

Poetics through Body and Soul: A Plurimodal Approach

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Abstract

In this presentation, I will show that various multimodal resources—such as utterance, prosody, rhythm, schematic images, and bodily reactions—may integratively contribute to the holistic achievement of poeticity. By incorporating the ideas from “ethnopoetics” (Hymes 1981, 1996) and “gesture studies” (McNeill 1992, 2005), I will present a plurimodal analysis of naturally occurring interactions by highlighting the interplay among the verbal, nonverbal, and corporeal representations. With those observations, I confirm that poeticity is not a distinctive quality restricted to constructed poetry or “high” culture, but rather an endowment to any kind of natural discourse that is co-constructed by various semiotic resources.

My claim specifically concerns a renewed interest in an ethnopoetic kata ‘form/ shape/ style/ model’ embraced as performative “habitus” among Japanese speakers (Kataoka 2012). Kata, in its broader sense, is stable as well as versatile, often serving as an organizational “template” for performance, which at opportune moments may change its shape and trajectory according to ongoing developments. In other words, preferred structures are not confined to an emergent management of performance, but should also incorporate culturally embedded practices with immediate (re)actions.

In order to promote this claim, I explore a case in which mutually coordinated performance is extensively pursued for sharing sympathy and camaraderie. Such a kata-driven construction was typically observed in a highly involved, interactional interview about the Great East Japan Earthquake,

in which both interviewer and interviewee were recursively oriented and attuned to the same rhythmic and organizational pattern consisting of an odd-number of kata.

Based on these observations, I argue that indigenous principles of organizing discourse are as crucial as the mechanisms of conversational organization, with the higher-order, macro cultural preferences inevitably infiltrating into the micromanagement of spontaneous talk.

Keywords: ethnopoetics, multimodality, gesture

Introduction

In this paper, I will tentatively show that various semiotic resources—such as utterance, prosody, rhythm, schematic images, and bodily reactions—may integratively contribute to the holistic achievement of poeticity. By incorporating ideas from “ethnopoetics” (Hymes 1981, 1996) and “conditional relevance” (Schegloff 1968), I will present a “plurimodal” analysis of naturally occurring interaction by highlighting the interplay among the verbal, nonverbal, and corporeal representations.

What I mean by “plurimodality” is characterized by a renewed interest in various forms of signs, cultural schemes and shared assumptions. These issues are often ignored by multimodal analysts, who aim to reveal micro-level, universally shared methods of interaction. My claim also concerns an indigenous but widely applicable notion, kata ‘form/ shape/ style/ model’ (Minamoto 1992, Yoshimoto 2001), which is embraced as performative “habitus” (Bourdieu 1990) among Japanese speakers. Kata, in its broader sense, is stable as well as versatile, often serving as an organizational template for performance, which at opportune moments may change its shape and trajectory according to ongoing developments.

Following these assumptions, the purpose of my analysis is three-fold. First, I will examine indigenously customized preferences in organizing talk and discourse, which are typically realized through (ethno)poetic constructions (Jakobson 1960; Hymes 1981, 1996). Secondly, I will try to classify those preferred constructions in terms of (at least) three levels of “relevance” (cf. Schegloff 1968). And finally, by paying closer attention to both embedded and emerging poetic practices of the community (cf. Silverstein 1985; McNeill 2003; Kroskrity and Webster 2015), I will show that poeticity is not a distinctive quality restricted to constructed poetry or “high” culture, but rather an endowment to any kind of natural discourse (however, attention to plurimodal elements is highly limited here: see Kataoka (in preparation) for a full treatment).

Frameworks for Analysis

Ethnopoetics, the term coined by Jerome Rothenberg, goes back to the 1960s, when many folklorists, anthropologists, linguists, poets, and translators tried to capture the power and beauty of the indigenous poetic performances that fail to be fully appreciated in the Western poetic traditions. Anthropologists

such as Hymes (1981) and Tedlock (1983) have individually developed frameworks for analysing such indigenous oral lore and performance, depending heavily on Jakobson's (1960, 1966) theory of the poetic function of language. This paper relies on their approaches for analyzing the systematic structure of verbal/non-verbal exchanges especially because the poetic nature of interaction has long been recognized in many fields of language studies (for recent developments, see Kroskrity and Webster, 2015).

