

How can Japanese be considerate to their interlocutor in refusals ? : A study of pragmatic strategies in Japanese discourse

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<https://doi.org/10.15017/5491>

出版情報 : 言語文化論究. 16, pp.147-164, 2002-07-12. 九州大学大学院言語文化研究院
バージョン :
権利関係 :

How can Japanese be considerate to their interlocutor in refusals ? :

A study of pragmatic strategies in Japanese discourse

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore patterns of considerate refusal in Japanese discourse and to describe their characteristics. Following an overview of previous studies, stretches of discourse exemplifying refusal, which were collected by role-play, will be analyzed. While Japanese discourse has been analyzed by many researchers in previous studies, the data collected through role-play in this study is based on situations that Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz (1990) used for discourse completion tests. In these twelve situations, it can be observed how Japanese discourse changes according to differences in the status of the interlocutor and the stimulus. Finally, the processes through which such indirect Japanese utterances will be interpreted as refusals will be clarified, using Sperber and Wilson's inference interpretation of relevance theory (1986). Using these processes, implicated conclusions are based on implicated premises but if these premises are specific to Japanese, the process of interpreting them as being indirect utterances may be unclear to non-Japanese. Hence, in order to make Japanese thinking patterns clear to non-Japanese, it is important to explain these processes.

Introduction

Japanese discourse is often criticized for being difficult to understand because of its ambiguity and indirectness but this is considered to be caused by “double bind” (Bateson and Bateson, 1987), which occurs when communication between people in important relationships have mutually unnoticed contradictions in their messages on different underlying logical levels.

According to Sztatrowski (1993:1), this means that “a Japanese utterance or behavior that seems strange to Americans is regarded as being reasonable and consistent in logic by the Japanese” (translated by the present author). Although the Japanese are said not to be logical, it can be assumed that based on this concept, the Japanese have their own logic as expressed through their utterances and attitudes. If this Japanese

logic can be identified, it may be possible to resolve difficulties of understanding Japanese people who look strange for some foreigners.

Yokoyama (1993) explained that the main characteristics of Japanese refusal are hesitation, incomplete sentences, ending sentences using specific or ambiguous expressions and using adverbs and words to express modesty. However, Laohaburanakit (1995) also observed, through the study of telephone-conversations, that although the Japanese refused higher and equal-status interlocutors' requests and invitations by just giving reasons or impossibility after reasons, they refused lower-status interlocutors by just giving impossibility or reasons after impossibility, indicating that the Japanese tend to show less regard for the feelings of lower-status people than for higher or equal-status people.

Meguro (1994) showed that the Japanese refusal strategy of modesty is difficult for non-Japanese to understand as being an actual refusal, such as saying 'I'm not good at making a speech' in order to refuse a request to make a speech at a party.

Moriyama (1990) examined the refusals of Japanese university students by questionnaire. His study showed that the Japanese tend to select refusal strategies according to changes in familiarity, status and the gender of the interlocutor.

From these studies, it can be hypothesized that Japanese utterances have distinct patterns that the Japanese usually regard as being logical but non-Japanese regard as being illogical. In this study, the Japanese logic of refusals will be clarified by analyzing conversation utterances and further characteristics of this logic will be highlighted. The data was collected through role-plays with Japanese adults living in Japan, in order to gather more information in real-life, face-to-face situations, while many other studies used questionnaire or discourse completion tests.

Method

Research Questions.

1. Can the Japanese complete refusals in any situation in this study? If not, what kinds of situations and why?
2. When completing refusals, what kinds of strategies do they use in process of refusals?
3. How are utterances during the refusals interpreted as refusals?

Subjects.

All subjects are native speakers of Japanese. They are all teachers of Japanese language or culture to foreign students living in Japan. The total number of subjects is 15, which consists of 8 males and 7 females. Their average age is 39.4 years old. Table 1 shows the detail.

Table 1. Number of subjects, gender and age.

age	20's	30's	40's	50's	60's	total	mean age
male	2	2	3	0	1	8	40
female	2	2	1	1	1	7	38.7
total	4	4	4	1	2	15	39.4

Materials and procedures.

All subjects were asked to participate in oral role-playing tasks in pairs. While Speaker A invited, requested, offered or made suggestions to Speaker B, using fixed statements written on his/her instruction cards, B tried to refuse freely without prescribed statements. B was asked to respond as naturally as possible, so as not to offend the interlocutor. After A's first turn, they both continued talking freely to complete the conversation.

