Let the wind blow from the East:

Using '*ba* (field) ' theory to explain how two strangers co-create a story

How can we achieve a global community where people from different backgrounds respect each other, so that we can co-exist peacefully on this globe? Ever since I was a student some fifty years ago, my dream has been to advance this goal. I began to study language and culture in the hope that these studies would enable me to achieve this dream.

In 1986, Professor Jef Verschuren, our secretary general, founded the International Pragmatics Association. He founded it with the vision: "More than ever, human survival depends on successful communication at various levels of interaction. On a global level, the fate of the human race has become literally dependent on our ability to cope with problems of international communication." When I encountered this message, I thought this is THE organization where my aspirations with regard to my scholarship could be realized.

However, as we all know, realizing this vision is not easy. In reality, scholars in an ever-increasing number of different disciplines dealing with language and communication have been making great efforts to contribute to our understanding of the human race and our societies. The result is emerging theoretical, methodological, and terminological diversity in various studies on language use and communication. It was in this context that the IPrA has been serving to create an OPEN FORUM. What is needed in this open forum is that we bring together

various research results from a variety of disciplines, and present, listen and discuss them freely, so as to yield results that can be disseminated to every area of all societies. IPrA is the forum for varieties of disciplines concerning the study of language use and communication that shares the common goal of achieving a global community where we can co-exist respecting each other.

From the time of the inception of the IPrA until today, Jef Verschuren and his wife Ann Verhaert have been magnificently guided the voyage of this association. Everybody who has gathered here at this conference will find it congenial, thanks to the tireless dedication of the Verschuren-Verhaert family and the staff of the University of Antwerp over the last quarter-century.

Six years ago, when I was elected as the first non-European, non-American President of this association, Jef Verschuren and I discussed possible new directions for the study of pragmatics. One such new direction would be to change the direction of the academic debate from unidirectional to multidirectional. What we mean by this is that pragmatics was originated in the West and has been disseminated all over the world. Since that time, relatively little knowledge has been gleaned from other parts of the world. While acknowledging the contributions from the West, it might be time for us to learn from other areas of the world, specifically the non-Western world, in order to achieve a better understanding of the complexity of linguistic practice on a global level.

Here at the 12th IPrA conference, I am delighted to find a greater variety of research topics on the program than has been the case in the past. In particular, I find that an increasing amount of research is directed towards cross-cultural pragmatics and multilingual communication. I think this trend is in accord with our research endeavor for a better understanding of peoples with different backgrounds. In light of the vision of this association, I believe that we are moving forward toward what Jef Verschuren conceived of as the founding vision of this association.

We welcome a frame of thinking that can encompass the differences found in comparisons of different cultural backgrounds. We should note that most of the assumptions, principles, theories, and research methods employed in pragmatics are the product of the Western mind, i.e., they are based on Western languages and socio-cultural backgrounds. Although they may seem to provide a universally applicable frame of thinking, in fact they serve only to a certain extent; for we cannot deny that there are some pragmatic phenomena left outside the frameworks of established principles, theories and research methods such as Conversational Maxims, Speech Act Theories, Linguistic Politeness Theories, Relevance Theory, and Conversational Analysis. So long as there is nothing proposed to augment the limits of these frameworks, we are left with unsolved linguistic, pragmatic, and discourse phenomena that are outside of the so called 'universal framework'.

How can we find a way to do cross-cultural pragmatics that is fair to the perspectives of every native speaker on this globe? What many of us have been doing is to study already established theories and methods, and apply them to the pragmatic phenomena of our native languages. Of course, these theories and methods can be useful as a starting point in clarifying what we are doing in practice. But what is crucially needed is a frame of thinking that might be useful to complement our familiar ways of doing pragmatics.

The question of seeking a frame of thinking familiar to my native language is the task I assigned to myself when I became the president of IPrA. We are all aware that there are a great number of cultures and societies on this globe. Islamic culture and Buddhist culture are just two such examples. I have had the honor of visiting Libya and Thailand three times each in the last few years. While I was visiting these places, I began to wonder how many of the existing research assumptions, principles and methods are accessible to the everyday practice of the people living there in their own traditional cultures.

As I mentioned earlier, it has been mostly Western perspectives that have informed the study of pragmatics. Now, what would happen if the wind blew from the East rather than exclusively from the West? Very few contributions to the academic community of pragmatics have been made from the East independent of Western approaches.

