

# Pragmatics Matters: Issue 39, Autumn 2012

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## JALT Pragmatics SIG Newsletter

JALT (全国語学教育学会) 語用論部会 ニュースレター

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## From the editor:

Hello everyone. I hope you have all had a fruitful summer, wherever it may have taken you.

This edition of the newsletter is being slightly hurried out so you have it before the JALT National Conference. In addition to our own presentations, discussions and annual SIG meeting, we have a special incentive to join the conference this year. **We are excited to welcome Dr. Alan Firth, from the University of Newcastle, England, as our sponsored speaker.** You can read about his presentation and research interests on the JALT website: [here](#)

More immediately, however, there are two things concerning the SIG and Dr. Firth. The **first** is information about, and an invitation to, **a special CA data session** which Dr. Firth will be leading a session on the Friday evening before the conference; that is, on October 12th, from 17:00 to 18:30 in Hamamatsu. As it is by invitation only, there is no information about this event in the conference booklet. Space is limited, so **if you wish to attend, please tell Donna Fujimoto** as soon as possible. Her email address is: [fujimotodonna@gmail.com](mailto:fujimotodonna@gmail.com)

The **second** item concerns this newsletter. **Our main feature in this edition is an interview with Alan Firth**, conducted by Ian Nakamura, who has been at the forefront of CA studies in Japan in recent years. I hope you enjoy this interesting and insightful exchange as a primer before Dr. Firth's talks at the conference.

Our **other feature** is a look back at some of the Pragmatics events at a very

## 編集者より

皆様、こんにちは。皆様がそれぞれの場所で実り多い夏休みを過ごされたことと拝察いたします。

語用論部会ニューズレター今号は、JALT 全国大会の前に皆様のお手元に届くように少々早めに発行しています。今年の全国大会には、会員の発表、ディスカッション、部会の年次会議に加えて、是非参加していただきたい特別な理由があります。それは、本部会の主催による、英国ニューカッスル大学のアラン・ファース博士のご講演です！ファース博士のご講演や研究分野についての詳細は、JALT ホームページをご参照ください。 [here](#)

ファース博士のご講演に伴いまして、至急のお知らせが2つあります。まず1つ目は、大会前の金曜日の夕方に行われる、ファース博士指導のものと CA データセッションです。10月12日17時から18時まで浜松でおこなわれます。このセッションは招待者のみ参加可能ですので、大会パンフレットには記載されていません。参加できる人数が限られていますので、**参加希望の方はドナ・フジモトまで至急連絡してください。**連絡先は次のメールアドレスです。 [fujimotodonna@gmail.com](mailto:fujimotodonna@gmail.com)

2つ目は、ニューズレター今号に関係しています。今号の特集記事は、イエン・ナカムラによるアラン・ファース博士へのインタビュー記事です。イエン・ナカムラは日本における最近の CA 研究の最前線にいます。大会でのファース博士のご講演をお聴きになる前に、2人の研究者による興味深く示唆に富むこの対談を手引きとして読んでいただければ幸いです。

その他、今号には、6月に広島で行わ

## From the editor: Knight

well-attended and enjoyable Pan-SIG conference, which took place at Hiroshima University in June.

Thank you for reading. Contributions to forthcoming editions are very welcome, of course. Please send articles or suggestions or questions to the editor at: [tknight303@gmail.com](mailto:tknight303@gmail.com). Thank you.

Tim Knight



Where in Japan was this photo taken? Those two fingers aimed at my neck look as if they are trying to do me harm, but I had a very enjoyable recent visit.

れた Pan-SIG 会議におけるプラグマティクスに関連するイベントについての記事も掲載されています。

ご購入ありがとうございます。皆様からの記事も歓迎しています。次号以降への記事掲載のご希望、ご提案、ご質問は、編集者の次の連絡先に送ってください。 [tknight303@gmail.com](mailto:tknight303@gmail.com). ありがとうございます。

ティム・ナイト

## Japanese co-editors:

**Naoko Osuka & Yukie Saito**

## Interview with DR. ALAN FIRTH:

Ian Nakamura

**Alan Firth** is one of the foremost authorities of English as a lingua franca, SLA, ethnomethodology, and conversation analysis (CA). He kindly agreed to be interviewed as an introduction and preview of his highly anticipated visit to JALT 2012 with particular attention to the members of the Pragmatics SIG. **The following discussion was conducted through e-mail exchanges with Ian Nakamura.** Ian would like to thank Tim Greer and Adam Brandt for their help with the topics and questions.