Another property that harnesses ongoing, emerging developments of talk is "conditional relevance" (Schegloff 1968), which stipulates that the production of a first pair-part makes a corresponding response both relevant and anticipated. This condition will typically be fulfilled through "adjacency pairs" (e.g., Question-Answer) in the sequential organization. Such practice-based interaction, or what is called *kata* 'form/ shape/ style/ model' (Minamoto 1992; Yoshimoto 2001), however, should not be confined to "micro" management of interaction—it may also incorporate "meso" and "macro" practices of community beyond local contingencies (cf. Levinson 2005).

Thus I claim the need for a broader concept which integrates "micro-to-macro" levels of relevance in discourse—or *kata* as an organizational motherboard, and point out that (at least) three levels of "relevance" are crucially expected (cf. Lakoff 1987; Hymes 1981, 1996). Specifically, the following levels of relevance (emergence of *kata*) were confirmed (1).

- (a) Micro, sequential, and highly universal level: "conditional relevance" (originally from conversation analysis)
 Meso, schematically shared, partially universal and partially particularized level: "schematic relevance."
 Macro, rhetorical/poetic, and culturally particularized, performatively habitualized level: "ethnopoetic relevance"

Generally speaking, a course of development in talk may be unpredictable, but still, the *kata*-based relevance may work to individually and/or collaboratively weave talk, body, and environment together into a larger textile. In the following analysis, attention to these types of relevance is shown to be essential to make certain discursive practice coherent and preferred.

Data and Participants

Here I explore a case in which mutually coordinated performance is extensively pursued for establishing and sharing sympathy and camaraderie. Such a *kata*-driven construction was typically observed in a highly involved, semi-structured interview about the Great East Japan Earthquake, which was collected in May, 2012, in Tochigi Prefecture (Tohoku District in Japan).¹

A selected segment from the interview concerns "changes in consciousness of childbirth and rearing," a question asked at the end of the interview session. There, both interviewer and interviewees were recursively oriented and attuned to the equivalent patterns organized at different levels of *kata*. The participants consist of the researcher/interviewer and two interviewees recruited through the

researcher's personal relationship. The abbreviations of the participant codes are as follows (2):

- A: Atsuko (Interviewer)
- B: Bunta (Interviewee 1: C's husband)
- C: Chiho (Interviewee 2: A's friend and mother of two children)

Analysis

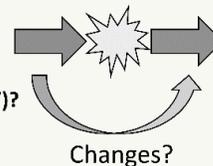
In what follows, I argue that higher-order macro principles of organizing discourse are as crucial as the mechanisms of micro-level conversational organization, with the former preferences unavoidably seeping into the micro management of spontaneous talk. Based on the assumption, the three levels of relevance are separately examined, and shown to collaborate to achieve hybrid poetics in interaction. In the following transcripts, only the English translation accompanies the line-by-line Japanese

Conditional relevance: "Adjacency pairs" and beyond

At the beginning of this segment, the interviewer A sets the upcoming topic by asking "Are there any changes in your sensitivity (i.e., "what you care about") before and after the earthquake?" To this question B answers that it is "food and drinks" (Ex. 1, Line 9: consequence of radioactive contamination), followed by A's confirmation "Ah huh" (Line 10). Obviously, this is an ordinary adjacency pair consisting of Question-Answer expressions, serving as a major building block of the interview. Similar sorts of pairs based on conditional relevance can be abundantly found throughout the interview session.

Example 1

1. A: We:ll (0.9)
2. we had 3.11 Disaster, you know.
3. B: yeah.
4. A: We had the earthquake.
5. And .. regarding the earthquake ,
6. before and after that (= the earthquake), ((induces "dichotomy"))
7. as you raise your kids,
8. are there any changes in your sensitivity (i.e., "what you care about")?
9. B: Food, (0.4) ... and drinks.
10. A: Ah huh:



What is intriguing about the data is that this particular question seemed to have induced and evoked in the minds of the participants a certain image based on what I call "schematic relevance," to which we now turn.

Schematic Relevance: “Leave/come-home” Schema

Because Interviewer A inquires Interviewee B of his psychological changes “before and after the earthquake,” B’s concern about food safety is an explicit reaction to ominous consequences of the disaster to the family. Preceded by this exchange, the same question was asked of C. Thus it seems quite natural for C, as a mother, to envision her children’s safety in terms of the “before/after” dichotomy—specifically through the “leave/come-home” schema—because the earthquake hit the area when her young son was at school (2:46 pm), he left home “before” the earthquake, and (fortunately) came home safe and sound “after” it.

