



Title	PARTICIPATION IN FAMILY CONVERSATION AS AN ADDRESSEE : A CASE STUDY OF A FOUR-YEAR-OLD BOY
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Citation	乳幼児発達臨床センター年報, 28, 63-75
Issue Date	2006-03
Doc URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2115/25374
Type	bulletin (article)
File Information	28_P63-75.pdf



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PARTICIPATION IN FAMILY CONVERSATION AS AN ADDRESSEE: A CASE STUDY OF A FOUR-YEAR-OLD BOY

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how the participation status is distributed in a Japanese family conversation. Videotaped daily conversations of one family consisting of four members (father, mother, 4-year-old boy, and 1-year-old boy) were analyzed. Through close examination of three fragments picked out from the transcripts, we could conclude that the 4-year-old boy had judged for himself whether he was an addressee or not, by using the gaze direction of participants including his own. Finally, the limit of this study was discussed.

Key words: family conversation, participation framework, pragmatic development

QUESTION

Conversation at home is an important site where young children learn how to use language. At the first stage of life, infants receive linguistic inputs passively from their parents. When children are able to speak more fluently, children learn an appropriate usage of the language through conversations with their parents. Therefore, participation in family conversation is one prerequisite for children to acquire pragmatic aspects of the language.

For young children, however, participation in family conversation is not an easy task. In a natural setting, there can be a circle of conversation without children. There the adults do not always speak in a suitable way for children. If children want to join the circle, it might be effective for them to use appropriate ways to participate in the conversation. This pragmatic task that occurs in multi-party conversation would be harder than those in adult-child dyad.

Recently, the language development process of children through multi-party conversation has attracted the attention of some researchers (Blum-Kulka & Snow, 2002; Craig & Gallagher, 1982; Gallagher & Craig, 1982; Craig & Washington, 1986). Schieffelin and Ochs (1986) indicated that children's communicative environments could differ among cultures. In some cultures, children will participate in primarily dyadic verbal interaction, typically seen in American White middle class family, while in other cultures, children will partici-

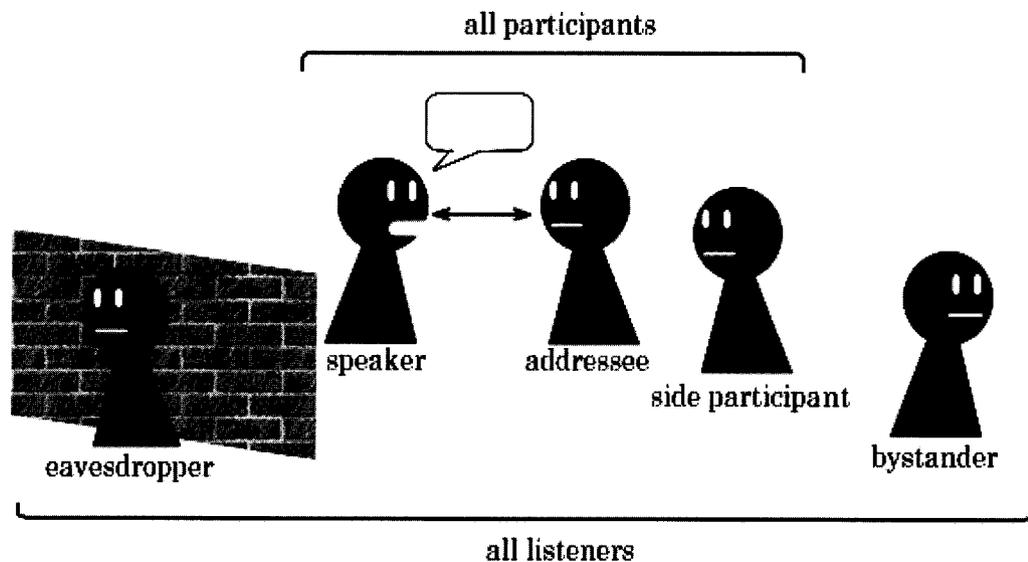


Figure 1 Participation framework (Clark, 1996; Goffman, 1981)

pate in primarily multi-party interaction, which, for example, can be found in Samoan family. However, in most cases, children will encounter multi-party conversation through the process of socialization. This may be so not only in Samoan culture, but also in American or Japanese culture. Dealing with multi-party conversation seems to be a pervasive problem for children in any culture.

