

**Report on the Dispatch to Belgian:  
Participation and presentation at the 18th IPrA**

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### **1. Introduction**

As part of the project “the ecological future making of childrearing in contact zones between hunter-gatherers and agro-pastoralists in Africa”, I participated in the 18th International Pragmatics Conference (18th IPrA) held at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (Photo 1). The IPrA is the world's largest research gathering on pragmatics. Related fields include linguistics, anthropology, sociology, communication theory, media studies, etc., and there are many participants from Japan. The purpose of my participation this time is to organize a panel discussion titled “Arts of Distancing in Talk-in-Interaction”, with my collaborator, Dr. Emi Morita (National University of Singapore), in order to construct a theoretical framework on language socialization, and to share knowledge on the latest research results including my own at the panel discussion. In addition, I exchanged views with other participants of the 18th IPrA on the ecological future of child rearing in the contact zone of African hunter-gatherers and agro-pastoralists.



Photo 1: The campus of the Université Libre de Bruxelles.

## 2. The main purpose of the panel

As the Covid-19 pandemic has been raging worldwide, ‘social distancing’ has become a popular concern across various media outlets. The concept of *social distance* was initially advocated by anthropologist Edward T. Hall. Hall (1966) proposed four main zones of space between individuals, i.e., (1) *intimate distance* (less than half a meter), (2) *personal distance* (about 1 meter), (3) *social distance* (2 to 3 meters), and (4) *public distance* (more than 5 meters). Socio-pragmatically, however, each of these ‘distances’ is defined by more than just the degree of physical spacing defined above. Since the seminal work of Tuan (1977), the conceptual distinction between *space* and *place* has been accepted in various disciplines. Likewise, studies of pragmatics have taught us how *communicative practices* can construct, define, and negotiate the socio-cultural meaning of space as place. Certain forms of directives are used to indicate vertical distance within institutional settings, for example, while the use of informal register, specialized vocabulary and dialects are used to co-construct the intimacies of “home” and the membership of casual and professional “in-group” relationships.

Thus, to understand how social meaning is constructed in place, it is necessary to clarify how

various semiotic resources are used in talk-in-interaction (e.g. Goodwin & Cekaite 2018). Through the examination of naturally occurring interaction data, this panel aims to investigate how interactionally constructed place (home, workspace, professional settings) and distance categories (friend/stranger, participant/bystander, etc.) are manifested in everyday talk-in-interaction.

### **3. Contents of the panel discussion**

The panel consisted of an introduction and the following four presentations (presenters are listed in parentheses).

1. Introduction to “Arts of distancing in talk-in-interaction” (Akira Takada, and Emi Morita)
2. Pragmaticization (?) of the Japanese honorific suffix *-haru* as a resource to mark agentive “distance” (Emi Morita, and Akira Takada)
3. Social and spatial distancing in preschool groups in Sweden and Japan: Locating place of self and other in group activities (Matthew Burdelski, and Asta Cekaite)
4. Making distance with the fetus; conversation analysis on prenatal genetic counseling (Michie Kawashima, Hiroki Maeda, and Akane Kondo)
5. Nominalization with *-ke(s)* ‘thing’ in Korean conversation: A “distancing” resource for mitigating epistemic claim (Kyu-hyun Kim)

Along line with the above purpose, Morita and Takada examined the use of the Kinki dialect of Japanese verbal suffix *-haru* and indicated that this known as honorific verbal suffix for denoting pre-established social distance has now also been pragmaticised among children as a way to proclaim distance one’s own differential measure of agency, social responsibility, and/or intentionality from that of another in reference to a certain specifically denoted act.

Burdelski and Cekaite explored ways in which preschool children in Sweden and Japan engage in practices that seek to put social and spatial distance between themselves and other children. Their analysis suggested that children’s pragmatic acts of social and spatial distancing simultaneously entail social proximity, including displaying resistance and alignment in forming social relationships.

Kawashima et al. attempted to deal with interactional management of “distance” with the fetus during the prenatal genetic counseling. Their analysis showed that by managing the distance with the fetus interactionally, the clinical geneticists and parents processed their decision-making not only with the objective/medical reasoning but also personal stance toward the fetus.

Kim explored the interactional meaning of the Korean nominalizing expressions involving the general noun *-ke(s)* (‘thing’) and found that *-ke(s)* plays a key role in rendering these forms interactional resources geared to implementing “distancing” practices.

Thus this panel approached the notion of distancing by focusing on specific linguistic forms (Kim; Morita and Takada), as well as by examining art of distancing in certain institutional settings (Burdelski and Cekaite; Kawashima) and discussed how people would construct and make sense of

distancing among participants. This argument seems to be applicable to language socialization in the contact zone of African hunter-gatherers and agro-pastoralists.

#### **4. Future perspectives**

In this panel, we were able to discuss skills and techniques for constructing, defining, and negotiating social distance among participants in interactions through a combination of the use of specific grammatical items and features in the participation framework. However, there is still a lack of empirical data and a theoretical framework for comparing and contrasting these practices. We intend to collect and analyze data on language socialization among various African hunter-gatherers and agro-pastoralists for further study.

Finally, my stay in Brussels this time was extremely short (two nights and three days) because it was still in the middle of the semester in Japan. However, during my stay in Brussels, I was able to see and hear about architectural monuments that remind me of European history, and to dine at a wonderful restaurant that combines the culinary cultures of various regions of the world (Photos 2 and 3). As an Africanist and anthropologist, I was very interested in this city, and I left Brussels wishing to return with a more flexible schedule.



Photo 2: Grand-Place Square in the center of Brussels, which is registered as a World Heritage site and is said to be the most beautiful in the world.



Photo 3: Belgian beer and stewed rabbit meat were the order of the day.

### References

- Goodwin, M. H. and Cekaite, A. (2018) *Embodied family choreography: Practices of control, care, and mundane creativity*. London: Routledge.
- Hall, E. T. (1966) *The hidden dimension*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
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