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How and Why "Personal Pronouns" Differ in East Asian Languages from European Languages: Ba-based Approach

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Personal pronouns

- Personal pronouns in European languages are pronouns that are associated primarily with a particular **grammatical person** –first person (as *I*), second person (as *you*), or third person (as *he*, *she*, *it*).
- Since there is **no grammatical person** in East Asian languages, personal pronouns are here defined as pronouns that index the speaker, the addressee, or the referent.
- ❖ In this presentation, mainly first and second person pronouns are to be discussed.

Let us see how different
personal pronouns in Japanese and Thai
are from those of European languages.

Personal pronouns in European languages

	English	French	German	Spanish
First	I	je	ich	yo
Second	you	tu/vous	du/Sie	tu/vos usted

Japanese personal pronouns

Person	Style \ Speaker	Adult		Young child	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
First	Formal	<i>watakusi, watakusi,</i> <i>watasi</i>	<i>watasi</i>	ϕ	<i>watasi</i>
	Plain	<i>boku</i>	<i>watasi, atasi</i>	<i>boku</i>	FN+ <i>tyan</i>
	Deprecatory	<i>ore</i>	ϕ	<i>ore</i>	ϕ
Second	Formal	<i>anata</i>	<i>anata</i>	(<i>kimi</i>)	(<i>anata</i>)
	Plain	<i>kimi</i>	<i>anata</i>	FN+ <i>kun</i>	FN+ <i>kun</i>
				FN+ <i>tyan</i>	FN+ <i>tyan</i>
	Deprecatory	<i>omae</i>	ϕ	<i>omae</i>	ϕ

Thai personal pronouns

No.	First person	Second person	Usage
1	k ^h â:p ^h ráp ^h útt ^h ácâw	p ^h ráʔon	commoner-royal
2	ʔa:ttàma:	jo:m	monk-commoner
3	k ^h â:p ^h ácâw	t ^h â:n	highly formal
4	k ^h â:	câw	formal (literary)
5	dìc ^h ăn/p ^h ǒm	k ^h un/t ^h â:n	formal (neutral)
6	c ^h ăn/raw	t ^h ɣ:	equal (neutral)
7	c ^h án	kɛ:/lòn	equal (coarse)
8	ku:	mɯŋ	equal (foul)
9	nǔ:	k ^h un/t ^h â:n	humble-superior
etc.	etc.	etc.	etc.

Fundamental Differences (1/2)

European personal pronouns

- Limited in number
- Grammatically obligatory
- Forms change according to grammatical case.

Fundamental Differences (2/2)

Japanese/Thai Personal Pronouns

- Many in number
- Their use is grammatically optional.
- Forms change according to interactional relationships, situational settings, and the speaker's identity.

Personal pronouns

	European Personal Pronouns	Japanese / Thai Personal Pronouns
(1) Number	Limited in number	Unlimited in number
(2) Grammatically required	Obligatory	Optional
(3) Change	Change according to grammatical case	Change according to interactional relationships situational settings, speaker's identity

1) Number

- There are **many** personal pronouns in Japanese and Thai.
- While personal pronouns in European languages are a fixed set in each language, those of Japanese and Thai are not. These were originally ordinary nouns that have been grammaticalized as the pronouns of person referents.

2) Grammatically optional

- Personal pronouns in Japanese **are not usually used** in natural conversation.
- Let us see how personal pronouns **are not used** in the Mr. O. Corpus, and contrast this with their use in the English translations.
- Speakers (T and S) are jointly engaged in the task of arranging 15 picture cards in order so as to make a coherent story. The conversations have been recorded and transcribed.

·08 S: *nan da kore tsukae nai na tte omo t tara*
what COP this use-can not FP QT think PAST when
'When (he) was thinking, "What is this? (I)can't use it".'

09 T: *un un*

yes yes

'Yeah, yeah.'

10 S: *koo gake ni sashikakat te*
like this a-cliff to come-near CON
'(He) came near to a cliff like this.'

11 T: *un*

yes

‘Yeah.’

