A Contrastive Study of Functionally Equivalent, but Semantically Different Sign Expressions in Japanese and German: An Analysis of Preferred Expression Styles

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A Contrastive Study of Functionally Equivalent, but Semantically Different Sign Expressions in Japanese and German: An Analysis of Preferred Expression Styles

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Abstract: This study focuses on functionally equivalent, but semantically different sign expressions in Japanese and German, such as *o-nori-no-sai-wa tesuri-ni o-tsukamari-kudasai* [Literally, "when steping on, please grip handrail"], *kiiroi-sen-no uchigawa-ni o-tachi-kudasai* [please stand inside yellow line], *oriru sai-wa o-oashimoto-ni go-chūi-kudasai* ["when getting off, please pay attention to under foot"], and *o-ko-sama tsure-no kata-wa o-ko-sama-no te-o totte o-nori-kudasai* ["person with child is asked to ride on taking child's hand"] in Japanese versus its German counterpart *Benutzung auf eigene Gefahr* ["using at your own risk"], which are posted near escalators. This example tells us that the Japanese sign consists of four concrete sentences whereas the German one presents a simple and abstract sentence. Such correspondents cannot be adequately explained from only construal and politeness perspectives. In this study, such corresponding expressions in Japanese and German will be contrasted to find out what information is relevant to each society. The results will reveal what communicative behaviors are expected in corresponding situations between Japan and Germany, which can contribute to efficient intercultural communication.

Keywords: Sign expression, functional equivalence, preferred style, Japanese, German

1. Introduction

Every language has its preferred styles of linguistic expressions, which can be revealed by comparing corresponding expressions of two languages. In the field of cognitive linguistics, a translation-based method has been used to compare such expressions, since any sentence in a particular language should be semantically equivalent to its translation. However, comparing translations, particularly within a literary text, is problematic due to comparability. The aim of this study is to propose a more appropriate method for determining preferred styles of expressions in Japanese and German based on comparing functionally equivalent routine formulas of the two languages. The aim of the study is threefold: 1) to point out problems in translation-based analysis from a point of view of comparability; 2) to propose an alternative analysis based on functionally equivalent routine formulas between the two languages; and 3) to demonstrate the validity of the alternative context-based method for contrastive analysis of stylistic preferences.

2. Description of Problems

2.1. Perspective Variations

Languages have their preferred styles of linguistic expressions. One of the different styles between two languages is the perspective from which linguistic expressions are formulated. Many studies have addressed differences in such perspectives. Among them, translation-based analysis has been used, especially in the field of cognitive linguistics. Ikegami's (2000) study, for example, is frequently referenced because it clearly demonstrates differences in perspectives between Japanese and English/German on the basis of the translation-based method of comparison.

Ikegami (2000) compared the first sentence of a Japanese literary text, *Yukiguni* [Snow Country] by Kawabata Yasunari (the first winner of the Nobel Prize of Literature in Japan), with its English and German translations.

Ikegami (2000) shows two types of perspectives:

(1) 国境の長いトンネルを抜けると雪国であった。
kokkyo-no nagai tonneru-o nukeru-to
boundary-PART.GEN long tunnel-PART.ACC go.through-when
yukiguni-deatta.
snow.country-COP.PAST (KAWABATA Yasunari: *Snow Country*)
['when going out of the boundary long tunnel, the snow country was']

(2) *The train came out of the long tunnel into the snow country*.
(tranl. by E. Seidensticker)

(3) *Als der Zug aus dem langen Grenztunnel herauskroch,*
As the train out.of the long boundary.tunnel out.crawl.PAST
lag das »Schneeland« vor ihm weit ausgebreitet.
lie.PAST the snow.country in.front.of it.DAT widely spread.PAST-PTCP
(transl. by O. Benl, cf. Kawabata (1987))
['as the train crawled out of the long boundary tunnel, the snow country lay spread widely in front of it']

The comparison shows different perspectives clearly: (1) does not clarify who was going through the tunnel into the snow country because it has no grammatical subject on the surface level. In the scene, the event of going through the tunnel into the snow country is depicted subjectively or experientially from a perspective inside the situation, that is, through the eyes of the narrator or the main figure of this story. This can be understood by the expression *yukiguni-deatta*, because it illustrates the direct recognition of the narrator or the protagonist that he/she has come into the snow country after the darkness of the tunnel. On the other hand, (2) and (3) are described objectively from a perspective outside the situation where the event occurred

because the grammatical subjects *train* and *Zug* are mentioned from a third person point of view.

