

Chapter 3

Selves Emerging in Meaning Construction: An Analysis of Mother-Child Conversation from a Semiotic Perspective



Every conversation of the child is coloured not only by his individual experience but also by his character, and this must be taken into account if the whole of the meaning is to be extracted from the conversation.

Katz, D. and Katz, R. (1936, p. 11)

From far before the emergence of modern psychology to the present day, oral conversation has been a medium of meaning construction in everyday life. It is not a simple transmission or copying of one's ideas to another person, but rather a collaborative work among participants to develop a shared topic through semiotically mediated processes. Research into conversation analysis and our everyday experiences tells us that, for example, a very short pause or hesitation in the course of conversation sometimes changes the path of meaning construction, and these observations show that natural conversation is very subtle and inconstant work that is difficult to predict

At its beginning, modern psychology attempted to use this flexible and dynamic nature of the dialogical process as one approach to understand the mind. However, with the proliferation of experimental methods stressing reproducibility as a significant advantage and a condition for established science, irregular interactions, especially those in daily life, were omitted from the toolbox of psychology, except for several limited areas of research. From the perspective of studies that attempt to generate some understanding of the mind and clarify the causes of behaviors with experimental methods, everyday interaction appears a mixture of the routine and the whimsical. In other words, we are not conscious of specific *motivations* to undertake routine conduct and this conduct is full of subtle variations. For instance, if a child and her mother have a routine to talk during their car ride, this is not a fixed rule and the topic of discussion changes depending on their mood, or coincidental encounters. However, it is in these whimsicalities that cultural resources work to form our psychological realities. Given this characteristic, daily conversation serves as a beneficial site to inquire into the semiotic processes that lead to the emergence of the

presentational self. In this chapter, starting from this foundational understanding, I explore examples of conversations by pairs of young children and their mothers.

Perspectives on Child Development in Talk

In the history of psychology, natural conversation between children and their parents has already been the subject of investigation to understand child development. As early as 1928, Katz and Katz collected and analyzed over 140 episodes of their sons' conversations (3 years old and 4 years old at the first recording of conversation) over a 1 year period. Their analysis was to aid their understanding of children's development as it appears in their dialogue, and the content of the conversation was considered to show "thinking, feeling and volitional attitudes taken up by the child towards his environment in general" (Katz and Katz, 1936, p. 5). They also attempted to understand the "character" of their two sons from the conversation and their observations.

Although their analysis was a simple series of interpretations concerning the episodes they observed, they clearly understood the utility of natural conversation to understand the children's minds. In their analysis, they stressed the importance of analyzing the conversational interaction as a whole, not dividing it into pieces, insisting that the conversation was "experienced by the participants themselves as a unity (p. 25)." They also pointed out the dialogical nature of conversation and the inadequacy of reporting one fragment of a child's utterance without clarifying the context.

Despite this pioneering study, researchers of developmental psychology did not consider the analysis of natural conversation as a major method. This aversion may stem, at least partially, from the lack of reproducibility of natural conversation in comparison with experimental methods or structured interviews. Subsequently, it was the sociolinguistic and anthropological approaches for child development that discovered the importance of analyzing verbal interactions in natural settings. With a focus on the process of linguistic socialization, Heath (1983) collected ethnographic data in two rural communities in the United States and described the differences in linguistic environments for children, in relationship with school education. Heath (1983) made detailed descriptions of "oral traditions" of these communities, which included ways of telling personal stories to others, as one concern within linguistic socialization studies is how personal storytelling is practiced. Thus, many studies discussed ways of personal storytelling, focusing on tellability—i.e., what is worth talking about (Aukrust, 2002)—or the structure of participation (e.g., who has the right to tell a story) (Blum-Kulka, 1997), with analysis of make-up of the stories.

Given this attention to the storytelling in natural conversation, researchers discussed its importance in a variety of ways, and did not concentrate on how children learn culturally specific ways of telling. For example, they pointed out its importance in children's understanding of the *reason* for people's behaviors or how events

occur (Blum-Kulka, 2002), and cultural norms (Georgakopoulou, 2002; Pontecorvo, Fasulo, & Sterponi, 2001). Studies of conversation analysis also supposed that sharing stories in daily conversation is important for maintaining our interpersonal relationships. That is, when participants engage in collaborative narration of a family story, it works "to ratify group membership and modulate rapport" (Norrick, 2000, p. 154). Middleton and Brown (2005) discussed the co-remembering by a young child and his mother as a construction of family membership. As Bamberg (2011) pointed out, what works in these instances is not *big* (biographical) stories but *small* stories. If the whole of a story is not shared, only repeating other speakers' words, phrases, or sentences "serves an over-arching purpose of creating interpersonal involvement" (Tannen, 1989, p. 52). These studies suggested that conversation concerning children's experiences works as a site of children's linguistic, cognitive, and social development.

Personal Storytelling and the Development of Children's Selves

In relation to a variety of interests pursued in linguistic socialization studies, Miller et al. (1990) pointed out that several types of interaction observed in ethnographical research are interpretable as the construction of children's selves: that is, "coming to express and understand who one is" (p. 305), citing the theoretical framework of social constructionism and Vygotsky's ideas. Miller et al. (1990) hypothetically proposed three types of storytelling—adults telling stories about children; adults and older children intervening in children's storytelling; and children appropriating others' stories—that are closely related to the construction of children's selves. Miller et al. (1992) further developed this concern by focusing on interpersonal relationships appearing in children's personal stories, and attempted to understand children's selves *in relation to others*.

The discussions by Miller and her colleagues indicated the role of others, both as partners in conversation and as the ones appearing in the stories, to clarify the self of children in their storytelling. From this fundamental interest, they made several cross-cultural comparisons of ethnographical data and discussed the differences in the ways children's past conduct was narrated. Among all this research, Wiley, Rose, Burger, and Miller (1998) presupposed that "children come to enact certain kinds of selves by virtue of their everyday participation with other people in characteristic self-relevant practices" (p. 833), and called this practice *selfways*, citing Markus, Mullally, and Kitayama (1997). This perspective on children's selves emphasizes how children's participation in personal storytelling is managed and performed to clarify the autonomous selves of the children, and shows the possibility of finding out children's selves in the ways storytelling is performed. Among the studies of conversation analysis, there also is an attempt to describe children's selves in the relationships *described in the stories*. Levine's (2007) study analyzed the talk between a 4 year-old child and his parents and discussed the significance

of talking about the neighborhood to situate themselves within a physical and social *landscape*. Thus, talking about a child's surroundings helps carve out who he or she is in his or her environment.

These studies show that two aspects of conversation discussed in the previous chapters—that is, relationships described through conversation and the relationship participants of the conversation construct—have already been adopted in several studies and have showed their potential. However, existing studies also suggest that there is room for discussing and elaborating theoretical frameworks that enable an integrative account concerning the self that emerges in these two aspects of the conversational interaction, rather than reducing it to a mere “cultural difference.”