アラン・ファース博士は、リンガフランカとしての英語、SLA、エスノメソドロジー、会話分析(CA)の著名な権威者の一人です。彼は語用論部会のメンバーに特別に敬意を表して、待望されている彼の JALT2012 の訪問についての紹介とプレビューとしてのインタビューを受けることに快く同意してくれました。以下の議論は、イエン・ナカムラ氏との Eメール交換を通して行われました。イエン氏はトピックや質問に関して助言をしてくれたティム・グリア氏とアダム・ブランドト氏に感謝したいと思います。

Dr. Alan Firth (right)



## Alan Firth interview: Nakamura

**Ian Nakamura (IN):** *As those of us using CA in our research (and teaching) know through experience, our introduction and initial exposure to the approach is usually memorable and instrumental in determining the extent to which we find CA interesting and whether we actually start studying and using it. Can you tell us a little bit about how you became interested in CA? And why you find it appealing as a research methodology?*

**Alan Firth (AF):** I became interested in CA while I was studying for an MA degree in Applied Linguistics at Birmingham University in the UK, in the late 1980s. Birmingham was well known at that time for the research being undertaken there on spoken discourse - particularly as practised by John Sinclair and Malcolm Coulthard, who'd published a seminal study of spoken discourse in classrooms in 1975. John Sinclair was a 'neo-Firthian' (after the British linguist J.R. Firth - no relation, as far as I know!), who as long ago as the 1930s had stressed the need to study spoken language (which had gone largely unheeded in the UK until Sinclair and Coulthard's work, 40 years later). Anyway Mike McCarthy was teaching at Birmingham in the 1980s and introduced some of us to the Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) paper on turn-taking, which intrigued me but also inspired me to delve deeper into CA. I developed a fascination for the detailed analyses of transcripts, which in some ways reminded me of the poetry analyses I much enjoyed doing when I studied English Literature for my Bachelor's degree. I was also attracted to the 'counter-culture' mindset that underpins ethnomethodology - which forms the theoretical foundations of CA. Ethnomethodology defines itself as an alternative to a mainstream (sociology) - which attracted me. I think I've always been that way inclined, in terms of my research - drawn towards the alternatives to the orthodox.

I think too that my curiosity towards CA was piqued by the fact that Sinclair and Coulthard saw their work as being more scientifically rigorous and 'more linguistic' than CA - which they dismissed as 'impressionistic sociology'. I was never convinced of the Sinclair-Coulthard model and found CA more amenable to capturing the intricacies of interactive talk. I returned to Denmark, started on my PhD (which used CA to analyse international business phone calls). I was surprised to note that no one else was doing or had done CA in Denmark, so I guess in some small way I had a part to play in introducing CA to Denmark. Nowadays there's an active group of CA scholars in Denmark, thanks to people like Jakob Steensig, Catherine Brouwer and Joannes Wagner.

**IN:** *Your work with Johannes Wagner (Firth & Wagner 1997, 2007) is widely considered to have been revolutionary in reconceptualizing the field of second language acquisition by bringing in greater awareness of the importance of social interaction and language use. What led you both to producing those papers, and what kind of influence do you see that they have had over the last 10-15 years?*

**AF:** Johannes and I have a background in second language learning and teaching, but we are also both interested in doing research outside the formal educational setting (such as language classrooms). When we first met - around 1990 - I think we both had a sense that

## Alan Firth interview: Nakamura

one of the problems in Applied Linguistics was that the discipline defined itself, largely, as being classroom focused, or more provocatively, classroom obsessed. The implications of this is that applied linguists' ideas and conceptions about language are viewed through the prism of second language learning and teaching. Applied linguists take this so much for granted that they don't often acknowledge the theoretical implications of such a narrow view - of language and learning and competence. I think our interests in second language use outside classrooms came mostly from work in CA that was prevalent in the early 1990s (though remains so today), namely interaction in workplaces (cf. Drew and Heritage's seminal publication 'Talk at Work', published in 1992).