Given this, both B’s concerns for food and C’s concerns for child safety share a common schema of “irreversibility” of consequence—“irreversible” in the sense that C’s son could not have made it back home if something worse had happened. Accordingly, C’s concern was most likely based on the experiential schema shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The “leave/come-home” schema

In the ritual greetings of “leaving/coming home,” *itte-rasshai* ‘please go’ is to be addressed to those leaving home, and they are supposed to return a phrase *itte-kimasu* ‘I will go and come back.’ When they come back home, they would say *tadaima* ‘I’m home,’ and someone at home will say *okaeri* ‘Welcome back.’ The order of *itte-rasshai* and *itte-kimasu* is reversible, as is that for *tadaima* and *okaeri-nasai*, but these sets of ritual expressions are not reversible in the larger construct of the “leave/come-home” schema. In other words, once one leaves home, s/he must come back there to fulfill the schema. This schema anticipates another practical relevance, or *kata*, in the larger unit of interaction above the level of adjacency pairs.

In Ex. 2, it is not yet clear whether the phrase “when they are leaving” (Line 95) is the trigger for the “leave/come-home” schema (cf. Lakoff 1987), but we recognize retrospectively that it is the case. The initiation of C’s “leave/come-home” schema was induced by A’s question, “what do YOU think?” (Ex. 2, Line 94), which was to be interpreted as the same inquiry toward B (Ex. 1, Lines 5-8).

Example 2

93. A: (2.0) ((turns to C))
 94. Well C-chan, (0.5) what do YOU think?
 95. C: I, now I never fail to look at their (=my kids') faces when they are leaving.
 96. A: Oh:
 97. <@ y[ou do @>.]
 98. C: [w e : l l] you know,
 99. A: So--
 100. C: how can I put it ..
 101. 'cuz there are so many people who died, ..
 102. A: yeah yeah (0.5)

The "before-after" dichotomy begins to merge with a "leave/come-home" schema.

That "leave/come home" schema actually came to be merged with the "before/after" dichotomy in the following exchange. The first pair part in the schematic relevance ("when they are leaving": Line 95) was initially not paired with the second pair part (the "coming home" part), but was re-introduced with more refinement (Ex. 3: Line 108), and was completed with the "come-home" pair part (Lines 114).

Example 3

103. C: w₁hen, .. yeah, when₁
 104. A: [₁while they were away₁]
 105. C: no one knows when such a big earthquake [2may occur,
 106. A: [₂yea yea yeah₂]
 107. C: well it (death on the road) could happen to yo:u my dear, ((turns to B, and back to A))
 108. So now I see them off, saying [₃"Please go!"₃] "Leaving home"
 109. A: [₃yea yea yea yeah₃]
 110. C: > though I may be staying home all [₄day₄]
 111. A: [₄yea₄] yeahme-
 112. C: and I'm the one who sees them [₅off,
 113. A: [₅N N ((nods slowly))
 114. C: but being able to see them come home [₆and₆] >hear they say, "I'm home" > is really,
 115. A: [₆yeah₆]
 116. C: re[₇freshing. ₇]
 117. A: [₇Relieved. ₇]

Many people died (because of the quake)

"Leaving home"

"Coming home"

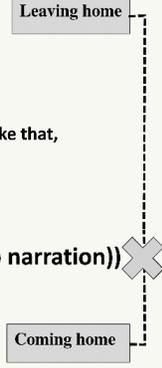
= survival = relief

For C, her son's failing to come back home safely was something she would never have imagined before the earthquake, so she regarded the fact that he did as shinsen "refreshing" (Line 116), or perhaps a "feat/miracle," which is worth telling for the merit of the schema.

Later in the interview, this "leave/come-home" schema is employed two more times. The one in Ex. 4 is the last (or third) round of the schema, where Speaker C resumed and completed the pair by commenting on her worries about "not coming home safely" (Line 236) even after the 13-line digression induced by Speaker B (Lines 221-233). It is notable that C could have moved out of her floor when B made the digression (Line 221-233), but volunteered to resume it and completed the

schema. We now see that, just like an adjacency pair in conversation, this ad hoc “leave/come-home” schema seems to induce strong relevance to the fulfillment of the pair.

