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Getting acquainted across cultures

Getting acquainted with others is one of the most basic interpersonal activity types. Yet there have only been a limited number of studies that have examined the ways in which we establish relationships in initial encounters. In this talk I discuss some of the key practices that have been identified in an ongoing project investigating initial interactions amongst both L1 (American and Australian) and L2 (Taiwanese and Japanese) users of English. Throughout the talk I draw from examples arising in both intracultural and intercultural settings to highlight the inevitable variability across speakers with respect to the practices by which they get acquainted and the indexical meanings that are attached to those practices. I conclude that the long established tradition of analysing identity in pragmatics needs to be complemented by a greater focus on how relationships themselves are accomplished in interaction.