Focus on the Conversation Concerning Everyday Transition in Children's Lives

To inquire into the self emerging through conversation, I analyzed recordings of mother-child conversations concerning children's experiences in institutions for young children (yochien and hoikuen; see footnote 1 of Chap. 1) (Komatsu, 2006, 2010, 2013). Although several studies of linguistic socialization (Aukrust, 2002) and early childhood education (Bradbard, Endsley, & Mize, 1992) discussed this topic of conversation, they did not fully identify its uniqueness and possible advantages. In concrete terms, Aukrust (2002) focused on the tellability of several topics but did not discuss the meaning of these topics in relation to child development. Bradbard et al. (1992) only showed parental responses to several items in a questionnaire. For this reason, I will show several reasons why I examine this conversation before analyzing the recordings in detail, citing the results of preliminary inquiries using a questionnaire for mothers.

Firstly, at least in Japan, this genre of conversation is frequent among young children and their mothers, and often includes some discussion of the children's interpersonal relationships. In responses from 581 mothers to a questionnaire asking about the frequency and content of their conversations about their children's experiences at yochien, nearly 90% of the mothers indicated that this topic came up every day, and around half of the mothers answered that they discussed this topic for more than 10 min on average (Komatsu, 2000, 2013). The mothers' answers also showed that frequent topics of conversation include children's interpersonal experiences in yochien: for example, nice things that teachers or friends did for children, or troubles or quarrels among similarly aged children (Komatsu, 2003). Although these answers rely on the mothers' subjective reports, it is plausible that these topics would appear on a daily basis, and these are often relatively long exchanges among family members with young children.

Secondly, in relation to the prevalence of this topic, these conversations are at work in the transition between two qualitatively different interpersonal relationships: namely, children's relationships among their same-aged peers, and their close relationships with family members. As already mentioned in Chap. 1, this transition

places the child's relational position in an area of liminality (Turner, 1969), where one's identity becomes uncertain. This liminal nature also works for mothers who take part in these conversations. The mothers' answers to the questionnaire show that mothers usually attach great importance to these conversations, especially in order to understand and share their children's experiences (Komatsu, 2000, 2013). The prevalence of these conversations is related to the mothers' positive attitude to them, and thus these conversations are uniquely positioned in the daily lives of young children.

The characteristics of these conversations offer favorable conditions for inquiring into how children's selves are clarified through interpersonal relationships. Although my discussion draws from a limited number of mother-child pairs, the mothers' answers to the questionnaire suggest that the interactions appearing in the excerpts are not limited to these pairs but are applicable to other families in Japan.

Data Collection and Preliminary Analysis

In the following discussion, I use data from longitudinal recordings of conversations by two pairs of mothers and their children who attended hoikuen or yochien. The recordings were made in the naturalistic settings of each family's ordinary life. Names of all study participants are pseudonyms.

Mina and her mother (Komatsu 2006, 2010) A young girl, Mina, and her mother live in a rural area of Japan (about 80 km from the center of Tokyo) with Mina's father and two older brothers. Longitudinal recordings on the car ride home from hoikuen were employed, following a previous study collecting naturally occurring conversational narratives (Preece, 1987). The mother was informed about the purpose of the recording and consent was obtained. To record conversation in a natural setting, the author emphasized that there was no obligation to talk about the child's experiences. The mother also understood that she could stop the recording at any time and could decline to hand over the recordings to the author if she or another family member did not want another person to hear them.

The recordings were made during their car rides, mainly on the way back from hoikuen. The majority of other instances of recordings occurred on their way to the supermarket or to the hospital that Mina visited for regular physical examinations, usually after Mina had attended hoikuen. Except for two recordings in which Mina's older brothers were also present, recordings were made when only Mina and her mother were in the car. The recordings were not made in any predetermined or scheduled fashion and there were several gaps in data collection, due to the mother's work schedule and other reasons.

Mina's age was between 4 years 4 months and 5 years 8 months when these recordings were made. The total time of these recordings was 34 h from 153 days of observation, not including preliminary recordings made before this period, which were undated. During the period in which the recordings were made, the author

conducted several interviews with the mother to clarify the content of the conversation by obtaining supplemental information about the people or events appearing in the conversation.

Yuuma and his mother (Komatsu 2013) Yuuma (nicknamed Yucchi) is a boy who lives in a city in the greater Osaka area of Japan with his parents and older brothers. Longitudinal recordings of his conversations with his mother were made in their house, mainly after he had returned from a yochien located within walking distance of their house. Before commencing the recordings, the author asked the mother to record only when they were relaxed and had ample time to talk, and she understood that she was in control of when to record and what to give the author, just as with the recordings of Mina's conversation. The recorded conversations were used for this study with the mother's consent.

The recording period was from May of Yuuma's first year in yochien (his age was 5 years 0 months) to March of the second year. (6 years 10 months).¹ Due to the fundamental nature of the recordings, as described in the case of Mina, the frequency, place, and total time of recording per day were not strictly controlled. Total recording time was 59 h from 193 days of observation. Supplemental information concerning the content of the conversation was obtained through interviews with the mother.

Transcription and extraction of episodes From the recordings, detailed transcripts with information about pauses and overlaps were made. In Yuuma's case, detailed transcription was limited to the sections of the recording where they talked about his experiences at yochien. Given the basic intention of the study to examine the interpersonal aspects of children's experiences appearing in conversation, episodes in which Mina or Yuuma and their friends appeared were extracted and used for further examination, though the standards used for extracting these episodes were slightly different between the two pairs. The number of episodes was 50 for Mina and her mother, and 89 for Yuuma and his mother. Details of episodes in relation to the periods of recordings can be found in Komatsu (2010) (Mina corpus) and Komatsu (2013) (Yuuma corpus).

Why Others? The Starting Point of Meaning Construction

In introducing the framework of the presentational self in Chap. 1, I focused on the enumeration of others (Mina's friends) as what constructs the Gestalt quality. Although talking about interpersonal relationships is considered important in the construction of the self, and is already analyzed in Miller et al. (1992), their study focused only on the categorization of the relationships mentioned in storytelling and

¹In Japan, the academic year generally begins in April and ends in March.

did not elaborate the process by which the self becomes clear in the configuration of children. Thus, as a foundation for the analysis of meaning construction processes, here I show how others mentioned in the episodes of conversation function in the process of meaning construction.

First, other people whom children meet outside the home offer unique opportunities for children to figure out who they are. As already pointed out, a child encounters many children of similar age every day in institutions for young children. In theoretical frameworks concerning the development of self-representation (Harter, 1999), children at this age (very early childhood, early to middle childhood) do not rely on the comparison between self and others in their understanding of self: adults are the important others in appreciating children's conduct. However, even though children do not, or cannot, adopt the perspective to evaluate themselves or others through comparison, children are able to observe the same individuals and themselves every day. They are always on the move, providing opportunities for interaction, and there are various affective experiences available. Our "psychological life in its sign-mediated forms is affective in its nature" (Valsiner, 2007, p. 301), and meeting others is one of several crucial events that can lead to such affective experiences.