In narratives, in general, a narrator as a narrating subject describes an event as a narrated object. The subject and the object are distinguished clearly, which can be confirmed in (2) and (3), where a narrator mentions an object that comes out of the tunnel as *train* and *Zug*, respectively, and describes them. In (1), however, the distinction is not clear. The phrase *yukiguni-deatta* ['snow country was'] expresses that the narrator tells experientially what appears in his/her face after having come out of the darkness of the tunnel. In other words, what a narrating subject recognized directly was depicted by the narrator. In this sense, a narrating subject and a narrated object are not clearly distinguished, in contrast to (2) and (3). On the basis of this observation, Ikegami (2000) claims that Japanese prefers expressing the union of the describing subject and described object, whereas English prefers opposition of the subject and the object (cf. Ikegami, 2012). This means that (1) is narrated from a point of view inside the situation where the event occurs and (2) and (3) from a point of view outside the situation.

Indeed, the comparison of an original sentence with its translation can illustrate a difference in styles of expressions clearly. However, it is unclear whether (2) and (3) are appropriate translations of (1), or whether the translations are the subjectively preferred expressions of translators. It seems that (2) and (3) do not reflect appropriately what (1) expresses in Japanese. In fact, translations can be different from translator to translator as seen in the following second German translation:

(4) *Jenseits des langen Tunnels erschien das Schneeland*.
beyond the.GEN long tunnel.GEN appear.PAST the snow.country
['beyond the long tunnel the snow country appeared']

Translation (4) corresponds elementally with (1) in content and form, because it does not contain the word *Zug*, as in (1). In this sense, (4) is more appropriate than (3), which confirms that individualistic preferences of translators can be reflected in translations.

2.2. Examples of Mistranslations

In this section, mistranslations as the second problem in translation will be discussed.

You see two examples of mistranslation below. Figs. 1 and 2 are an informational and a prohibition sign, respectively. Fig. 1 is a sign in an international airport in Jakarta, Indonesia. Fig. 2 is a sign posted in a hot spring in Kyushu, southwest Japan. The author took both photographs.



Figure 1. Sign in Jakarta, Indonesia



Figure 2. Sign in Unzen, Japan

Fig. 1 directs the passengers to *baggage claim*. Here, the translation "品物損害クラーム" [*shinamono-songai-kurāmu*: 'goods-damage-claim'] seems to be meaningless. The proper corresponding sign expression of *baggage claim* in Japanese should be "手荷物受取所" [*tenimotsu-uketorisho*: 'baggage-receiving.place'].

For Fig. 2, the English translation is problematic. The English expression *Keep within the boundary fences* is written under the Japanese expression "歩道外立入禁止" [*hodō-gai tachiiri-kinshi*: 'walk.pass-outside entrance-prohibition'] and the sentences are semantically and functionally equivalent, though the English and the Japanese sentence are formulated formally positively and negatively, respectively. However, the English sentence can be misunderstood and dangerous. On the sign, the expression *Keep within the boundary fences* is translated inappropriately because of Japanese transference. Consider how transference can misconstrue the intended meaning of a Japanese sentence, such as *saku-no uchigawa-ni inasai* ['boundary.fences-within stay']. The Japanese spatial expression *uchigawa-ni* ['in.side-at'] is translated to the English preposition *within*, though *uchigawa-ni* is actually an expression for the side where the visitors stand in front of the sign, i.e., from the point of view of the visitors inside the situation. The English preposition *within*, however, is usually used from a perspective outside the situation, i.e., from a bird's eye view. In Fig. 2, the space the preposition focuses on will be a dangerous, hot, steaming place. Therefore, *behind* should be used instead of *within* to appropriately convey the intention of the sign. This mistranslation can be further explained by the difference in preferred styles of linguistic expressions between Japanese and English. As previously discussed, English sentences tend to be expressed from a point of view outside the situation that an event occurs, such as in (2). Therefore, *behind* must be used to avoid a possible danger. Japanese sentences, however, prefer a point of view inside the situation that an event occurs as seen in (1), which caused the writer to select *within* rather than *behind* because the place where the visitors stand is expressed in Japanese normally as *uchigawa* ['in.side'] and the perspective of the writer is the same as that of the visitors.

