

Let the wind blow from the East:

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

Sachiko Ide

Abstract

Six years ago when I was elected as the first non-European, non-American President of the International Pragmatics Association, Jef Verschueren, the Secretary General, 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 is meant by this is that pragmatics has originated in the West and been disseminated all over the world, while 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 different areas of the world in order to achieve a better understanding of the complexity of linguistic practice on a global level.

This presidential lecture addresses the question of how a teacher and a student can co-create a story in a short period of time by employing the 'ba (field)' theory, an innovative framework for thinking that originated in the East. The 'ba' based approach compensates for the consequences of the scientific approach of reductionism. It assumes 1) the researchers' inside/subjective point of view instead of outside/objective point of view, 2) a dual mode of thinking in regard to the self, i.e. two domains of self consisting of the domain of the ego-centric self and the domain of place that surrounds the ego-centric self, 3) a dynamic model of interaction similar to an improvised drama, and 4) covert communication in addition to overt communication.

The data to be discussed came from video recorded discourse in the Mr. O Corpus. The conversation was video recorded while a student and a teacher were trying to

complete the task of making a coherent story by arranging fifteen picture cards. The discourse data were analyzed into two types of discourse according to the occurrence and non-occurrence of the interpersonal modalities at the end of utterances. The one with interpersonal modalities is analyzed as 'dialogue discourse', and the one without as 'merging' discourse. Japanese pragmatics presupposes the use of honorifics, representatives of interpersonal modalities, between strangers, which is the linguistic politeness known as *wakimae* (discernment). Dropping of presupposed use of modalities by strangers is obviously a deviation from the principle of linguistic politeness according to *wakimae*. This deviated use would serve as a creative use (cf. Silverstein). It is in this merging discourse that the discourse phenomena of repetition, simultaneous utterances, and chaining utterances occur. These would not add any information to the conversation, but serve to synchronize and entrain conversationalists. When the dynamic processes of synchronization and entrainment emerge between conversationalists, covert communication arises in the setting where the conversation is taking place. This covert communication creates the setting for smooth overt communication. Thus, the two strangers succeed in completing the task of creating a story in a short time without conflict. It will be argued that it is by virtue of the 'ba' theory based approach to discourse that the dynamic processes of co-creating a story by strangers can be illuminated.

Key words: *ba* (field) theory, entrainment, covert communication, honorifics, *wakimae*