In the case of multi-party conversation, one of the biggest problems for children who try to participate in the conversation might be to deal with audience diversity. As some social researchers (Clark, 1996; Goffman, 1981) have stated, in conversational setting there are more types of audible listener than official addressee. There will be side-participants, overhearers and eavesdroppers. According to the concept of “participation framework” (Goffman, 1981), the listeners who are audible to the speaker’s utterance can be divided into ratified participants and unratified participants (see Figure 1). Ratified participants consist of parties such as speaker, addressee and side participant who are “taking part in the conversation but are not currently being addressed” (Clark, 1996, p.14). Unratified participants consist of bystanders and eavesdroppers. They are both overhearers who can hear the speaker’s utterance but are not official participants. The difference between them is that the speaker may be aware of bystanders but not eavesdroppers.

For such diversity of listeners, children should learn whether they are just unratified participants or official addressees who have the responsibility to respond. When there are only two persons, the addressee is the non-speaker thus participants would not misjudge about who the addressee is. However, when three or more persons are participating in the conversation, problems not seen in dyad conversation would emerge. Because there are at least two possible addressees in the audience, the speaker should select addressee from the audience, and the non-speakers should judge who the addressee of the utterance is.

Goodwin (1986) dealt with this problem of audience diversity by examining how a particular topic can divide audience into relevant group and non-relevant group.

"In order to constitute an audience, it is not enough for appropriate recipients to be physically present at the place where a performance occurs. Rather potential witnesses to the performance must actively align themselves to what is happening as an audience." (Goodwin, 1986, p.285)

Goodwin (1986) examined a sequence of talk among three adult couples, and picked out some cues that marked utterances addressed to particular persons in all the listeners.

How do children deal with such problem of audience diversity in their conversations? Craig and Gallagher (1982) and Craig and Washington (1986) investigated this problem through the examination of triad conversation among 4-year-children in playroom experiments. They found that when there were three persons in a room, the one who had stood near by and been gazed by the previous speaker had the highest possibility of being the next speaker. This result was applicable to both white children and black children. Therefore, also seen in the case of children, it might be said that some cues within the conversation have been used for participants to judge who the relevant addressee was.

However, the previous studies have limits in their method. Firstly, they examined data, which comes from somewhat experimental situation where participants have been gathered in a room in order to exclude extra interventions from unexpected participants. Unexpected events may often occur in real conversation. For instance, unexpected participants would interrupt and would suddenly leave the conversation. By experiencing these kinds of accidents, children will learn the use of language to deal with such accidents. This aspect of developmental pragmatics was beyond the subjects of the previous studies.

Secondly, quantitative analysis was the main method in the previous literatures. Though the overall tendency of language use might be understood by quantitative methods, the reason why a certain specific method is adopted by children at a certain moment in a sequence of interaction might not be understood. Thus, to overcome the limits, it is reasonable to investigate the conversation occurred in natural setting through sequential analysis.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the ways adopted by a child to judge who the addressee of the previous speech is in participants of a setting. By examining in detail children's behavior in real conversation among family, it will be clarified what necessary skills are needed to be a good conversationalist.

METHOD

The data used in this study were from videotaped naturalistic conversations of one Japanese family.

Participants

The members of the family were parents and two children; the elder brother, Ken, and the younger brother, Syu (the names of them are pseudonyms). When the observation started, the brothers were 4 years old 7 months and 1 year old and 11 months, respectively. The brothers almost always lived with the mother, since they did not go to kindergarten and the day nursery. The parents' occupations were as follows; mother was a full-time housewife and father was a full-time corporate employee.