2.3. Problems of Translation-based Method

Translation-based comparisons are problematic with respect to "comparability," though they have clearly shown different stylistic expressions between corresponding sentences of two languages. Here, four points can be identified as problematic (cf. Nishijima, 2018):

a) arbitrariness (selection of materials)

b) unnaturalness (bias or influence by source language)

c) translators' individual dispositions (subjectivity)

d) mistranslations (misunderstanding or influence by source language)

Regarding arbitrariness, in Ikegami's (2000) translation comparison discussed above, only the first sentence was selected from the whole text of *Yukiguni* [Snow Country] and compared with its English and German translations. Different perspectives were demonstrated with the translated sentence, however, and comparing one example is not enough to generalize that Japanese prefers subjective construal or perspective inside the situation whereas English or German prefers objective construal or perspective outside the situation.

Unnaturalness refers to the idea that it is not always obvious whether the translation is a natural, or usual, expression in English or not. This concept is related to the next point, translators' individual dispositions. For example, (2) does not correspond with (1) semantically, as shown above. In this sense, a translation can be dependent on a translator's individual disposition.

Lastly, mistranslations change the overall meaning of a sentence. Example (2) can be considered a mistranslation because it does not reflect the meaning of the original sentence, which expresses a subjective recognition of the narrator or the protagonist that he/she was going through the darkness of the tunnel and then has come into the white space of the snow country. This contrast was not depicted appropriately in (2) or (3) (Nishijima, 2018).

In this way, the translation-based method is not always appropriate for comparing two languages.

3. Requirements for an Appropriate Comparison

3.1. Comparability for Comparing Two Languages

Here we discuss comparability for comparing corresponding expressions between two languages. The aim—that is, the purpose for which the two languages are compared—is important. In our case, the purpose of the language comparison is to find out the preferred styles of linguistic expressions of the languages to be compared.

Based on the previously established problems with respect to comparability, it can be pointed out that the translation-based method is not always appropriate for comparing corresponding expressions between two languages. Now, what conditions are required to compare corresponding expressions between two languages properly with respect to comparability—that is, comparison without individual subjectivity? At a minimum, the following four points must be considered for an objective and fair comparison:

1) Independence: Compared corresponding expressions of the two languages must be independent of each other. That is, they are not influenced by each other.

2) Naturalness: Compared corresponding expressions of the two languages must be natural ones. They must be normal or usual in the language in question.

3) Functional equivalence: Compared expressions must be functionally equivalent in order to find out similarities and differences in the styles of the corresponding expressions.

4) Corresponding concrete situations: In order to compare functionally equivalent expressions, compared expressions must be used concretely in the corresponding situations in both languages

These requirements can be fulfilled by routine formulas on signs in corresponding situations between two languages as shown below.

3.2. Routine Formulas on Signs

Examples of corresponding expressions that fulfill the conditions above are signs that are found in public spaces, such as railway stations, that provide information or make requests to passengers, in parallel situations, in each language. Such expressions can be called sign expressions (cf. Nishijima, 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2018).

Here you see examples of two corresponding sign expressions in Japanese and German (Figs. 3 and 4).

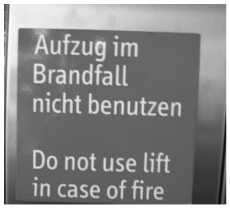


Figure 3. Sign expression in Germany

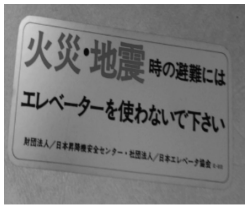


Figure 4. Sign expression in Japan

Corresponding sign expressions on the signs are as follows:

(5) *Aufzug im Brandfall nicht benutzen*
elevator in fire.case not use.INF
[‘not use elevator in case of fire’]

(6) 火災・地震時の避難にはエレベーターを使わないで下さい。
kasai/jishinji-no hinan-ni-wa
fire.and.earthquake.time-PART.GEN evacuation-for-TOP
elebeetaa-o tsukawa-naide-kudasai
elevator-PART.ACC use-NEG-IMP.HON
[‘don’t use elevator for evacuation in case of fire and earthquake, please’]

The functions of (5) and (6) are both a prohibition to use an elevator. Both expressions are natural and usual in each language. However, they show different styles of expression—that is, the function is the same, but the way of expressing information is different with respect to syntactic structure and semantic information. (5) is an infinitive phrase, whereas (6) is an imperative sentence with information on elevator use restrictions that are in place during earthquakes. Such a comparison using corresponding sign expressions in a corresponding concrete situation enables us to determine preferred ways of linguistic expressions of the languages in question. In this sense, the comparing method can be called a context-based one.

