

## Perspectives in Routine Formulas: A Contrastive Analysis of Japanese and German

Yoshinori Nishijima, Kanazawa University

The present paper discusses the different perspectives from which Japanese and German speakers formulate utterances. It was hypothesized that these different perspectives are reflected not only in evaluating concepts of communicative behavior, but also in routine formulas for controlling communicative behavior in Japanese and German. This hypothesis was examined by comparing two pairs of functionally equivalent routine formulas in Japanese and German. Furthermore, a questionnaire was administered to compare other Japanese and German routine formulas possibly used in corresponding situations. The results confirmed that in Japanese, linguistic formulation patterns relate to the empathy felt by the speaker toward an interlocutor, arising from the perspective of their situation, whereas in German, these tend to depend on an opposition between the participants involved, characterized by a perspective external to their situation. Because the data employed in the present study are limited, the hypothesis should be verified using extensive data. The results of this study helps clarify the possible misunderstandings between Japanese and German speakers, owing to the different linguistic formulation patterns employed, and could promote more efficient foreign language teaching.

Every language has its own concepts for evaluating communicative behavior. These could be related to politeness or communicative normality; for example, *teinei* (polite), *yasashii* (friendly), and *namaiki* (arrogant) in Japanese and *höflich* (polite), *freundlich* (friendly), and *überheblich* (arrogant) in German (Marui, Nishijima, Noro, Reinelt, & Yamashita, 1996). A contrastive study on the evaluating concepts in different languages reveals that each language has a unique style of everyday communication. A recent study on evaluating concepts found that a speaker's perspective in communication is often formulated in linguistic items that express evaluating concepts (Nishijima, 2006). The perspective taken in a communication situation plays an important role in achieving an adequate level of communication in a given language. In communication, each language has its own conventional ways of formulating utterances from certain perspectives.

The question arises as to how we are to acquire a perspective relevant to effective communication. This study hypothesizes that being exposed to routine formulas for controlling communicative behavior can play a crucial role in this acquisition, because in the process of socialization, one is often exposed to such terms as *abunai* (dangerous) and *vorsicht* (attention), which are uttered in corresponding situations in Japanese and German, respectively. The present paper tests this hypothesis by using two kinds of lexical data and presents differences in the use and formalization pattern of routine formulas between Japanese and German. The latter is achieved by comparing Japanese and German routine formulas that were experimentally collected as common utterances in various corresponding situations.

### Previous Study and Hypotheses

Several studies have investigated the issue of politeness in relation to communication. One such study type is on the evaluating concepts of communicative behavior, which can be further divided into two categories: (1) the analysis of evaluating concepts in particular languages such as Japanese and German and (2) a contrastive analysis for evaluating concepts that exist between two languages such as Japanese and American English, or Japanese and German. The first category has been investigated with respect to several languages including German (Hermanns, 1993, 1995; Reinelt, 1995; Yamashita, 1995), and Japanese (Nishijima, 1995, 1996). In the case of contrastive analysis, studies have been previously carried out comparing Japanese and American English (Ide, Hill, Carnes, Ogino, & Kawasaki, 1992), Japanese and German (Kuhlmann, 2005; Marui et al., 1996; Nishijima 2000), Japanese and Korean (Nam, Nishijima, & Saiki, 2006), as well as Japanese and Chinese (Nishijima & Tao, 2009). These studies revealed that the particular communicative perspective is related to what is regarded as normal for the purpose of communication in each language. Nishijima (2006) pointed out that the employment of evaluating concepts derives from the empathy toward the interlocutor (the listener). Empathy appears also to act as a way of creating the relevant context with regard to the linguistic formulation pattern employed in Japanese (Kuno, 1973; Makino, 1978).

As already pointed out, the use of routine formulas such as those used for controlling communicative behaviors can play a role in the acquisition of a given perspective that is relevant and appropriate to the communication process. Nishijima (2007) previously addressed this issue by comparing a number of functionally equivalent routine formulas spoken in corresponding situations in Japanese and German. His findings suggested that the routine formulas of Japanese speech derive from empathy directed toward the listener, whereas in German, these are based on the opposing positions taken up by speaker and listener.