Procedures for data collection

The family was requested to take pictures of them with a camcorder when entire family gathered at the living room. The conversations were recorded both with a camcorder and with a digital audio player (iRiver N10), while the latter was put on the elder brother's chest with an adhesive tape. The camcorder was fixed and set up on the shelf that was at the corner of the living room.

We asked them to be at the room as much as possible, but did not limit their free movement and activity. So, the entire family was not necessarily in the living room during the recording time. They were able to decide the day and the time of recording freely. The family was requested to record one-hour long recording, twice a week. Observations were often done on holiday when father was at home.

Procedures for data analysis

After the recording, the audible conversations and the transitions of the gaze direction were transcribed. In fragments of transcriptions below, we used the abbreviation for the names of speakers as follows; K corresponds to Ken, S to Syu, M to mother and F to father, respectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This paper focuses the analytical attention on the 4-year-old elder brother, Ken. Through close investigation of behaviors of Ken during conversations, we examined the child's knowledge of turn allocation. Conversation proceeds as mutual coordination with others, so that the family members' behaviors, other than Ken, will also be the subject matter of analysis. We would like to consider the following question: how did the child take on an addressee role in the previous speech in an ambiguous situation?

Judgment as a speaker

It is not easy for participants to judge whether one is an addressee of a speaker or not. Generally speaking, in the setting where four or more participants exist, two or more conversations that deal with separate topics might be occasionally formed (Figure 2). If a similar phenomenon occurred among three persons, one participant must participate in both conversations where separate topics progress (Figure 3). Seeing this from another aspect, two speakers must make a judgment on which speaker will be the addressee of the next utterance.

This phenomenon applies to conversations at home. When three or more members of a family gather in a room, one should judge who the current addressee is and who will be the next addressee. To illustrate this, we will pick out one fragment from the transcription.

Here is the explanation of the setting of the Fragment 1. Four members of the family gathered in the living room. Ken was asking the mother about the painting, which depicted heroes that appeared in TV program, on a balloon toy. Alongside Ken's question, Syu had also been questioning the names of minicars from the next room, while facing the mother. The mother who was the common respondent of the brothers' questions was not in the camcorder's sight, but her voice was recorded. The father who was sitting on a

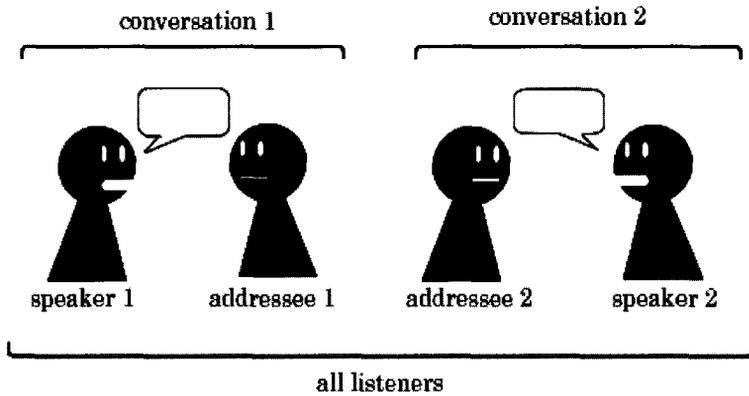


Figure 2 Two circles of conversation that occur simultaneously in one place

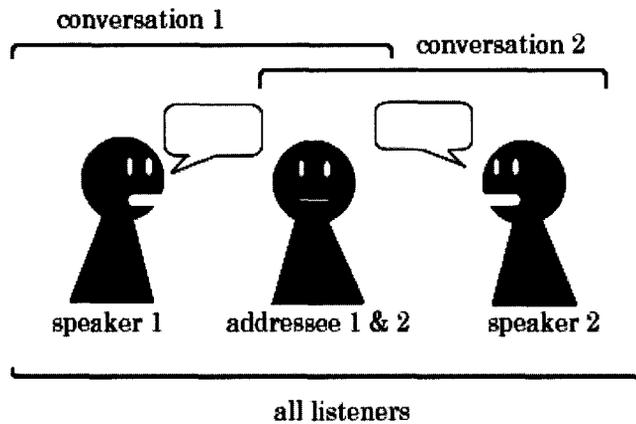


Figure 3 Scrambling to get one addressee's attention between two speakers

chair in silence seemed not to participate in the triad conversation. Transcription and gaze direction are shown in Table 1 and drawing that depicts this setting is illustrated in Figure 4.