These interpersonal relationships of children also activate the concern of the parents—the second reason I focus on others in the process of meaning construction. Although children themselves may not consider the importance of interpersonal relationships, parents who talk with their children have a strong interest in the relationships their children make. Maintaining harmonious relationships with friends is an important concern for parents, and conversation serves as a site for understanding these relationships (Komatsu, 2013). As the conversations we analyze are collaborative work between children and parents, in which their concerns become clear, conversations about others hold the potential for rich meaning construction.

In addition to these two reasons, I will point out that both the act and the result of mentioning others have the capability to be a fundamental aspect of clarifying the self. In [Excerpt 1.2](#), roles in the theater performance ("rabbits") worked to identify and clarify the differences between the child talking in the conversation and the others through enumeration. Even without such an explicit framework for enumeration, differentiation between self and others occurs to clarify the child's presentational self. This is because the mere appearance of others, even just as names, reveals the essential commonalities with and differences with the child who is telling her mother stories. Here is an example of some very simple enumeration of self and others as constructed by Mina and her mother.

Excerpt 3.1

(Komatsu, 2010, p. 224, Excerpt 3, cited with minor modifications) [After Mina and her mother have talked about their meeting with the author.]

- 1 Mo: A man who came that time is Komatsu. That teacher was Mr. Komatsu. (1 s).
- 2 Mi: Oh. That teacher was Mr. Komatsu! (Yes) (1 s) Well, [his] name sounds like a woman's, doesn't it?

- 3 Mo: Hmm ... but there are many surnames. Family names. Mina's is Iiyama. (1 s) [speaking simultaneously with line 4] Iiya.
- 4 Mi: Iiyama (yes) Mina, [surname comes first in Japanese] Machida Mina, (yes) ah, Yamashita Sayuri, (yes) Matsuzaka Aika, (yes) Kinoshita Taku, (yes) Honjo Yuto, Toyama Yuuki, Sada Miki, (yes) you know?
- 5 Mo: Yes.
- 6 Mi: So many names, aren't there? (Yes) But Mina and Mina are the same. (Yes) Like Machida Mina, Toyama Mina, and Iiyama Mina.
- 7 Mo: Yes.

Mina is 4/11 years old. The excerpt includes 3 turns immediately before the episode picked up according to the criterion for analysis. Names are pseudonyms except for the author. See footnotes to Excerpt 1.1.

In this episode of conversation, Mina enumerates her friends' names (line 4) after her mother's comment about the variation in surnames. Subsequently, she mentions two of her friends who share the same first name, Mina (line 6). This meaning construction results in an ensemble of children who attend the same hoikuen and sheds light on Mina as one of them. Three young girls share the same first name, but they are different from each other. In addition to this configuration observers construct in their understanding, it is plausible that Mina and her mother had a detailed figure of each child and formed an elaborated Gestalt quality.

This example shows that the inclusion of others in such a collaborative meaning construction is often very effective because it can lead both participants' and observer's search for the relationships among them to construct a unified figure based on the commonalities and differences. In this process, the amount of information about the self and others is not necessarily related to the clarity of the self that the observer discovers. A short but sensible composition of a child and others can bring about the uniqueness of him or her in relationships and of his or her perspective that emerges within the meaning construction.

In addition, the making of a simple list is not separate from the relationship constructed by the participants in the conversation. Again, in this interaction Mina is leading the enumeration and her mother is in the position of follower, though she gives additional information (line 3). Because making a list in conversation has several interpersonal effects, including enhancing rapport between the participants (Tannen, 1989), an interaction as in Excerpt 3.1 also functions in the construction of the relationship between a young child and her mother.

Making Multiple Contrasts of Self and Others: The Role of Culturally Constructed Categories

The configuration of self and others discussed above can develop by integrating many concepts or standards that children contact in their daily lives. Children's experiences in institutional settings like hoikuen are not limited to just encountering

a variety of other people, but are broad enough to offer multiple perspectives for looking at others. The theater performance roles appearing in Excerpt 1.2 provide a good example. Each child has a role as an animal, such as “rabbit,” that is familiar for children, and the commonalities and differences of these roles create an image in addition to the unique image of each child.

Although categories such as roles in a performance are common in collective activities for young children in Japan, children also introduce different genres of information into conversation to describe their own uniqueness. Toward the end of the Mina corpus, there is an episode of conversation in which a variety of perspectives are integrated in the configuration. Excerpt 3.2 is an extract from this long interaction.

Excerpt 3.2

(Komatsu, 2010, pp. 217–218, Excerpt 2, cited with minor modifications, original Japanese in Komatsu (2006))

- 1 Mi: Well, like mom, (yes) and [our] teacher decided to play ‘mother’ [in pretend play]. Nakayama Makoto [Mina’s friend, boy] played the child (yes) for Mina’s group. (Yes) [It’s] Fourth (yes) and then, umm, Makoto (yes) was the child.
[Several turns omitted].
- 2 Mi: And (yes) older sister was Mina and then, umm, Taka-morita Yuko [Mina’s friend, girl].
- 3 Mo: Taka-morita Yuko, what a long name! (1 s).
- 4 Mi: [Didn’t you] know [her] surname? Mom (don’t know) [You] didn’t know [her] surname [speaking simultaneously with line 5] Taka-morita.
- 5 Mo: Ah Yuko! That Yuko is she?
- 6 Mi: Yes, always [speaking simultaneously with line 7] slow [in eating lunch and doing work].
- 7 Mo: Always slow Yuko [laughs] ... [I wonder] Who is slower, well, Mina [or Yuko]. Ah, so Taka-morita (yes) is [her] surname (1 s). [She played] An older sister, and?
- 8 Mi: Yuko can’t read Ja Jab Japanese.
- 9 Mo: Ah, Yuko can’t speak Japanese?
- 10 Mi: Yes, only a little.
- 11 Mo: Only a little, but [she] can play with everyone very well, can’t [she]? Is it ok to play [even if you] can’t speak?
- 12 Mi: Yes, sure. Today, [we] played in a big maze. (Umm) Mee-zu, Mee [Mo laughs] (Yes) And then, the father was (yeah) Nakayama Takashi [Mina’s friend, boy] and the mother was a girl with ‘O’ O O ya ma (yes) and a girl with ‘Ri’ (Rie!) Ding dong! (2 s). [Her surname] Oyama ... And Rie has a child, (1 s) her younger sister. (Hum) Shall I tell you, mom? (Yes) Ooyama (yes) Chika.
- 13 Mo: What? [Is she] a real younger sister [of Rie]? Not in the pretend play (yes). (1 s).

- 14 Mi: And it has nothing to do [with this talk].
 15 Mo: [Speaking simultaneously with line 16] Yes.
 16 Mi: There, (yes) Rie, (yes) and Makoto, (yes) and you know, Nakayama Taka,
 and Mina, Mina, and Taka-morita Yuko (yes). So only, only,
 17 Mo: Only they can play [in Mina's group].
 18 Mi: Yes.

Mina is 5/8 years old.

