

## **A Discourse-Centered Approach to Japanese Culture**

Chair: Cyndi Dunn, University of Northern Iowa

This panel examines the mutually constitutive relationship between language and culture in the sense of shared meanings and webs of signification. The papers explore how attention to language structure and use can provide insight into cognitive frameworks and sociocultural norms within Japanese society. At the same time, they demonstrate how language use in interaction is one of the most powerful mechanisms through which groups create, recreate, and contest those understandings. Papers by Adachi and Stanlaw examine how certain linguistic and discourse patterns reveal contrasting cognitive frameworks between speakers of Japanese and English. Ide and Dunn offer contrasting examples of the formation of cultural norms for interaction, whether as part of an emerging community of practice, or as imposed from above. Together, the papers in the panel demonstrate the contribution that linguistic anthropology can make to the understanding of social and cognitive frameworks in Japanese society.

### *Can You Wear Your Heart on Your Sleeve in Japanese? - Cognition Meets Formal and Biological Constraints in Japanese Discourse.*

James Stanlaw, Illinois State University

Since the Chomskyian revolution in the 1970s, Japanese has been one of the most frequently used examples besides English to demonstrate innate universals of language processes. Another alternative holds that grammar is conceptualization rather than a set of rules, and that meaning emerges not only within specific contexts of discourse, but also through particular world views and cognitive frameworks. I demonstrate this latter argument using several simple Japanese verbs—"eat," "drink," and "wear"—to show how the typical formal linguistic paradigms fail to account for everyday usage. That is, to explain even mundane Japanese conversations, an appeal must be made to how the Japanese speaker implicitly imagines the world—a view, I argue, that is significantly different from that of an English speaker. These differences also apply to alleged psychological universals: I show that the commonly accepted standard model of color nomenclature fails to account for much Japanese data.

### *"There is a Squirrel in the Tree:" Spatial and Other Cognition Differences Between Japanese and English Speakers*

Nobuko Adachi, Illinois State University

Despite the close relationship between Japan and the United States, Japanese and Americans seem to know very little about some crucial everyday linguistic differences in the ways Japanese and English represent the world. This is due to both the taken-for-granted assumptions native speakers of both languages bring into daily discourse, but also in the ways the two languages grammatically depict these cognitive differences. A simple factual sentence like "There is a squirrel in the tree" brings to mind different pictures: A Japanese would imagine that a squirrel is in a hole in the tree-trunk, while an American might imagine a squirrel sitting on a tree branch. These differences are seen not only in mutually-puzzling basic translation mistakes, but also in higher levels of discourse and conversation. This paper explores some of these linguistic and

cultural differences by looking at selected examples from daily conversation rituals.

*Language and the Emergent Sense of Community: The Case of Nichanneru Residents in Cyberspace*

Risako Ide, University of Tsukuba

The goal of this paper is to describe *nichanneru*, Japan's largest internet bulletin board (<http://www.2ch.net>), as a community of practice by analyzing the ways in which anonymous participants create an emergent sense of "being together" through their particular writing practices. Taking a specific thread as an example, I do this by describing the pragmatic and metapragmatic rules of communication that the users abide by. Specifically, I describe the gender, age, and social status-neutered style of writing as a shared norm of appropriate participation. I also demonstrate "teasing" and "bursting-into-laughter" as a collective performance which creates the sense of togetherness in the immediate context of interaction. Lastly, I analyze the metalinguistic comments that the participants use to describe their writing, focusing on what is referred to as "high quality" communication. Through these analyses, I demonstrate how the immediate and emergent sense of community is manifested through the practice of writing.

*Institutionalized Discourse in the Workplace: Japanese "Business Manners" Training*

Cyndi Dunn, University of Northern Iowa

This paper examines the institutional standardization of discourse patterns in business etiquette training for new employees in Japanese companies. Many companies provide new employees with seminars on "business manners" covering everything from how to bow and present business cards to how to use polite language when answering the telephone. This paper will examine the language ideologies constructed in such training based on participant-observation of business manner seminars offered by five different training companies as well as interviews with instructors and students. I examine the perceived deficiencies in self-presentation that these courses are meant to address, as well as what types of speech practices are held up as ideals to be emulated. I also explore the issue of how the training companies use the widespread cultural practice of personal goal setting as a way to motivate students to internalize these standards as part of their daily practice.

Discussant: Karen Nakamura, Yale University