So we were straddling two fields - second language learning, and CA, and at that time this was rather novel. Hardly any research had been published where the ideas or theories or methods of CA were brought to bear on second language talk. CA had largely ignored second (or third, fourth, etc.) speakers. The opposite wasn't the case though - several second-language scholars had cherry-picked concepts and terminologies from CA (e.g. Faerch and Kasper's research on 'Communication Strategies' in the mid-1980s, and Gass and Varonis' publications - at the same time - on L2 conversations). However what was clear to Johannes and me was that L2 researchers were not adopting CA's emic stance (on such things as identity and competence): L2 speakers were invariably viewed as 'L2 learners' or 'non-native speakers', regardless of the emic relevance of such terms, and were invariably seen as communicatively deficient because they didn't always do things the way native speakers were seen to be doing things (cf. Jenny Thomas' famous paper on the L2 user's 'pragmatic failure', which appeared in the mid-1990s). Further, L2 users were unproblematically assumed to be pursuing 'native speaker competence'. These ideas underpin SLA, for example, and we set about deconstructing them.

So we discussed writing papers about these issues, as a way of attempting to conceive of SLA in a different light. What we didn't see at that time was that we were actually proposing a new way of thinking about big concepts such as language, learning, and competence.

As for the influence of the papers we wrote, well I am sure Johannes would agree with me that we had absolutely no expectation that our papers would make the impact they did. Others had tried to critique SLA too - for much the same things we were critiquing the field, but they hadn't really made much of a dent: SLA at that time (mid-90s) was a kind of cognitive fortress - more or less. But I think that an important factor in our work being significant was that we published in a major journal (Modern Language Journal) in a 'special issue' that brought the debate into focus in one volume - between the more traditional SLA scholars (Long, Gass, Poulish, Kasper) and those - like Kelly-Hall, Rampton, Liddicoat, and Johannes and me - who were frustrated at the overly cognitive emphases in the field. I think too, looking back, that we made an impact because our critique of SLA offered a way forward in terms of theory and perhaps even method

## Alan Firth interview: Nakamura

(though we did not elaborate on these aspects in our 1997 and 1998 papers), while this was not so clearly articulated in other contemporaneous critiques of SLA - such as those written by David Block (in 'Applied Linguistics' in 1996) and Jim Lantolf at around the same time.

**IN:** *You are particularly known for arguing in favor of looking at second language use outside of the language classroom. Your paper (Firth, 2009) helpfully revisits (Firth & Wagner, 1997, 2007) and elaborates on your vision of 'learning' outside the traditional SLA inquiry. Can you say something about why this is so important, for both researchers and language teachers?*

**AF:** I've covered this above, but I'd like to add something: we teach not only so that our students can succeed in classrooms, but so that they can succeed outside the classroom. The problem is, though, that we don't know what's going on outside L2 classrooms. It's extraordinary how little we know about language use and language learning 'in the wild', when people are not constrained by exams, tests, textbooks, lesson plans, teacher-student roles, etc. So if our teaching is going to impact the real world of what's happening outside the classroom, we had better start looking carefully at what happens in the multitudinous areas of life where people are not simply 'learners' or 'non-native speakers' but where other languages are used as part and parcel of the lifeworld. What happens, in terms of language, communication, and competence, when 'additional' or 'other' language users are customers, or friends, or colleagues, or sisters//brothers, or managers, or callers, or civil servants or whatever?

Looking outside the classroom, for me, is a heuristic: it forces us to challenge the applied linguist's tendency to regard L2 speakers as 'learners', as people who need help to become 'proficient' speakers of the second language. What might we learn if we stopped thinking that way? What value might we find, what theoretical insights might be gained, how might we improve educational practice, by broadening our empirical horizons?