To demonstrate a more objective and reliable comparison of two languages using the context-based method, pairs of corresponding sign expressions will be compared in the following section so that various comparison points can be derived.

4. Sign Expressions

4.1. Framework of Corresponding Signs

Expressions on signs in corresponding places in two languages can be functionally, semantically, and/or formally equivalent. In order to compare such corresponding sign expressions, a framework for a more appropriate comparison should be set up. First, corresponding expressions can be divided into two groups: 1) functionally equivalent and 2) functionally inequivalent. Each group can be further divided into two or three subgroups. In this way, the following framework can be proposed:

1. Functionally equivalent expressions

1-a) functionally, semantically, and formally equivalent
立入禁止 [*tachiiri-kinshi*]
enter.NOML-prohibit.NOML
['entrance prohibition']
Zutritt verboten
enter.NOML prohibit.PAST-PTCP
['entrance prohibited']

1-b) functionally and semantically equivalent
飲めません [*nome-mas-en*]
drink.able-HON-NEG
['[we/you] cannot drink']
Kein Trinkwasser
no drink.water
['no drinking water']

1-c) functionally equivalent
遺失物係 [*ishitsu-butsu kakari*]
lose.NOML-item section

['section of lost item']
Fundbüro
find.PAST-PTCL.NOML.bureau
['bureau of found item']

2. Functionally inequivalent expressions

2-a) signs with different functions
かけこみ乗車はキケンです。お客様のご協力をお願いします。
kakekomi-jōsha-wa *kiken-desu.*
rush.in.NOML-board.NOML-PART.TOP danger-COP.HON
o-kyaku-sama-no go-kyōryoku-o
HON-passenger-HON-PART.GEN HON-cooperation-PART.ACC
o-negai-shimasu
HON-require-HON
['rush boarding is dangerous. [we] require passengers to cooperate']
Achtung! Nicht ein- oder aussteigen,
caution not in- or out.get.INF
wenn Warnsignal ertönt und aufleuchtet!
if warning.signal sound and up.light
['caution! not get in or out if warning signal sounds and flashes']

2-b) no corresponding signs
降りるお客さまが先になります。
oriru o-kyaku-sama-ga
get.out HON-passenger-HON-PART.NOM
saki-ni nari-masu
first-PART.DAT become-HON
['passenger getting out first']
Eingang nur mit gültigem Fahrausweis
in.go.NOML only with valid ticket
['boarding only with valid ticket']

Note that the category of 1-a) is not defined strictly because it is difficult to formally correspond linguistic items that are considered as equivalent between the two languages. Note further that the distinction of 1-b) and 1-c) is relative or a matter of degree. Therefore, it is also difficult to distinguish both categories strictly.

The category "function" seems to presuppose the category "meaning." Therefore, in this study, categories 1-a), 1-b), and 1-c) cannot be distinguished strictly, but they are regarded as one category—that is, functionally equivalent. Semantic information, however, will be contrasted.

As for 2-a) and 2-b), they are not functionally corresponding. Therefore, expressions of these categories are not analyzed or discussed in this study. Such functionally inequivalent expressions, however, can provide useful suggestions for intercultural communications studies

because they are formulated or not formulated based on different values within language societies, and they can reveal what is relevant to communication in a society where the language is spoken. In this sense, such expressions should be discussed from another point of view.

4.2. For a Comparison of Differences in Semantic Information

In comparing two languages, equivalents between the two languages should be compared. The category 2-b) above is not appropriate to the comparison because there are no equivalents between Japanese and German. Therefore, this category is excluded from the comparison in this study. However, sign expressions in this category, as mentioned above, can provide us much information about what is relevant to the communication in each language or society. For example, (7), (8), and (9) below mention nothing unusual to Japanese passengers who have experience with public transportation (cf. Marui, 2006).