Several studies have examined the more general aspects of Japanese syntax from the point of view of cognitive linguistics (Ikegami, 1991; Nakamura, 2004; Yamanashi, 2009). For example, according to Yamanashi (2009), the Japanese language tends to describe a scene as if the speaker was located within the scene. In English, the same situation is usually described from a vantage point removed from the situation. On the basis of the claims made in the field of cognitive linguistics, we hypothesize the following: With respect to how routine procedures in linguistic processing are formalized, we propose a tendency for a Japanese speaker to act as if located within a scene when engaged in communication with others; among German speakers, however, it is proposed that there is a tendency for the speaker to regard the scene from an external perspective, in the sense that both the individual participant and the speaker are regarded as separate, independent, objective entities. Such differences in perspective are thereby reflected in how routine formulas are realized in each language, which are initially acquired and then reinforced by employing and listening to those in the normal process of socialization. On the basis of this argument, two operational hypotheses can be proposed as follows:

H1: Routine formulas in Japanese are derived from the situation within which a speaker is embedded as a result of the empathy directed toward the interlocutor by the speaker, whereas in German this occurs as if the speaker existed outside the situation as a result of the opposing positions of participants.

H2: Japanese parents tend to employ expressions formulated in terms of empathy in relation to understanding the negative feelings of their children, whereas German parents tend to employ expressions which endeavor to encourage their children to transform negative feelings into more positive ones.

## Method

### *Participants*

In order to test the first hypothesis, various German routine formulas were mainly collected from students attending seminars held at a university in Regensburg, Germany, from October 2001 to January 2003. Some of this data was discussed with German colleagues at Kanazawa University in relation to their Japanese equivalents.

In order to test the second hypothesis, a survey was carried out in Kanazawa, Japan in Kindergarten T during November 2004 where 37 valid responses were provided by Japanese participants. A corresponding survey was carried out in Kindergarten S in Düsseldorf, Germany in November 2005 where 33 valid responses were provided by German participants. All of the participants were recruited from guardians of children attending the kindergartens. A questionnaire was distributed to the guardians, and they were asked to complete and post them to the researcher.

### *Procedure*

*Corresponding conventional expressions for H<sub>1</sub>. abunai and vorsicht.* If a Japanese parent is walking with his or her child and the child bumps straight into a post, the parent would immediately cry out, “*Abunai (Dangerous).*” According to a German colleague, in a corresponding situation in Germany, *vorsicht (caution)* or *halt (stop)* would be uttered. Thus, it can be seen that, although the two scenarios are functionally equivalent, categorically and semantically there are obvious differences.

A further example of routine formulas that are functionally equivalent involve the terms *kikoemasen (cannot hear)* and *lauter bitte (louder please)* which can be similarly analyzed. Suppose that you are a high school student. What would you say if you cannot hear what a classmate is saying to the teacher in class? In Japan you would say *kikoemasen* and in Germany you would say *lauter bitte*.

*Possible expressions in corresponding situations for H<sub>2</sub>.* In order to examine this hypothesis, a questionnaire survey was carried out from November 2004 to November 2005 in both Japan and Germany. Respondents to the survey consisted of guardians of children attending a kindergarten in Kanazawa, Japan and Düsseldorf, Germany.

Respondents were requested to write any appropriate linguistic expressions to the question: What would you say in the following situation? You visit a park with your child who runs and falls, causing a small wound. The child begins to cry.

## Results

### *Equivalent Routine Formulas*

In response to the first hypothesis, results indicated that there are apparent differences in routine formulas used by Japanese and German speakers.

