Young children’s initial assessments in Japanese
Matthew Burdelski (Osaka University)
Emi Morita (National University of Singapore)

Introduction
Over the last few decades, researchers concerned with human interaction have viewed knowledge not as residing solely in the individual mind, but as shared and produced in situated interaction. In particular, knowledge of the social world, including shared conventions, communicative norms, and social values, is first acquired by children from caregivers and others in activities and sequences of action, and is crucial for participating as a member of a community or society. An important way that humans relate and share knowledge in interaction and, in the process, construct their views of the social world, is through evaluating, or by making assessments. In this sense, assessments are not merely descriptions of the social world, but social actions and stances that are often responded to, aligned with, or contested in meaningful ways.

Although there has been an increasing amount of analytical attention paid to assessments in adult interaction, there is comparatively little research focusing on young children. An analysis of children’s assessments in everyday interaction can shed light on ways in which young children use their linguistic resources, together with embodied resources, to display evaluative and emotional stances, perform social actions, constitute relationships, and co-construct knowledge with adults and other children.
This chapter examines both such knowledge production between participants, as well as children’s often quite surprising display of the depth of socio-cultural knowledge that they have already acquired by the age of two, through an analysis of children’s assessment practices in family households. In particular, we examine two year-old Japanese-speaking children’s *initial assessments*, such as “It’s interesting/fun” or “It’s scary,” addressed to caregivers, siblings, or other adults. Although two-year-old’s linguistic repertoire is still quite limited, our turn-by-turn analysis of their assessment activity reveals their sensitivity to the sequential environment, to the kind of response made relevant next, and to which kinds of social actions can be performed through the initial assessment. Our analysis, in short, is an in-depth study of one of the hitherto under appreciated ways in which social action figures prominently in young children’s everyday communicative conduct through the activity of assessment.

**Assessments**

Prior research within conversation analysis has examined assessments in everyday interaction in a variety of settings (e.g. Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987, 1992; Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Lindström & Mondada, 2009; Pomerantz, 1984; Sidnell, 2014). Studies show how assessments are used to perform social actions, such as to “praise, complain, compliment, insult, brag, self-deprecate” (Pomerantz, 1984: 63), and are a vehicle for displaying affective and epistemic stances in relation to some
assessable, or focus of concern. For instance, Goodwin and Goodwin (2000) propose that an assessment entails “affectively evaluating some relevant current event, available either in the local scene or through a report in the talk of the moment” (p. 42). Sidnell (2014) argues that an assessment is “an utterance that expresses its speaker’s positively or negatively valenced stance towards some person or object talked about — for example ‘It’s a fantastic film’ or ‘That is so gross’” (p. 138). To this end, speakers often deploy adjectives that indicate their emotional orientation, and utilize other resources such as adverbs, prosody, and non-vocal resources that intensify this orientation (cf. Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989).

Moreover, although assessments are produced by individuals, they are often organized as an assessment activity “that not only includes multiple participants, but also encompasses types of action that are not themselves assessments” (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992: 155). Assessments are also culturally variable. For instance, Strauss and Kawanishi (1986) show how Japanese speakers more often than Korean and American English speakers use repetition or “echo” of the speaker’s prior assessment. In addition to affective stance, assessments are also a vehicle for displaying epistemic stance, which refers to the ways degrees of knowledge with respect to some focus of concern are encoded in an utterance (e.g., Heritage, 2012).

In addition to adult interaction, assessments have been examined in adult-child interaction (e.g., Burdelski & Mitsuhashi, 2010; Butler, 2008; Clancy, 1985; 1999; Keel, 2015). Adult assessments to children encompass practices referred to as praise (e.g. “That’s
good”), but their functions are much broader. In particular, Japanese caregivers often use assessments in issuing directives to children on what to do or not to do. For instance, Clancy (1999) shows how Japanese mothers use the word *kowai* ‘scary’ in relation to children’s undesirable behaviors (e.g. Mother says, ‘Oh, that’s scary’ in response to a child who is yelling loudly and pretending to fire a gun in order to get the child to sit down). In addition to issuing assessments, Japanese caregivers explicitly instruct children how to make assessments to third parties, typically as a display of positive affect (e.g., *kawaii tte* ‘Say [to him or her], “It’s cute”’), and attribute assessments to others, such as pre-verbal children and animals at the zoo or park, who have not spoken or cannot ostensibly speak (e.g., *oishii tte* ‘The turtle says, “It’s delicious”, Burdelski, 2015; ‘Older sister says, “I’m afraid”’, Clancy, 1999). In these ways, caregivers socialize children to the appropriate use of assessments as a key communicative practice in engaging with others in the social world.