Fragment 1

To emphasize that two topics were carried on simultaneously, the dialogue of Syu and the mother is aligned on the left side, and that of Ken and her is on the right side, respectively.

	Speaker 1	Utterance	Speaker 2	Utterance
01			K	Nani kore "What's this?"
02	S	Korewa? Korewa? "What's this?"	Korewa? Korewa? "What's this?"	Korewa? "What's this?"
03			K	Nani kore? "What's this?"

04		M	Kin-niku ja naika "Isn't it a muscle?"
05		K	Kin-niku tte? "What does muscle mean?"
06	S		Korewa? Korewa? Korewa? Kore "What's this? What's this? What's this? What's"
07	M		Syooboosya, patoka "Fire truck, police car."
08	S		Korewa? "What's this?"
09	M		Patokaa "Police car."
10		K	Onna demo kin-niku anno kai "Do women even have muscles?"
11	S		Korewa? Koowa? Koozooba? "What's this?" (The last words were unclear.)
12		M	Sodayo, Onna datte Kin-niku arundayo "Yes. Even women have muscles."

In this sequence, Syu and Ken asked each question to the mother separately (01-02). The mother first responded to Ken's question about the picture (03-04), though Syu have repeated the interrogative utterances (02). After Syu have uttered the interrogation in

Table 1 Transcription of utterances and gaze direction in Fragment 1

Time code (min:sec)	11:51	11:52	11:53	11:54	11:55	11:56	11:57
Ken: utterance	Nanikore? "What's this?"			Nanikore? "What's this?"		Kinnikutte? "What does muscle mean?"	
Ken: gaze	mother	balloon toy	mother	→	balloon toy	→	→
Syu: gaze	minicar on the table	→	→	mother	minicar	→	→
Syu: utterance		Korewa? "What's this?"	Korewa? "What's this?"	Korewa? "What's this?"		Korewa? "What's this?"	Korewa? "What's this?"
Mother: utterance						Kin-nikujanaika "Isn't it muscle?"	

continued

Time code (min:sec)	11:58	11:59	12:00	12:01	12:02	12:03	12:04	12:05
Ken: utterance				Onnademo kinniku annokai "Do women even have muscles?"				
Ken: gaze	→	→	→	→	→	mother	→	balloon toy
Syu: gaze	mother	minicar	mother	→	minicar	→	mother	→
Syu: utterance	Korewa? "What's this?"	Kore "What's this?"	Korewa? "What's this?"		Korewa? "What's this?"		Koowa? "What's this?"	Koozooba?
Mother: utterance		Syobosya, patoka "Fire truck, police car"	Patoka "Police car"				Sodayo, Onna datte Kin-niku arundayo "Yes. Even women have muscles."	

Note. Utterances have been translated into English and are written below the actual utterances in quotation marks. Things written in the column "gaze" indicate objects in the direction of one's gaze. The symbol "→" means that the direction of gaze was carried on from the previous status.