(7) 降りるお客さまが先になります。 (sign in a platform at a station)
oriru o-kyaku-sama-ga
get.out HON.passenger-HON-PART.NOM
saki-ni *nari-masu*
first-PART.DAT become-HON
[‘passenger getting out first’]

(8) ドア開閉時には足を挟まれないよう十分お気をつけ下さい。
(sign on door in a train)
doakaiheiji-ni-wa *ashi-o* *hasama-re-nai-yō*
door.open.close.time-in-TOP foot-PART.ACC catch.PASS.NEG-for
jūbun o-kiotsuke-kudasai
enough HON-pay.attention-IMP.HON
[‘when door opens or closes, please pay attention to foot not to be caught’]

(9) お降りの際わきから来る車にご注意ください。(sign in a bus)
o-ori-no-sai *waki-kara kuru kuruma-ni*
HON-get.out.NOML-PART.GEN-time side-from come vehicle-at
go-chūi-kudasai
HON-pay.attention-IMP.HON
[‘when getting out, please pay attention to vehicle coming from your side’]

Signs such as (7) – (9) are not seen in Germany, likely because the provided information stays within the bounds of common sense and therefore is not considered worth mentioning. Thus arises the question: why is such information provided on the signs in Japan? It is likely that the Japanese prefer to be treated as if they are shown concern and taken care of by mentioning the obvious, although this is still in speculation.

How about the following sign expressions, (10) and (11), in German:

(10) *Einstieg nur mit gültiger Fahrkarte*
get.in.NOML only with valid ticket
['boarding only with valid ticket']

(11) *Rutschgefahr! Begehen auf eigene Gefahr*
slip.danger go on own danger
['slip danger! go at your own risk']

The background for (10) on a sign in Germany is that there are no entrance gates at railroad stations that allow passengers to access platforms and get on trains without tickets. This expression comes from the institutional situation in Germany.

Expression (11) presupposes the principles of an individual's responsibility and personal judgment. In a corresponding situation in Japan another sign expression would be selected, for example, 立入禁止 [*tachiiri-kinshi* [enter.NOML-prohibit.NOML], 'no entrance'] as a prohibition to access because of the principle of responsibility for management (see below).

4.3. Preferred Linguistic Styles

As previously mentioned, every language has its preferred styles of expressions, which can be revealed by comparing corresponding sign expressions between two languages, for example, Japanese and German.

The following six points, minimum, are relevant to communication in Japanese and German as preferred styles of expressions (for an explanation of each point, see below):

1) perspectives
2) negative or positive
3) participatedness
4) concreteness/explicitness
5) politeness
6) responsibility

Based on these points, the differences in preferred styles of corresponding sign expressions between Japanese and German are presented below.

5. Demonstration

5.1. Perspectives

Previous literature such as Ikegami (2000, 2012), Ozono (2008), Narita (2009), and Nomura

(2010) have discussed differences in perspectives. Namely, there are two types of construals or perspectives with respect to the point of view of an event and how it is depicted and verbalized: subjective construal and objective construal (cf. Nakamura, 2004). The former is formulated from a perspective within the situation whereas the latter is from an outside perspective. The following signs in (12) and (13) both signal the same event that the bus will stop next, but differently. (14) and (15) inform us in different ways of the same prohibition that the water is not for drinking.

(12) *Tsugi tomari-masu*
next stop-HON
['[we] stop next']

(13) *Wagen hält*
vehicle stop.CONJ
['bus stops']

(14) *Nome-mas-en*
drink.able-HON-NEG
['[we] cannot drink [it]']

(15) *kein Trinkwasser*
no drink.water
['no drinking water']

In Japanese, (12) and (14) have no grammatical subject on the surface level. These expressions are formulated subjectively or experientially from the perspectives of people on the bus and near the water, respectively, observing directly what occurs in relation to the bus they are on and the water they see. Therefore, the subject in the expression can be omitted. In this sense, (12) and (14) are expressed from inside the situation where the events occur, from inside the bus and near the water. In German, (13) has a grammatical subject: *Wagen* ['vehicle', here 'bus']. *Wagen* is mentioned in the expression, thus (13) is formulated from the perspective of one outside the bus. (15) shows objectively what the subject matter is because *Trinkwasser* ['drinking water'] is mentioned. The difference between (12)/(14) and (13)/(15) corresponds to that of subjective and objective construals, respectively, similar to the comparison of the first sentence of Kawabata's novel (1) with its German translation (3) above. From the comparison between Japanese and German sign expressions, it can be confirmed that Japanese sign expressions tend to be expressed subjectively or experientially and German ones objectively.