Within research on adult-child interaction, studies have also shown how children spontaneously initiate assessments to adults. For instance, Clancy (1999) found that two year-old Japanese children use the word *kowai* ‘scary’ to relate their fears of real (such as toys) and imagined stimuli (such as ghosts). In a study of English-speaking children, Keel (2015) observes that children frequently initiated assessments to caregivers (using adjectives such as “beautiful”). By focusing on instances when a child’s initial assessment to an adult did not engender a response (for instance,
because the adult was engaged in a competing activity), Keel shows how children use verbal and non-verbal resources in pursuing a response, such as by repeating the assessment or bringing the object (assessable) over to the caregiver.

Assessments have also been examined in children’s peer interactions (e.g., Burdelski & Mitsuhashi, 2010; Butler, 2008; Goodwin, 2007). For instance, in a study of English-speaking preadolescent girls, Goodwin (2007) shows how they make assessments of objects and events, together with embodied resources (e.g., gesture, bodily positions), in constructing peer relationships in relation to inclusion and exclusion in the group. In a study within a Japanese preschool, Burdelski and Mitsuhashi (2010) found that Japanese girls used kawaii ‘cute, adorable’ with gestures and other embodied resources to question and evaluate their own and other girls’ appearances.

Given the above discussion, while we know a good deal about assessments in interaction among adults and in adult speech to children, we still have much less understanding on the ways children, especially younger than three years old, initiate assessments to adults and other children.

**Setting, method, data**

The data for the present study come from two data corpora of family interaction with young children in Japan. The first corpus consists of approximately 150 hours of data of 13 families with a two year-old
child also residing in the Kansai area of Japan.\footnote{The collection of data and transcription were partly supported with a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Year Abroad Grant (first author).} The second corpus comprises nearly 500 hours of audiovisual recordings of 17 families with a young child (infant to four years old) residing in the Kansai (or Western) area of Japan\footnote{The collection of data was partly supported by a JSPS Grant-in-Aid for Young Scientists (S) “Cultural formation of responsibility” (Project No. 196720002 head by Akira Takada) and JSPS Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (A) “Cultural and ecological foundations of education and learning: An anthropological study on rhythm, imitation, and exchange” (Project No. 24242035 headed by Akira Takada). The analysis was partly supported by a National University of Singapore Academic Research Fund FY2015-FRC2-014 for the project titled “Japanese Children’s Social Interaction and Language Use” (second author).}. In this corpus, the researchers also at times engaged in interaction with parents and children, especially at the beginning and end of each recording session, and recorded these interactions. For the purposes of the present study, we focused on all of the data in the first corpus and a portion of the data in the second corpus (four families) in making collections of children’s initiating assessments using adjectives. While all of the above data were initially transcribed with the assistance of transcribers, we re-transcribed the segments for analysis using CA conventions in terms of detailed verbal and non-verbal features.

**Children's initial assessments**

In these data, children often produce initial assessments (Keel, 2015) using a wide range of adjectives (e.g., *hayai* ‘fast,’ *iya* ‘dislike,’ *kawaii* ‘cute,’ *kowai* ‘scary,’ *muzukashii* ‘difficult,’ *oishii* ‘delicious,’ *omoshiroi* ‘interesting,’ *sugoi* ‘great’) to display their affective responses to things, actions, and events, while performing a range of
social actions. Although children’s assessments are often lexically and syntactically straightforward, children often do quite a bit of interactional and embodied work in preparing, launching, and designing their assessments. This may include gaining others’ attention, inviting their response, and carrying on the assessment activity beyond an adjacency pair. Children also use a range of embodied resources in assessment activity. In the following analysis, we show how young children use adjectives together with other linguistic resources and embodied means in displaying their socio-cultural knowledge on how to carry out assessments and use them to display stance, perform social action (Lerner & Zimmerman, 2002; Lerner, Zimmerman & Kidwell, 2011), and constitute other culturally meaningful realities.