Linguistic politeness principles and theories were proposed in the 1970s and 80s. They were supposed to be universally applicable theories. After carefully examining these theories from the perspective of my native language, I found that they were not doing justice to the linguistic politeness central to Japanese, where the use of honorifics plays a major role in polite language usage. It seemed that these principles and theories were a product of European ethnocentrism. This led to my proposing the principle of linguistic politeness according to *wakimae*. By *wakimae* aspect of linguistic politeness, I mean the politeness expressed by the speakers' observation of their sense of place instead of the speakers' volitional speech act. This is supposed to reflect a native speakers' practice of using honorifics in Japanese. However, even after all these years,the working of the mechanism of *wakime* use has been left unexplained.

Why? I have been trying to understand this for almost twenty years, trying to understand it within the framework of so called scientific thinking, by which I mean the dichotomous way of thinking I learned through my university studies. I realized that analyzing the working of the *wakimae* use of linguistic politeness required an approach that challenged the limits of so called 'scientific', reductionist oriented thinking.

It was a thrill when I encountered *ba* based theory, for it seemed a possible basis for a new understanding. *Ba* theory seemed a promising foundation to explain the working of the *wakimae* use of linguistic politeness.

MAIN PRESENTATION BY POWER POINT

Now we have seen how two interactants merge and co-create a story. The processes of sharing their minds has been explained using a frame of thinking according to *ba* theory. It is in the domain of place, not the domain of the egocentric self, that the interactants merge, share common ground in the intensified *ba*, and thus enable the emergence of a new joint idea. This kind of phenomenon happens to a greater or lesser degree everywhere in our conversations in families, among friends and elsewhere where a congenial atmosphere lies. We have just observed it in detail in a microanalysis of discourse data.

The study of language use using *ba* theory is only just beginning. We have seen its application in the analysis of task discourse which I hope provided a better understanding not only of how two strangers could co-create a story, but also why it was possible.

The *ba* theory is a useful frame of thinking for explaining a number of unique Japanese pragmatic phenomena that have been regarded as 'unique' from the perspective of Western languages. Abundant use of modality expressions, including honorifics and sentence particles, the lack of overt subject, the great varieties of personal pronouns, and frequent occurrence of switch reference are just a few of the many noteworthy phenomena in Japanese language practice. *Ba*

theory would be useful for understanding more than the Japanese pragmatic phenomena. Since *ba* oriented thinking encompasses the linguistic codes and the context of their use, it can lead to a deeper understanding of the dynamic aspect of indexicality and evidentials that are foci of some discussions in contemporary anthropological linguistics.

The idea of *ba* has existed since ancient times in the Eastern world; its characteristics are reflected in Buddhism and Japanese philosophy. It is noteworthy that *ba* theory has a parallel in quantum field theory. Quantum field physics is an advanced physics from Newtonian physics. The latter is the basis of reductionist thinking that laid the foundations of science, technology and social systems in the modern world. I claim that *ba* theory and quantum field theory in physics are parallel, because both put emphasis on the place where the particle is located, not the particle itself. By place I mean such things as quantum field, context of communication, and environment of human lives; by particle I mean atomic particles, individual human beings and indeed language itself.

On March 11, triple disasters, i.e., an earthquake, a tsunami, and a nuclear power explosion, challenged the eastern part of Japan. It was a devastating experience such as we have not had since World War II. People in Japan are struggling hard to recover from this tremendous tragedy.

When they heard about this devastation, people from all over the world expressed sympathy, and provide support by sending rescue teams, natural gas, donations,

and thousands of paper cranes folded by school children. On the personal level, each of us Japanese received emails, phone calls and messages from friends and acquaintances from every corner of this globe. The Japanese are impressed and most grateful for this outpouring of people's kindness and considerate thought, and compassion that touched us. Why can people be so moved that they perform these acts of kindness for sufferers so many miles away from their own homes?

It is because *ba*, the semantic space, can be extended to anywhere you want. The acts of kindness and concern expressed to victims in Japan is evidence that *ba* can be extended to the global level. According to *ba* theory, you stay in your own place for your domain of your egocentric self, the egg yolk area, but at the same time your domain of place, the egg white area, can be extended to places as far as your mind and heart can travel.

Now, my dear colleagues, we have opened the 12th IPrA conference, and the forum is open for every one of us gathered here from so many areas of this globe. Let us imagine the image of the semantic space of *ba* spread among us gathered in this hall, and enjoy the feeling of sharing the *ba*. As I have shown in this presentation, sharing the *ba* in discourse brings participants together, and, as a result, new ideas are likely to emerge spontaneously in the *ba* of this conference.