

## Abortion: An Instance of the Right to Kill

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In North America, in particular in the United States, abortion has become an important political issue and controversial topic in many regional, state, and federal elections, with pro-life and pro-choice activists hotly lobbying their causes. Therefore, in the course of the data analysis, many rhetorical expressions emphasizing their points were found. However, the interest and focus in this paper is purely linguistic and neutral. What is attempted here is to describe the diverse attitudes of Japanese and North Americans toward abortion through their respective use of the language and the conceptual patterns in the related discourse. The purpose is to serve the ultimate goal of finding distinctive cognitive patterns of English- and Japanese-speaking peoples on death and dying in general (See Table 1).

### Definition and Etymology of Abortion in English and in Japanese

The verb form of abortion, *abort*, means to miscarry, to have a premature delivery of a child, to bring to a premature or fruitless termination, to fail to complete a mission, etc. It is also used to mean to terminate a pregnancy both spontaneously and artificially. In the former case, it is more often referred to as miscarriage, and is not within the scope of this analysis, and it is the latter meaning that is dealt with in this paper. Etymologically, the word *abort* comes from the Latin *abori-ri*, in which *ab* means “off” or “away” and *ori-ri* means “to arise, appear, come into being, etc.”

On the other hand, there are two Japanese terms for abortion; *chuu-zetsu*, which is comprised of *chuu* (middle, center) and *zetsu* (cut off, sever, discontinue), and *datai*, which is comprised of *da* (drop, fail, fall down, come down) and *tai* (embryo, foetus). The latter expression is rather old and technical, and used more in legal contexts, and the former is in general use at present in formal and informal contexts.

The English *abortion* has a strong sense of “interfering or preventing something to develop fully,” while the underlying pattern of Japanese *datai* is the typical Lakoffian UP-DOWN metaphor, but the other more popular expression *chuu-zetsu* has a conceptual pattern of “a line cut in the middle” related to LIFE IS AN ENTITY (3-c.A LINE), similar to the English word *abortion*.

### Data

The data of the analysis for this panel have been taken from published essays and letters, newspapers and magazine articles and editorials, and internet message boards, so as to have both public and private types of language use. However, as far as the topic of abortion is concerned, hardly any data have been found in newspapers and magazines in Japanese, because, unlike in North America, this topic is not currently publicized or politicized, at least not in the past few years since the data collection started. Therefore, newspaper and magazine articles in English have been disregarded in order to keep balance between the English and Japanese data.

Table 1: Conceptual Patterns of Death

	DEATH/DYING	FROM SURVIVOR'S PERSPECTIVE	LIFE RELATED CONCEPTS
A. ACTION	1 DYING IS AN ACTION/EVENT 1-a/b: IN A POINT IN TIME/AT A PLACE 2 DYING IS A PROCESS 2-a: CONDITIONS OF DYING 3 DEATH IS ANNIHILATION		
C. CONTAINER	1 DEATH IS A CONTAINER 2 DEATH IS DESTROYING A CONTAINER 3 DEATH IS LOSS OF CONTENTS 3-a/b/c/d/e: LIQUID/HEAT/FIRE/FLAME/BREATH		1 LIFE IS A CONTAINER 2 LIFE IS THE CONTENTS IN A CONTAINER 2-a/b/c/d/e: LIQUID/HEAT/FIRE/FLAME/BREATH
E. ENTITY	1 DEATH IS A PERSON 1-a/b: POSITIVE(FRIENDLY)/NEGATIVE(FEARFUL) 2 DEATH IS AN ENTITY 2-a/b/c: A MOVING ENTITY/A FEARFUL ENTITY/A HEAVY ENTITY 3 DEATH IS LOSING AN ENTITY 3-a: COMPENSATION FOR PRECIOUS ENTITY 3-b: LOSING A PRECIOUS POSSESSION 3-c: CUTTING OFF A LINE 3-d: DESTROYING AN ENTITY 3-e: STEALING AN ENTITY	2 DEATH IS AN ENTITY 2-b: AN ANNOYING ENTITY 3 DEATH IS LOSING AN ENTITY 3-d: DESTROYING AN ENTITY 3-e: STEALING AN ENTITY	3 LIFE IS AN ENTITY 3-a/b/c: PRECIOUS POSSESSION (A GIFT/A LINE)
J. JOURNEY	1 DEATH IS DEPARTURE (with NO RETURN) 2 DEATH IS THE END OF THE JOURNEY (FINAL DESTINATION) 2-a: RELIEF FROM BURDEN/STRUGGLE 3 DEATH IS GOING TO ANOTHER PLACE 3-a: WITH DESTINATIONS (HOME/NIRVANA/PARADISE/HEAVEN) 3-b: AN ESCAPE ROUTE 4 DYING IS A JOURNEY		1 LIFE IS ARRIVAL 2 LIFE IS A JOURNEY 2-a: WITH BURDEN/STRUGGLE 2-b: A PATH
S. STATUS	1 DEATH IS DOWN 2 DEATH IS LACK OF MOVEMENT 2-a/b: SLEEP OR REST/SILENCE 3 DEATH IS DISAPPEARANCE 4 DEATH IS FREEDOM 5 DEATH IS TRANSFORMATION 6 DEATH IS BONDAGE	3 DEATH IS SEPARATION/LOSS	1 LIFE IS UP 2 LIFE IS CONSCIOUSNESS/AWARENESS 4 LIFE IS BONDAGE
T. TIME	1 DEATH IS A PHASE OF LIFE 1-a/b: WINTER/NIGHT		1 LIFE IS A CYCLE 1-a/b: A YEAR/A DAY