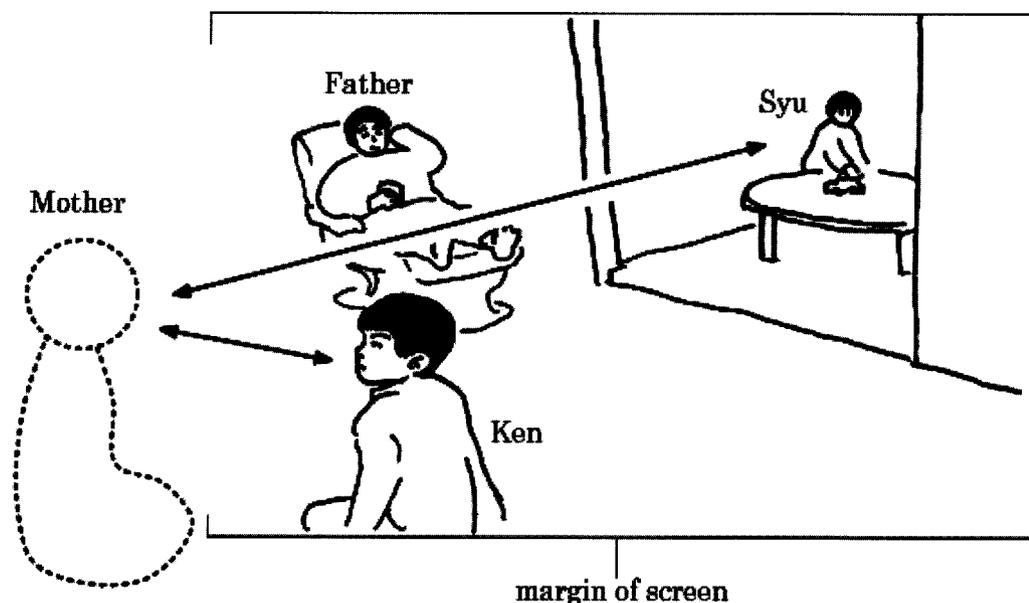


Figure 4 Drawing of the setting at Fragment 1

Note. At this moment, the mother was out of sight but in the room with the family. The figure drawn in dotted line show guessed position of where the mother was sitting.

rapid succession, the mother answered the question finally (06-07). The second question by Ken (05) was not answered because the mother had begun to answer Syu (07). Ken's third question (10) received the mother's answer (12), though the interrogation of Syu could not receive the answer immediately (11).

There are two noticeable points. One is that the mother was skillfully dealing with separate questions that came from two children. These kinds of adult interaction skills are certainly interesting and may need more adequate examination; however, this is not important here. Second and more important point for the subject of this study is that both children did not confuse which answer had been addressed to them. Just after Ken had asked a question to the mother (05), she responded not to him but to Syu in the sequence of 06 to 09. Thus, one may say that he used some kind of cues other than adjacency on sequence as criteria to judge whether the mother's utterance had been addressed to him or not.

To investigate what resource Ken used for judgment of the addressee, we analyzed participants' gaze direction (see Table 1). From close observation of this transcription, Ken almost always glanced over or gazed at the mother before or midst of the question to her. The only occasion that he uttered question without glancing at the mother occurred in 05 (Time Code 11:56 in Table 1). At that time, he was looking at the balloon toy. On the other hand, Ken turned his gaze towards his mother in midstream of the fourth question (10), and by asking a question followed by the gaze, he was able to receive an answer from the mother.

It must be noted that Ken did not react to the mother's utterance that had occurred immediately after his question without glancing at her. That is, Ken seemed to judge that

the utterance of other participants was not addressed to him when he had uttered the adjacent speech without directing his gaze to the participants. To put it differently, in the family setting, if Ken uttered something with looking at somebody, the next speech uttered by the other person would be interpreted by Ken as a reply to his utterance.

This leads us to the speculation that Ken, as speaker, used gazing to make a listener a respondent. Ken might know utterance with gazing to particular listener has some interactive meanings for listeners. For confirmation of this speculation, in the next section we would like to examine how Ken behaved when he was a listener.

Judgment as a listener

We compared two contrasted scenes. One was the scene that Ken responded to the father's calling of Ken's name, and the conversation between them started (Fragment 2) and the other was that both Ken and the mother responded to the father's utterance, and the conversation among parents started (Fragment 3). These scenes from Fragment 2 and 3 were observed for two minutes on a day other than Fragment 1. To illustrate the setting of both scenes, drawings of the body arrangement of the participants are shown in figures below.

