

Embracing the Other: Stance, Prejudice and Potential in *Otōto no Otto*

Daniel Gimbrone

JPN 730S

Matthew Burdelski

Fall 2024

Introduction

In the study of linguistic interaction, stance-taking has emerged as a crucial lens for understanding how speakers position themselves and others in social and cultural contexts. This paper explores the dynamics of stance-taking in a scene from the manga *Otōto no Otto*, drawing on the theoretical framework developed by Elinor Ochs (1992; 1993; 1996). By applying Ochs' concepts to the rich interactional data in this scene, we can gain insight into how linguistic resources are deployed to navigate complex familial, cultural, and emotional dynamics, particularly in the face of unexpected challenges and shifting social norms surrounding sexual identity and same-sex marriage.

Theoretical Framework: Ochs on Stance

Elinor Ochs' work on stance has been instrumental in illuminating the ways in which language is used to construct and negotiate social identities, relationships, and cultural norms. Ochs defines stance as “a socially recognized disposition” (Ochs 1993), encompassing a range of linguistic strategies that speakers employ to position themselves and others in interaction.

A key dimension of Ochs' framework is the distinction between affective and epistemic stance. Affective stance refers to “a mood, attitude, feeling, and disposition, as well as degrees of

emotional intensity vis-a-vis some focus of concern” (Ochs, 1996), while epistemic stance relates to “knowledge or belief including degrees of certainty of knowledge, degrees of commitment to truth of propositions, and sources of knowledge” (Ochs, 1996,). These stance categories provide a valuable toolkit for analyzing how speakers express and manage their subjective orientations through language.

Ochs also emphasizes the indexical nature of stance-taking, whereby linguistic forms “index” or point to particular stances, social identities, and contextual features (Ochs, 1992). This indexical perspective highlights the ways in which specific language choices serve as markers of a speaker’s position within a complex web of social and cultural meanings.

Additionally, Ochs stresses the collaborative and interactional nature of stance-taking, arguing that stances are not simply expressed by individual speakers but are co-constructed through the dynamics of discourse (Ochs, 1992). This view underscores the importance of examining stance-taking as a reciprocal process that unfolds through the turn-by-turn flow of dialogue.

***Otōto no Otto* as a Site for Analyzing Stance**

The manga series *Otōto no Otto* (My Brother’s Husband) offers a compelling site for exploring the dynamics of stance-taking in interaction. Created by Gengoroh Tagame, the series

centers on Yaichi, a single father coming to terms with the unexpected arrival of Mike, his late brother's Canadian husband. The manga thoughtfully explores issues of cultural difference, homophobia, and the complexities of family relationships, providing rich ground for linguistic analysis.

In particular, the scene depicting Yaichi and Mike's first meeting presents a complex tapestry of stance-taking as the characters navigate the challenges of their new relationship against the backdrop of conflicting cultural norms and personal beliefs surrounding homosexuality and same-sex marriage. The interaction is marked by a delicate dance of language, gesture, and silence, as Yaichi and Mike work to establish a fragile connection while confronting their own preconceptions and emotional vulnerabilities.

Moreover, the arrival of Yaichi's daughter Kana partway through the scene introduces a further layer of complexity, as her more open-minded stance toward Mike's identity and relationship with her uncle hints at the potential for generational shifts in attitude. The scene thus offers a microcosm of the broader social and cultural tensions that the characters must navigate, rendering it a rich site for exploring the power of stance-taking in interaction. The excerpt can be found at the end of this paper.

Analysis

YAI: *Aa, sono...*

(Um, well...)

Nanda...

(What is this...)

Tooi tokoro o wazawaza...

(You came all this way...)

The interaction begins with Yaichi's epistemic stance of uncertainty and emotional distance, marked by hedging, questioning, and trailing off. This stance reflects Yaichi's initial discomfort and lack of preparedness for the unexpected reunion with his late brother's husband.

YAI: **thinking* Teme... kono yaro...*

(You... this bastard...)

Nanda!

(What the hell!)

**thinking* Hanase homo!*

(Let go, homo!)

...Oi, chotto

(Hey, hold on...)

Warui nda ga...

(Sorry, but...)

Mike's sudden embrace triggers a dramatic contrast between Yaichi's internal and external stance. Internally, Yaichi's thoughts are marked by harsh, derogatory language, indexing a strong negative affective stance rooted in homophobic attitudes. However, his external language is more measured and polite, demonstrating an attempt to modulate his stance for the sake of social decorum. The discrepancy highlights the conflict between Yaichi's ingrained prejudices and the need to navigate the unexpected social situation.

MIK: *Oo, soorii, soorii!*

(Oh, sorry, sorry!)

MIK: *Gomen nasai, tsui...*

(Sorry, I just...)

Anata ga sono...

(It's just that you...)

Anmari Ryouji ni nite ita kara...

(look so much like Ryoji...)

Mike's apology indexes his recognition of the social transgression and his attempt to realign his stance with cultural norms. The code-switching between English and Japanese highlights Mike's dual cultural positioning, while also demonstrating the sincerity of his apology. His explanation for the embrace seeks to reframe his action as an emotionally motivated response, mitigating the potential face-threat to Yaichi.