While searching for the data on the Internet, the difference between English (North American) and Japanese sites becomes very clear. For one thing, in English, the distinction between religious and non-religious sites is very difficult to make, since the pro-life movement is strongly connected to fundamentalist Christian groups. Meanwhile, in Japanese, there are quite a few women with abortion experience who host websites in order to relate their own experiences and to invite others to share their experiences for the purpose of mutual

healing and/or for helping other women. The sites have no particular religious connection. Also found are a few Buddhist temples which try to help heal the after-abortion suffering by answering questions and giving the women consolation and comfort. Such differences in the types of sources themselves show the different degree of intervention of religion in the issue of abortion in North America and in Japan. For the purpose of consistency between English and Japanese data, the data taken from Japanese religious (temple) sites are included into the private discourse data since it mostly takes the form of one- to-one consultancy/advice similar to peer dialogue.

Another noticeable difference in English and Japanese sites is that, in the latter, there is not as sharp a contrast between pro-life and pro-choice views as seen in the former. The Japanese women who have experienced abortions may express such emotions as sorrow, regret, and guilty feelings as much as pro-life women in the English data sources might do, but their conclusion or reflection on their experiences is not necessarily pro-life. Thus, the difficulty arises in analyzing Japanese language use in terms of pro-life/pro-choice as is possible in English data, although pro-choice data is unsurprisingly very small.

Thus, the data sources themselves reflect the different social values and perspectives on abortion in current discourses in Japan and North America. The data sources are listed in the references at the end.

### Data Analysis

The data collected from the sources are counted in accordance with the following rules:

1. In the data sources listed in the appendix, there are collections of essays, personal dialogues, and confessions, and each item in a website or a book is treated as an individual source. That is to say, each book and website examined is composed of multiple sources.
2. The same words and expressions appearing in an individual source are treated as one instance. In other words, the repetition of words/expressions in the same source is considered irrelevant because such repetition may only reflect the author's personal preference, language habit, and/or extent of vocabulary.

Some examples of words and expressions used in English and Japanese private/public discourses are listed below, with their respective conceptual categories.

#### 1. Referring to the act of abortion

\* English public discourse: *kill, murder, make it dead and terminate pregnancy* (A-1), *take life* (E-3).

\* English private discourse: *murder, terminate, kill, and expel the unwanted foetus*(A-1), *have "procedure" done* (A-2), *give up, take life and get rid of* (E-3), *have it go away* (J-1), *end a life* (J-2).

\* Japanese public discourse: *kill, and murder* (A-1), *take life, thinning, return a child, destroy life, and rob one of a life* (E-3), *bring down* (S-1), *lose* (SS-3<sup>1</sup>).