**IN:** *Japan and other EFL countries tend to view and treat English broadly as an international language that should be learned according to 'native' standards. However, the idea of a lingua franca seems to paint a much different picture of what actually occurs in such contexts. Another, related, area of your work is English as a lingua franca. Can you say something about what ELF is to you, and why and how this field of research and perspective is also of great importance to second language teachers?*

**AF:** I believe I was one of the first applied linguists to talk about English as a lingua franca (see my 'World Englishes' paper from 1990). I used the term 'lingua franca' as a way of liberating myself from the ideological baggage associated with then prevalent labels 'non-native speaker' and 'L2 learner'. In terms of what ELF is to me, I would say it's a frame of mind, a theoretical disposition, if you will - a 'third way' of looking at language and social

## Alan Firth interview: Nakamura

action. To me, the most important contribution of ELF research is that it forces us to rethink orthodoxies in the field. Over the last decade, ELF research has been dominated by the pedagogical implications of questioning the idea that L2 learners are attempting, or they should be attempting, to emulate native speakers - that this is what L2 learning and use is about. Researchers such as Jennifer Jenkins and Barbara Seidlhofer have promoted ELF research that addresses the question of what should ESL teachers do, in a world where L1 speakers of English are hugely outnumbered by 'other' speakers of English. I commend the zeal of my colleagues Jenkins and Seidlhofer, and applaud their efforts to force difficult but to my mind necessary questions on the profession - a profession that is by nature conservative. But my own ELF-related interests are broader than pedagogical implications - I'm also interested in what the notion of lingua franca can tell us about language and multilinguality, about translanguaging, as Suresh Canagarajah calls it. We stand on the cusp of new ways of conceptualising language and L2 competence, and lingua franca is one of a number of subversively deconstructive approaches that demand all educators' attention.

**IN:** *Now that there is an established body of CA studies and researchers applying the methodology to L2 interaction / SLA, what future directions do you envisage the research field taking? What roles can language teachers play in these processes or projects?*

**AF:** You're right that a good deal of CA-based research is currently being undertaken on L2 interactions - both inside and outside L2 classrooms. CA, though, is more than a methodology - it is a set of theoretical dispositions - about competence, especially, but also about the role of setting, activity, and the role of the social. CA, to me, is a necessary and valuable corrective to the dominant SLA view that L2 learners need help, that their language is deficient, that they are under-achievers as long as they have an accent or conjugate verbs wrong (or should that be wrongly?). CA forces us, as teachers, and as language researchers, to question our assumptions about competence, and reminds us that the user's perspective is as valid as - or perhaps more valid than - the teacher's or the researcher's. In other words, CA, in terms of theory, forces applied linguists to question what are often monolithic assumptions in the field.

CA is also a rich and powerful set of analytical tools, reminding us again of the need to study, carefully and closely, L2 usage where it happens, wherever it happens. Careful description must, I believe, precede extrapolation. This has been the cornerstone of my own research. Teachers can gain a great deal, I believe, from learning about what CA research has discovered about how people talk to one another in authentic, real-world, consequential encounters. At the very least, it may help us improve textbook dialogues, and awaken us to the skills L2 speakers possess, regardless of accent or 'incorrect' conjugations.

At the same time, I think it's important to make the case that L2 research into spoken

## Alan Firth interview: Nakamura

interaction has much to contribute to CA as a field of study. CA is, I would contend, generally monolingual in its theoretical orientations. Applied linguists should not adopt a supine stance towards CA, but rather they should develop a confidence, borne out of good, careful, detailed analyses, that they have something important to contribute to the discipline. What that contribution will be remains to be seen, but there are grounds for optimism, I believe.

**IN:** *As in many Asian countries, there is ongoing public concern and debate in Japan about how to raise students who can speak English in international settings. Are there any specific points or issues about interactional competence and intercultural communication we have not yet mentioned that you think teachers and students in Japan would benefit from considering?*

**AF:** Yes, definitely, but I'm going to save them for my talk at JALT in October. I don't want to give all the goodies away too early.

