

Exploring human communication from the perspective of “semiosis”

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Abstract

Communication is such a complex phenomenon that grasping its entire picture is a formidable challenge. My research confronts this challenge by centering on three core ideas. (1) Drawing on semiotics, it focuses on the three modes of signification based on “similarity,” “existential contiguity,” and “social convention”; (2) it views communication as the “interaction between occurring signs and their surrounding contexts” mediated by such sign modes; (3) it recognizes that human communication is fundamentally social and closely related to identities and power relations. By adopting this approach, I am trying to address seemingly disconnected issues of communication within a unified framework.

Background & Results

I am currently involved in two main (collaborative) research projects. One is an attempt to establish “multimodal semiotics.” In communication, we respond not only to language, but also to various body movements, such as body orientations, movements of the head, hands, and feet, and pointing. We react to them because they serve as signs that “point to” (index) something related to ongoing communication, and we are actually reading such indexing. Hence, communication is an empirical site in which different signs, including language and body movements, and various contextual elements that are made relevant by mediating signs “come to coherence,” generating a variety of interpretations. From this stance, I am analyzing (partly) annotated video data to figure out semiotic mediation processes that underlie co-occurrence and sequence of gestures and other body movements.

The other is investigation of identities, power relations, and ideologies associated to communicative practices in the context of language education, especially English language education in Japan. We not only use certain languages in society, but also hold beliefs about languages (language ideologies) like “English is a global language.” In addition, (often institutional) sites of language education, like schools, have specific social norms, roles, and asymmetrical relations in which language learning is always embedded. With a goal to support practices to nurture critical language awareness, my research aims to uncover what values regarding language and communication are reproduced in language education, how teachers and learners internalize and resist them, and what contexts are reinforced and/or transformed by such acts.

Significance of the research and Future perspective

The projects introduced here are driven by consistent questions; “How do various constitutive factors of human communication, from language and body movements to social relations, intersect?” and “What are the processes that make such intersection possible?” While contemporary technological development enables highly advanced statistical analyses based on “big data,” the significance of my research lies in shedding light on areas that may be overlooked

by such analyses. I hope to contribute to society by committing to communication research that encompasses both identification of patterns and contextual diversity.



Embodied interaction between a science communicator and visitors [Data provided by National Institute of Informatics]



Joint emergence of “learning English” and “being a student”

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U R L	Enomoto, Takeshi, Linguistic anthropology of EFL education, Osaka University Press, 2019 (in Japanese)
Keyword	Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) Scientific Research Grants for Research in the Field of Academic Change (B) 2022 “Embodied semiotics: Understanding gesture and sign language in language interaction” https://research.nii.ac.jp/EmSemi/index_e.html
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