Preparing, launching, and designing initial assessments within multiparty participation frameworks

As pointed out by Keel (2015), in producing assessments, children may compete with surrounding talk and activities. Thus, in order to initiate an assessment successfully, they often have to build a participation framework (Goffman, 1981) that is prefaced on gaining one or more recipients’ attention towards an assessable in the here-and-now. While young children’s initial assessments are at times rather abrupt, as they are not always topically connected to an ongoing conversation and activity, children use a range of verbal and non-verbal resources in preparing, launching, and designing their assessments. For instance, in (1), a two and a half year-old
male child (Ken) initiates an assessment in the midst of adults (Mom and researchers) who are engaged in conversation. Here, Ken is seated at the dining table playing with a toy bus, and Mom is seated next to him. The researchers (who are off camera) are seated on the opposite side of the table, and have just been offered a snack and drink by Mom, prior to the start of the official observation.

(1) “Toy car and passenger” (K = male child, 2:6; M = Ken’s mother; Rs = Researchers [one male and one female]; FR = female researcher)

01 K: hora [hora.
hey hey
‘Hey, hey.’
((touching toy bus, looks slightly up at researcher))

02 M/ Rs: [((2.6 talking and laughing))]

03 → K: [[kore sugōri:] this great
‘This is great’
[ [((looking at a researcher while holding toy person))]

04 M/ Rs: [ [((Researchers and mother talking))]]

05 K: [ ((puts toy person inside car)) ]
In this multiparty context of ongoing talk by three adults, Ken utilizes several strategies in a step-by-step manner to secure the researchers’ attention in positioning them as recipients of his
assessment. He first attempts to achieve joint attention (e.g., Kidwell & Zimmerman, 2007) with a verbal directive (line 01: ‘look, look’), and then deploys the deictic term ‘this’ followed by an assessment adjective (line 03: sugo::i: ‘great’). This deictic term invites the researchers to check and see what Ken is referring to. Just at the moment Ken produces ‘this,’ he holds up a toy person with both hands at his eye level (see Figure 1). Thus, in using a speaker proximate demonstrative term ‘this’ while physically “showing” the object to another party (Kidwell & Zimmerman, 2007), Ken creates an interactional space where other participants’ recognition of his action is relevant in the midst of adults’ conversation. One of the researchers (female) responds by using the same assessment adjective (line 06: su↑go::↓i) with vowel elongation. Here, rather than simply repeating Ken’s assessment term, the researcher produces her second assessment with rising and falling intonation, which can be heard as an upgrade (Pomerantz, 1984) that displays heightened affective stance and appreciation of Ken’s toy.

Following the researcher’s response to his first assessment, Ken extends the assessment activity by repeating the assessment adjective (line 07: sugo::i), but uses the assessment to perform a different kind of social action. In particular, in comparison to his first assessment (line 03), here Ken’s assessable (toy) is already recognized by the other participants. Therefore, the absence of ‘this’ in the version of the assessment that he deploys for the second time is not accidental, demonstrating that he is now taking account of the new context where joint attention has already been secured. Having
established a solid participation framework for the assessment activity, Ken now demonstrates the toy’s function by putting the toy person inside and taking it outside the car rapidly a number of times (line 07 and Figure 2). His doing so makes visible what is sugoi about this car – i.e., that the person can be put inside the car as a passenger. Although Ken’s formulation of the assessment is linguistically simple, it is sequentially complex in that he builds upon and elaborates his prior assessment in terms of the toy’s functionality, taking into account two integral parts: person and car.

Furthermore, Ken orients to the assessment within a multiparty participation framework in which there are multiple addresses who can provide relevant responses to his new action. As he demonstrates this action, Ken appears to move his gaze from one researcher to another and repeats the assessment adjective (line 09), which selects other participants as possible next speaker, given that a response was not forthcoming after the assessment in line 07. One of the researchers (female) accepts this invitation, not by producing another assessment, but by explicitly verbalizing the function of the toy that Ken has been demonstrating through his actions regarding the toy (line 12: ‘Oh, he/she is riding in the car’). In this way, Ken and the researcher co-construct knowledge regarding what is sugoi about the toy, and in the process display stance and perform social action through the assessment activity.