This episode shows a structure in common with [Excerpt 1.2](#): that is, Mina enumerates her friends on the basis of their roles in a pretend play, and others appearing in this episode construct the grid in which to place Mina, as discussed in the former section. However, there are also several differences in meaning construction in comparison with [Excerpt 1.2](#). The first is in the configuration of Mina and her friends. In [Excerpt 3.2](#), they are not simply enumerated but described with a variety of characteristics (lines 6, 8, and 12) that are observable in hoikuen. These descriptions of her friends are different from the ones in [Excerpt 1.2](#) because they are not from one episode (e.g., a pretend play) but based on Mina's observations or experiences that identify their characteristics. These descriptions of Mina's friends were not evident when [Excerpts 1.2](#) and [3.1](#) were recorded. Komatsu (2006) shows that Mina's inserting such one-time episodes concerning her friends in instances of conversation began to appear in the corpus a half-year before the episode in [Excerpt 3.2](#) was observed.

By integrating this type of description into the enumeration of friends, the configuration of self and others becomes more elaborated, and Mina's multiple viewpoints for arranging her friends and herself become clearer. In this collaborative meaning construction, Mina also acts more skillfully in her positioning in relation to her mother, as she is the one who knows the children and events at hoikuen. For example, she actively presents questions for her mother to guess (lines 4 and 12). Conversely, corrections by the mother of her daughter's misunderstandings as observed in [Excerpts 1.2](#) and [3.1](#) are not evident. Thus, Mina's self in relation to other(s) is clearer in [Excerpt 3.2](#)—not only in her descriptions of others but in the interactive positioning with her mother.

Construction of the Presentational Self as a Development at the Microgenetic Level

The differences between [Excerpts 1.2](#) and [3.2](#) discussed here are obtained by looking at two processes from a single perspective. In [Excerpt 3.2](#), by managing her position more skillfully, Mina is able to add further detail about how she sees her friends and her detailed descriptions of her friends and her experiences also work to position her as an expert on events at hoikuen. Thus, Mina and her mother are now

more refined in their use of discursive devices in creating the layout that positions Mina. The interval of 15 months between the two episodes suggests that this difference reflects Mina's linguistic and psychological development.

However, there is no other episode in the recordings that is equally detailed in the description of the self and others as Excerpt 3.2, which indicates that this type of interaction cannot be explained by psychological abilities of the child that enable the repeated emergence of the same type of interaction. Although it is plausible that Mina's vocabulary increased and her cognitive and social understanding was elaborated during this 1 year period, the interactive act of inserting related information concerning her friends cannot be explained by one specific ability that is measurable by a standardized measurement. The relationship-making in the conversation may also be related to the socioemotional characteristics of Mina and her mother. However, the genre of conversation I discussed occurs rarely and it is difficult to know what aspect might reflect this emotional disposition of the pair, even if it is an important prerequisite for a smooth conversation.

Using the framework by Valsiner (2007) that considers human development at three levels, the foregoing discussion suggests that a perspective that finds out the self as a Gestalt quality does not fit with the development at the *ontogenetic* level, especially when it presupposes well-maintained "stable meaning structures that guide the person within one's life course" (Valsiner, 2007, p. 302). The emergence of the self discussed here is the development at the *microgenetic* level that occurs "as the person faces the ever-new next time moment in the infinite sequence of irreversible time" (p. 301). What we can observe here is the result of the meaning construction that is *not* abandoned in the overabundance of semiotic activity. Further, the conversation is also embedded in the context between home and institution, and is mildly guided by "*mesogenetic* constraints" (p. 302; e.g. routine activities): in this case, regular conversations during car rides.

In Valsiner's (2007) framework of semiotic approach, what is happening at each of these three levels (microgenetic, mesogenetic, and ontogenetic) does not demonstrate one-to-one correspondence, and there is no simple relationship between microgenesis and ontogenesis, as in "the frequency of microgenetically similar recurrent events accumulates over time linearly to impact ontogenesis" (p. 303). Thus, it is difficult to know the development at ontogenetic level from the data discussed here. Valsiner also discusses the importance of focusing on the "processes that proceed *between* the different levels": that is, the "affective creation of signs" (p. 305). Following this perspective, I attempt to describe the process by which signs emerge and are used in meaning construction.²

²For a discussion concerning mesogenetic structures, see Chap. 6.

How Signs Work in Conversation: A Description of the Dialectic Tension of Meaning

How does meaning develop in the conversation and present a complex composition of self and others? As Rommetveit (1992) explained, conversation is the participants' establishing "shared social reality" (p. 23) by reciprocal adjustment of their perspectives. They are "epistemically dependent upon each other and co-responsible for the product" (Rommetveit, 1992, p. 33), and achieve the collaborative sharing of the event by their continual introduction of new perspectives or new information. In this process, "the speaker has the privilege to determine what is being referred to and/or meant, whereas the listener is committed to make sense of what is said, temporarily adopting the speaker's perspective" (Rommetveit, 1985, p. 190). Accordingly, what is shared in one given moment of interaction is not independent from what is shared before that moment. In other words, meaning always has some relationship with what was already shared in the relationship.

In the description of such a process, I adopt a perspective that views the meaning as the oppositions, from the Austrian tradition of psychology with its origin in the work of Franz Brentano, elaborated to *the field of meaning* by Alexius Meinong "who established the foundations of *Gestalt* thought in Graz (Austria) in the 1880s" (Valsiner, 2007, p.158). Meinong (1983) emphasized the dialectic nature of meaning that enables further development. In his framework, apprehension of "A" comes with the apprehension of "**non-A**" and these two are asymmetric; that is, **non-A** operates as *negativum* of A (Valsiner, 2007). According to Meinong (1983), **non-A** works in our recognition of X that is *not* similar to A. Thus, our sharing something (A) in conversation is always accompanied by **non-A**, although it is not something explicit and fixed.

From this basic idea, Josephs, Valsiner, and Surgan (1999) developed a theoretical framework of *meanacting* (acting toward creating meaning) in the dialogical processes that sees the sign as what "orients the sign constructor (user) toward the immediately potential future (p. 258)" and introduced the field-like expression of meaning construction (See Fig. 3.1 for example). It shows a complex of united opposites of A (e.g., "I played a rabbit today.") and **non-A** that is a semi-open indeterminate field for possible new meanings. For example, the new meaning, "I don't like playing a rabbit" might appear in this field. Although **non-A** is open to new meaning, it exists in relative opposition to A and these two are embedded in a completely open context for the sign, **Not-A**. In this relationship, the dialectic tension of A <> **non-A** provides the dynamics for new meaning related to the existing meaning.

This schema shows the fundamental structure of meaning construction and does not fit with the orientation for objective categorization of turns in interaction employed by most psychological research. In other words, it is impossible to set an objective standard to find "A" in a given interaction, and the framework gives us only a perspective to look at the conversation considering the existence of a dialectic tension that leads to further microgenesis of meaning.