*Abunai and vorsicht.* *Abunai* and *vorsicht* are often used in corresponding situations in both Japan and Germany and can therefore be regarded as functionally equivalent. In comparing the two routine formulas used in communication, however, several differences become apparent. Semantically the word *abunai* means *dangerous* and *vorsicht*, *caution*. In this regard, *abunai* and *vorsicht* can be classified as an adjective and noun, respectively. One of the important differences in use lies in the perspective from which the speaker views the situation: (1) viewing from the perspective inside the situation in question and (2) viewing from the perspective outside the situation in question.

*Kikoemasen and lauter bitte.* *Kikoemasen* means *cannot hear* and refers to a disconcerting situation in a negative way. However, it does not express a solution to the situation. The corresponding expression in German, *lauter bitte*, does not describe the situation but gives a clear solution.

### *Possible Corresponding Expressions*

The data was analyzed in terms of functional and semantic criteria and classified according to the relevant items where the expressions were divided into five groups according to content for both languages as follows:

1. Refers to *no problem*.
2. Refers to *pain*.
3. Refers to *pain* and *no problem*.
4. Expressing a magical phrase (*kiss and make it better*).
5. Refers to *pain* and employs a magical phrase.

The different content types were then compared.

*Japanese.* Table 1 sets out the answers obtained from the Japanese guardians. Two types of expressions were employed by almost 30% of the informants: The *no problem* and the *pain* type. For example, *sonogurai daijobu* (*no problem*) can be found in the *no problem* category, and *itaine* (*it hurts a lot, I know*) can be found in the *pain* category. The sum of both types reflects 60% of the answers.

Table 1  
*Content-Types in Japanese (%)*

Ranking	Content-Types	Proportion
(1)	<i>no problem</i>	32.4%
(2)	<i>pain</i>	29.4%
(3)	<i>pain and no problem</i>	17.6%
(4)	<i>kiss and make it better</i>	8.8%
(5)	others	11.8%

Table 2  
*Content-Types in German (%)*

Ranking	Content-Types	Proportion
(1)	<i>no problem</i>	46.7%
(2)	<i>pain and kiss and make it better</i>	30.0%
(3)	<i>pain</i>	10.0%
(4)	others	13.3%

*German.* Table 2 sets out the answers obtained from the German guardians. The *no problem* type was used more frequently by German informants than Japanese informants, and by almost half of all the informants. For example, “*Na komm, ist doch nicht so schlimm* (“*Oh come here, it’s not so bad*”).” This type was also used most frequently in Japanese but only by 30% of the Japanese respondents. The second most frequently used expression consisted of *pain* and a *magical phrase*, which was employed by 30% of informants. For example, “*Hast Du Dir wehgetan? Komm, ich puste!* (“*Did that hurt? Come here, kiss and make it better*”).” These categories therefore made up more than 70% of the total responses. Note that 43.3% of the total utterances in the German answers included directive expressions such as *komm* (*come*), *zeig mal* (*show me*), *schau mal* (*look*), and so on.

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the different perspectives from which Japanese and German speakers formulate utterances. It was hypothesized that these different perspectives are reflected not only in evaluating concepts of communicative behavior, but also in routine formulas for controlling communicative behavior in Japanese and German. That is, Hypothesis One examined the functionally equivalent routine formulas in Japanese and German languages, namely: *abunai*, *vorsicht*, *kikoemasen*, and *lauter bitte*. Hypothesis Two examined the basis of the functionally equivalent expressions that are expected to be uttered in corresponding situations in Japan and Germany (questionnaire).

*Pairs of Equivalent Routine Formulas*

One of the important differences in use lies in the perspective from which the speaker views the situation: (1) A perspective from within the situation in routine formulas in Japanese and (2) A perspective that is external to the situation in routine formulas in German.

In the use of *abunai*, Japanese speakers observe the scene where something dangerous can occur and describe it as dangerous experientially in the eyes of the speakers, from the perspective inside the situation because they only describe the situation through the adjective but do not give any more concrete order to their child; although in this situation *abunai* can also function idiomatically as, “Watch out!”. In the use of *vorsicht*, however, German speakers order their child to pay attention in the corresponding situation immediately without describing the situation. In this sense, *vorsicht* is uttered objectively from the perspective of the outside of the situation. The other pair, *kikoemasen* (*cannot hear*) and *lauter bitte* (*louder please*) can be similarly explained.