The role-plays consisted of twelve situations based on the research of Beebe et al. (1990), which were categorized into four stimulus types eliciting refusals: three requests, three invitations, three offers and three suggestions. Each type of refusal was elicited in three different situations: a lower-status person refusing a higher-status interlocutor, a higher-status person refusing a lower-status interlocutor and an equal-status speaker refusing an equal-status interlocutor. The classification of the role-play stimulus, according to the status of the refusers and the situations, is as follows:

Table 2. Classification of Role-Play

Stimulus type	Refuser's status	Role-play item	Situation
Request	Lower	#12	Stay late at night for job
	Equal	#2	Borrow class notes
	Higher	#1	Request a pay raise
Invitation	Lower	#4	Boss's party
	Equal	#10	Dinner at friend's party
	Higher	#3	Fancy restaurant
Offer	Lower	#11	Promotion to distant town
	Equal	#9	Piece of cake
	Higher	#7	Pay for broken vase
Suggestion	Lower	#6	Write little reminders
	Equal	#5	Try a new diet
	Higher	#8	More conversation in language class

Data analysis.

All conversations produced by the subjects were recorded onto cassette tapes and transcribed. Analysis in this study focused on language expressions and not on intona-

tion, stress or non-verbal body language, although these are also important components of the communication process.

Using Beebe et al.'s (1990) data analysis method, the utterances produced by Speaker B as refusals were analyzed in terms of semantic formulas. Refusals are classified as 'Direct' and 'Indirect' refusals, and 'Adjuncts', that is, preliminary and follow-up remarks that could not stand alone and function as refusals. The list shown below is a modification of Beebe et al.'s original 'Classification of Refusal' (1990: 72).

Classification of Refusal

I. Direct

- A. Performative (e.g., "O-kotowari shimasu." 'I refuse.')
- B. Non-performative statement
 - 1. "No" (e.g., "ieie", "iyâ")
 - 2. Negative willingness/ability (e.g. "Dekinaindesu." '(I) can't do (it)', "Ukagaemasen" '(I) can't go.')

II. Indirect

- A. Statement of regret and apology (e.g. "Zannen desuga." '(I)'m sorry...', "Sumimasen." '(I) apologize.')
- B. Wish (e.g. "O-tetsudai dekireba ii n desu kedo." '(I) wish (I) could help (you) ..')
- C. Excuse, reason, explanation (e.g. "Kodomo ga sono hi wa ie ni iru node." '(My) children will be home that night,' "Zutû ga suru node." '(I) have a headache.')
- D. Statement of alternative
 - 1. I can do X instead of Y (e.g. "Hoka ni dareka sagashite miyô." '(I)'d rather look for another person.')
 - 2. Why don't you do X instead of Y (e.g. "Dareka hoka no hito ni tanonde mitara." 'Why don't (you) ask someone else?')
- E. Statement of future or past acceptance
 - 1. Set condition for future or past acceptance (e.g. "Motto hayaku itte itadaitetara dekita n desuga." 'If (you) had asked (me) earlier, (I) would have...')
 - 2. Possibility of future acceptance (e.g. "Tabun raiki ni nattara age rareru to omoimasu." 'Maybe in the next financial year, (we) can offer (you) a better pay.')
 - 3. Promise of future acceptance (e.g. "Kono tsugi wa iki masu." '(I)'ll come next time.')
- F. Statement of principle (e.g. "Kono jugyô wa bunpô no kurasu desukara." 'This class is on the grammar.')
- G. Statement of philosophy (e.g. "Katachi aru mono wa izure wa kowareru mono dakara." 'Things with shapes eventually break.')
- H. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor
 - 1. Threat or statement of negative consequence to the requester (e.g. "Memo o

totte mo sono memo ga wakaranaku naru node. 'If (I) write the reminder, (I'll forget where it is.)'