How Meaning Develops in Conversation: Sequence of Differentiation

In natural conversation, the differentiation of meaning occurs in turn-taking. In the excerpt below (from [Excerpt 1.2](#)), once Mina has introduced “(bunny) rabbits” in lines 2 and 4 replying to her mother’s question, her mother introduces a narrower category of rabbits (“snow rabbits”) to the shared area of meaning (line 5). This is a transformation of the shared meaning: that is, an example of differentiation. Following her daughter’s identification with “snow rabbits,” the mother makes a correction (another differentiation; line 7).

(From [Excerpt 1.2](#))

- 1 Mo: What is Saito Taku [Mina’s friend, boy] (yes) going to play in the theater performance? (1 s).
- 2 Mi: A bat. (2 s) And Mina [I play] a rabbit.
- 3 Mo: In the dance by the rabbits? The bat? (1 s) [Does he appear in] Another dance?
- 4 Mi: After the bats, (uh hum) then maybe rabbits, (hmm) bunny rabbits.
- 5 Mo: Mimi, the bunny ... Oops [I guess I was] wrong, snow rabbits!
- 6 Mi: Mina, the snow rabbit xx [inaudible].
- 7 Mo: Mina is [You are] a moon rabbit, aren’t you? (Oh, [you are] right) A yellow rabbit, aren’t you?
- 8 Mi: [I’m] Not a snow rabbit. (1 s) xx [inaudible]?

From the perspective of meanacting, this process achieves a *growth of meaning* (Josephs, Valsiner, and Surgan 1999, p. 266). Using the field-like expression by Josephs et al., this interaction is hypothetically described as in [Fig. 3.1](#). In this interaction, I set Mina’s introduction of “bunny rabbit” as a point in which a complex of meaning begins to move (**A**), and this provides a latent field for further meaning (**non-A**). **Non-A** exists in relation to **A** (rabbit) but is a potential field of new meaning (e.g., “I play a *doggie* after that”). In the tension between these two fields, the first differentiation in this process happens in field **A**; that is, it is differentiated into the field of **a**’, “a snow rabbit”, with **non-a**’. In this field, the mother constructs a new meaning field (designated **a**’), “a moon rabbit,” in the **non-a**’ area, and Mina follows it (lines 7–8).

In this example, as soon as they share what one utterance means, Mina and her mother differentiate it further. In other words, their sharing of something sets up a proximal zone of differentiation in the interaction. Such smoothness is not always observed, or rather is rare, in the recordings. This is because the microgenesis of meaning is over-abundant and “most of the semiotic devices created are abandoned, some even before their use” (Valsiner, 2007, p. 301). Thus, the meaning construction here somehow *survived* to become explicit. This instability of meaning construction can be explained by multiple dialectic tensions that are closely related to the makeup of this genre of conversation. At the micro level, it is the tension of **A** <> **non-A** discussed above.³

³Other types of tension are discussed in Chaps. 6–8.

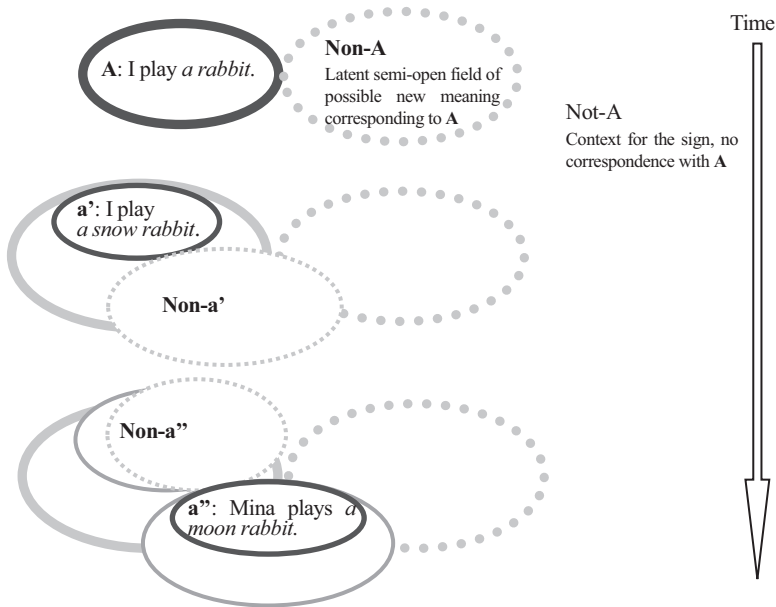


Fig. 3.1 Meaning complexes constituted in the interaction between Mina and her mother (Komatsu, 2010, p. 222, Figure 1, cited with minor modifications)

The positioning of Mina and her mother becomes possible through this sequence of sharing and differentiation, and the process also clarifies both participants' perspectives in relation to each other. In the interaction described above, the mother leads the differentiation, whereas Mina's perspective is not as clear. However, once the complex of meaning—that is, a grid constructed from the roles—appears, Mina begins to use it by clarifying the relationships between the roles and the names of her friends, and assumes a position of teaching these to her mother.

(From Excerpt 1.2)

- 9 Mo: A flower rabbit. (Wrong) Mina, the moon rabbit.
 10 Mi: That's right. Sayuri [Mina's friend, girl] and Sada Miki [Mina's friend, girl] play flower rabbits, don't they? (yes) Iiyama Mina and Sanae [Mina's friend, girl] are, well, moon rabbits, two moon rabbits and (yes) the white rabbit is, well, Tano (1 s) Tanokura (yes) Tano ... Tanokura, yeah, Tanokura Nagisa [Mina's friend, girl].
 11 Mo: Tanokura Nagisa.
 12 Mi: And then, Matsuzaka Aika [Mina's friend, girl] (yes) Machida Mina, [Mina's friend, girl] (yes) [you] see?

13 Mo: Yes, [I] see.

14 Mi: Three girls do that together, right?

15 Mo: Yes, but Mina [you] play in two, don't you?

16 Mi: Yes, and also Sayuri [plays] in two. (Yes) And Matsuzaka Aika [plays] in th, three. (Yes) (3 s) Three girls do (yes) that together, right? (2 s) Machida Mina (1 s) is ... one [meaning 'first'] ... see? (1 s) And Sayuri is two ['second']. Mina is three ['third']. That's the way [you] memorize, right?

17 Mo: Yes.

Although “white rabbit” (another role? Or another name for snow rabbits?) is newly introduced here, what works in this section of interaction is a configuration of proper nouns: that is, names of Mina's friends. Proper nouns and common nouns are different in their intension, but the name of each friend carries a potential for new meaning related to him or her. In this particular interaction, this potential does not work well and the configuration of children is elaborated only by *tracing* developments in the former interaction—that is, these names are simply imposed upon the grid of roles. In contrast to this relatively simple extension of meaning, Mina uses the grid of related roles to assume a position in relation to her mother. The details of the casting represent information that Mina knows better than her mother, and these details offer her an opportunity to assume the position to *teach* it.

