

Omoiyari no aru and Rücksichtsvoll : A Contrastive Analysis of Evaluating Communicative Behavior

メタデータ	言語: English 出版者: 公開日: 2017-10-03 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: 西嶋, 義憲 メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2297/36643

Omoiyari no aru and Rücksichtsvoll: A Contrastive Analysis of Evaluating Concepts of Communicative Behavior

Yoshinori Nishijima
Kanazawa University

Abstract

Nishijima (2010) shows that in Japanese, linguistic formulation patterns relate to the degree of empathy felt by the speaker toward an interlocutor depending on the situation, whereas in German, linguistic expression depends on an opposition between conversational participants, stemming from an external perspective towards the situation. This observation was based on an analysis of corresponding routine formulas in Japanese and German. This paper aims to demonstrate that this claim is also valid in a corresponding pair of basic evaluating concepts of communicative behavior in Japanese (*omoiyari no aru*) and German (*rücksichtsvoll*). These concepts are related to a fundamental sense of politeness, that is, consideration for the other in order to accomplish smooth communication. This study clarifies the attitudes that are crucial for adequate communication in each language and the relevant behaviors that lead to smooth communication in each language. This study could also explain possible misunderstandings between Japanese and German speakers.

Keywords: perspective, Japanese, German, evaluating concept of communicative behavior, routine formulas, intercultural communication

Every language has its own concepts for evaluating the metacommunicative behavior of hearers and speakers. For example, *teinei-na*, *shinsetsu-na*, and *namaiki-na* are used in Japanese and *polite*, *friendly*, *rude*, and *arrogant* are used in English. These concepts may be described as “politeness concepts” or “evaluating concepts of communicative behavior” (Ide, Hill, Carnes, Ogino, & Kawasaki, 1992; Marui, Nishijima, Noro, Reinelt, & Yamashita, 1996; Nishijima, 2000).

Previous studies related to these evaluating concepts can be divided into two groups: (1) analysis of evaluating concepts of communicative behavior in particular languages and (2) contrastive analysis of evaluating concepts of communicative behavior between two languages, such as German and Japanese. As for the study of particular languages, various languages have been analyzed like German (Hermanns, 1993, 1995; Reinelt, 1995; Yamashita, 1995, 2003) and Japanese (Nishijima, 1995, 1996). Contrastive studies include analyses of Japanese and American English (Ide et al., 1992), Japanese and German (Kuhlmann, 2005; Marui et al., 1996; Nishijima, 2000), Japanese and Korean (Nam, Nishijima, & Saiki, 2006), and Japanese and Chinese (Nishijima & Tao, 2009; Tao, 2010; Tao & Nishijima, 2010).

These various studies have revealed different tendencies for each language with respect to communicative aspects of the use of evaluating concepts of communicative behavior, or with respect to the interpersonal concerns of speakers and hearers during normal communication in each language. Yet little attention has been paid to differences between pairs of equivalent concepts across two languages. Ide et al. (1992), for example, analyzed these types of equivalent pairs. They compared *polite* and its related concepts *respectful*, *considerate*, *pleasant*, *friendly*, *appropriate*, *casual*, *conceited*, *offensive*, and *rude* in American English with those of Japanese, namely, *teinei-na*, *keii no aru*, *omoiyari no aru*, *kanzi yoi*, *sitasige-na*, *teki-setu-na*, *kidoranai*, *unuborete-iru*, *kanzyou wo kizutukeru*, and *burei-na* (sic).

The results showed that most of the corresponding pairs of concepts are equivalent except one of the pairs: *friendly* in American English and its Japanese counterpart *sitasige-na*. The English concepts of *polite* and *friendly* can be categorized along the same dimension; however, the Japanese corresponding concepts *teinei-na* and *sitasige-na* are quite different (cf. Ide et al., 1992, pp. 290-291). This result is very interesting as there may be differences between corresponding concepts that are regarded as semantically equivalent in the sense of translational relationships typically found in bilingual dictionaries. The details of Ide et al. (1992) will not be discussed any further here. This current study focuses on the corresponding pair *considerate* in American English and *omoiyari no aru* in Japanese in relation to the German corresponding concept *rücksichtsvoll*. This study focuses on these concepts because politeness normally entails general consideration for the other person for the sake of smooth communication. In this sense, *considerate* and its Japanese and German counterparts *omoiyari no aru* and *rücksichtsvoll*, respectively, can be regarded as a very important concept in a polite communication.