12 S: *a, ano boo tsuka-erut te hiramei ta toka*

ah that stick use-can QT hit-upon PAST or-something

‘Ah, (he) thought that (he) can use that stick, or something.’

=====

13 T: *a, soo desu ne*

ah so HON COP FP

‘Ah, (I) think so too.’

14 S: *soo iu no wa doo desu ka*

so say NOM TOP how HON COP Q

‘What do (you) think about this (story)?’

No personal pronouns in conversation

- Note that no personal pronouns at all are used in this Japanese conversation
- In the English gloss, we can see the obligatory personal pronouns that are inserted in parentheses and highlighted in red.
- Speaking Japanese with personal pronouns are **marked** usage.

Let us see marked usage

3) Change

As the speaker, you change your reference to yourself depending on

- who you are talking to
- where you are talking
- what kind of identity you have
at the moment of speaking,
given who you are talking to and
where you are talking.

How do I refer to myself at home?

- As pointed out above, the non-use of personal pronouns is unmarked.
- Every use of personal pronouns is marked.
- Depending on emphasis or distinction or contrast needed (Ozawa 2016), one of the following self reference terms is used.

Some 1st personal pronouns for myself (1/3)

- **Interacting**

with a superior

watakushi

with a colleague

watashi

with my husband

mama

with my children

mama/watashi

with grandchildren

baaba

with children in the neighborhood

obachan

with student when teaching

sensei

- The list is open ended.

More 1st personal pronouns for myself (2/3)

- **Setting**

formal

watakushi

informal

watashi

Still more 1st personal pronouns for myself (3/3)

- **Identity**

wife	<i>mama/watashi</i>
------	---------------------

mother	<i>mama</i>
--------	-------------

grandmother	<i>baaba</i>
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- The list is not exhaustive, because there are various combinations of factors that interact and determine the choice.
- Effects of bystanders or those who are in the earshot must be accounted for.

Complex use of personal pronouns (1/3)

- When the addressee is a grandchild, in an informal setting, with the identity of grandmother → *baaba*
- When the interactant is my child, in an informal setting with the identity of a family member → *mama*

Complex use of personal pronouns (2/3)

- When the addressee is my child, in an informal setting without putting emphasis on my relationship to the child → *watashi*
- But, if the topic is grandchildren and they are within their earshot. → *baaba*
- But, if a third person is present. → *watashi*

Complex use of personal pronouns (3/3)

- It is impossible to provide an exhaustive list of the conditions for the choices, as there are psychological factors of the participants that change from moment to moment depending on the mood of the gathering.
- You cannot expect to find analytical rules for the choices. However, these choices are made almost automatically in everyday life .
- The interplay of the factors influencing the use is complex.

How can we explain the use of personal pronouns?

- The problem cannot be solved by the orthodox scientific thinking of reductionism, where elements are analyzed and discussed in terms of the logic of cause and effect.
- In order to understand the use of personal pronouns, we have to shift from the perspective of modern scientific thinking to that of **ba-based thinking**.

What is *ba*-based thinking ?