Domo arigato for the questions!

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Ian Nakamura (left), of *Okayama University*, was asking the questions.

# Pan-SIG Conference Report (1)

The following section contains some presenters' reflections on the JALT Pan-SIG conference, which was held at Hiroshima University in June 2012.

次のセクションでは、2012年6月に広島大学で開催されたJALTのPan-SIG会議の発表者の感想を紹介します。

The first article is a summary – by the presenters – of the Pragmatics Forum, which was given on June 17, 2012.

## Visual narratives for L2 pragmatic learning: Sociocultural literacy development

By Noriko Ishihara, Makiko Asaba, Megan Burke, Akiko Chiba, and Bill Mboutsiadis

In this panel, we reported on **our exploratory efforts in enhancing pragmatic competence** of children and young adults **through a narrative approach**. Narratives can serve as a mode of knowing and thinking and can mediate collaborative pragmatic development. In order to appeal to children and young adults, we particularly draw on *visual* narratives, utilizing picture books and *kamishibai* performance. Our focal participants included ten L1 speakers of Japanese learning English in Japan (age 8-13), five L1 speakers of Japanese learning English in Hong Kong (age 7-12), and six L1 speakers of Japanese in Japan who had previously studied abroad (age 20-23). Below we provide a brief summary of each case study.



Forum  
presenters, left  
to right:

Megan Burke,  
Akiko Chiba,  
Noriko  
Ishihara,  
Makiko Asaba.

## Pan-SIG Conference Report: Ishihara et. al.

The **first pilot study** attempted to raise **three young learners' (ages 8-9)** L1 and L2 pragmatic awareness before they formally start learning English. Both English and Japanese versions of a picture book, *What do you say, dear?* (Joslin, 1958), were used to introduce a basic concept that expressions, such as *I'm sorry* and *sumimasen* in these two languages, don't necessarily have one-to-one correspondence in pragmatic meaning. An awareness-raising approach was used as most participants were novice learners of English. Through the lessons, learners came to notice various lexical features such as *desu/masu* ending in Japanese representing specific pragmatic meanings and were able to use this awareness in their post-lesson. For example, **students noticed that generally the longer an expression gets, the politer it becomes.** Then they successfully applied this principle in determining the levels of politeness in other expressions.



The **second pilot study** focused on student's awareness development of English polite requests. Three sessions were conducted with **five Japanese elementary school children (ages 7-12)** in Hong Kong. Learners were continually engaged in pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic discussions, such as table etiquette and verbalization of inner thoughts, elicited from scenes in the picture books. Using the contexts from the stories, learners practiced several request expressions (e.g. *Can you pass the potatoes, please?*; *May I have the chicken, please?*). Class discussions extended to the analysis of the factors

contributing to the varying range of politeness levels. **The learners' commented in the post-session survey that they have learned there are different ways of expressing the same idea in English.** Findings from these sessions also highlighted the weightiness of the early exposure to an array of expressions within a speech act.

In the **third study**, two picture books (*Yo! Yes?*, Raschka, 1993; *My Dog Never Says Please*, Williams, 1997) were used in elementary and junior high school public school settings to raise **five learners' (ages 11-13)** L1 and L2 pragmatic awareness of **expressing gratitude, polite requests, terms of address and greetings.** The learners enjoyed a change from their traditional textbook lessons. In particular, the illustrations offered learners opportunities to infer about using language appropriately in context, whether it

## Pan-SIG Conference Report: Ishihara et.al.

be talking at the dinner table with family members or at the park with a friend. Crafting specific pre, during and post reading discussion questions relating to the text and specific element of pragmatics was the key to assessing learners' development of pragmatic awareness.

The **fourth** presenter used **digital kamishibai**, a modern form of traditional visual story-telling to elicit university students' narratives of their past journeys, present realities, and imagined futures of their language learning histories. Six learners discussed their study abroad experiences focusing on pragmatic development. A workshop was then conducted on the use of the software. The highly motivating medium combines text story with illustrations, photos, voice, sound, and music. The students had become story narrators of their own pragmatic learning experiences in their actual recorded voices that were later shared and discussed (Barfield et al., 2011). The presenter shared a successful work and argued that this form of storytelling appeared to have served as a transformative experience for the learner. In addition the digital stories, with author permissions, can become a rich and authentic source of archival materials for pragmatic learning.