This example suggests that two year-old children display socio-cultural knowledge about how to prepare and launch assessments in multiparty interaction, and design their assessments
in a step-by-step fashion in which each step accomplishes a different task for the ongoing assessment activity taking sequential development and changing context into consideration.

Assessment as a vehicle for displaying an aligned stance within collaborative activity

While in some cases children initiate assessments in relation to things, actions, and activities in which they had been for the most part (prior to the initial assessment) independently engaged (as in excerpt 1), in other cases they initiate assessments to specifically mark on-going activities as collaborative and jointly constructed.

For instance, in (2), a researcher and female child (Aya) are playing with woodblocks on the living room floor. Aya has just made a gate out of blocks (two for the posts, and one for the roof). When the researcher, who has come over to play with Aya, lowers her body and looks through the opening of the gate while facing Aya, who is also looking through the opening but on the other side, the researcher says, ‘I can see (you)’ (*mieta*). Aya appears delighted with this play by smiling and laughing. The excerpt begins after this action, as the researcher places down a block in front of the gate (which she refers to as ‘a wall’) that obstructs their ability to see each other through the gate opening.

(2) “Toy woodblocks” (Aya = female child 2:11, R = Researcher)

01  \( \rightarrow \) R:  *kabe.*
wall
‘A wall.’

((places block in front of gate))

02 A: kabe.

wall
‘A wall.’

((tries to look through gate))

are?

RT
‘Hm?’

05 R: mienai.

see-POT-NEG
‘I can’t see (you).’

06 (0.6)

07 R: (pa::n.

ONM
‘Tada!’

((removes block in front of gate))

Figure 3. As Aya (left) looks through the opening of the gate, researcher removes block in front of it.

08 >mieta.<

see-POT-PST
‘I can see (you).’

09 A: [GYA::haha.]
In this excerpt, Aya initiates an assessment following a prior sequence of talk and embodied actions surrounding an object of mutual attention and collaborative activity. In particular, after the researcher places a block in front of the gate that Aya built, calling it ‘a wall’ (line 03), the researcher attempts to look through the gate and proclaims, ‘I can’t see (you)’ (line 05). Then, after the researcher removes the block and says, ‘Tada! I can see (you)’ (lines 07-08, and Figure 3), Aya, who had also been attempting to look through the gate on the other side, happily screams and erupts in laughter (line 09). Following a long pause (4.2 seconds) during which Aya brings her body upright as the researcher places another block next to the gate, Aya produces an assessment, (line 12: ‘It’s fun/interesting, ne’). In the context where Aya and the researcher
collaborate on building some object with wood blocks, each participant’s addition to the established object becomes assessable. Here, Aya initiates her assessment *omoshiroi* ‘fun/interesting’ with the interactional particle *ne*, explicitly thematizing alignment as a relevant interactional agenda (Morita 2005).

Japanese interactional particles such as *ne* are linguistic resources that mark interactional concerns regarding the ongoing action in relation to contingent turns at talk within a participation framework. As previous research reports that children acquire *ne* around the 1.5 word stage, or typically between the ages of 1:6 to 2:0 years (Clancy, 1985; Morita, 2016; Yamada, 1980), this excerpt also suggests that once children acquire *ne* they may use it in assessments to display an aligned stance in joint activity.

In assessing the addition of ‘a wall’, which is the researcher’s invention, an absence of *ne* here would mark this assessment as Aya’s one-sided evaluation of the researcher’s contribution. Her appropriate use of is specifically indicating her stance that this assessment is alignment-relevant and contingent to the researcher’s action, “as something that can be responded to, and participated in, in a special way” (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987: 11). While the assessable is cooperatively built and experienced, Aya’s use of *ne* contextualizes that the enjoyment of the play involving the ‘wall’ should be also jointly done.

The researcher then responds to Aya’s assessment by repeating the same assessment adjective also tagged with the Interactional Particle *ne*, specifically indicating that this second assessment is a
product that is responding to Aya’s first assessment. Such mutual use of *ne* establishes the ongoing assessment activity as joint praising and thematizes that the building of a mutually aligned stance is one of the central interactional agendas here (Morita 2005). Aya’s expert deployment of *ne* reveals that even two year-old children have knowledge of how to design their initial assessments in a way that explicitly acknowledges the other participant’s contribution to the assessable.

