

Disposition, Remembering, and Recalling

Shin Sakuragi (Shibaura Institute of Technology)

1. Introduction

Contemporary analytic philosophy of memory is, in a sense, philosophy of remembering. Virtually all philosophical inquiries into memory in the analytic tradition focus on how we “remember” things. In this paper, after overviewing the background of analytic philosophy of memory, I focus on the dispositional conception of remembering is presumed in contemporary discussions on memory. In my view, the conception faces many challenges in light of empirical evidence relating to how English speakers use the verb, “remember.”

2. Two ways of “remembering”

C.D. Broad’s *The Mind and its Place in Nature* is among the earliest philosophical works which discuss different concepts of memory in terms of analysis on “remember.” In Chapter entitled *Memory*, he examines how we use sentences whose main verb is “remember.” The same proposal is taken over by Ryle, and culminated in two seminal works in philosophy of memory: Malcolm’s three lectures on memory in 1962 and Martin and Deutscher’s “Remembering.” Both works focus on definitions of remembering, rather than memory. Tulving is influenced by those analytic proposals, and characterizes his episodic/semantic distinction partly in terms of which verb, “remember” or “know,” we are inclined to use in describing our memory.

In a way, philosophy of memory in terms of analysis on “remember” is well grounded in how English speakers refer to memory phenomena. We can confirm in multiple large-scale English corpora that “remember” is by far the most frequently used English term expressing memory phenomena. The frequency of “memory” is about half as many, and other verbs are much less. Meanwhile, “remember” is known to have a variety of its usages. First and foremost, it may be used as both dynamic and stative verbs. In fact, many analytic discussions on memory presuppose the two conceptions of memory ever since Broad famously distinguished two ways in which we “remember” things based on the verb’s two usages: an act of remembering and a power to remember.

However, Ryle in *The Concept of Mind* goes further and claims that Broad’s “memory-power” is a dispositional state of mind. Behind Ryle’s view is clearly the dispositional conception of “know.” Although it might not be carefully defended, his view has been widely accepted in philosophy of memory, and thereby, lays the groundwork for subsequent philosophical works on memory.

3. Dispositional reading and its manifestation event

Leaving the controversies on the concept of mental disposition aside, a dispositional remembering naturally poses a question; what manifests one’s dispositional remembering? Broad clearly thinks that it is one’s act of remembering; namely, “remember” in the occurrent sense. In a similar vein, Malcolm (1977) points out that typical disposition/manifestation relation is

expressed by the combination of a verb in the simple present and its progressive form. However, “remember” is considered as a typical stative verb, and as Don Locke correctly points out, its progressive form is not typical though not ungrammatical.

Its frequency matters, notwithstanding. Multiple English corpora clearly show that the proportion of “remember” in the progressive form is not comparable to that of typical dynamic verbs, and significantly less than even a verb which has both stative and dynamic usages, such as “feel.” This empirical evidence by itself does not prove that no use of “remember” refers to an act of remembering. Still, it seems to indicate that even if the dispositional reading of “remember” as a stative verb is correct, dispositional remembering is not a typical disposition because its manifestation events do not appear to be easily specifiable.

An apparently promising proposal to the present question is to take notice of an act of recalling. “Recall” is frequently used, and taken to refer to an occurrent memory event. According to this proposal, just like the two Japanese memory verbs respectively refer to memory-act (“omoidasu”) and memory-power (“oboeteiru”), one’s “recalling” refers to a memory-act, which manifests his dispositional remembering.

Despite the apparent plausibility, the dispositional conception of “remember” manifested in an act of “recalling” bring us to many puzzles in the face of empirical evidence. It is controversial, to say the least, to assimilate “remember” to a typical stative verb, such as “know.” “Remember,” unlike “know,” surely has progressive usages. So, what do we mean by “remember” in the progressive form, and what is the difference between an act of remembering and that of recalling? Meanwhile, “recall” is not very frequently used in the progressive form compared to typical dynamic verbs. Indeed, corpuscular evidence suggests that “recall” and “remember” are used in very similar ways. Moreover, the proportion of “recalling” to “remembering” is much less than “omoidasu” (memory-act) to “oboeteiru” (memory-power).

<The list of Corpora>

The Corpus of Contemporary American English, and The iWeb Corpus, hosted by English-Copus.org (<https://www.english-corpora.org/>)
NINJAL-LWP for the Tsukuba Web Corpus (TWC), , hosted by International Student Center, University of Tsukuba (<https://tsukubawebcorpus.jp/en/>)

<References>

- C. D. Broad, *The Mind and Its Place in Nature*, Reprint by Littlefield, Adams & Co. (1960, 1925).
- D. Locke, *Memory*, Macmillan (1971).
- N. Malcolm, *Knowledge and Certainty: Essays and Lectures*, Cornell University Press (1963).
- N. Malcolm, *Memory and Mind*, Cornell University Press (1977).
- C.B. Martin, and Deutscher, M, “Remembering,” *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 75 (1966), 161–196.
- G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, The University of Chicago Press (1949).
- E. Tulving, “What Is Episodic Memory?” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* Vol. 2 (1993), pp. 67–70