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# Speaking as Parts of a Whole: *Wakimae* Utterances in Japanese Conversation

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# Purpose of the study

- This study utilizes the concept of *ba* to analyze how harmonious and consistent interaction is realized in Japanese dyadic conversation.
- The speakers' self-referencing sense of place within the relationship of the dyad, or *wakimae*, governs this interaction rather than the speakers' volitional choice of strategies.
- Speakers behave as parts of a whole, resulting in a sense of *ba*, and produce induced-fit utterances by monitoring what is relevant for the conversation.

# What is *ba*? (1)

- Shimizu (2000: 13)
- Suppose you were one of the cells that make up your body. Imagine how you would sense your whole body, and what that would feel like. *Ba* is this feeling.
- Thus, *ba*, in this case, is a property of life that subsumes you and all the other elements of your body. The various types of cells in your body are inseparable entities that share a common *ba* and exist in harmony.

# What is *ba*? (2)

- Ba refers to a space in which interaction emerges and speakers as well as the surrounding environment are interdependent and indispensable components (Saft 2014).

# *Ba*-based discourse analysis

The researcher should:

- Consider speakers and *ba* to be inseparable and regard the speakers' utterances as self-representations of *ba*.
- Attempt to understand the internal experiences of speakers who feel *ba* and are influenced by other speakers and the surrounding environment.

# Cf. Western perspectives

- The world is comprised of man and his environment. The environment is separated from man by an invisible border. Man observes the environment through this border. This means that the environment is observed from the outside (Shimizu 1994: 68).
- The notion of context assumes a distinction between the self and the other and stresses the reflexive relationship between social actors and the surrounding environment (Saft 2014: 116).

# Three assumptions for *ba*-based discourse analysis

(1) *Kan* (観) perspective

(2) *Wakimae* (discernment)

(3) Induced-fit utterances

# (1) *Kan* perspective

## ➤ *Ken* (見)

A perspective through which the subject pays attention to the object

## ➤ *Kan* (觀)

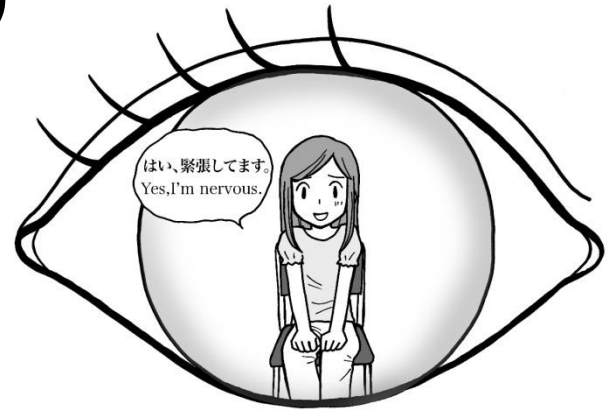
A transcendent perspective through which the subject views the whole, including his/herself, other(s), and the global feature of the environment



[http://www.47news.jp/feature/47school/kanji/post\\_44.html](http://www.47news.jp/feature/47school/kanji/post_44.html) (2015.7.1)



# Ken (見)



# Kan (観)



## (2) *Wakiame* (discernment)

### ➤ *Wakimae* (Ide 1989, 1991)

- Self-referencing sense of place
- *Wakimae* is a type of language use that is based on the speaker's choice to express him- or herself by conforming to socially expected roles
- Oriented to social norms

### ➤ Cf. Volition

- Volitional use of language is based on the speaker's use of intentional strategies to ensure that his or her message is received favorably by the addressee
- Oriented to individual addressees

# (3) Induced-fit utterances

The induced-fit of two speakers' self-representations is essential for harmonious and consistent interaction. It is only possible when:

- The story-making pattern is shared by speakers.
- The story is produced by speakers under the influence of subsumable constraints, which are induced in each speaker by *ba*.
- The same constraints inform them which kind of representation will be relevant next.

# The Data

- Mr. O Corpus: Cross-cultural comparative discourse data (Japanese, American English, etc.)
- The subjects were (1) pairs comprised of teachers and students who had never met before and (2) pairs of students who had close relationships with one another.
- Each pair talked about the topic, “what were you most surprised at?” for about 5 minutes.

# A teacher (T) and a student (S) who were meeting for the first time

1 T: *a, ima kincho shiteru, daijoo [bu {laugh}*

**ah, are (you) nervous now? (are you) OK? {laugh}**

2 S: *[hai, {laugh} kincho shite masu*

**yes, {laugh} (I) am nervous**

3 S: *{laugh} hai*

**{laugh} yes**

4 T: *ee, jaa, chotto kincho shiteru mitai dakara, saisho watashi kara*

**well, (you) seem to be a little nervous, so I (will go) first**

5 S: *a, hai=*

**ah, yes**

6 T: *=bikkuri shita hanashi suru n desu keredomo=*

**(I will) tell a story in which I was surprised, though**

7 S: *=hai*

**yes**

# Why do the teacher and the student behave in that way?

When the teacher (T) and the student (S) talk with one another:

1. Their *wakimae* is automatically activated.  
↓
2. Role expectations in line with their places within the dyad are recognized (quasi-parent–child relationship).  
↓
3. Induced-fit verbal exchanges are produced by both sides, fulfilling complementary roles.  
↓
4. Harmonious and consistent interaction occurs.



**Kan**  
(観)

# A storyteller (T) and a listener (L) who know each other well: T's story of when she saw a dying crow on the street

1 T: *un, sugoi ne, nan daro, karasu gurai okkii to, kekkoo*  
yeah, wow, well, (being) big like a crow, (it's) quite

2 L: *bibiru yo[ne*  
(it's) scary, isn't it? ← Relaying

3 T: *[nan daro, un, ningen poi towa iwanai kedo, doobutsu tte kanji datta*  
well, yeah, (I) won't say (it was) like a person, but (it was) like an animal

4 L: {*laugh*} *shikamo kuroi shi ne=*  
{*laugh*} and also (it is) black so ← Relaying

Repetition &  
Relaying

5 T: *=kuroi shi, sugoi, demone, kawai soo datta, yappa,*  
*shi[nisoo dato, karasu dakedo*  
(it was) black so, wow, but yeah, (it) was pitiful, see so, since (it)  
was dying, even though (it) was a crow

6 L: *[aa, nn, n, karasu dakedo*  
Ah, hmm even though (it) was a crow ← Repetition

7 T: {*laugh*} *kawai soo da*  
(it) is pitiful ← Relaying

8 L: *soo datta n da*  
so (it) was

# Why do the students behave in that way?

When two students who share a close relationship talk with one another:

1. Their *wakimae* is automatically activated.



2. Role expectations according to their places within the dyad are recognized (*uchi*-relationship; one-mindedness rather than individuality).



3. Induced-fit verbal exchanges occur by repeating and relaying the other's utterances to create anticipation and a mutual story.



4. Harmonious and consistent interaction occurs.



**Kan**  
(観)



# Conclusion

- The concept of *ba* is a way to better understand real human interactions without separating man and the environment.
- Harmonious and consistent interaction is governed by the speakers' self-referencing sense of place within the relationship of the dyad, or *wakimae*, rather than the speakers' volitional choice of strategies.
- Speakers behave as parts of a whole, resulting in a sense of *ba*, and produce induced-fit utterances by monitoring what is relevant for the conversation.

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