Fragment 2

The explanation of setting of Fragment 2 is as follows: both Ken and the father sat on floor. They were at a distance of about 2 meters, and were facing the same direction (Figure 5). When Ken was playing with his dolls, he was called by the father. Right after the father's sixth calling, Ken turned to him. At that time, the father's gaze was towards Ken (Figure 6). Afterwards, the conversation between them lasted for approximately one minute.

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 01 | F | Ken chan, Ken chan
"Ken, Ken" |
| 02 | F | Ken chan
"Ken" |
| 03 | F | Ken chan, Ken chan
"Ken, Ken" |
| 04 | F | Ken chan
"Ken" |
| 05 | K | Un
"What?" |
| 06 | F | Bideono saa kameratte maarui noni sa
"Lens on a camcorder has a circular shape, but" |
| 07 | K | Un
"Yeah." |
| 08 | F | Nande terebini utsusuto shikakuino?
"The image on TV has a square shape, why?" |
| 09 | K | E!
"Uhm." |

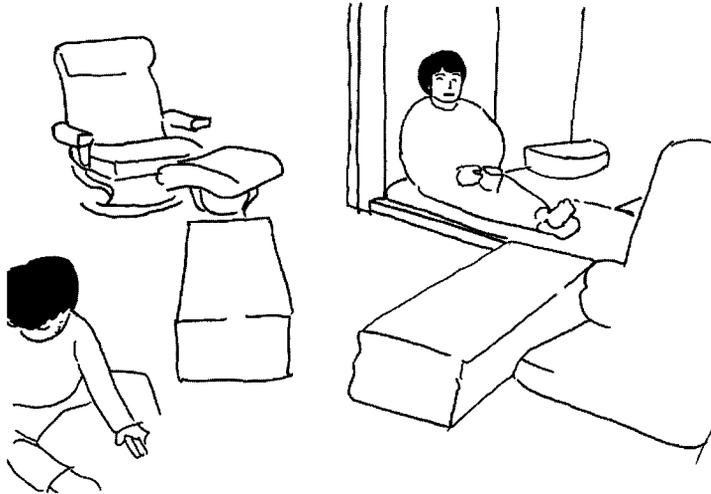


Figure 5 Drawing of the body arrangement and gaze direction at line 01

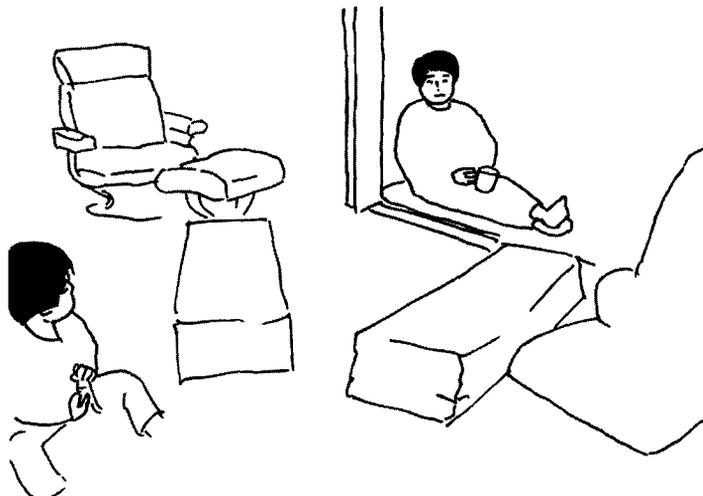


Figure 6 Drawing of the body arrangement and gaze direction at line 05

Fragment 3

The explanation of setting of Fragment 3 is as follows: while father-Ken conversation continued from their exchange in Fragment 2, the mother and Syu sat behind Ken and the father. After the father responded to Ken's utterance, he casted his eyes down to the newspaper on his thigh and Ken started to play with the dolls again (Figure 7). Immediately after the father had asked, "Sutaato nanji data no (What time did it start? "It" seemed to mean the video recording.)" while rubbing his eyes, Ken said "Un (Huh?)" and turned to the father (Figure 8). Ken quickly turned his gaze to the doll in his hands, and then the mother answered, "Eeto ne (Well.)" (Figure 9). The father responded to this, and the conversation between the two lasted several seconds.