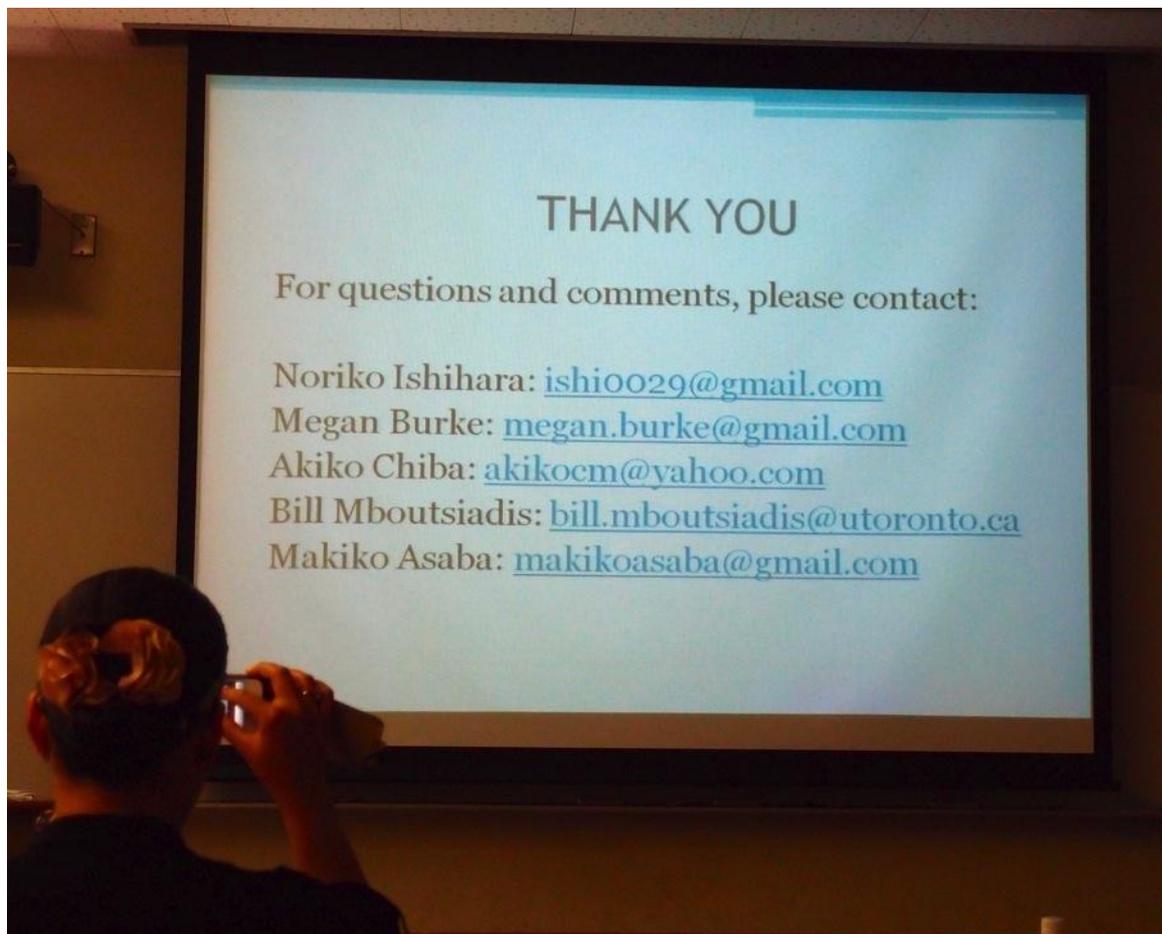


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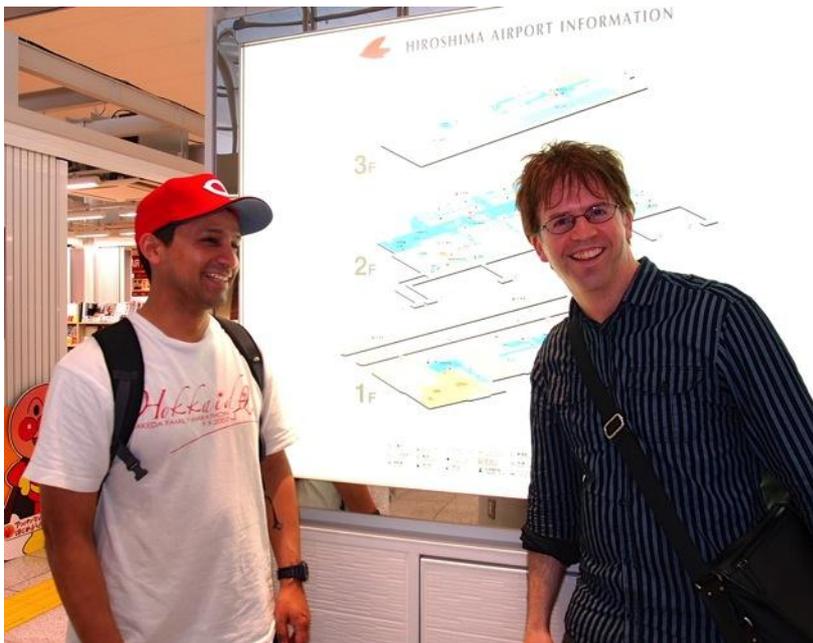
## Pan-SIG Conference Report: Ishihara et.al.

For further information about any of the forum presentations, please contact the presenters at the email addresses in the picture below.



## Pan-SIG Conference Report (2)

By Seth Cervantes and Barry Kavanagh (pictured below, after the conference).



Barry Kavanagh (of *Tohoku University*) – writes *Seth Cervantes* – gave a fascinating presentation on **the unconventional ways people communicate through online weblogs**. Barry compared popular American weblogs with Japanese weblogs, and focused his attention on the use of unconventional means of communication (emoticons, pictograms, the manipulation of grammatical markers, phonetic spelling and laughter representations) and found that Japanese bloggers and commenters use unconventional means of communication more frequently than their American counterparts to express pragmatic meaning such as intention or affective stance. He also noted the influence of Japanese manga on the formation of Japanese emoticons. After attending Barry's presentation, I wondered if Japanese non-conventional means of communication found in weblogs reflect a Japanese concern for other people's thoughts and feelings.