According to Ide et al. (1992), *considerate* and its Japanese counterpart *omoiyari no aru* are semantically equivalent; however, there is a slight but very important difference between these concepts. The difference stems from the different communicative perspectives from which the concepts are formulated. This kind of difference in communicative perspectives was previously discussed in Nishijima (2010). According to Nishijima (2010), when speakers produce utterances in Japanese, there is a general tendency to express the scene from inside the situation and, as a result, the perspectives of speakers and hearers blend and are not fully distinguished. In German, on the contrary, when speakers produce utterances, there is a tendency to express the scene from outside the situation. In this way, speakers and hearers are clearly distinguished. Based on this contrastive analysis, a hypothesis can be proposed regarding the two corresponding concepts. Concepts that have been generally regarded as equivalent can actually be different in terms of the communicative perspectives from which the concepts are formulated. In order to examine the hypothesis in this study, the pair of concepts *omoiyari no aru* in Japanese and its German counterpart *rücksichtsvoll* are compared in two ways: (1) based on information taken from lexical descriptions in dictionaries and (2) by the use of routine formulas.

Methods

For the purposes of this paper, information taken from lexical descriptions in comparable, contemporary, and compact dictionaries in Japanese and German as well as routine formulas will be used. The dictionaries used in this study are comparable with respect to various points like publication year, number of entry words, editorial policy, daily use, popularity, and user. Dictionaries for both native and non-native speakers are used in this study.

Japanese

Iwanami Kokugo Jiten [abbreviation: *Iwanami*] (6th ed.). (2000). Tokyo: Iwanamishoten.

Daijirin Kokugo Jiten [abbreviation: *Daijirin*] (2nd ed.). (1995). Tokyo: Sanseido.

Informative Japanese Dictionary for Japanese Learner [abbreviation: *Informative*]. (1995). Tokyo: Shinchosha.

German

Deutsches Universalwörterbuch [abbreviation: *DUW*] (4). (2001). Aufl., Mannheim etc.: Dudenverlag.

Wahrig Deutsches Wörterbuch [abbreviation: *Wahrig*] (7). (2000). Aufl., Gütersloh; München: Bertelsmann.

Wörterbuch Deutsch als Fremdsprache [abbreviation: *DaF*]. (2000). Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter.

The routine formulas come from a survey that was carried out in Kanazawa, Japan in Primary School M during February 2011 where 70 valid responses were provided by Japanese participants. A corresponding survey was carried out in primary schools in several other cities, such as Heidelberg in Germany, during January 2011 where 56 valid responses were provided by German participants. All of the participants were recruited through the guardians of children attending the primary schools. A questionnaire was distributed to the guardians, and they were asked to complete and send them to the researcher.

In order to examine the hypothesis, a questionnaire was carried out from January to February 2011 in both Japan and Germany. Respondents to the survey consisted of guardians of children in the third year attending primary schools in Kanazawa, Japan and in several other cities, such as Heidelberg, Germany.

Respondents were requested to write any appropriate linguistic expressions in response to the following prompt: You see your child pull leaves off trees in a park. What would you say in the following situation?

Results

Lexical Descriptions

Japanese

The phrase *omoiyari no aru* is not defined in any dictionary; however, *omoiyari*, from which *omoiyari no aru* is derived, is defined. Some definitions are given below.

a) *Iwanami*

Doojoo suru koto. Sono kimochi. (p. 153)

Same Feeling do-NOM. Such a feeling.

To feel empathy toward someone. Such a feeling.

b) *Daijirin*

sono hito no mi ni natte kangaeru koto.

the person-POSS body-DAT become and consider -NOMINALIZATION

Sasshi te kizukau koto. Doojo (p. 372)

Read feelings and care-NOMINALIZATION. Same feelings.

To become the body of the person and consider from a point of his/her view.