The Potential of Proper Nouns

The interaction in Excerpt 3.2, in which Mina actively introduces her perspective on her friends, shows another example of differentiation in a shared field of meaning. Mina brings up her friend's names in reference to the roles they played (lines 1–2), and this resembles the process in the latter half of Excerpt 1.2 shown above. However, one of her friends, Yuko, serves as a point to extend the field of meaning. Mina's mother first comments the length of her surname, and then Mina mentions some of her personal characteristics. Subsequently, in relation to one of Yuko's characteristics, Mina tells a story about what she did with Yuko that day. These meaning constructions all develop in relation to the young girl Yuko, but they also construct the description of Mina (Fig. 3.2).

This meaning construction is all related to Yuko: that is, the meaning complex described here is within the field of “who Yuko is.” Although it is difficult to describe all the processes as a simple plane figure as here, we can see a variety of characteristics appear one after another in relation to her: that is, they are successively *taken over* by new signs (Josephs, Valsiner, and Surgan 1999). These include length of surname (lines 3–4), slowness of eating lunch (lines 5–7), linguistic ability (lines 8–11), and an episode of play (lines 11–12). In relation to this meaning construction concerning Yuko, who Mina is in relation to her also becomes clear. She is a rival in

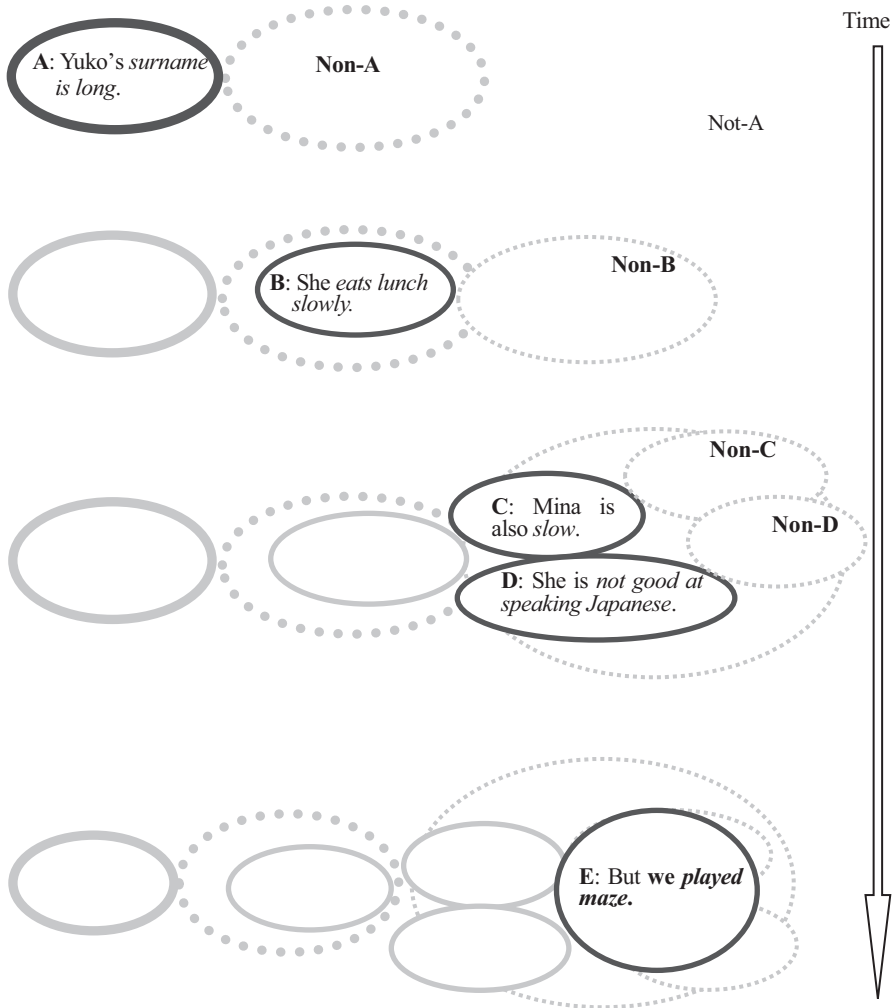


Fig. 3.2 Meaning complexes constituted concerning Yuko and Mina

slowness of eating lunch (although this is only indicated by the mother’s statement), but a partner in the play. In this construction of the meaning field, Mina also emerges as an observer of Yuko’s speech. Unlike the meaning construction in [Excerpt 1.2](#), this process is led by Mina and is more dynamic in its proceedings. Here again, Mina’s position in relation to her mother as the one who knows the children in hoi-kuen well appears in the succession of differentiations in the field of meaning.

These analyses of the two excerpts from the perspective of meanacting, focusing on the dialectic nature of meaning, exemplify the process by which a variety

of information concerning self and others (relating to each other) emerges to form a configuration. It can be described as a realization of the dialectic dynamics that signs have. This also clarifies the perspective of the participants who introduce new meaning, and the positioning in the conversation is achieved in the successive differentiations of the meaning field that they share. Activities in hoikuen—institutional contexts in which many children interact with each other—offer concepts to describe, or frames to look at, other people (e.g., roles in pretend play), though they do not always develop into ontogenesis that offers a stable perspective for self and others. The next section will apply this framework to the other mother-child pair (Yuuma corpus) and further elaborate the understanding of this process.

How Concepts Work Together to Construct a Configuration: An Analysis of Yuuma's Stories

In the analyses above, we observed many different types of concepts working in conversation to form configurations of children who have common futures and differences. Using these concepts, Mina enumerated some of her friends in order to construct a grid to position herself. As I discussed, enumeration of children observed is one natural way of understanding experience, because of the basic feature of hoikuen whereby many same-aged children gather. In the Yuuma corpus, in which 89 episodes of conversation mention his friends and himself in yochien (another type of institution for young children), a variety of concepts concerning membership (e.g., belonging to various groups in the yochien, close friendships) or personal characteristics (e.g., abilities, characteristic behaviors) appeared. These also worked to interrelate Yuuma and others in conversations, often accompanying their enumeration. In the following sections, I will attempt an analysis focusing on examples utilizing group membership as a foundational frame in which to place children.

Although it depends on the policy of each institution or school, we can observe many types of activities in which children participate as groups formed of several members (ordinarily four to six children) at hoikuen, yochien, and elementary schools in Japan. These groups are designated by numbers or names for identification. The children in each group often sit together to eat lunch and are expected to do their activities collaboratively. In the conversation with Yuuma, his mother often asked how they ate lunch, with group membership used as a frame to position the children. To describe how the concepts at yochien work in meaning construction leading to the emergence of presentational self, I introduce three episodes of conversation observed in different periods of recording.

Excerpt 3.3

(Komatsu, 2013, pp. 123–124, Excerpt 1, cited with minor modifications)

[After talking about the seating arrangement for lunch at yochien.]