5.2. Negative or Positive

Routine formulas can be expressed either negatively or positively. Japanese sign expressions prefer negative formulation, whereas German ones tend to be formulated positively. The following sign expressions, (16) and (17), can be seen at the door on a bus in Japan and Germany, respectively.

(16) ステップに立たないで下さい。
suteppu-ni tata-naide-kudasai
step-on stand-NEG-IMP.HON
['don't stand on step, please']

(17) *Auftritte freihalten*
step.PL free.keep.INF
['keep steps free']

Example (16), in Japanese, conveys a negative request or polite prohibition; (17), in German, however, is formulated as a positive infinitive form. The same distinction can be seen between (18) and (19) below.

(18) 指定方向外進行禁止
Shiteihōkō-gai shinkō kinshi
designate.NOML.direction-except go.NOML prohibit.NOML
['prohibition of going except designated direction']

(19) Vorgeschrieben Fahrtrichtung
designate.PAST-PTCP drive.direction
['designated drive direction']

The same request can be formulated negatively in Japanese and positively in German. Japanese signs tend to prefer negative expressions whereas German signs prefer positive ones.

5.3. Participatedness

The difference in preferred style of linguistic expressions can be seen in subjective or objective involvement in an event: subjective participation as an agent or patient versus objective participation as an outsider. The difference can be also explained in relation to empathy, which is sharing and understanding feelings of the party concerned. Examples (20) and (21) show the difference.

(20) 遺失物係
ishitsubutsu-kakari
lose.NOML.item-section
['section of lost item']

(21) *Fundbüro*
find.PAST.PTCP.NOML.bureau
['bureau of found item']

Japanese example (20) expresses the place where one can make a declaration of and find his/her lost items. In this sense, (20) is also formulated from a subjective point of view of a person that lost his/her belongings.[1] In German, however, (21) expresses the place where there

[1] One reviewer pointed out that there is a semantically corresponding English expression, *lost property office*, which seems to be formulated in the same way as the Japanese phrase.

are found things. Thus, (21) is formulated from an objective point of view of found things. The same relationship can be seen in the corresponding sign expressions of (22) and (23).

(22) 手荷物受取所
tenimotsu-uketorisho
baggage-receive.NOML.place
[‘place for receiving baggage’]

(23) *Gepäckausgabe*
baggage.out.give.NOML
[‘giving out of baggage’]

Example (22) expresses the place where a passenger can receive his/her baggage that he/she checked, from a point of view of the person that checks and receives his/her baggage. However, (23), is formulated from an objective point of view of baggage that is given out.

5.4. Concreteness/Explicitness

The sign expressions differ in concreteness or explicitness. Japanese sign expressions tend to be formulated abstractly and implicitly, whereas German ones prefer concrete and explicit formulations. The difference can be seen in (24) and (25).

(24) 足元注意
ashimoto-chūi
foot.under-caution
[‘caution under foot’]

(25) Vorsicht! Stufe
caution step
[‘caution step’]

Example (24) does not mention what should be paid attention to. On the contrary, (25) concretely and explicitly expresses what should be paid attention to: *Stufe* [‘step’]. The same distinction can be seen in (26) and (27).

(26) 頭上注意
zujō-chūi
head.above-caution
[‘caution above head’]

(27) *Durchgangshöhe beachten*
through.way.height pay.attention.to
[‘pay attention to height of passage’]

While (26) does not mention concretely and explicitly what should be paid attention to, (27) expresses it concretely and explicitly.

5.5. Politeness

In general, it is not expected that sign expressions contain politeness or linguistic consideration to readers because space on the signs is limited. However, each language considers readers differently. The following sign expressions (27) and (28) can be seen at baggage claim in airports in Japan and Germany, respectively.

(27) 危険ですので この上にのぼらないでください。
kiken-desu-node kono ue-ni nobora-naide-kudasai
danger-COP.HON-because this top-on climb-NEG-IMP.HON
['because [this] is dangerous, don't climb on this, please']

(28) *Das Gepäckband nicht betreten*
the baggage.band not step.on.INF
['not step on the baggage band']

In Japanese, (27) includes two polite expressions as courtesies.[2] Furthermore, the reason for the prohibition is mentioned, which is also regarded as being considerate of passengers. However, (28) in German is an infinitive form that has no second person pronouns. In this case, no mention of any person to whom the expression is directed can be regarded as polite or considerate of others in German.