Seth Cervantes and Rob Olson (both from *Tomakomai Komazawa University*) – writes *Barry Kavanagh* – gave an entertaining and visually stimulating presentation on **the non-standard spelling that people use in instant messages to help them express pragmatic information**. They gave a review of the literature and examined how instant messaging differs from face-to-face communication in terms of proxemics, haptics (physical contact) and non-verbal behavior. Their data consisted of instant messages between the presenters and ten of their students and they showed examples of how students utilize these non-standard spellings to convey extra pragmatic meaning in these

## Pan-SIG Conference Report: Cervantes & Kavanagh / Knight

text-based communications. Interestingly for English teachers, the presenters gave an insight into the possibility on how these forms can be taught.

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*Tim Knight adds:* In addition to the Forum and the presentations given by Barry, Seth and Rob, there were 16 presentations under the Pragmatics SIG umbrella, giving this year's Pan-SIG conference a very healthy Pragmatics SIG presence. Below is a mention of some of them.

In a lively and entertaining presentation, **Bricklin Zeff** introduced his research into the speech act of 'greetings'.



**Mayumi Fujioka** outlined activities\* to help university students learn how to produce pragmatically appropriate oral and written feedback for peers' writing.

(\* Look out for these activities in the SIG's forthcoming book, *Pragtivities*.)