YAI: *Iya... ii n da ga...*

(No... it's fine, but...)

YAI: *Tonikaku agatte...*

(Anyway, come in...)

Naka ni haitte kure

(Come inside.)

Yaichi's response is marked by significant pauses and hedging, indexing his continued discomfort and hesitation. However, his invitation to Mike to come inside represents a subtle shift towards a more accommodating stance, even as the trailing off suggests ongoing

reservation.

YAI: *Sore de...*

(So...)

MIK: *Ano...*

(Um...)

MIK: *Iie, oniisan no hou kara douzo*

(No, brother, you first.)

YAI: *A... suman*

(Ah... sorry.)

Douzo

(Go ahead.)

YAI: *Sono yobikata*

(That way of addressing me...)

Yamete kurenai ka?

(Could you stop it?)

MIK: *A... gomen nasai*

(Ah... sorry.)

MIK: *Yaichi... san?*

(Mr. Yaichi?)

The awkward silence and hedged utterances index the continued stance of uncertainty and discomfort between the characters. Mike's use of the familial term *oniisan* represents an attempt to establish a closer relationship, but Yaichi explicitly rejects this stance. This direct metapragmatic request asserts Yaichi's desire to maintain greater distance and formality. Mike's switch to the more neutral *Yaichi-san* demonstrates his accommodation to Yaichi's stance, as he works to find a more acceptable form of address.

KAN: *Tadaima!*

(I'm home!)

KAN: *A, okyakusan*

(Oh, a guest.)

YAI: *Gyougi warui zo*

(Mind your manners.)

Goaisatsu shite

(Greet him.)

Kana's arrival introduces a new interactional dynamic, with Yaichi attempting to socialize her into appropriate behavior towards a guest. This stance indexes Yaichi's role as a parent and upholder of social norms, even as it also deflects from the underlying tension of the situation.

KAN: *Konnichiwa!*

(Hello!)

MIK: *Hai, konnichiwa*

(Hello!)

KAN: *Uwaa, gaijin da!*

(Wow, a foreigner!)

MIK: *Gaijin ja arimasen. Kanada-jin*

(Not a foreigner, a Canadian.)

Kana's exclamation (*Uwaa, gaijin da!*) indexes a stance of naïve excitement at Mike's foreign appearance, while also revealing a simplistic cultural categorization. Mike's response assertively rejects the *gaijin* label, instead emphasizing his specific Canadian identity. This self-positioning challenges the overgeneralization inherent in the term *gaijin* and asserts Mike's

stance as a culturally distinct individual.

YAI: *Kana! Kocchi kite suwatte!*

(Kana! Come here and sit!)

YAI: *Musume no Kana da*

(This is my daughter, Kana.)

KAN: *Kana de~su*

(I'm Kana!)

MIK: *Hajimemashite, Kana-chan. Maiku Furanagan, Kanada-jin desu*

(Nice to meet you, Kana. I'm Mike Flanagan, a Canadian.)

Yaichi's directive to Kana and his introduction of her work to control the interactional flow and assert his parental authority. Kana's self-introduction, with its casual, friendly tone, contrasts with the prior tension, reflecting her innocence of the complex adult dynamics at play. Mike's reciprocal introduction, including his reiteration of his Canadian identity, seeks to establish a friendly rapport with Kana while maintaining his own cultural positioning.

KAN: *Ne, Papa, kono hito dare?*

(Hey, Dad, who's this?)

YAI: *Kono hito dare... tte*

(Who's this... you say?)

Omae sou iu kikikata...

(That way of asking...)

MIK: *Watashi, Kana-chan no ojisan desu*

(I'm your uncle, Kana.)

Kana's direct question is met with Yaichi's mild rebuke, indexing his parental stance in socializing her into appropriate interactional norms. Mike's response, identifying himself as Kana's uncle, represents a significant move in redefining his relationship to the family. This stance claim, while accurate, also strategically foregrounds familial connection over the complex issues of Yaichi's relationship to his late brother's same-sex marriage.

KAN: *Doyu koto? Imi wakannai!*

(What do you mean? I don't get it!)

MIK: *Watashi, Kanada de Kana-chan no Baba no otouto to kekkon shimashita*

(I married your dad's younger brother in Canada.)

Dakara Kana-chan no ojisan

(So I'm your uncle.)

KAN: *Ee!?*

(What!?)

MIK: *Hai*

(Yes.)

KAN: *Papa ni otouto!?*

(Dad has a younger brother!?)

Teka, otoko doushi de kekkon!?

(Men getting married!?)

Sonna koto dekiru no!?

(Can you even do that!?)

MIK: *Dekimasu yo*

(Yes, you can.)

YAI: *Dekinai yo!*

(No, you can't!)

Kana's surprised reaction to Mike's revelation prompts him to offer a more detailed

explanation, explicitly referencing his marriage to Yaichi's brother in Canada. Kana's subsequent utterances index a stance of shocked discovery and cultural unfamiliarity with same-sex marriage. This stance, while naïve, also potentially creates a space for the renegotiation of cultural norms and expectations.