In Japan, there are also sign expressions directed to children; (29) is one such expression.

(29) ベルトコンベアの上にのぼるとあぶないよ。
Berutokonbea-no ue-ni noboru-to abunai-yo
belt.conveyor.PART.GEN top.on climb.when dangerous-PART
['[it is] dangerous when climbing on belt conveyor']

Example (29) is formulated for children because kanji characters are not used except for 上 (*ue*); a direct style with よ (*yo*) is used to appeal to children directly. In Germany, such a sign expression is not seen because typically the guardians or parents are responsible for the behavior of the child, which is confirmed in (30).

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[2] In general, it is often pointed out that Japanese expressions are more polite than their German or English counterparts. For example, sign expressions with imperatives in Japanese are usually accompanied with the word *kudasai*, whereas those of German and English do not include the corresponding *bitte* in German or *please* in English. According to a reviewer, English usage in Hong Kong is more polite tban that of first-language English countries, as seen in examples such as *Please mind the step* (in Hong Kong) and *Mind the step* (in England). It would be interesting to study how other Asian countries formulate corresponding imperatives with respect to politeness.

(30) *Betreten der Baustelle verboten.*
step.in.NOML the.GEN construction.place prohibit.PAST-PTCL
Eltern haften für ihre Kinder.
parents be.responsible for their children
['stepping into construction place prohibited. parents are responsible for their children']

5.6. Responsibility for Possible Accidents

There are two types of sign expressions regarding responsibility for possible accidents. In Japan, administrators or managers are usually responsible for possible accidents in concerning situations. In Germany, however, users are expected to be responsible for their behavior. Therefore, different sign expressions can be seen between Japan and Germany, like in (31) and (32), which are found at escalators.

(31a) お乗りの際は手すりにおつかまり下さい。
o-nori-no-sai-wa tesuri-ni
HON-ride.on-PART.GEN-time.TOP hand.rail-PART.DAT
o-tsukamari-kudasai
HON-grip-IMP.HON
['when stepping on, please grip hand rail']

(31b) 黄色い線の内側にお立ちください。
kiiroi-sen-no uchigawa-ni o-tachi-kudasai
yellow-line-PART.GEN in.side-on HON-stand-IMP.HON
['please stand inside yellow line']

(31c) 降りる際はお足元にご注意ください。
oriru sai-wa o-ashimoto-ni
get.off time-TOP HON-foot.under-at
go-chūi-kudasai
HON-pay.attention-IMP.HON
['when getting off, please pay attention to under foot']

(31d) お子様連れの方は、お子様の手をとってお乗りください。
o-ko-sama tsure-no kata-wa
HON-child-HON company-PART.GEN person-TOP
o-ko-sama-no te-o totte
HON-child-HON-PART.GEN hand-PART.ACC take.and
o-nori-kudasai
HON-ride.on-IMP.HON
['person with child is asked to ride on taking child's hand']

(32) *Benutzung auf eigene Gefahr*
use.NOML on own danger
['using at your own risk']

In Japan you can see concrete and detailed directions on a sign at an escalator, such as in (31a-d). In contrast, (32) provides a brief rule for users. In this example, contrary to the findings based on concreteness/explicitness above, Japanese sign expressions are more concrete and more explicit than German ones. This is probably because responsibility is involved. The administrators of the escalator in Japan inform passengers of concrete directions for safety behavior when using the escalator in order to avoid a possible accident, which is regarded as the responsibility of the administrators. In this sense, it can be speculated that people who use an escalator are not considered as competent adults that can make a judgment on how to use it safely. In Germany, people are expected to be able to act on their own judgment. Therefore, it is regarded as enough to call for the attention of possible users in Germany. Such differences in principles of behavior between Japan and Germany could explain why signs for prohibition are seen in Japan more often than in Germany.

6. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, it is firstly discussed that a translation-based method is not always appropriate for an objective and reliable comparison of corresponding expressions between two languages because individual subjective dispositions of translators are inevitable in translation. Secondly, it is demonstrated that comparing functionally equivalent sign expressions in Japanese and German can reveal several of the preferred styles of expressions in a more reliable fashion. Thus, the validity of the context-based approach using functionally equivalent expressions was confirmed.

In future research, functionally inequivalent signs employed in corresponding situations will be compared. The research will reveal what is relevant to communication in corresponding situations between Japanese and German.

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