## Pan-SIG Conference Report: Knight

**Anne McLellan Howard** examined the feedback given by teachers during university students' discussions.



**Kim Bradford Watts** analyzed newspaper articles about a microfinance website, Kiva. org.

**John Bankier** reported on his study of university students' awareness of hedging devices.

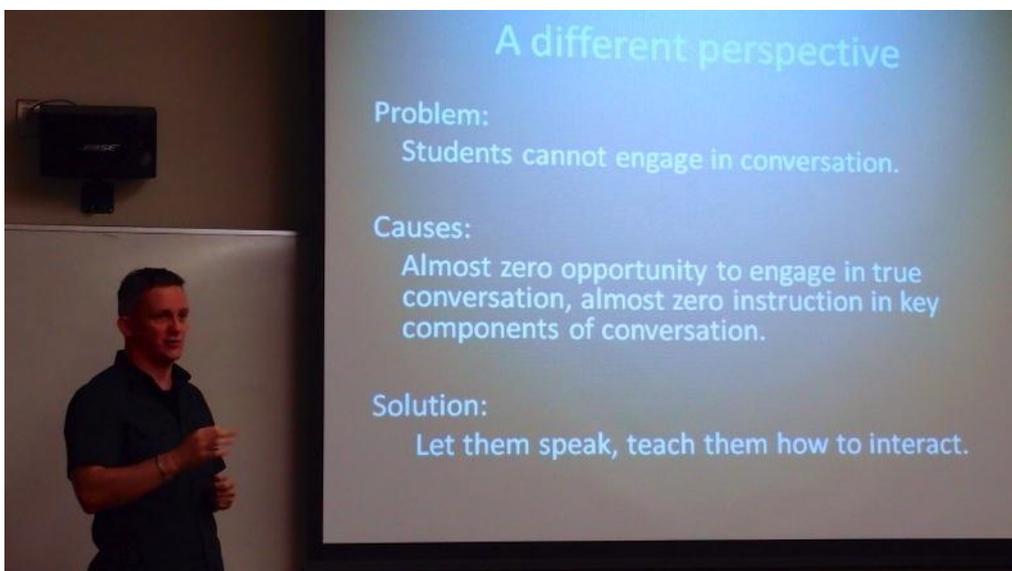


## Pan-SIG Conference Report: Knight



**Simon Capper** focused on intercultural communication, introducing materials he has designed and published.

In a Conversation Analysis research-based approach, **Midori Ishida** explored the use of receipts, such as *soo desu ne* ("That's true"), among learners of Japanese as a second language.



**John Campbell-Larsen** showed, with the aid of video clips, how explicit teaching of conversational language brought about progress in his students' speaking skills.

## Pan-SIG Conference Report: Knight

### Michael Iwane-Salovaara

introduced teaching strategies to help learners see conversation as something more than a series of discrete and unconnected parts of speech.



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The **Pragmatics SIG lunchtime meeting**, lead by Donna Fujimoto, was well attended. Among the topics talked about were news about Dr. Alan Firth's visit to Japan for the JALT conference and a progress report from Carol Rinnert, one of the editors of the **forthcoming SIG publication *Pragtivities***, a collection of more than 60 classroom activities for teaching pragmatics.



## Pan-SIG Conference Report: Knight

Just off the Hiroshima University campus, there was an excellent reception held on the Saturday evening at which local musicians, singers and dancers provided traditional, spirited entertainment.



## SIG Information

<b>Coordinator</b>	<i>Donna Tatsuki</i>
<b>Treasurer</b>	<i>Noriko Ishihara</i>
<b>Co-Program Chairs</b>	<i>Donna Fujimoto</i> <i>Reyco Shimosawa Takeda</i> <i>Linamaria Valdivia</i>
<b>Membership Chair</b>	<i>Tim Greer</i>
<b>Co-Publicity Chairs</b>	<i>Mark Holst</i> <i>Seth Cervantes</i>
<b>Newsletter Editor</b>	<i>Tim Knight</i>
<b>Japanese Language Co-Editors</b>	<i>Naoko Osuka</i> <i>Yukie Saito</i>
<b>Website Editor</b>	<i>Tim Greer</i>
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See you at the JALT national  
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