\* Japanese private discourse: *kill, and murder* (A-1), *life erased, extinguish and blow off* (C-2), *give up, make a sacrifice of, throw away a life, pick off a life, cut a life, and lose a life* (all E-3), *gone, disappear and pass away* (J-1), *drive off to (entomb into) the darkness, send to*

*the sky, go back to (called up to) heaven, and return to the sky (all J-3), flow away (down), shed away and bring down (S-1) demise (SS-1), lost, parting and farewell (SS-3).*

#### 2. Referring to the aborted foetus

\* English public discourse: *foetus, aborted child, and unborn baby (A-1), living stuff, and created baby (E-3), ghost (S-4).*

\* English private discourse: *child, foetus, victim, and baby (A-1), product of conception (E-3), unborn angel (S-4).*

\* Japanese public discourse: *child and foetus (A-1), "water child" (S-4).*

\* Japanese private discourse: *child and baby (A-1), baby in heaven and baby in the sky (J-3), "water-child's spirit," and spirit of child (S-4), lost baby (SS-3).*

#### 3. Referring to the pregnancy/childbirth.

\* English public discourse: *carry the pregnancy to the term (C-2), create the baby, and give birth to (E-3), enter the world, and come (J-1), human life begins (J-2).*

\* English private discourse: *bear child, child was born (A-1), deliver (E-3), enter into this world (J-1).*

\* Japanese public discourse: *be born (A-1), deliver and bear out a life (E-3), life indwells (J-1).*

\* Japanese private discourse: *be born, and bear (A-1), deliver, bestow life, and give lodging to (E-3), come to my tummy, life resides, and come into life (J-1).*

#### 4. Referring to death/dying

\* English public discourse: *die (A-1), end of life (J-2).*

\* English private discourse: *death, dead, and die (A-1), end of life (J-2), sleep forever (S-2).*

\* Japanese public discourse: *drop a life, and lose life (E-3), death, die, dead (A-1).*

\* Japanese private discourse: *life vanishes, extinguished life (C-2), cut a life, and lose (E-3), cease to exist (live), pass away, gone and disappear (J-1), go to heaven, go back to the sky, and reach heaven (J-3), sleep (S-2), attain Buddhahood (S-4).*

### Expressions Particular to Japanese

The Japanese expressions are given in gloss translation, which can not convey their full meaning and implication. Some religious-related expressions used very frequently in private discourse are explained below. (Refer to Table 2 for their Japanese writings):

1. *mizuko*: a euphemism for the miscarried and the aborted babies, which literally means "water child," the child returned to water, which is a symbol of the source of life.

2. *meinichi*: literally means "life day," but refers to the day of the year on which one died, thus it's actually "the death day" even though it is called "the life day."

3. *jizou*: is a guardian deity of children in the pantheon of Japanese Buddhism. Thus, the expression such as "go to see *jizou*" is the equivalent to "go to heaven" in English.

4. *kuyou*: literally means "offer and nurture," a memorial service usually accompanied by offerings of food, drink, and materials of amusement such as toys for the dead child. In many cases, such offerings are placed in front of *jizou*, who is supposed to be with the unseen spirit of the *mizuko* as its guardian.

5. *joubutsu*: literally means "to become a Buddha or attain Buddhahood," a euphemism for dying very often used both in religious and non-religious contexts.

Table 2: Japanese Writings (KANJI)

No.	Japanese Writing	Pronunciation	Lit. Meanings	Meaning
1	水子	mizuko	water child	child returned to water
2	命日	meinichi	life day	the day of the year one died
3	地藏	jizou	(proper noun)	a guardian deity of children
4	供養	kuyou	offer and nurture	memorial service
5	成仏	joubutu	become Buddha	(euphemism of dying)
6	冥福	meifuku	happiness in other world	
7	授かる	sazukaru	receive	given from someone
8	魂	tamasii	soul	

6. *meifuku*: “happiness in the nether world.” People usually pray for the dead to be happy in the after life.

#### Implications of the Conceptual Patterns

As cited in the section on data analysis, Japanese seems to have more variation in euphemism, but the amount of data is not enough to show statistical significance. Having said that, still some tendencies can be found in the use of the conceptual patterns in both languages, and the tendency in the Japanese data is strongly connected to the vocabulary described above.