**Constructing an assessment so as not to invite a response**

The previous examples have shown that two year-old children can properly build participation frameworks while proffering a first assessment. However, our data also show that children know how to design their initial assessments specifically so as not to invite an interlocutor’s response, as we will see below. Here, Sae is playing with a puzzle by herself, but is not successful at putting the pieces together on the board. Her mother is nearby sitting at the dining table using a laptop computer.

(3) “Puzzle” (Sae = female child, 2:8)
In Amanda Bateman and Amelia Church (Eds.), Children’s knowledge-in-interaction: Studies in Conversation Analysis (pp. 231-255)

01  S:  ((playing with puzzle on floor))

Figure 5. Sae plays with puzzle by herself on floor.

02  → S:  [aa nande* muzukashii n
HM how difficult COP
daro, kore wa.
CONJ this TOP

‘Ah, how difficult this is!’

(((S moves to sit-up position, and puts her hair back with both hands))

Figure 6. Sae moves her body to sit upright, as she makes an assessment.

* ((Note: nante is mispronounced as nande))

After playing with the puzzle for a while, Sae raises her body, which physically disengages her from the puzzle, and utters an assessment ‘Ah, how difficult this is!’ (line 01). This assessment is prefaced with the interjection aa (‘Ah’), followed by the grammatical format nante (how) plus an adjective with a copula in conjecture form, making it an exclamation. If Sae had used the assessment adjective
muzukashii (‘difficult’) by itself, her utterance could have been heard as a complaint that would have invited a response. That is, as her mother is nearby, a different choice of linguistic format for the assessment may have developed into an assessment activity, but this choice of format (aa nante muzukashii n daro ‘Ah, how difficult it is!’) does not invite such activity.

Right after this exclamation, Sae flips the page over to check out another puzzle, as though she might give up playing this particular puzzle. Importantly, her gaze never moves to her mother. It is therefore clear that her turn is not designed to be heard as a complaint that is seeking remedy, or asking for help involving her mother. Schegloff (1988:117) refers to such deliberately crafted “mutterings which leave another free to respond or not” as “out-louds.” By constructing her assessment with this particular grammatical form of exclamation, Sae designs her initial assessment of the puzzle as just such an “out-loud”, or hearably private exclamation, which does not solicit another’s intervention. Although Sae’s utterance was likely overheard by her mother, Sae’s mother does not respond, which suggests that she treats Sae’s assessment as located within a participation framework in which the mother is not explicitly selected as an addressee.

Such a formulation is contrastive to our previous two examples, where children used various resources to involve adults in their assessment activities. This excerpt suggests that children even at this young age also have acquired the socio-cultural knowledge of how to use assessments so as not to involve others in a current
activity where involving others is not part of the agenda – and that all assessments are tied to particularly configured participation frameworks and consequential for the sequential trajectory of utterances.

Initiating assessments in a temporally sensitive manner

Our data also reveal occasions in which two year-old children make assessments in relation to past events and shared experiences with family members. In (4), a mother and child (Hana) are in the kitchen just prior to eating dinner. Mom is preparing dinner, and Hana is sitting in her high chair holding her bib with an animated picture of a goat on it. Just prior to this excerpt, Mom and Hana had been talking about the bib, and Mom had wondered aloud whether Hana can put it on by herself (hitoride epuron dekiru ka na ‘I wonder if you can put on the bib alone’).

(4) “Goat” (Hana = female child, 2:0, M = Mom)

01 H: [hichujie chichujichan.
sheep sheep-DIM

‘Sheep sheep’

[([holding and looking at her bib])

02 M: n’ ee? yagisan des yo
RT RT goat-HON COP-HON IP

‘Hm? What? It’s a goat.’

03 (2.6)
M: konaida ita desho? yagisan.
other.day be-PST TAG goat-HON

‘The other day there was a goat, right?’

H: yagichan kowai↓↑:

‘The goat is scary.’

((looks at Mom))

Figure 7. Hana looks towards Mom as she initiates an assessment.

M: so.

right

‘Right.’

H: (1.5) ((looking down at her bib))

M: kowai↑↓ tte yutteta ne↓

scary QT say-PST IP

‘You said, “The goat is scary,” right.’