To read the feelings and care. Empathy.

c) *Informative*

aite no tachiba ni natte kangaeru koto. (p. 126)

Partner-POSS position-DAT become and consider-NOMINALIZATION

To become the position of the partner and consider from a point of his/her view

Consider from a point of view of the position of the partner

German

d) *DUW*

In taktvoller, schonender Art u. Weise (p. 1330)

In tactful caring way

e) *Wahrig*

Voller Rücksicht, Rücksicht nehmen (p. 1066)

Full consideration-POSS, consideration take

Of full consideration, to make a consideration

Cf. *Rücksicht*:

Achtsamkeit auf die Interessen, Gefühle usw. anderer (p. 1066)

Carefulness to the interests, feelings etc. others-POSS

Carefulness to the interests, feelings, etcetera of others

f) *LDaF*

Voller Rücksicht, Rücksicht zeigend (p. 832)

Full consideration POSS, consideration show-PRES. PARTICLE

Of full consideration, showing consideration

Cf. *Rücksicht*:

Verhalten gegenüber anderen Personen, das die besonderen Gefühle,
 Behavior against other Persons, which the special feelings,
 Interessen, Bedürfnisse, Schwächen dieser Personen angemessen
 Interests, needs, weakness these Persons-POSS adequately
 berücksichtigt, feingefühlig beachtet (p. 831)
 consider, sensitively pay attention to

Behavior to other persons, which considers and pays attention to the special feelings, interests, needs, weakness of the persons adequately

Possible Corresponding Expressions:

As for the possible corresponding expressions, the data were analyzed in terms of functional and semantic criteria, classified according to the relevant themes expressed, and then divided into several groups according to main theme for each language as follows:

1. Refers to *pain*
2. Refers to *pity*
3. Refers to *stop*
4. Refers to *inhibition*
5. Refers to *live*
6. Refers to *undisturbed*

These different groups were then compared.

Japanese. Table 1 shows the answers obtained from the Japanese guardians. Two types of expressions were employed by almost 30% of the informants: The pity and the stop type. For example, *kawaisoodesho* (it's a pity, isn't it?) can be found in the pity category, and *yamenasai* (stop) can be found in the stop category. Taken together, these types reflect 60% of the total of all answers. However, it is interesting to note that the pity type is mentioned more often than the stop type.

Table 1: Content Types in Japanese

Ranking	Content-Types	Occurrence Ratio (%)
(1)	Pity	31.4
(2)	Stop	27.1
(3)	Inhibition	24.3
(4)	Live	12.9
(5)	Pain	2.9

German. Table 2 shows the answers obtained from the German guardians. For this group, the results varied widely. The stop type was mentioned most frequently (almost 27%) and the second most frequent type was the inhibition type (14%). For example, *hör damit auf!* (drop it) can be found in the stop category, and *das macht man nicht* (don't do that) can be found in the inhibition category. Both types were understood as directives to stop an undesirable action. A third type also appears: the live type, such as *die pflanze ist auch ein Lebewesen* (the plant is also a living thing).

Table2: Content Types in German

Ranking	Content-Types	Occurrence Ratio (%)
(1)	Pity	26.8
(2)	Stop	14.3
(3)	Inhibition	11.4
(4)	Live	10.0
(5)	Pain	8.6

Discussion:

It is important to point out that there are fine-grained differences between both concepts even though they are generally regarded as semantically equivalent in Ide et al. (1992). The results can be summarized as follows:

Core meaning of *omoiyari no aru* in the Japanese dictionaries:

To share the feelings of the partner or to have empathy toward the partner.

Core meaning of *rücksichtsvoll* in the German dictionaries:

In tactful and careful way

To be careful about the feelings and interests of the others
or to consider requests/wants of the others.

Lexical Information

By comparing the lexical explanations of both concepts above, it is clear that the difference between them has to do with the concept of empathy. The meaning of *omoiyari no aru* contains the concept of *dojo*, or empathy; however, the description of *rücksichtsvoll* does not include this concept. *Dojo* is composed of two parts, *do* (same) and *jo* (feelings), and can be literally translated as "sympathy." *Dojo* essentially corresponds with "empathy" because according to dictionaries the Japanese word means sharing the other's feelings and seeing from the other's perspective. For example, the definition of *dojo* found in Longman-Dictionary of Contemporary English, 1995, is "the ability to understand other people's feelings and problems" (p. 449). *Mi ni naru* ("become [other's] body") and *tachiba ni naru* ("become [other's]

position”) can also be interpreted as “share feelings and problems of others.” These interpretations are possible because it is supposed that in Japanese, the speaker can know exactly how the listener thinks/feels. In Japanese expressions, both persons do not stand in opposition, but rather share their positions. Therefore, the speaker is willing to be psychologically close to the listener, that is, with feelings of empathy toward the interlocutor. In the German dictionaries, however, these explanations of empathy or understanding of the other’s feelings could not be found. In German communication, the speaker and listener are in opposition, and there tends to be a psychological distance between them where each person does not understand what situation their interlocutor is embedded in.