Mike's affirmative response assertively positions same-sex marriage as possible and valid, challenging the heteronormative assumptions implicit in Kana's question. In contrast, Yaichi's blunt denial reasserts a more conservative stance, foreclosing the possibility of same-sex marriage and, by extension, the legitimacy of Mike's relationship to his late brother. This stark juxtaposition of stances brings the central conflict of the scene into sharp relief.

KAN: ...*Dotchi?*

(So, which is it?)

YAI: *Iya... sono...*

(No... well...)

YAI: *Dakara... are da*

(So... it's like this...)

Nihon ja dekinai kedo, yoso no kuni nara dekiru koto mo arun da yo!

(It's not allowed in Japan, but you can do it in other countries!)

KAN: ...*Hen na no*

(That's weird.)

YAI: ***thinking*** *Daro?*

(Right?)

thinking *Otoko doushi de kekkon dekiru nante no ga hen nanda yo!*

(It's weird that men can marry each other!)

Kana's question demands a resolution to the conflicting stances presented by Mike and Yaichi. Yaichi's response, while still hesitant, represents a slight softening of his earlier categorical denial. His explanation acknowledges the possibility of same-sex marriage in other cultural contexts, even as it reasserts the norm of its impossibility in Japan. This stance, while still rooted in heteronormative assumptions, carries potential for the recognition of cultural difference and the relativization of norms.

Kana's response, however, challenges this compartmentalization, asserting a stance that frames the inconsistency between cultural norms as strange or irrational. This questioning stance, while still reflecting a degree of childlike simplicity, nonetheless points to the inherent instability

of culturally relativist framings of moral and social norms.

Yaichi's internal response reveals the persistence of his deeply ingrained heteronormative stance, as he continues to view the very idea of same-sex marriage as aberrant and strange. This inner thought, juxtaposed with his more tempered external explanation, highlights the profound tension between Yaichi's personal beliefs and the demands of the evolving interactional context.

KAN: *Kocchi de yokute acchi de dame nante*

(It's okay here, but not there?)

Sonna no hen!

(That's what's weird!)

YAI: *So... sou ka?*

(Is... is it?)

Kana's final challenge forcefully rejects the logic of cultural relativism, asserting a universalist ethical stance that views inconsistency in moral norms as inherently problematic. This stance, expressed with the directness and simplicity of a child's perspective, cuts through

the complexities of adult rationalizations and forces a confrontation with the fundamental question of what is right and wrong.

Yaichi's response, marked by significant hesitation and a questioning tone, indexes a moment of profound destabilization in his stance. Faced with Kana's clear ethical challenge, Yaichi appears to waver, his earlier certainties thrown into doubt. This moment of hesitation and questioning could be indicative of a deeper shift in Yaichi's stance, as he is forced to confront the limitations and contradictions of his existing beliefs.

Conclusion

This analysis has demonstrated the complex interplay of stance-taking in the negotiation of identity, relationships, and cultural norms surrounding same-sex marriage in this key scene from *Otōto no Otto*. By applying Ochs' framework to the rich interactional data, we have seen how the characters deploy a range of linguistic and discursive strategies - from code-switching and hedging to silence and metapragmatic commentary - to navigate the shifting terrain of their interpersonal and cultural landscape.

The scene has illustrated the ways in which individual stances are rooted in broader cultural narratives and assumptions, as well as the potential for those stances to be challenged and destabilized through the dynamics of interaction. In particular, Kana's questioning stance,

grounded in a child's direct engagement with questions of fairness and consistency, has emerged as a potent force for the potential renegotiation of deeply held beliefs and biases.

At the same time, the analysis has highlighted the profound emotional and psychological complexity of stance-taking in the face of personal loss, ingrained prejudice, and the confrontation with difference. Yaichi's internal struggles, as revealed through the contrast between his inner thoughts and outer expressions, illustrate the human challenges involved in the process of stance evolution and change.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated the value of fine-grained, multimodal analysis of stance-taking in the illumination of the complex dynamics of identity, culture, and interaction. By attending closely to the linguistic and embodied details of this scene, we have gained insight into the ways in which the micro-level negotiations of everyday conversation are inextricably tied to the macro-level struggles of social change and cultural transformation. In this way, the study of stance-taking in interaction offers a powerful lens for understanding the human dimensions of some of the most pressing issues of our time.

Excerpt of *Otōto no Otto* by Gengoroh Tagame









References

Ochs, E. (1992). Indexing gender. In A. Duranti & C. Goodwin (Eds.), *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon* (pp. 335-358). Cambridge University Press.

Ochs, E. (1993). Constructing social identity: A language socialization perspective. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 26(3), 287-306.

Ochs, E. (1996). Linguistic resources for socializing humanity. In J. J. Gumperz & S. C. Levinson (Eds.), *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity* (pp. 407-437). Cambridge University Press.

Tagame, G. (2014-2017). *Otōto no Otto*. Futabasha.