2. Guilt trip (e.g. "Sonna koto o saseru wake niwa ikanai." '(I) can't make (you) to do it.')
 3. Criticize the request/requester, etc. (statement of negative feeling or opinion); insult/attack (e.g. "Sonna daietto wa kimochi warui yo." '(I) feel bad with such a diet.')
 4. Request for help, empathy, and assistance by dropping of holding the request.
 5. Let interlocutor off the hook (e.g. "Iti desu yo." 'It's okay.', "Shinpai shinaide kudasai." 'Don't worry (about it).')
 6. Self-defense (e.g. "Watashi nari ni yatte iru n desu." 'I'm doing all I can do.')
- I. Statement of modesty (e.g. "Enryo sasete itadaki masu.")
- J. Acceptance that functions as a refusal
1. Unspecific or indefinite reply
 2. Partial acceptance
 3. Lack of enthusiasm
- K. Avoidance
1. Nonverbal: a. Silence b. Hesitation c. Do nothing d. Physical departure
 2. Verbal: a. Topic Switch b. Joke c. Postponement (e.g. "Kazoku to sōdan shite mimasu." '(I'll discuss it with (my) family.')
 - e. Hedging (e.g. "Ima no tokoro wa nanto itte iika wakaranai desu ne." '(I) don't know what to say now.')
- III. Adjuncts to Refusal
1. Statement of positive opinion/feeling of agreement (e.g. "Sore wa tanoshi sō desu ne." 'That sounds pleasant.')
 2. Statement of empathy (e.g. "Taihen desu ne." '(I realize you) are in a difficult situation.')
 3. Pause filler (e.g. "Êtto." 'Well.', "Ûn." 'Uhh.')
 4. Gratitude/appreciation (e.g. "Arigatō gozaimasu." 'Thank you.')
 5. Address
 6. Signal of ending (e.g. "Ja mata." 'See you.')
 7. Asking interlocutor for more information (e.g. "Dono kurai agete hoshii n desuka." 'How much of an increase do (you) think (you) need ?')
 8. Giving interlocutor some information (e.g. "Hiroshi ga nôto yoku totteru rashii yo." 'I heard Hitoshi's got really good notes.')
 9. Hoping/Encouraging (e.g. "Kondo wa sugu mitsukete kudasai ne." '(I) hope (you) can find (it) soon next time.')
 10. Acceptance of another suggestion
 11. Acknowledgement of understanding an interlocutor (e.g. "Hai, sō desu ne." 'Yeah.')
 12. Confirming (e.g. "E.")
 13. Incomplete utterance

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1. “Can the Japanese complete refusals in this study? If not, what kind of situation and why?”

Some subjects in this study could not complete their refusals in some situations and preferred to accept some requests, invitations and suggestions. Table 3 (below) shows the percentage of subjects who could not complete their refusals. ‘% of male of all’ means the percentage of males of all accepters in the situation.

Table 3. The portion of people who accepted (H=Higher, E=Equal, L=Lower)

Stimulus	Request			Invitation			Offer			Suggestion		
	H.	E.	L.	H.	E.	L.	H.	E.	L.	H.	E.	L.
Refuser's status												
Role-play item	1	2	12	3	10	4	7	9	11	8	5	6
% of accepters	0	33.3	43	7	13	29	0	7	0	0	13	50
% of male of all	0	80	100	100	50	100	0	100	0	0	100	71.4
% of female of all	0	20	0	0	50	0	0	0	0	0	0	28.6

Most of the subjects who could not complete their refusals were of equal or lower status. This result shows that in Japanese society, differences in status influences behavior, that is, opposite attitudes of their real intentions. Japanese people tend to choose to avoid disagreement if they can put up with the requests and suggestions of people of higher-status.

It is possible that this tendency is affected by the notion of Tate-shakai (Nakane, 1967) which means ‘vertical society’. In company situations in particular, 50 % of all subjects accepted their boss’s suggestion of writing little reminders so as not to forget where important things are, and 43% accepted their boss’s request of staying late at night for finishing job. It is also noticeable that most of them were male. This could mean either that males tend to consider it more dangerous to refuse their bosses than females or that females are better than males at refusing politely.

In equal-status situations, some people accepted their classmates’ requests and their friends’ invitations, offers and suggestions. 33.3% of subjects agreed to their classmate’s request to borrow class notes because they are begged. Perhaps because they felt sympathetic, these subjects did not feel they could refuse, even though it was not their fault that their classmates missed the class. This tendency might be affected by the Japanese preference for harmony. In other equal-status situations, only a few subjects accepted interlocutors’ invitations, offers and suggestions because they had no reasons strong enough to refuse them.