- 01 K Soremo bideoni hairuyo sono koemo
 “Your, your voice will be recorded on video, too.”
- 02 F Ufufu hairunja naika
 “Ha, could be.”
- 03 K Soodaroo, waabishitoo, juuwaa, auoo, suchoo
 “I think so.” (the last half of the utterance seemed to be onomatopoeia)
- 04 F Sutaato nanji datta no?
 “What time did it start?”
- 05 K Un?
 “Huh?”
- 06 M Eetone
 “Well.”

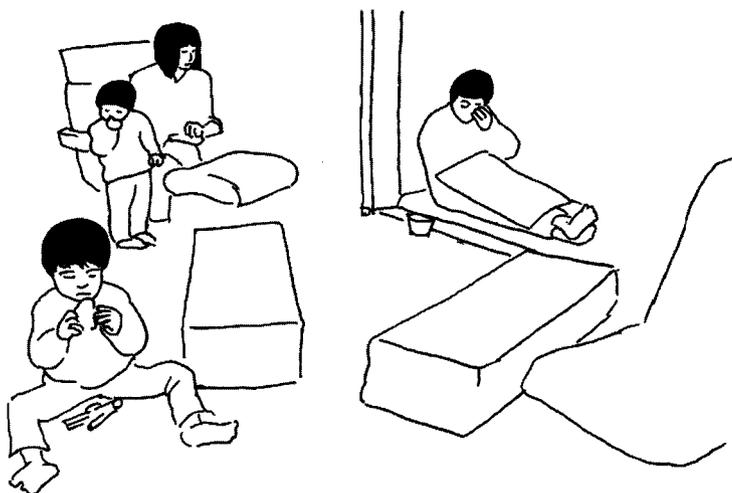


Figure 7 Drawing of the body arrangement and gaze direction at line 04

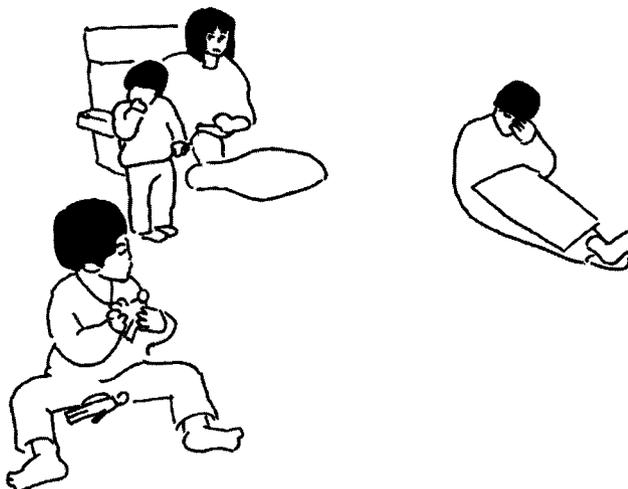


Figure 8 Drawing of the body arrangement and gaze direction at line 05

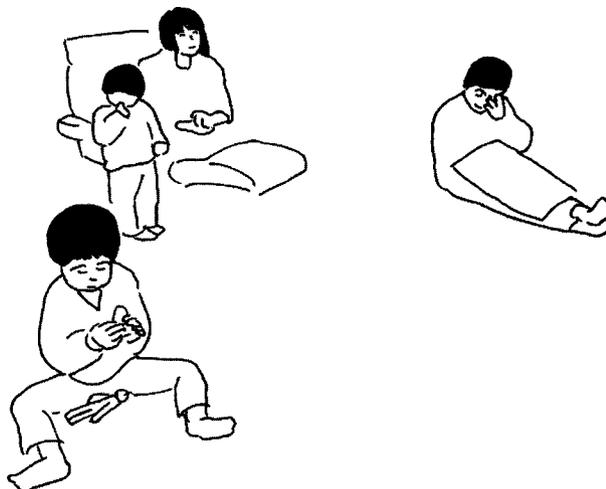


Figure 9 Drawing of the body arrangement and gaze direction at line 06

It can be indicated that there were some consequent differences among Fragments 1 through 3. Major differences were between Fragment 1 and 3, and between Fragment 2 and 3. The former concerns participation framework: one participant responded to the previous questions from two speakers in Fragment 1, two participants responded to the previous questions from one speaker in Fragment 3. We may say that participation framework in Fragment 3 could be depicted as a precisely converse model of Fragment 1. In the latter, the major difference was regarding whether Ken continued his conversation with the father or not. Thus, by comparing these fragments, we can infer the criteria that Ken used to judge whether he had been an addressee or not, in the case where he was one possible addressee among the listeners.

The question that we must consider here is the relationship of the father's gaze direction and Ken's behavior. The point to observe is the father's gaze direction when Ken had turned around. In Fragment 2, when Ken turned to the father, it resulted that they faced each other and the conversation had continued. To the contrary, in Fragment 3, at the moment when Ken turned to the father, the father was not able to gaze at Ken because he was rubbing his eyes. It can be interpreted that when Ken returned to playing with his dolls in Fragment 3, immediately after the response to the father's utterance, shows Ken's judgment that he was not an expected addressee. The father's utterance here was followed by two answers by Ken and the mother. This suggests that because there was no gaze, Ken judged for himself that he was not an expected addressee, since the two answerers were both possible addressee of the father's utterance.

Of course, it is necessary to think about another possibility. For example, the reason why Ken did not continue the conversation might be because he had judged the father's question in Fragment 3 (04) to be too difficult for him to answer. However, in Fragment 2, the question raised by the father (06) was likely to be as difficult for Ken as the one in Fragment 3. Therefore, it can not be concluded that the contents of the father's questions affected Ken's judgment.

Interestingly, the mother was able to judge that she was an addressee though the father