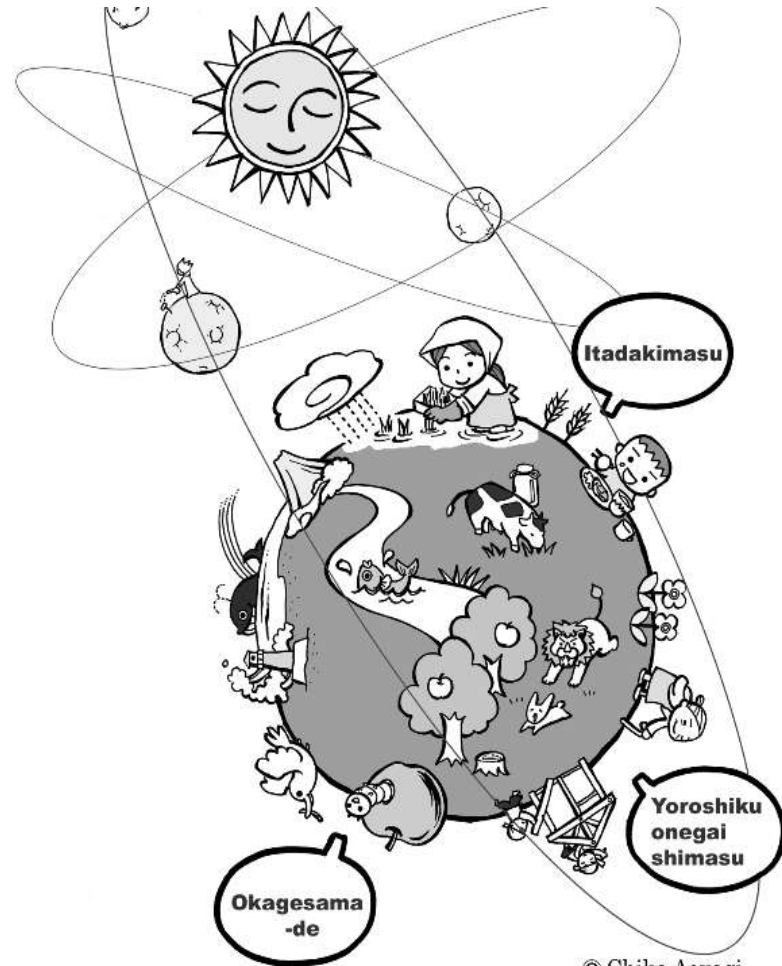
- *Ba*-based thinking is a way of thinking that contrasts with the reductionistic scientific way of thinking.
- *Ba* is literally 'field', but it is different from 'field' *a la* P. Bourdieu.
- While in *ba* way of thinking, a person is considered as an element embedded in a particular space, in 'field' *a la* Bourdieu, a person thinks he is an agent who acts in the space by his volitional power.
- In *ba* based thinking, people all perceive themselves as parts of the whole.
- This is the Copernican perspective.

Shift of Perspectives Ptolemaic to Copernican



© Chika Aoyagi

Ptolemaic perspective



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Copernican perspective

Shift of perspectives on ontology

◆ **Ontology in modern scientific thinking** ⇒ **Ptolemaic** ‘I think, therefore I am.’

- Individuals see themselves as the center of the world.
- Everything is under the control of the individual.

◆ **Ontology of *ba* based thinking** ⇒ **Copernican**

- There is *basho* (*ba* + *sho* ‘place’) first, where individuals come into being/emanate.
- Individuals are embedded in *basho*.
- Individuals are interacting in *basho*.
- Everything is changing from moment to moment.

How can we shift to the Copernican perspective?

- This shift to the Copernican viewpoint requires that we make different assumptions than those to which we are accustomed.
- What kind of assumptions? They are the kind of assumptions that reverses what has been common sense in modern scientific thinking.
- These are the assumptions of *ba* based thinking. (Shimizu, 1996,2000,2003,2004)

Assumptions of *Ba*-based thinking

1. Immediacy/Inside perspective

1. Dual mode thinking model (static model)

1. Improvised drama model (dynamic model)

Explanation for grammatically optionality

Why are personal pronouns in Japanese are not usually used?