Routine Formulas

The Japanese people mainly use two types of expressions: the pity type and the stop type. The formal pattern for the first type foregrounds the feelings of trees as anthropomorphized inanimate objects and shows sympathy for them. The second type simply involves a direction to stop pulling leaves off trees.

The German people mainly use two types of expressions: the stop type and the inhibition type. Both types function as directives to stop pulling leaves off trees. In German, the live type is less frequent whereas it does occur frequently in Japanese.

Thus, compared to the German people, the Japanese prefer expressions with subjective content and they are more interested in sharing the feelings of or empathy towards a target.

Additional data

In order to make the differences more salient, this section focuses on additional data, including a complex word and a corresponding pair of routine formulas.

In Japanese, there is a complex word, *omoiyari yosan* (budget). It consists of two words: *omoiyari* (to give consideration, “share the feelings and problems of others”) and *yosan* (budget). Taken together, this complex word means “budget allocation for sympathy.” This term is used to refer to Japan’s extra contribution to the cost of stationing U.S. troops in Japan. This contribution was originally not Japan’s duty. Since the appreciation of the yen against the dollar, special consideration based on sympathy, that is, *omoiyari*, has been given to the U.S. troops. The term captures the notion that the U.S. must want more financial support even though it was not directly required. This example illustrates that the word *omoiyari* means a sort of special consideration, which is not required but is made for sympathy.

Furthermore, there is a pair of equivalent routine formulas in Japanese and German: *Watashi no mi nimo natte yo* and *Versuch doch mal, dich in meine Lage zu versetzen*. Both expressions are used in situations where a speaker wants his/her listener to know his/her problematic conditions. Each expression can be paraphrased as follows:

Watashi no mi ni mo natte yo

My body-DAT also become try-IMP MOD.PART

Try to become my body too

Try to share my feelings too.

Mini-naru (the end-form of *mini-natte*) is explained or paraphrased as *dojo suru*. The word *dojo suru* consists of two parts: *dojo* (same feelings) and *suru* (do). According to dictionaries, *dojo suru* means “to share the same feelings as the other.” In Japanese it is expected that the listener not only understand the problematic position of the speaker, but also share the feelings of the speaker because it is assumed that they share perspectives and the listener feels empathy towards the speaker. According to Kuno (1970), the concept of empathy is relevant to the linguistic pattern in Japanese syntax (cf. Makino, 1978). Therefore, in Japanese, it is easy for the listener to share the perspective of the speaker; however, the German equivalent is perceived differently.

Versuch doch mal, dich in meine Lage zu versetzen

Try-IMP. PARTICLE you into my situation to put

That is: Try to put you into my situation.

(cf. *put yourself in my shoes* would be an adequate English translation)

In the German routine formula, it is expected that the hearer understands the speaker's situation but does not share his/her feelings because the hearer and speaker are regarded as completely different individuals who cannot anticipate how the other person may feel.

These examples have clarified that Japanese expressions are more subjectively and experientially formulated on the basis of empathy where speakers and listeners are in psychological closeness, whereas in German, self-other relations are based on opposition and there is a perceived psychological distance between the speaker and hearer.

Conclusion

The comparison of the corresponding pair *omoiyari no aru* in Japanese and *rücksichtsvoll* in German showed that there is also a difference in the communicative perspectives that underlie both concepts. These differences are similar to those between routine formulas of communicative behavior in Japanese and German, that is, differences in internal and external perspectives of the situation (cf. Nishijima, 2010). The Japanese evaluating concept *omoiyari no aru* is explained in terms of psychological closeness and empathy between the speaker and listener. Its German counterpart *rücksichtsvoll*, on the contrary, is explained in terms of an oppositional relationship and psychological distance between the speaker and listener. Additional studies would further clarify these communicative attitudes that are crucial for intercultural and intra-cultural communication, yet they have been paid little attention thus far.

It is unclear whether such different tendencies are also relevant for other evaluating concepts of communicative behavior because the data in this paper are limited. In addition, the use of evaluating concepts is dependent on the social attributes of the participants, a detail that was not considered in this paper. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze other various concepts, especially negative evaluating concepts, from a sociolinguistic point of view.

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