- 1 Mo: [I] see. (1 s) Then everyone says “Itadakimasu,” [ritual greeting chorus before meal] don’t you?
- 2 Yu: Yes. (3 s) [We] selected a group [of children who lead the greeting] for lunch, before.
- 3 Mo: Eh? Is there such a group for lunch?
- 4 Yu: Yes, [there are] the star group, the watermelon [group] and the [speaking simultaneously with line 5] tulip
- 5 Mo: Yucchi [nickname for Yuuma], what group [do you] belong to?
- 6 Yu: The melon [group] is next to the strawberry [group] xx [inaudible, laughs].
- 7 Mo: Eh? Is your group strawberry [group]?
- 8 Yu: Yeah, yeah.
- 9 Mo: Who belongs to strawberry? [Do you] remember now? (1 s)
- 10 Yu: Kentaro [Yuuma’s friend, boy], Rina [Yuuma’s friend, girl], (Yes) Minori [Yuuma’s friend girl] (Yes)
- 11 Mo: And [speaking simultaneously with line 12] Yucchi? (Yes) Five [children]?
- 12 Yu: Just [five] Yeah.
- 13 Yu: Yes. (1 s)
- 14 Mo: Kentaro, Yucchi, Minori (1 s), Rina? (Yes) and Yucchi.
- 15 Yu: Yeah. (1 s) Say, mom.
- 16 Mo: What?
- 17 Yu: Kentaro.
- 18 Mo: Kentaro.
- 19 Yu: Yucchi.
- 20 Mo: Yucchi. (1 s)
- 21 Yu: xx [inaudible]
- 22 Mo: Rina.
- 23 Yu: Minori.
- 24 Mo: Minori. (3 s)
- 25 Yu: Four [children]?
- 26 Mo: But here, just four children. Why?

Yuuma is 5/9 years old.

Yuuma started attending the yochien when he was 4 years and 11 months old and Excerpt 3.3 was recorded at the end of Yuuma’s first year there. In this episode of conversation, his mother is asking about the way they ate lunch, and Yuuma introduces the names of the groups (line 4). Answering his mother’s request (line 9), he describes with whom he makes up the “strawberry” group (line 10). The conversation continues with the mother confirming the group’s membership, based on her understanding that the group is formed of five children (line 11). The configuration of children including Yuuma himself resembles what I discussed earlier as the meaning construction from Excerpt 1.2, because it is the simple enumeration of children without further development. However, the details of this interaction are different:

that is, the groups are clearly introduced by Yuuma (line 4). The relationship between Yuuma and his mother is also slightly different from the positioning observed in Excerpt 1.2. The mother asks questions repeatedly to lead the conversation, focusing on group membership. However, Yuuma also assumes a position to impart his knowledge by asking his mother to repeat the names of his friends (lines 15–24).

Thus, this is also an example of the emergence of presentational self in the configuration of the child and others, and it shows the role of concepts used in the activities that children experience. Later in the recordings, as discussed when comparing Excerpts 1.2 and 3.2, Yuuma and his mother show variations of this simple meaning construction (Excerpt 3.4).

Excerpt 3.4

(Komatsu, 2013, pp. 125–127, Excerpt 2, cited with modifications)

[After talking about Yuuma's friend who is slow at eating lunch.]

- 1 Mo: Then [you] eat [lunch]? (1 s) [Do you] eat lunch with members of the *han* [an old-fashioned expression meaning “group”]? (Yeah) Lunch with [members of] the *han*?
- 2 Yu: Yeah, what does *han* mean?
- 3 Mo: Oh. [Do you] eat with [members of] the group? (Yes) Sorry, sorry. With the group?
- 4 Yu: Yes. What does *han* (Yes) mean?
- 5 Mo: Meaning [of *han*]? Hmm. When I visited [your] class on parents' day, (Yes) you were enjoying origami, (Yeah) sitting with [members of] *han*, weren't you? (Yes) Group. (Yes) Yucchi [nickname for Yuuma] and Yukari [Yuuma's friend, girl] and.
- 6 Yu: Shinki Kentaro [Yuuma's friend, boy] (Kentaro and) Hiroki [Yuuma's friend, boy] and.
- 7 Mo: Hiroki and (1 s) who? [speaking simultaneously with line 8] One more child.
- 8 Yu: Isuzu [Yuuma's friend, girl].
- 9 Mo: Ah [You] sat next to Isuzu, didn't you? (Yes) And [you] eat together. Fo, five children? Lunch. (Yes) [You] sit and eat in that seat? (Yes) Then, all say “Itadakimasu?” (Yes) And “Gochisosama” [ritual greeting chorus after meal]
- 10 Yu: [We] didn't use tables today.
- 11 Mo: [You] didn't use tables today? (No) Why?
- 12 Yu: Well, coz, tomorrow, today, [we] didn't eat lunch [at yochien].
- 13 Mo: Ah, [you] set up the tables on the day for lunch?
- 14 Yu: Yes, yes.
- 15 Mo: [Do you] set up the tables by yourself? (Yes) Where are the tables [when you're not using them]?
- 16 Yu: Somewhere beside there, side, um, there is a piano, the piano isn't it? (Yeah, yeah) And right beside there. (Um) Here, here.

- 17 Mo: [You] keep them here. (xx [inaudible]) And [do you] set them up yourself for lunch? (Yes) I see. (1 s)
- 18 Yu: Yucchi is [I am] a strong boy.
- 19 Mo: A strong boy? Then, tables, is there a table only for Yucchi or for Hiroki [Yuuma's friend, boy]? Is your name on the table? Or, [can you] use any table [you want]? (Yes) Tables.
- 20 Yu: Yeah, the tallest [of the children] is at the front. (Um) And smaller children in the back. (Um) Small, small, small.
- 21 Mo: Ah, Yucchi [you] sit there because [you're] the tallest? (Yeah) Ah, I see I see. (1 s) What was [your] job [in class] today, Yucchi? (2 s)
- 22 Yu: [I] don't have any job today, today.
- 23 Mo: Oh, [you] didn't have a job.
- 23 Yu: Yo-chan [Yuuma's friend, girl] [did].
- 24 Mo: Yo-chan had a job?
- 25 Yu: Yes, Yo-chan and her group.
- 26 Mo: Group? So, [you] didn't have any job today?
- 27 Yu: No. (1 s) Take turns. (Eh?) Take turns.
- 28 Mo: Ah, [you] take turns. (Um) What kind of jobs are there? (2 s)
- 29 Yu: [Shall I] tell you? (Yes) (2 s) The cherry flowers [group], (3 s) the butterfly (Yeah), (3 s) the strawberry (Um) the cherry, (Um) and the tulip.
- 30 Mo: Oh, are these the names of the groups? (Yes) So, what kind of jobs do these groups have?

Yuuma is 6/0 years old.

This interaction was observed in Yuuma's second year at yochien. In the long flow of interaction, the subject of conversation moves in relation to the activities he experienced in the classroom. Throughout this move, the subjects always have some relationship to the group he belongs to. After enumerating the members of his group (his mother uses "*han*" in Japanese) (lines 5–8), Yuuma mentions the table he regularly uses with no clear relationship to his mother's questions (lines 9–10). In this interaction, Yuuma extends the field of meaning from his list of friends to the specific episode of the day. Adopting the terms of meanacting, this represents the development of meaning in the **non-A** field in relation to the elaboration of group membership—i.e., field **A**—in the former interaction.