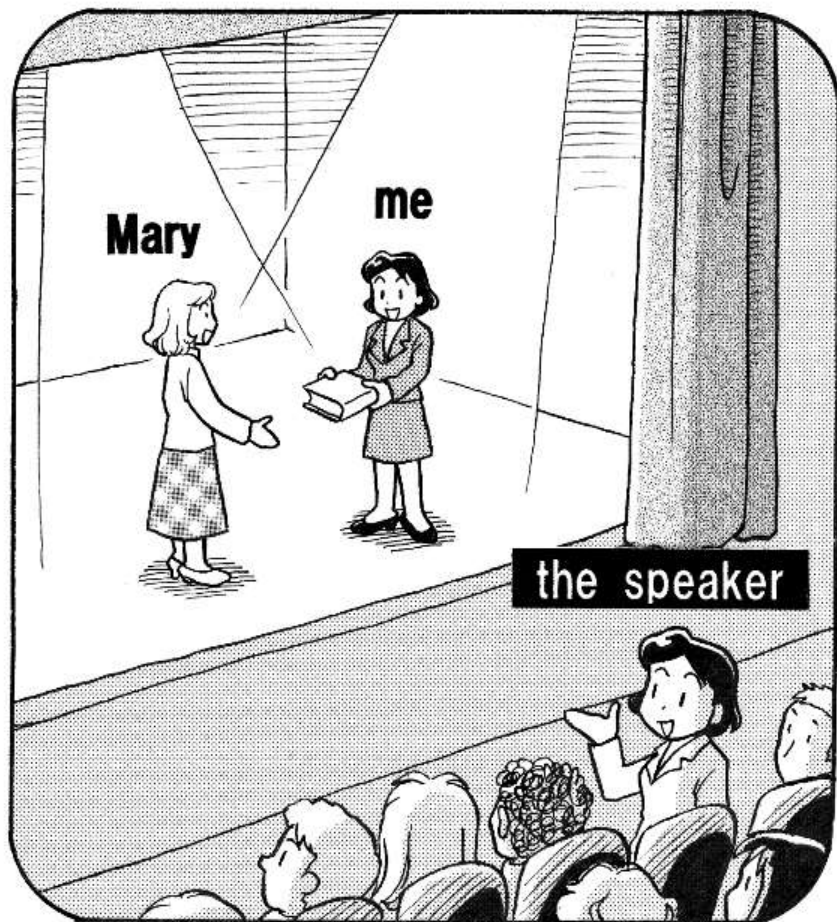
- This is to be explained by introducing the assumption that could be called the perspective of immediacy of *ba* based thinking.

Immediacy

The first assumption of *ba* based thinking

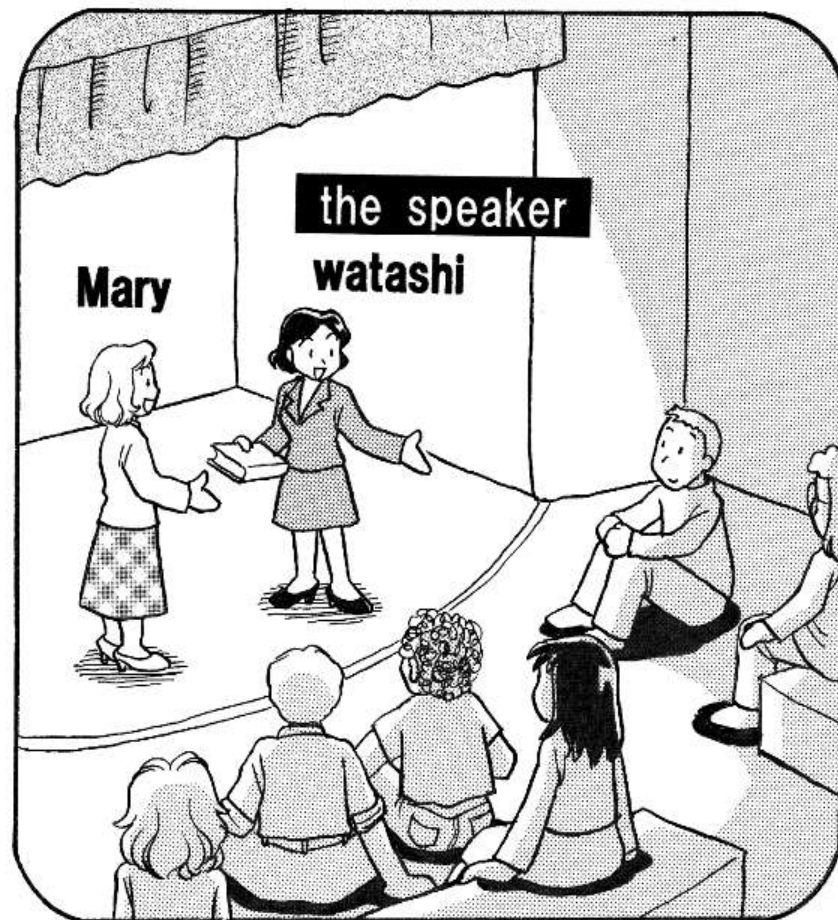
- The first assumption of *ba* based thinking is the speaker's perspective of immediacy.
- It is the perspective of direct experience, or a you-and-I-are-here-together now perspective.
- It is a **not an objective** perspective.
- It is a perspective whereby **individuals perceive themselves as parts of the whole.**

Mary gave me this book.