Among the metaphorical conceptual patterns, most of the basic categories appear in the abortion data in both languages, except TIME, which has no instance either in English or in Japanese, and CONTAINER, which appears only in Japanese but not in English.

In English, ACTION/EVENT is dominant equally in public and private discourses, and the second most frequent is ENTITY, the third, JOURNEY, and the fourth, STATUS, suggesting similar vocabulary and conceptual patterns in public and private discourses, which are in a relatively logical, pragmatic, and scientific *logos* mode. (See Figure 1.)

On the other hand, public and private discourses in Japanese show more disparity. The ACTION/EVENT category is used nearly twice as much in public discourse as in private discourse, though still much less than in English public discourse. Meanwhile, the most frequent conceptual categories in private discourse are JOURNEY and ENTITY, followed by ACTION/EVENT, which is much less. This clearly shows the use of different types of language in public and private discourses. (See Figure 2.)

The order of overall frequency in English is ACTION/EVENT, ENTITY, and JOURNEY, while it is ENTITY, JOURNEY, and ACTION/EVENT in Japanese, and the frequency of ACTION/EVENT is about half of English. In addition, in Japanese, there is no strong dominance of one category as seen in English, because, even though the order of ACTION/EVENT, ENTITY, and JOURNEY in Japanese public discourse is the same as in English, the two most frequent categories of ENTITY and JOURNEY in private discourse

Figure 1: Frequency of Conceptual Patterns in English (%)

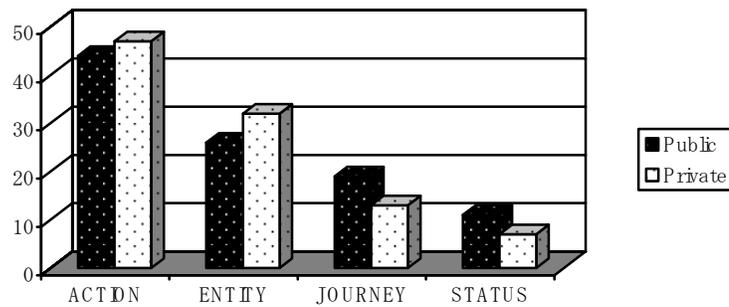
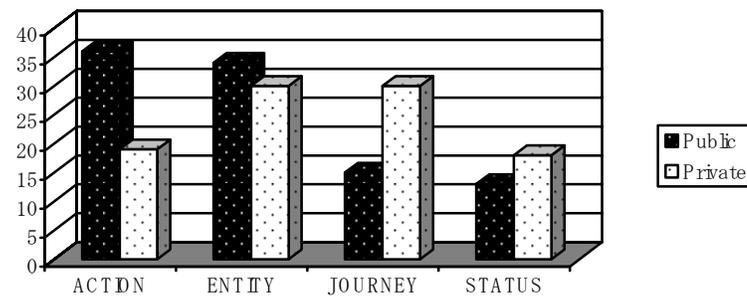


Figure 2: Frequency of Conceptual Patterns in Japanese (%)



counteract and dilute the dominance of any category. This suggests that Japanese use more euphemism than English-speaking people who tend to use more *logos* type of language even in private discourse, and also reflects the social character of Japanese who prefer indirectness in their language use. (See Figure 3.)

The fourth frequent category, STATUS, appears twice as frequently in Japanese as in English, and though its usage in Japanese public discourse is more or less at the same level as in the English counterpart, Japanese private discourse shows quite a high frequency, in fact, very close to that of ACTION/EVENT. This is due particularly to the DEATH IS DOWN metaphor in which such words as *orosu* (bringing down), *nagasu* (flowing down), both colloquial expressions for having an abortion, are included, as well as to the DEATH IS TRANSFORMATION metaphor, a characteristic of the Japanese mentality and euphemism regarding dead people. (See Figure 4.)