Although the meaning construction after this turn was led by the mother (lines 11–17), this also works to introduce his perspective into the conversation. He again introduces the topic "Yucchi is a strong boy" (line 18) in relation to the set-up of tables for lunch. In this way, Yuuma clarifies his unique perspective in relation to his mother's during the description of the groups in terms of members, usage of tables, seating arrangements, and jobs assigned. This meaning construction also extends into Yuuma's physical strength and height. Thus, Yuuma at yochien becomes clear through multiple comparisons and descriptions here to observers.

These two episodes of conversation by Yuuma and his mother follow the process I discussed in the case of Mina and her mother. Activities children experience offer frames in which to place children and construct who the child (Mina or Yuuma) was,

though this activates by chance. This configuration has the potential for further development from a simple enumeration of names to the description of a variety of characteristics, and this is another aspect of the positioning that the child and the mother achieve through interaction. Thus, the presentational self emerges in multiple relationships in which a child is associated with others. Further, as the next example shows, it can include a very personal aspect of relationships.

Enumeration Shifts to the Personal

Excerpt 3.5 was recorded during Yuuma's last term at yochien. As in the two episodes introduced above, this interaction begins with the mother's questioning about his experiences during lunchtime (line 1), to which Yuuma answers by enumerating his friends (line 2). From this arrangement, the mother introduces an affectionate relationship between Yuuma and a girl (Sayaka) and asks the reason why he likes her (line 5). Not answering this question, her son introduces an episode of his friend's kissing the same girl (line 6). This exemplifies that the framework to enumerate or compare children extends into the framework used to describe more personal or private aspects of relationships. In other words, it shows the broad range of meaning construction that starts from group membership.

This development of meaning also brings about a positive mood for the child and his mother—that is, the shift of the topic to the personal, somewhat romantic, aspect of interpersonal relationships enables the mother to poke fun at Yuuma's luck in a new group (line 11). Although she returns to confirming Yuuma's good relations (lines 15 and 17) at yochien, the meaning construction here enables the playful *teasing* in conversation that is not evident in Excerpts 3.3 or 3.4.

Excerpt 3.5

(Komatsu, 2013, pp. 128–129, Excerpt 3, cited with modifications)

- 1 Mo: Wait a minute. Sorry, sorry. [Let's go back to] What [we] talked about just now. (Yes) With whom [did you] eat lunch today?
- 2 Yu: Sayaka [Yuuma' friend, girl] was next to Yucchi [nickname for Yuuma] here. (Yes) Shingo [Yuuma's friend, boy], Nana [Yuuma's friend, girl] here, Shingo was next to Nana, and Ayumi [Yuuma's friend, girl] was next to Shingo.
- 3 Mo: Ah, [you ate] with [members of] your *han*. With members of the group.
- 4 Yu: Yes. Group.
- 5 Mo: xx [inaudible] (Yes) So, next to Yucchi is Sayaka. (Yes) Your sweetheart, Sayaka! (Yes) Yucchi [You] love her, don't you? (Yes) Sayaka. (Yes) Why [do you] love her?
- 6 Yu: Shinta [Yuuma's friend, boy], er, (Yes) has smooched with Sayaka once.
- 7 Mo: Really? Didn't Sayaka refuse that? (No) (1 s) Ah. (2 s) I see. Who [do you] like the most, Yucchi? (2 s)

- 8 Yu: xx [inaudible], Sayaka and (Yes) Takai Ma-kun [Yuuma's friend, boy] (Yes). Takai Ma-kun and (Yes) (4 s)
- 9 Mo: Then, just the kids you like! The new group. (Yes) Girls.
- 10 Yu: Yes [speaking simultaneously with line 11] and,
- 11 Mo: Hey. And Nana too! (Yes) Wow!
- 12 Yu: So, Takai Ma-kun belongs to the ice group.
- 13 Mo: Ma-kun is in the ice group?
- 14 Yu: Not in (Yes) xx [inaudible] group.
- 15 Mo: Hum, is there a quarrel in the group? Yucchi.
- 16 Yu: [We] don't.
- 17 Mo: [Are you] good friends? (Yes)

Yuuma is 6/8 years old.

The characteristics of the meaning construction here, in comparison with Excerpts 3.3 and 3.4, may derive from Yuuma and his mother's understanding of others at yochien. However, just as with the corpus of Mina and her mother, such an episode is rare in the recordings and thus is not considered a simple reflection of stable knowledge concerning them. Although the concepts that children encounter at yochien or hoikuen often work as the foundation for setting out the names of the children concerned, how meaning construction and positioning between the participants develop from such a configuration will depend on the unpredictable dialectic dynamics of **A** <> **non-A** that our use of signs introduces into the field of meaning.

Conclusion

Our conversations in natural settings are not only for transmission of what we know to others, but for our relationship-making and our making sense of past and future. This is also true for young children and their mothers. In addition to this hybrid nature, interaction in conversation is always affected by its environment at the micro- and macro- levels. Fluctuation of conversation in natural settings due to this complicated architecture makes it difficult to understand the interaction from the perspective of a great deal of research in developmental psychology that presupposes the stability of interactions obtained from the ontogenetic development of children.

In this chapter, by touching on several episodes from such non-stable but rich recordings of mother-child conversations, I have attempted to describe several variations in the emergence of presentational self that developed from the mentioning of others that children encounter in the institutionalized setting. The episodes showed a common foundational configuration of children and differences in development to position the self and others. This resembles the process of listening to an orchestral work unfold, in which one simple theme develops through variation and by adding instruments.

The presentational self appears as a configuration of self and others, and the examples of conversation have showed that this configuration is constructed using a variety of categories or concepts that children encounter in their lives. Within the framework by Josephs, Valsiner, and Surgan (1999), I hypothetically described the process by which one of these categories sets a latent field for further meaning in relation to a preceding description of self or others. In other words, the self emerges through the power of signs that provides us the possibility of developing new meaning from existing meaning. As the examples discussed here are necessarily limited in number and characteristics, there might be other episodes of conversation in which we can find other types of presentational self. However, at least in the examples I analyzed, the presentational self is what becomes observable through the participants' actions in this possibility of new meaning. To offer an extreme example of this basic schema, even silence in conversation can possibly be an act of extending shared meaning and can be a place for the presentational self.

Despite this generalizable nature, the genre of conversation I discussed is not so common in the recordings. It is also presumable that children and their mothers will not talk as in these examples if researchers ask them to *replay* the conversations. One reason for this is that conversations develop from over-abundant microgenetic meaning construction. In these works, meaning occasionally develops to present a clear figure of self in relation to others, just as wind waves in the beach are variously distributed in their heights and sometimes very high waves appear. From this perspective, Excerpts 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5 from the Yuuma corpus may be considered as something resembling the highest of multiple repeating waves. Children are always engaging in meaning construction but this does not necessarily signify the permanent emergence of clear presentational self in the conversation.

In other words, the discussion here is of an understanding that considers the self that appears locally and momentarily in our active relationships with physical and interpersonal surroundings, and via the functioning of signs. To clarify this framework further, I will compare it with existing approaches to the self in psychology in the next chapter.

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