English

Kono hon kureta no yo.
this book gave NOM FP



Japanese

Watch the difference of stage lights.

Immediacy (1/3)

- In the drawing representing the the English utterance, 'Mary gave me this book.'
- If the speaker took the perspective of immediacy, she would not have to express 'Mary' and 'me', as they are obvious in the scene.
- However, the speaker is seeing herself at a distance from the event she is describing. Therefore, she is making an objective statement, watching the scene from a distance.
- This is the reason why two persona must be drawn in the English figure: one persona on the stage and the other persona, the speaker, at a distance from the stage.

Immediacy (2/3)

- **Japanese:**

(Mary ga watashi ni) kono hon (wo) kureta no yo.

(Mary SUB me) **this book (ACC) gave NOM FP**

- In the immediate context, the speaker, the addressee, and the audience are in focus as parts of the scene.
- The subject (Mary) and the object (me) are not expressed, as they are obvious in the immediate context.

Immediacy (3/3)

- Therefore, the utterance can consist of a minimum of information.
‘this book, gave, NOM, FP’
- NOM ‘*no*’ stands for nominalization.
- FP ‘*yo*’ stands for a final particle expressing the speaker’s confirmation of her utterance towards the addressee.
- The expression of the speaker’s attitude towards the hearer is obligatory in *ba* based thinking that must assume immediate perspective.

Explanation for change of use

- Why do personal pronouns change according to the interactional relationships, situational settings and the speaker's identities?
- This complex change among personal pronouns can be explained by the assumptions of dual mode thinking, and by the improvised drama model of *ba* based thinking.

Dual mode thinking (1/3)

The second assumption of *ba*-based thinking

- In order to make sense of such complex phenomena, fundamental assumptions of modern scientific thinking have to be questioned.
- One of those assumptions is the Cartesian concept of self that is the basis of the concept of the individual, and thus of modern science.
- In light of East Asian traditions, where interdependency is assumed, rethinking some aspects of modern scientific thinking seems a productive first step.

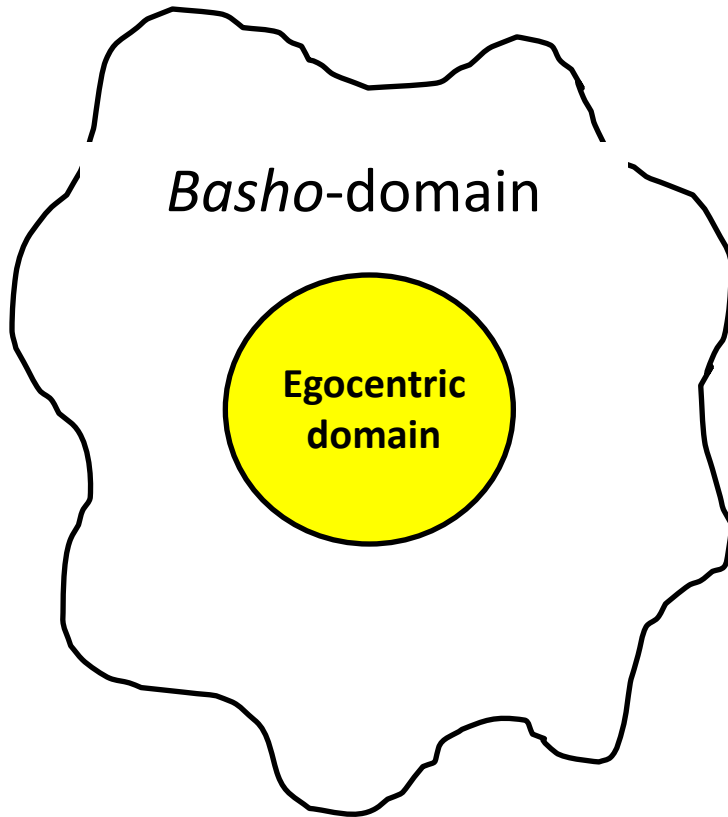
Dual mode thinking (2/3)