#### Implications of Japanese Compound Verbs

In relation to the above, Japanese compound verbs require some explanation. In the Japanese language, as well as in many other Asian languages, a characteristic of compound verbs, which consist of a main verb with a secondary verb, expresses the speaker's

Figure 3: Overall Comparison of English and Japanese Conceptual Patterns (%)

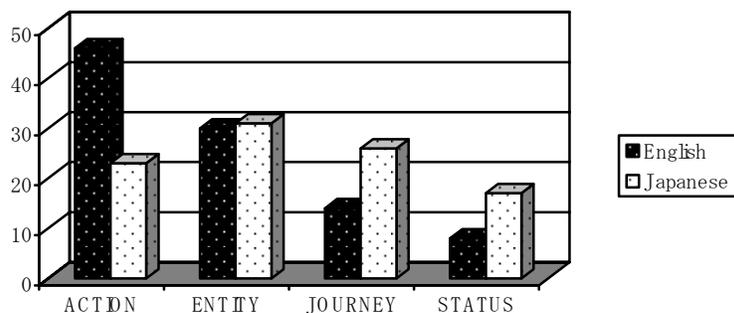
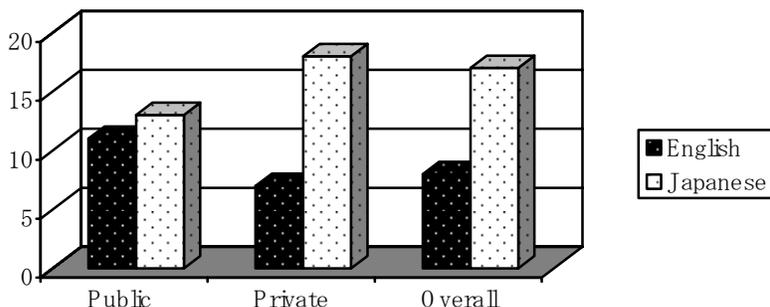


Figure 4: Frequency of Status (%)



relationship from a hierarchical point of view. Those relevant here have secondary verbs indicating “giving and receiving” relations, which are *-ageru*, *-kureru*, *-morau* attached to the main verb. In current usage, the verbs *ageru* and *kureru* mean “to give” and *morau* means “to receive.” The choice of these compound terms reflects the hierarchical and in-group/out-group relationship of Japanese society. In other words, with *ageru* (from the viewpoint of the giver) and *kureru* (from the viewpoint of the receiver), the subject is the benefactor and the object is the beneficiary, while *morau* implies the opposite. In the case of *unde-ageru*, the subject “woman” gives the object “foetus” the act of *umu* (to produce, deliver, bring it into the world), while with *unde-morau*, the subject “child” receives such an act from the object “mother.” This usage of compound verbs describes the cognitive relation between mother and child similar to LIFE IS AN ENTITY, even though these compound verbs themselves are classified in ACTION/EVENT, since a metaphorical conceptual pattern of their main verb comes under the category of ACTION/EVENT.

Thus, it can be said that between mother and child (foetus in this topic) the relationship exists of giving and receiving as a prerequisite for the child’s birth. Japanese also recognize that conception occurs by the will of something supernatural, a counterpart of the Judeo-Christian God in English, as seen in the many examples of the metaphoric expression *sazukaru* (Refer to Table 2, Item 7), meaning “bestowed, given from a superior” and consider

children as “a gift,” but without the giving-receiving relationship between mother and child, a child can never be born.

The child as beneficiary implies it has consciousness, and though it can not be called a human being yet, it is considered as some kind of life energy with awareness. Therefore, the mother has a guilty feeling for not acting to bring it into this world and make it human, which results in the frequent usage of words suggesting some kind of spirit entity such as *tamasii* (Refer to Table 2, Item 8), which means soul or spirit, *mizuko*, and *kuyou*, as explained in the section alone on particular Japanese expressions, and they all come under the conceptual pattern of DEATH IS TRANSFORMATION in the category of STATUS.

### Conclusions

The overall picture of abortion in North America and Japan reflected in the language use is as follows:

1. Among both English- and Japanese-speaking peoples, a majority of people consider abortion to be wrong, and even though some pro-choice people especially in English-speaking countries consider it a necessary evil to protect the human rights of women, they don't actively promote it as much as pro-life people.

2. Therefore, in both languages, those who strongly oppose abortion tend to voice their views more openly and loudly both in public and private discourses. This is reflected in the much smaller number of pro-choice data sources than those of the pro-life.