Such a difference in perspective can be somewhat difficult to understand. Here we can give another example by which the difference in perspective can be shown more obviously with the help of the following studies (Ikegami, 1991; Nakamura, 2004; Yamanashi, 2009).

Suppose that you work in your office alone. You get a telephone call from one of your colleagues. He or she asks you whether there is someone in your room. You answer in Japanese or German:

Japanese: *Kokoni-wa daremo imasen.* (*There is no one here.*)

German: *Hier ist niemand außer mir.* (*There is no one here except me.*)

In contrast to the German sentence, the Japanese sentence seems to be illogical because you are in fact in your room. The sentence could be more understandable logically if it would be rewritten as follows like the German one: “Kokoni-wa watashi igai daremo imasen (“There is no one here except me”).”

The sentence is indeed logical, but it is not usual in Japanese. The difference between the sentences lies in the insertion of the phrase *watashi igai* (*except me*). The sentence with the phrase *watashi igai* describes that the speaker of the sentence views the scene from an outside perspective. The speaker expresses it by viewing himself or herself in the scene objectively through the eyes of the observing speaker. The sentence without the phrase *watashi igai*, in contrast, shows that there is no one *else* because the speaker is involved in the scene and views it from a perspective inside the situation.

As for an objective perspective preferred in German, an utterance from the following phone conversation can help understanding. You call an office, where your acquaintance (Ms. A) works, and ask to speak with the person (cf. Hirooka, 2009, pp. 210-211).

You: “I would like to speak to Ms. A.”

A: “This is she.”

Ms. A. is the person with whom you are just speaking. In Japanese you would say, “*Watashi desu (It’s me)*,” in the first person. In English, however, the reply is, “*This is she*,” which is formulated in the third person and suggests a sort of opposition between the speaker and the listener objectively.

#### *Possible Corresponding Expressions (Questionnaire)*

The Japanese tend to use two types of expressions: the *no problem* and the *pain* type. The formal pattern for the first type is focused on the actual wound and describes this as not being the problem. The second type is formalized in terms of empathy. For example, the most frequently referred routine, *itaine*, is composed of two parts: *itai* and *ne*. *Itai* is an adjective which means *painful*. *Ne* is a modal particle that expresses empathy to the listener, and means *I understand your feelings*.

Thus, Germans tend to use the *no problem* type more. The formal pattern of this type of phrase concerns actively changing the feelings of the child. For example, “*Beruhige Dich, schau’ mal hin. Ist doch alles in Ordnung* (“*Calm down, look, everything’s okay*”),” consists of a sentence that gives an order to the child, whereas in Japanese, the corresponding expression does not consist of an order, but is more a description such as *sonogurai daijoubu (that isn’t a problem)*. Interestingly, a German mother will invariably instruct a child to come to her, whereas Japanese mothers are more likely to go to the child. In addition, the second most frequent category consists of a *magic phrase* which encourages their child to ignore immediate concern through distraction and cheers up the child.

#### Conclusion

This discussion has revealed that two types of perspectives emerge when comparing routine formulas in Japanese and German. The first perspective is external to the situation in routine formulas in German. The speaker and listener are in opposition, and they use psychological expressions that convey distance. The second perspective from within the situation in routine formulas exists in Japanese. The speaker views a scene through the eyes of the speaker involved in the scene and not from an external perspective. The speaker uses psychological expressions that convey closeness to the listener; that is to say, with feelings of empathy toward the interlocutor.

The purpose of the present study has been to help clarify certain misunderstandings that may occur between Japanese and German individuals as a result of the different linguistic patterns of expression employed and thereby promote efficient foreign language teaching.

It is not clear to what extent the differences in empathy and opposition in formulation can be valid in routine formulas employed in Japanese and German, because the data in this paper is limited. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze other types of functionally equivalent routine formulas by using more extensive data sets.

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