H: yagichan kowai.

goat-DIM scary

‘The goat is scary.’
In Amanda Bateman and Amelia Church (Eds.), Children’s knowledge-in-interaction: Studies in Conversation Analysis (pp. 231-255)

Figure 8. Hana makes an assessment, while gazing down at her bib.

11 (0.4)

12 M: kowakunai noni ne.
scary-NEG even.though IP

‘Even though it’s not scary, right.’

13 (0.3)

14 M: ↓kowai;↑tte yutteta ne.
scary QT say-PST IP

‘You said, “It’s scary,” right.’

15 ((story continues about the goat and other animals they had seen and fed at a petting zoo))

When Hana says the animal name ‘sheep’ (line 1), Mom takes this as a reference to the animal on her bib by saying it is a ‘goat’, as a form of other-initiated/other-repair (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977) (line 4). As her correction does not receive any response from Hana, Mom interprets this silence as Hana’s non-recognition of “sheep” at that moment, and encourages Hana to remember the word ‘goat’ by connecting it to a shared event that occurred on a family visit to a petting zoo ‘the other day’ (actually, three months prior, according to a follow-up interview). Hana responds to this evoked memory by initiating an assessment of the goat (line 06: yagichan kowai;↓↓ ‘The goat is scary’), and then looks towards Mom who is standing at the table (Figure 7).
Even though Hana’s grammar of the assessment is in the present tense, it is heard as sequentially and temporally connected to Mom’s talk in the previous turn, which shifted the temporal frame from the here-and-now to some time in the past. Although Hana’s assessment that ‘the goat is scary’ is not about the goat on her bib, which was actually the focus of the ongoing talk, her assessment here is thus not an unreasonable one, as she ties her assessment to the new temporal frame initiated by Mom. Moreover, Hana’s assessment is a display of her remembering ‘the goat’, by repeating what she did say at the actual encounter with ‘the goat’ the other day, and thus can be heard as Hana voicing or reporting the speech of herself. After Mom validates this, Hana demonstrates that she has now connected the animal called ‘goat’ with the here-and-now object, i.e., the picture on her bib by still talking about ‘the goat’ but looking at her bib.

Young children’s assessment adjectives may thus be tied to their emotional experiences in the past, and children may reveal these experiences in their initial assessments when the temporal frame is appropriate. Children are thus sensitive to the ever-shifting concern of temporal relevance in talking about some object. Moreover, Hana’s initial assessment here is a vehicle to display her way of understanding the object in the current discussion. Although her assessment of ‘the goat is scary’ is negotiated with Mom, Hana initiated the sharing and co-construction of knowledge regarding ‘the goat’ in a “public space” in the first place.
Performing different social actions using similar assessment adjectives

As we have seen in the previous examples, two year-old children use assessments to perform social actions, display stances, and constitute other socio-cultural meanings such as relationships, by employing adjectives along with a range of other linguistic and embodied resources. The social actions performed through assessment can be multiple, depending on the intended addressee or who responds to it. A case in point is the adjective kowai ‘scary/be scared,’ which has been examined in previous research as noted earlier (Clancy, 1999), as well as the adjective iya ‘dislike,’ which children deploy in responding to particular things (real or imagined) and situations that are undesirable to them (Clancy, 1985).

In (5), Sae (2:0) is engaged in pretend “shopping” by carrying a basket of toy goods, and has just opened the door to head out of the living room into the hallway. Mom has been playing along with Sae, by pretending to be a store clerk in an earlier episode. Sae’s older brother (Taku, 5:3), who is also in the room, has been primarily playing on his own up until now when he attempts to engage Sae in a different kind of “play” in an attempt to scare Sae.

(5) “Ogre mask” (S = Sae, female child 2:0, T= Taku, or Sae’s older brother 5:3, M = Mom)
In Amanda Bateman and Amelia Church (Eds.), Children’s knowledge-in-interaction: Studies in Conversation Analysis (pp. 231-255)

01 S: [((As Sae, who is carrying a shopping basket, prepares to leave the room as if to go out, she stops and looks towards her brother who has just put on an ogre mask.))]

Figure 9. Sae’s noticing of her masked brother.

02 M: [arigato:gozaimashita:::]

thank.you-HON-POL-PST

‘Thank you very much.’