3. Whether from sin or as a necessary evil, women who suffer a guilty feeling after abortion need some form of reconciliation with the self and life in general, and the process is quite different between English- and Japanese-speaking peoples. As far as can be seen from the data taken from North American and Japanese sources, the English data suggests the following formula: abortion→killing a life→sin in the light of Christianity→guilty feeling toward God→reconciliation (healing) through mercy and forgiveness of God/Christ.

4. While the Japanese data suggests the following: abortion→not giving a potential baby its birth (its right to life), and returning it to where it comes from→guilty feeling toward the aborted baby (not to God) →personification of the aborted baby as spirit→reconciliation (healing) by offering a prayer to the spirit (Also see Figure 5).

5. These formulas are reflected in the more frequent use of the vocabulary classified as ACTION/EVENT, such as *homicide*, *murder*, *human life*, and *personhood*, in English, both in public and private discourses, and in Japanese, particular vocabulary such as *mizuko*, *kuyou*, and *meifuku*, which are classified as S-4:DEATH IS TRANSFORMATION.

From their respective language uses, it has become clear that English-speaking people prefer a more logical, pragmatic, and scientific mode of conceptualizing even in private discourse than Japanese-speaking people. The vital issue for them is whether a foetus is a human person with character and individuality or a simple sub-human being without personality, such as a cell. Once it is determined, even on an individual basis, the debate can be settled in a logical way based on the Judeo-Christian ethics: you can kill sub-human creatures but should not kill human persons. This way of settling the issue is based on *logos* type of discourse, and the English vocabulary on abortion clearly reflects this mentality.

In the meantime, Japanese tend to be more emotional in their private discourse, and use a more *mythos* type of language, which is quite different from their public discourse. This feature in Japanese private discourse indicates not only Japanese preference for indirectness

Figure 5



in the language use, but also how deep-seated the mythic perception of the world is as a root of Japanese culture, even though Japanese speakers may not be aware of it.

For Japanese, a foetus, which English-speaking people try to classify logically either as a human person or a simple cell, is a semi-human creature and is converted into a kind of spirit entity after it is killed. This is important in the process of healing and reconciliation of women with abortion experiences. This mentality, which is based on *mythos*, creates an ambiguous zone of perception not found in the other topics with this paper, which are capital punishment and suicide. According to Karen Armstrong (2005), the modern civilization still depends upon mythological thinking to explore the ultimate meaning and significance in our lives, the inner regions of one's personality, and the way to alleviate despair. However, the degree of dependence varies according to the culture, and the topic of abortion is a field in which such differences are most clearly shown, because of the ambiguous zone it creates.

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competence in both English and Japanese, and their research in both cultural domains is both informative and insightful.

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#### Note

1. The category SS signifies STATUS FROM SURVIVOR'S PERSPECTIVE. Thus, SS-3 is SEPARATION/LOSS as stated in the column FROM SURVIVOR'S PERSPECTIVE.

*(Appendix follows)*

## Appendix

*English Data Sources*

- Abortion Experience* (2006) [www.voy.com/129741/](http://www.voy.com/129741/)  
 Crisscross Japan Forum (2006) *What's the Opinion on Abortion?*  
[www.crisscross.com/jp/forum/Whats\\_the\\_Opinion\\_on\\_Abortion?/m\\_410084/tm.htm](http://www.crisscross.com/jp/forum/Whats_the_Opinion_on_Abortion?/m_410084/tm.htm)  
 Elliot Institute (2006) *Testimonies* [www.afterabortion.org/](http://www.afterabortion.org/)  
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*Kanasiikoto* [Sad Thing] (2006) [www.kanasiitoko.com](http://www.kanasiitoko.com)  
*Marinno Hitorigoto* [Marin's Monologue] (2006).  
[www.sutv.zaq.ne.jp/0527/chiyu/main/ref/index.html](http://www.sutv.zaq.ne.jp/0527/chiyu/main/ref/index.html)  
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*Uri-chan no Ouchi: Taikendan* [Uri's Home: Tell Your Experiences]. (2006)  
[www1.rocketbbs.com/613/uritti.html](http://www1.rocketbbs.com/613/uritti.html)  
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 [Women Breaking the Silence - Essays and Opinions on the Movie 'Abortion – Women in North and South']. Mireruba-shobo, Japan