- *Ba* based thinking begins with questioning the concept of self.
- Is your skin the boundary of your self?
- No, there is another layer of the subconscious self around yourself.
- Suppose you give way to a person who is passing by from behind. Why can you sense the person behind you?
- It is because we have outer layer of self on the subconscious level.

Dual mode thinking (3/3)

- According to *ba* based thinking, the self has two domains: the egocentric domain and the *basho* domain.
- The egocentric domain is the self that is surrounded by the *basho* domain.
- The *basho* domain exists around the egocentric self. It is perceived at the subconscious level, and therefore invisible.

The egg model of dual mode thinking



A: Egocentric domain

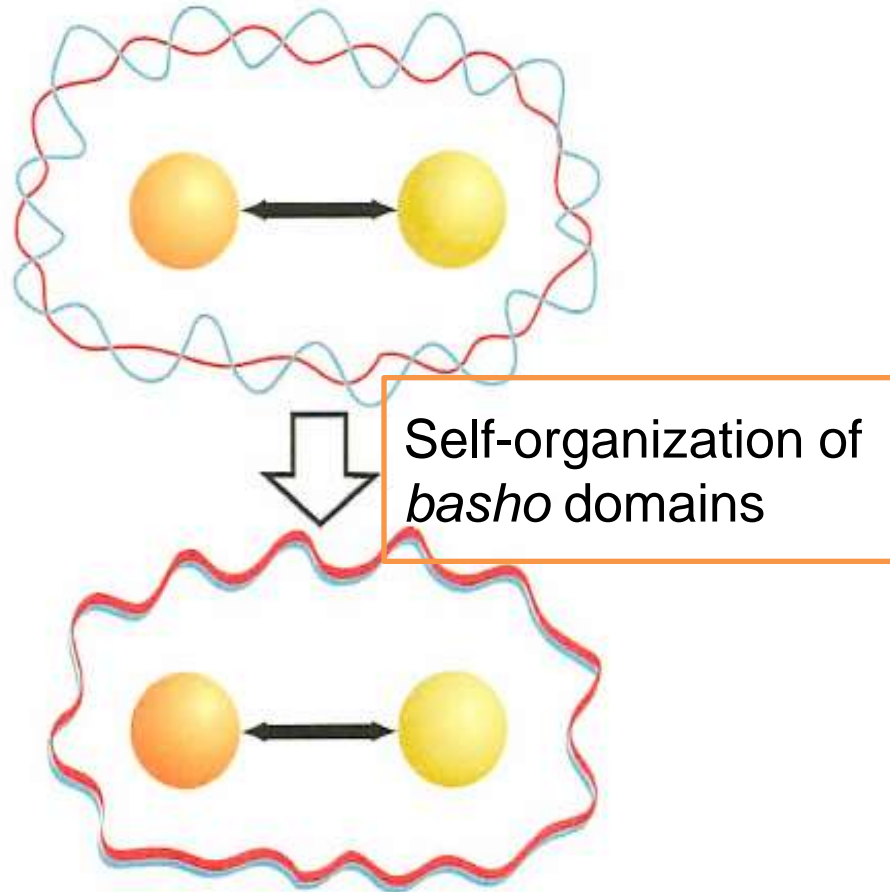
Recognized
in the neo-cortex of the brain
Functions in the **mind**

B: *Basho* domain

Perceived
in the amygdala of the limbic system
Functions in the **body**

It is important to note that A and B are working simultaneously.

