievement verb which means incomplete activity in the progressive aspect; while *murder* in “He’s murdering the time!” is an activity verb which means activity in progress with the progressive form. This comes to be under the case of attempted murder, so Time in turn takes revenge on the Hatter. Notice again that *murder* requires an object with a semantic feature, [+human], which also supports the attempted murder of Time and moreover the Hatter’s personification of Time.

3.4. Language in the Dormouse’s Story

In the Dormouse’s story are many implications of incoherence due to his mock awakening. To these Alice can’t help talking back from time to time, which brings new arguments among them.

The Dormouse introduces three sisters living at the bottom of a well. This is soon changed into “living on treacle” in response to Alice’s question. Living on treacle is talked back by Alice who indicates a

probability of “being ill.” To this the Dormouse returns simply and conventionally “very ill” as if it minds only the wording but the idea. The association, “living on treacle,” surprises Alice into denying angrily the existence of the treacle-well. This, however, meets the Dormouse’s threatening not to continue its story. She can’t help conceding the existence of treacle-well, saying “I dare say there may be one.” This *one* is a pronoun for treacle-well, but the Dormouse interprets it as a numeral and talks back angrily, “One, indeed!”

The Dormouse resumes, “so these three sisters—they were learning to draw, you know—” In collocation with *well, to draw* requires an object as Alice asks. “Without considering at all,” the Dormouse says “Treacle.” This answer puzzles Alice so much as to ask very cautiously, “But I don’t understand. Where did they draw the treacle from?” She feels it an extraordinary situation in which insiders can really draw something in it from there. This reveals a paradox of location.

(3) “You can draw out of a water-well,” said the Hatter; “so I should think you could draw treacle out of a treacle-well—eh, stupid?”

“But they were *in* the well,” Alice said to the Dormouse, not choosing to notice this last remark.

“Of course they were,” said the Dormouse: “well in.”

The Hatter’s help gives another puzzle to Alice: outsiders may draw treacle out of the treacle-well, but can insiders in the treacle-well really draw the treacle from the treacle-well? Notice that here the Hatter cunningly changes his wording *draw from* into *draw out of*, which comes to matter what to draw rather than where to draw. *Draw out of* implies the subjects as outsiders, which serves to evade Alice’s indication of paradoxical situation of insiders. To her confirmation of the location, the Dormouse answers in changed word order. “They were in the well” and “they were well in” are not the same with much of a muchness in wording.

Yawning and rubbing its eyes, for it was getting very sleepy, the Dormouse goes on, “and they drew all manner of things—everything that begins with an M—” In this saying, the meaning of *draw* seems to have another implication apart from the collocation with *well*. The new meaning of *learning to draw* is also familiar with Alice and the story proceeds in the new perspective. The condition “with an M” annoys Alice to ask why, to which is “Why not?” by the March Hare. This, without specific reason, is too decisive to make her silent.

(4) The Dormouse had closed its eyes by this time, and was going off into a doze; but, on being pinched by the Hatter, it woke up again with a little shriek, and went on: “—that begins with an M,

Logic and Language at the Mad Tea-Party

such as mouse-traps, and the moon, and memory, and muchness—you know you say things are ‘much of a muchness’—did you ever see such a thing as a drawing of a muchness?”

“Really, now you ask me,” said Alice, very much confused, “I don’t think—”

“Then you shouldn’t talk,” said the Hatter.

In proportion to the Dormouse’s sleepiness, its story runs into nonsense. The objects of drawings fall into not only things material or moral, but a part of idiomatic expression, *muchness*. Notice that change of meaning in *draw* results from lack of semantic feature, [+liquid], in the objects, which easily associates *learning to draw* with the drawing lessons.

During the Dormouse’s story are some curious arguments.

(5) “Take some more tea,” the March Hare said to Alice, very earnestly.

“I’ve had nothing yet,” Alice replies in an offended tone: “so I ca’n’t take more.”

“You mean you ca’n’t take *less*,” said the Hatter: “it’s very easy to take *more* than nothing.”

“Nobody asked *your* opinion,” said Alice.

“Who’s making personal remarks now?” the Hatter asked triumphantly.

“Take some more tea” is a stock phrase for offering another helping of tea. *Some more* presupposes the existence and implies another one. Particular with this wording, Alice, logically speaking, points there could not be another helping of what is not at all, logically. Contrasting what comes after *more (than)*, she suggests *more than nothing* isn’t so senseful as *more than something* is. The Hatter retorts, cunningly changing words, “You mean you ca’n’t take *less*, it’s very easy to take *more* than nothing.” Contrasting what comes before *than nothing*, he proceeds to point out a new idea that Alice could not take, numerically speaking, a negative number but positive number. In full reconstruction of their utterances, she prefers “more than *something*” to “more than *nothing*”; the Hatter “*more* than nothing” to “*less* than nothing.” This difference in assumed wording explains their discrepancy which presents a curious logic-play.