Example 4

209. C: yeah but you know,
210. That scene of his leaving home today,
211. A: N N N
212. C: I watch more intently than before or something,
213. A: N uhuh uhuh
214. C: I search for him from [1]here ((in the living room))
215. A: [1] uhuh [2] uhuh uhuh
216. [2] and then run upstairs and [3] watch him from behind, and like that,
217. A: [3] uhuh uhuh <@ uhuh hxhx@>
218. We surely see them off, don't we?
219. C: yeeeahh.
220. A: I know [1] I know. ((cognition verb))
((rebuttal by B -->13 lines omitted – return to narration)) 
234. C: *If it hits us again,*
235. A: Un.
236. C: *I just wonder if they come back home alright-* [yeah
237. A: [Just wonder if they will come home alright.
238. Un.
239. C: (0.8) that's [what I think ((cognition verb))
240. A: [Un .
- 

Next, I examine if there exists another higher-order level of relevance that binds the discourse together beyond the micro and meso levels. The tripartite set of “leave/come home” schemas that we observed above could be a good example, but I will instead refer to another achievement of a similar set of odd-number constructions. There, another tripartite construct was discursively realized in terms of “action vs. thought” (external vs. internal) pairs, which were in fact repeated three times.

Ethnopoetic Relevance: A “tripartite” Construction

I will focus on a macro level construction termed here “(ethno)poetic relevance.” I have elsewhere shown that tripartite constructions are prevalent in Japanese discourse (Kataoka 2009, 2012; see also Yoshimoto 2001), and in that sense, they should inherently show strong relevance to such an ethnopoetic organization. That being the case, if the third element is not complemented in the tripartite construction, participants would naturally perceive that “something is missing.” Despite this acute awareness, however, discourse analysts have rarely dealt with plurimodal achievements in terms of such higher-order organizations.

In Ex. 5, C’s imaginary (but highly plausible) utterances addressed to Ryota (C’s son) were first quoted in her own voice (Lines 192, 194), followed by the quote of her inner voice (“Self- thought”: Line 197). The same formation was recycled in an expanded style: Quotes of her “self- utterance” in Line 199, 201, and 203, and “self-thought” in Line 205 and 207. Here, a preferred sequence is repeated, starting from the “outer” and ending with the “inner” depiction. As we have already seen for “conditional” and “schematic” relevance, use of a certain element would induce (an)other element(s)

to appear, motivating the fulfillment of an expected formation in situ.

Example 5

188. C: yeah:
189. A: [‘ it’ scary. ‘
190. C: [even if I, you know, pay a lot of attention:
191. A: uhuh
192. C: “if it’s coming [from behind, [y’know what I mean,
193. A: [n un un un un N N } Quote of self-utterance
194. C: anyway you gotta be attentive walking on the <@street” [1-hx } } ①
195. }
196. A: [1nn [2nn nn nn } Quote of self-thought
197. C: [2 “especially dubious with Ryota,” I guess. }
198. A: m @@@@ [3@ ((Looks at B))
199. C: [3 “Don’t look around restlessly,
200. A: [4 @@@@ ((Looks down a moment)) } Quote of self-utterance
201. C: [4 or don’t swing around your umbrella, } } ②
202. A: -yes yes yes [1 yes yes }
203. C: [1 you gotta walk seriously,” [2 that’s what I say. }
204. A: [2 yes yes yes yes yes } Quote of self-thought
205. C: (0.8) “cuz my kid is timid,” [I would say.
206. A: [N N N }
207. C: “I wanna make it clear anyway,” so I thought. (cognition verb)
208. A: -n n n }

Both A’s and C’s utterances and reactions are characterized by systematic repetitions, where the formation of quotes consists of 3 lines (2+1) and 5 lines (3+2). What is more notable is that, for these eight lines, Interviewer A’s reactions consist of repeated sets of different aizuchi’s ‘backchannels,’ which come in four pairs of the same two aizuchi’s repeated rhythmically (Lines 194/196, 202/204, 206/208), with laughter inserted as an evaluative response (Lines 198/200).

The third installment of the “outer-to-inner” shift (Ex. 6) appeared following Ex. 5, where we find an equivalent (but not identical) set of the “action-thought” pair.

Example 6

209. C: yeah but you know,
210. That scene of his leaving home today,
211. A: N N N }
212. C: I watch it more intently than before or something, } Reference to self-action
213. A: N uhuh uhuh }
214. C: I search for him from [1 here ((from the living room)) }
215. A: [1 uhuh [2 uhuh uhuh }
216. C: [2 and then run upstairs and [3 watch him from behind, or like that, }
217. A: [3 uhuh uhuh <@ uhuh hxhx@> } } ③
218. We surely see them off, don’t we?
219. C: yeeeahh.
220. A: I know [1 I know. (cognition verb)
((rebuttal by B --> 13 lines omitted – return to narration))
234. C: “If it hits us again,
235. A: Yeah. }
236. C: I just wonder if they come back home alright-” [yeah } Quote of self-thought
237. A: [just wonder if they will come home alright.
238. Yeah.
239. C: (0.8) that’s [what I think (cognition verb) }
240. A: [Uhun. } Recurrent returns!

