

14th KUASS
(Kyoto University African Studies Seminar)

**Gestures in oral societies:
The fading of obligatory gestures through writing**

Date: April 6 (Sat), 2013, 15:00 – 17:00
Venue: Medium Seminar Room, 3F Inamori Bldg.,
Kawabata Campus, Kyoto University

Lecturer: Dr. Matthias Brenzinger (CALDi, University of Cape Town)

ABSTRACT:

Among former hunter-gatherers quite a number of gestures hold a very different status in communication compared to gestures use in literate societies. The impact of literacy on oral language is obvious; it fosters the flattening of regional dialectal variation and freezes standard varieties. Some scholars discuss writing itself as gestures, but this latter aspect will be ignored here. In this discussion, I claim, that the spread of literacy has a major influence on the status and nature of gestures in communication. Obligatory gestures, a term which I introduced for those gestures that are exclusive means to convey certain, specific information without the option for the speakers to express these meanings in oral language, i.e. without these gestures. It seems that such obligatory gestures are exclusively used in non-literate societies of intimates. Face-to-face communication among members of such societies of intimates differs from that of heterogeneous, highly differentiated societies in many respects. The presentation, however, will demonstrate the importance of literacy in pushing obligatory gestures out of usage.

Discussant: Dr. Daiji Kimura (CAAS, Kyoto University)

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