03 T: [((quickly then turns away from Sae))]

04 → S: [kowai.]

scary

[kowai.][kowai.

scary scary

‘It’s scary, scary, scary.’

[[(walks towards Mom))]

Figure 10. Sae walks towards her mother while making an assessment.

05 M: [nani ga kowai no.

what NOM scary Q

‘What’s scary?’
06  T:  [(quickly taking off ogre mask)]
07  S:  niini.
      older.brother
      ‘Older brother.’
08  T:  (0.6) (coughs) (0.6)
09  niinii    chau de?
      older.brother not IP
      ‘It’s not me.’
10  M:  ((turns her head towards Taku.))
11  S:  mm?
      ‘Mm?’
12  T:  niinii    chau de?
      older.brother not IP
      ‘It’s not me.’
13  T:  (1.0)
      ki no sei    [ki no sei.
      imagination imagination
      ‘It’s just your imagination, it’s just your
      imagination.’
      ((turns head towards Sae))
      (20 lines omitted as Taku repeats the phrase, ‘It’s just your imagination’ to
      Sae several times, and mother tells Sae there is nothing bad going on. Taku and
      mother then encourage Sae to go out shopping again, as in lines 34 and 35))
34  M:  baiba:[i.
      ‘Bye bye.’
35  T:  [baiba::i.
‘Bye bye.’

36  S:   ((waves her hand and then walks into the hallway))

37  M:   "Sae utagatteru yan, meccha."
name doubting   IP   very

‘Sae is suspicious, y’know, very much.’

38  T:   (   )?

39  (2.3)   ((As Sae comes back into the living room, Taku, who is wearing an ogre mask, rushes up to her))

40  T:   uahahahahahahaha

Figure 11. Taku scares Sae by wearing ogre mask.

41  →  S:   IYA!
dislike

‘No!’

42  T:   (ba:yanbu::).   ((puts his face in front of Sae’s face.))

43  →  S:   hmhm, iya:, ya:me, niini,
no   dislike   stop-IMP   older.brother

‘No! Stop it, older brother’

44  →  iya   KYA::::::::
dislike   (scream)

‘No! AHHHHHHH!’
In this excerpt, Taku attempts to interrupt Sae’s play and engage her in an alternative activity by attempting to scare her with an ogre mask. When Sae’s mother tries to send Sae out the door by bidding her farewell in role-play mode (line 02), Sae turns towards Mom but sees Taku (in back of Mom) who has just put on a red ogre mask (line 01 and Figure 9). After gazing towards Taku, Sae turns and walks back towards Mom while saying, ‘It’s scary, scary, scary’ (line 04 and Figure 10).

Sae’s assessment here operates in a complex participation framework, and displays various social actions and stances to different recipients. As she approaches Mom, Sae inevitably gets close to Taku, who is behind Mom, and then halts and cautiously keeps some distance from him. On the one hand, Sae’s assessment can be heard as being addressed to Taku, in which case, kowai
‘scary’ is her reaction to Taku’s attempt to scare her. On the other hand, Sae’s assessment can also be heard as being addressed to Mom, as an appeal and request for help in protecting her from her brother as an ogre. However, as Sae has expressed her feeling of being scared without specifying what she is scared of, this leaves the “assessable,” or target of the assessment, ripe for repair and open to negotiation. Mom seizes this opportunity by asking what is scary (line 05), implying that for her there is nothing scary (even when she ostensibly knows what is scary for Sae). Mom’s repair initiation here suggests to Taku that she is playing along with Taku’s plot as she is pretending not to know why Sae is scared. This, in turn, provides an account to Sae for why Mom is not giving Sae protection. After Sae responds to Mom’s repair initiation by saying that it is her older brother (who is scary) (line 07), Taku, having just taken off the ogre mask, responds to Sae by emphatically denying that it is he who is scary, and claims it is Sae’s imagination (line 13).

