

The Pragmatics of Individualism and the Pragmatics of Contextualism:  
In Search of a Sustainable Global Community

The 20th century is said to have been a century of science. Millions of people on this globe have enjoyed prosperity achieved by the progress of science and technology. However, there continue to be such problems as those related to the environment and the discrepancy between the rich and the poor. The critical issue of the current century is to question what was wrong with the way things were in the past, and to seek a paradigm shift in order to deal with these problems.

What can be gained by looking more closely at the theories of pragmatics, the scientific field of the study of language use? Grice's Maxims of Conversation, Speech Act Theory, Politeness Theory and Relevance Theory are all familiar. These are the frameworks that are supposed to be universally applicable to language use phenomena. The premise for these theories is that the individual speaker has intention and conveys it to the listener. The idea behind this premise is the individualism that was cultivated through the enlightenment and the anthropocentric development in the Western societies.

An attempt to apply politeness theory, for example, to the use of honorifics, the central notion of politeness in the Japanese language goes against the intuition of native speakers. The use of honorifics is more automatic than the strategies involving the speaker's intention. The assumption of theories of pragmatics that presupposes the intention of the individual speaker does not fit the way Japanese is spoken. The underlying ideology in the use of honorifics is not individualism, but contextualism, where the speaker is regarded as an element of the context. The origin of such an ideology can be found in Mahayana Buddhism, which is relevant to Japanese people's common sense idea in daily practice.

In this article, it is proposed that contextualism or the logic of *ba* is a useful framework for discussing elements of Japanese language use such as honorifics, personal pronouns, and giving and receiving verbs. It will be maintained that the pragmatics of contextualism or the logic of *ba* is one of the alternatives to pragmatics based on individualism. This can be understood only through "dual mode thinking", as it is different from the logical, rational, or "linear" way of thinking in societies where individualism is central. The paradigm shift of the scientific way of thinking from 'linear' to 'dual mode thinking' can be viewed as the shift from 'the Ptolemaic theory' to 'the Copernican theory'.