To the Hatter’s interruption, Alice blames, “Nobody asked your opinion.” The Hatter, blamed before by her for personal remarks, is choosy enough about *your* expression to indicate that she herself is now making personal remarks. With the use of *your*, her utterance is not intended to be personal remarks as he insists. The Hatter, however, over-generalizes her expression with *your* into personal remarks, which discourages her to proceed.

3.5. Language for Mock Utterance

The Hatter has his own way to cut in and make up mock utterance of “I don’t think” from Alice’s, “I don’t think.” Suggesting the implication that Alice is not the thinker at all, he adds rude insult with “Then you shouldn’t talk.” Notice that the Hatter’s ad hoc interruption makes the negative in mock utterance into main verb negative, which is neg-raised in her wording. The Hatter literally takes negative to the effect that she is not the type of thinker, which could not be in the original.

4. Conclusion

We can see how complicated this mad tea-party chapter is constructed by way of *mock* and many tricky wordings, which consists of two parts in contents bordering on the Dormouse tale. In the latter part develops some amplification of episodes in the former part; mock existence or mock personal remarks. These episodes of mock existence are used for counterattacks against Alice’s ignorance, in the beginning of this chapter, of their intention to boycott Alice by saying “No room!” with clear plenty of room. This significantly reveals the method in madness.

As the chapter title shows, this tea-party and the participants are mad enough to make Alice complicated: the Hatter is as mad as the Hatter, the March Hare goes mad in March and the Dormouse is in mock awakening. Just as in the liar’s paradox, Alice gets into a labyrinth of logic and language. As slight differences are accumulated into the mad tea-party which Alice calls “the stupidest tea-party,” so with the case of the Hatter and Time. These are occurred from mock existence of which is not present at all. Most of them appear to be which is nothing but mock. The episodes overthrow the presuppositions of mock existence, which leads to absurdity, as shown in case of wine or tea, or the Hatter’s riddle. So strained interpretation serves as pretext for word-play and fun. The tea-party is also ready with tea things but Alice cannot have any tea after all. To her the tea-party turns out to be mock in logic and she can’t be helped to escape from this nonsensical party.

It is natural, considering the theme in this chapter, that the Hatter’s riddle has no answer at all. The main aim is not in the riddle itself, but to introduce a mock riddle as if a real riddle. Mock existence of the answer in the riddle functions significantly according to the theme “mock.” Urged by readers’ requests, Carroll published an answer in the 1897 edition where he confessed, “the Riddle, as originally invented, had no answer at all.” This supports nothing but our theory of mock.

The story in Wonderland proceeds in the Alice’s dream. Until this chapter, Alice seems to have been sleeping deeply, then in chapter VIII, she becomes a light sleeper. Mock world in Wonderland is therefore nonsensically reflected in the mad tea-party, especially in the story of the Dormouse in mock awakening. Alice, in this tea-party however, cannot sense the discrepancy so that there is no end to the

Logic and Language at the Mad Tea-Party

controversy between them. After entering into the beautiful garden, she can sense it in terms of mock, which develops into the Mock Turtle's world where the reality gradually presents itself to the climax of the cards' trial. At last Alice cannot bear the gap between mock and reality; and exposes it to the cards with the words "you are nothing but a pack of cards!" After all Alice awakens to the realities of life from the dream of Wonderland, which explains all the nonsense in terms of mock.

TEXT

Carroll, Lewis, (1984). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. A facsimile of the first edition of 1866. London/ Basingstoke: Macmillan Children's Books.

REFERENCES

- Batey, Mavis, (1980). *Alice's Adventures in Oxford*. London: Pitkin Pictorials.
- Bloom, Harold, ed., (1987). *Lewis Carroll*. New York: Chelsea House.
- Gardner, Martin, ed., (1970). *The Annotated Alice*. New York: Penguin Books.
- _____, ed., (1990). *More Annotated Alice*. New York: Random House.
- Hudson, Derek, (1977). *Lewis Carroll—An Illustrated Biography*. New York: New American Library.
- Inaki, Akiko and Tomoko Okita, (1991). *Alice no Eigo—Fushigi-no-Kuni no Kotoba-gaku (Alice's Adventures in Logic and Language)*. Tokyo: Kenkyusha Shuppan.
- Sutherland, Robert D., (1970). *Language and Lewis Carroll*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Williams, S. H., Falconer Madan and Roger Lancelyn Green, eds., (1962). *The Lewis Carroll Handbook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.