Following Taku’s repeated suggestions that Sae is just imagining something scary, which seems to (for Sae) end the ogre activity, Sae returns to playing shopping again upon Taku and Mom’s urging (lines 34 and 35). Sae then leaves the living room with her shopping basket in hand. At this point, Mom has fully aligned herself with Taku’s play (attempt to scare Sae) by addressing him in a quiet voice so as not to be overheard by Sae (line 37), which Taku seems to take as an invitation to re-engage in the ogre play. In particular, when Sae comes back into the living room, Taku, who has put back on his ogre mask rushes up to Sae
and makes ogre-like sounds while putting his masked face close to Sae’s face (line 40 and Figure 11). In response, Sae screams out while saying *iya*, which is an assessment adjective that literally means ‘dislike’ or ‘disgusting,’ and is often used by Japanese children to reject something, similar to saying ‘no’ (Clancy, 1985). In using *iya*, Sae directly appeals to Taku to immediately stop this activity, and makes the social action of her assessment explicit by screaming and issuing a directive to Taku to stop (lines 43 and 44). When this combination of an assessment and directive does not lead to Taku stopping the activity, Sae appeals to Taku by expressing her fear using the adjective *kowai* (lines 45 and 47). At this point, Mom interjects in order to bring an end to the ogre activity by welcoming Sae back home, using a formulaic expression *okaerinasaimase* that indexes the earlier role-play mode.

What is noticeable in this excerpt is that Sae displays her understanding when to use *kowai* (be scared, scary) and when to use *iya* (dislike, disgusting), although both are assessment adjectives to display negative feelings towards a situation or object. On the one hand, Sae uses *kowai* to indicate her fear in general, as an emotional appeal. In particular, this appeal could have functioned to ask for Mom’s help at this particular timing in which she is unable to specify to Mom what exactly is wrong, as Taku had already taken off his mask. On the other hand, she deploys *iya* to reject something immediately, as what she “dislikes,” which is clear for the other participants at this interactional moment. In short, Sae designs her assessment differently depending on whether the object or activity
that disturbs her is immediately recognizable to the other participants or not.

This excerpt exemplifies that children as young as 2:0 years old are able to display their fine-grained socio-cultural knowledge regarding the interactional nuances of similar assessment terms (*kowai* and *iya*). These adjectives are deployed not merely as a reflection of children’s inner emotional and cognitive states but as an interactional resource to respond to and cope with their circumstances within multiparty participation frameworks. That is, two year-old children demonstrate and use such knowledge to take different recipients into account when initiating assessments, and to mobilize those recipients in different ways and towards different ends. Here, then, we see that even children as young as two year-old children have developed a working knowledge of the interactional requirements and possibilities made available within an interactive participation framework.

**Summary and Conclusion**

We have observed how Japanese children at an early stage of verbal language development already possess the pragmatic and socio-cultural knowledge needed in order to successfully initiate assessment activities whereby they can share their emotional experience and perspective regarding an ongoing situation in a fully-fledged interactional manner. Rather than being understood as the simple use of adjectives said on impulse, or an action that merely describes some things or events, or the reflection of some internal
states, here we have argued instead that children’s skillful initiation of assessments and assessment activity at this age should be seen as their attempt to involve other participants (in most cases) in joint participation framework assessment activity upon a shared assessable that has been made locally relevant (Wootton, 1997).

Two aspects of ‘children’s knowledge’, in particular, became relevant in our study. One aspect regards the socio-cultural knowledge and interactional competence that children reveal that they have in initiating assessments. In our analysis of Japanese child-caregiver interaction, we found that two-year old children can already very successfully display their understanding that various factors are prerequisite for successful achievement of assessment activities. Two year-old children were able to set up participation frameworks and to establish the joint attention with interlocutors needed in order for the assessable in the initial position assessment to be received and responded to properly. In so doing, they also reveal that they have already internalized the socio-cultural knowledge that allows slightly different adjectives to mobilize their recipients in considerably different manners.

The second aspect revealed regards children’s constructing knowledge through social interaction, and by sharing their views of the social world to others for subsequent validation or negotiation. Indeed, we believe that our data show that even children as young as two-years old are not just recipients of adult-initiated assessments regarding how things in the world should be perceived, but rather, social actors who can effectively initiate engagement with others
about their own world views, and negotiate those interactional engagements efficiently. In this sense, we can say that even two-year olds can be providers and co-constructors of knowledge within interactive participation frameworks.

References


In Amanda Bateman and Amelia Church (Eds.), Children’s knowledge-in-interaction: Studies in Conversation Analysis (pp. 231-255)


In Amanda Bateman and Amelia Church (Eds.), Children’s knowledge-in-interaction: Studies in Conversation Analysis (pp. 231-255)