In Ex. 6, C first makes a reference to her “self-action” when her son Ryota is leaving home (Lines

210-216), complemented by her reference to “self-thought” (Line 234 and 236). It is intriguing that even after the 13-line digression by Speaker B, Speaker C resumed the story by commenting on her self-thought, completing the third “action-thought” pair. (This portion, as is evident now, overlaps with the third installment of the “leave/come-home” schema mentioned above). The overall organization is a unit of three’s, each of which shows a centripetal epistemic shift from outside to inside. Besides, not only the textual representations but also gestural/ somatic representations exhibit a highly equivalent and repetitive formations on other levels, concerting to create higher-level organizations together.

Specifically, while Interviewer A’s initial response (Line 211) is to just nod (“N”), at Line 213 her nods turn into the backchannel “uhuh.” Then, at Line 215, she continues uttering “uhuh,” nodding simultaneously. Finally, in Line 217, she also overlaps an evaluative gesture, namely a smile/laugh, on the last beat of her backchannel. Additionally, as seen before, a sequence of overlapping utterances begins to emerge at Line 215. Notably, each of A’s four responses consist of three beats, and they comprise repeated iterations of equivalent elements (albeit not completely homogeneous). As the participants project these cumulative and equivalent responses, an accommodative structure begins to form.

One more thing to note is the insertion point of the evaluative “cognitive” verbs *omou* “think” and *wakaru* “know/understand.” These verbs, used by all the participants, only appeared at the thematic boundaries, marking the termination of the theme or give a conclusive tone to the preceding utterances. It is not accidental that these verbs were employed at these points because showing understanding and agreement, whether verbally or nonverbally (such as systematic patterns of nodding and eye gaze), clearly serve as a boundary marker of interaction (see Kataoka (in preparation) for more details on plurimodal achievements).

The rationale for recognizing these utterances as “ethno-poetic” would be evident—it is “ethno” because this tripartite formation is culturally habitualized, and “poetic” because it is based on systematic patterns of repetition and parallelism—the attainment called “recurrent returns” by Jakobson (1966). However, ethnopoetic relevance would be just one type of realization of the macro-level relevance, so it would not be surprising if there are other types of macro-level *kata*’s as well.

Given all these observations, we can now make a general argument that other *kata*-based levels of relevance should be acknowledged in addition to a micro-level conditional relevance, with the meso and macro-levels infiltrating into each other to make coherent and holistic the interactional practice (Figure 2).

There, the constraints on the structure, or *kata*, gradually diminish and tend to become less visible (and conscious) as we move toward the periphery. But these types of relevance should still work in combination to organize the preferred discourse.

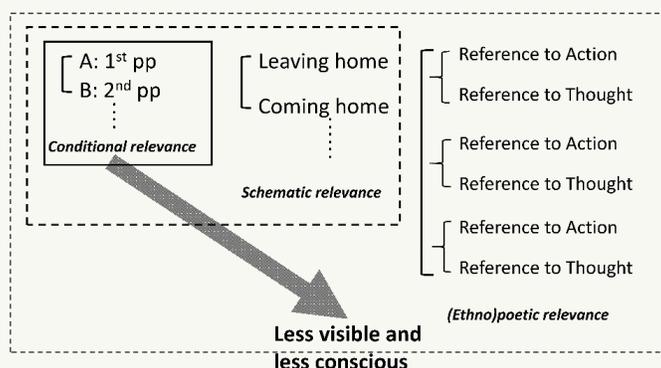


Figure 2. (At least) 3 levels of discursive relevance

Conclusion

“Micro” is not everything, as Levinson (2005) warned against what he called “Manny’s dangerous idea” that assumes that micro-level managements can fully explain the intricacies of interaction. I emphasize that schematic and poetic principles of organizing talk are, though less visible, as crucial as conditional relevance, because they inevitably infiltrate into the micro management of talk (and vice versa). We need not only to deal with ad-hoc, emergent, agentive interactions but also to re-capture the covertly habituated, cultural practices by attending to various semiotic resources. For that purpose, the notion *kata* is a useful tool that encompasses a textual, performative, and conceptual template for multi-level, plurimodal achievement.

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Endnotes

- 1 The original data was collected by Takako Okamoto, and I greatly appreciate her generous permission to use this segment for the analysis. utterance is presented to save space and secure the ease of visibility (see Kataoka (in preparation) for a full rendition of the text).