was not looking at the mother in Fragment 3. Possibly, the cues are necessary to open up the conversation between parents and children, while it is not necessary for the father and the mother. This hypothesis would be worthy to investigate for the study of family conversation, but to argue this point would take us beyond the scope of this paper.

We may briefly summarize the above as follows: As a speaker, Ken expected the listener who he had been directing his gaze would be the respondent for his utterance. As a listener, he presumed that the speaker who had directed his/her gaze at him would address him for interlocutor.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In this paper, we have explored the behaviors of a 4-year-old boy in a natural conversation that took place at his home. Generally, children will learn various aspects of language use through participation in family conversation. However, participating in a conversation is not a simple task because we need to know the ongoing dynamics of participation framework. To approach this issue, we investigated on how the boy would judge who the addressee of the previous speech was.

With close examination of three fragments collected from the transcription, Ken seemed to have turn allocation knowledge to judge that the next possible speaker had received the previous speaker's gaze. When he was one of the listeners, it was critical for Ken's judgment that the speaker had been facing him. This was clarified from the comparison between Fragment 2 and 3. On the other hand, in Fragment 1, when he had asked question without looking at his mother, he judged that the mother's answer was not addressed to him but to Syu. It seems that Ken, as a speaker, had used this knowledge.

From these findings, we can consider that the gaze of participants was one of critical resources for Ken to organizing multi-party conversation. Gaze has been considered as one of the major resources for organizing turn allocation by sociologists, such as Kendon (1967), Heath (1986) and Goodwin (1980), and by developmental researchers, such as Craig and Gallagher (1982). This study suggests that in daily conversation at home, a child used the participants' gaze direction to judge who the addressee was and to participate in the conversation appropriately.

Because this analysis is based on only three fragments taken from just one family, the findings obtained here has limits in application. To improve validity of the findings, it will be necessary to investigate other families' conversations as well.

Notes

This paper is based on the presentation presented at The 47th Annual Meeting of Japan Society of Educational Psychology (Asai Gakuen University, Hokkaido) and The 17th Annual Meeting of Japan Society of Developmental Psychology (Kyusyu University).

This research was partially supported by the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, Grant-in-Aid for Young Scientists (B), 17730377, 2005.

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