The two eggs model of dual mode thinking



How do the selves interact? (1/5)

- Suppose you put two raw eggs in a shallow bowl.
 - Egg yolks, which represent the egocentric domains of selves, remain independent.
 - Egg whites, which represent the *basho* domains of selves, gradually merge in a self-organizing way, and create a shared *basho*.
- This is the metaphorical representation of how one self interacts with the other self.

How do the selves interact?(2/5)

- While egocentric domains (the egg yolks) are independent of each other, *basho* domains (the egg whites) merge into one domain.
- The egocentric self is surrounded by another layer of self, the *basho* domain, at the subconscious level.

How do the selves interact? (3/5)

- The expression of the egocentric self interacts with the other egocentric self.
- The self also communicates in the subconscious level in the *basho* domain that is shared by the selves.
- Thus, the selves interact on two levels. One level is the cognitive level (mind) and the other is the level of perception (body).
- At the subconscious level, in the *basho* domain, the selves communicate their sensitivities.

How do the selves interact? (4/5)

- The complex factors governing personal pronoun choice reflect the interactional relationships, the situational settings, and the speakers' identities. They cannot simply be explained by the speaker's shift of frames as has been tried in the sociolinguistic literatures to date.
- But it can be explained by the dual mode thinking in *ba* based thinking.

How do the selves interact? (5/5)

- *Ba* based thinking assumes that there are two modes of interaction working.
- These are the conscious/cognitive level and the subconscious/body level.
- The speaker communicates in the *basho* domain to make the speaker's position coherent with interactants, settings and identities by the speaker's sense of place (*wakimae*) in context.

Improvised drama(1/3)

The third assumption of *ba*-based thinking

- While the egg model is a static model, the improvised drama model is a dynamic model of *ba* based thinking.
- In our daily lives, we never know what happens next. Moreover, everything changes from moment to moment.
- This dynamic aspect of our activities is metaphorically represented as improvised drama model.

Improvised drama(2/3)

- In the improvised drama, there are actors, an audience, and the theater.
- The theater is the *basho* domain, where actors interact and communicate.
- The actors are influenced by the audience.
- When the actor makes a move, it changes the the *basho* domain where the other actors and the audience are shared , and this move triggers the next actor's move.

Improvised drama(3/3)

- Likewise, nothing is predetermined, and actions change from moment to moment.
- Therefore, frequent/subconscious/automatic changes of self references can be explained.
- *mama* (to children, informal, family member),
baaba (when the grandchildren are within the earshot),
watashi (when a third person is present)

Making sense of complex pronoun choice (1/3)

- As the speaker, you first interact with the addressee and define yourself cognitively.
- You also interact in the shared *basho*, where interactants communicate at the subconscious level. This is where the speakers' sensitivities towards themselves and others are perceived. Thus, the pronouns are chosen according to the speaker's sense of place (*wakimae*) at the moment of speaking.

Making sense of complex pronoun choice (2/3)

- The choice of first person pronoun may change even talking to the same person depending on the content of what you say, who the by-standers are, and the psychological mood of the interaction. You may choose first this pronoun and then another. The dynamics change from moment to moment, so the choice does, too.

Making sense of complex pronoun choice (3/3)

- The practice of complex pronoun choice which changes from moment to moment can not be explained by rules.
- But it can be explained by the metaphorical model of improvised drama, one of the assumptions of *ba* based thinking.

Concluding remarks(1/2)

- We have seen how and why some East Asian personal pronouns are fundamentally different from those of European languages.
- In order to explain the mechanism of why East Asian languages are different, *ba* based thinking was introduced.
- Three assumptions of *ba* based thinking, i.e., immediacy, dual mode thinking and Improvised drama, were discussed in making sense of this complex use of personal pronouns.

Concluding remarks(2/2)

- Up to now, the literature on personal pronouns has been discussed based on the scientific approach of reductionism. (Brown and Gilman 1961)
- However, a number of language practice phenomena in non-western languages fall outside of the frame of thinking of the traditional scientific approach.
- This presentation, I hope, is a step towards an explanation of language use in some non-western languages.

Thank you

Chinese Persona Pronouns

	Normal	Polite
First	wo	
Second	ni	nin

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Yuusuke Mochizuki