In higher-status situations, all subjects but one completed their refusals. This result also appears to be affected by the notion of Tate-shakai (1962). Their strategies of

refusal will be examined in the next section.

Research Question 2. “When completing their refusals, what kinds of strategies do they use in process of refusals ?”

It is inferred from the results of the previous studies that the Japanese choice of refusal strategies may be affected by the status-relationships of the interlocutors and so the results of Research Question 2 will be examined in the light of status difference.

Higher-status refuser's strategies

Situation #1: refusals of request for an increase in salary

In this situation, the refuser is the owner of a bookstore experiencing financial problems and the requester is one of the best employees. No subjects accepted the employee's request. 21% of all refusers used direct refusals. Some of the examples are as follows:

- (1) Dô shitemo muri nandesu kedo ne.
'It is impossible (for me to raise your pay) at any cost.'
- (2) Kibô ni soi kaneru to yûka.
'(I) can not meet (your) request.'

In utterance (1), the expression of nandesu kedo ne softens its direct meaning and in utterance (2), the expression of to yûka expresses the hesitation of the refuser. It is difficult to find comparable English expressions for such Japanese, which are used as strategies to modify directness. These expressions might make it easier for people to use direct formulas.

Indirect strategies and adjuncts used by most refusers in the first and second turn are 'Pause filler', 'Positive opinion', 'Excuse/explanation', 'Request for empathy' and towards the end, 'Postpone' was used to answer an interlocutor's request.

Situation #3: refusals of invitation to fancy restaurant (bribe)

In this situation, the refuser is the president of a printing company who can not afford to purchase printing machines recommended by the interlocutor. The inviter is a salesperson at a printing machine company. Only one subject accepted the invitation.

43% of all refusers used direct refusals. Some of the examples are as follows:

- (3) Chotto o-kotowari itashitai to omou n desu ga.
'(I) would like to refuse (your invitation).'
- (4) Chotto sono go-shôtai wa o-uke dekinai n desu yo.
'(I) can not accept the invitation.'

In utterances (3) and (4), the Japanese word chotto was used as a mitigator of directness, o of o-kotowari and itashitai in (3) and go of go-shôtai and o of o-uke are deferen-

tial to make refusals polite. Using deference in spite of higher status is due to distance between the inside and the outside of his/her company. The English translations of Japanese utterances (3) and (4) do not give exactly the same impressions as Japanese, even though they are all direct formulas.

Indirect formulas and adjuncts used in this situation began with 'Pause filler', 'Excuse', 'Negative opinion', 'Positive opinion', and later 'Regret', 'Set condition of future acceptance'. Some subjects used 'Postpone' to answer the invitation.

Situation #7: refusals of offer of pay for broken vase

In this situation, the refuser is the employer of a cleaning lady and the offerer is a cleaning lady supporting three children. No subjects accepted her offer.

80% of all subjects said "no" to refuse her offer to pay for a broken vase. Various direct Japanese expressions meaning "no", such as *iyaiya*, *iyâ*, *ieie*, which are used by both men and women, can help to reduce the cost to the cleaning lady for something that was her fault.

The main indirect formulas used are 'Off the hook' and 'Philosophy' such as "Things with shapes eventually break.", 'Explanation' and later 'Hoping' that she will take care not to let it happen again.

Situation #8: refusals of suggestion of more conversation in language class

In this situation, the refuser is a university language teacher and the suggester is one of his/her students, who wants to improve speaking skills. No subjects accepted a student's suggestion.

No subjects used direct refusals. They began to reply his or her student's suggestion with 'Confirming' or 'Acknowledgement of understanding an interlocutor' and then, 'Empathy', 'Criticize', 'Principle' of the class whose purpose was to gain grammatical knowledge before practicing conversation. 'Statement of alternative' was used towards the end.

Equal-status refuser's strategies

Situation #2: refusals of request for borrowing class notes for next day's test

In this situation, the refuser and requester are classmates. 33.3% of all subjects accepted a classmate's request, although they were specifically instructed to refuse the request. They did not use any direct formulas. All the subjects who refused managed to complete their refusals directly.

27% of all subjects used direct refusals. Some examples are as follows:

- (5) Konkai wa kasenai n dakedo.
'(I) can not lend (you my notes) this time.'
- (6) Chotto ima kasenai na.

‘(I) can not lend (you my notes) now.’

Wa of konkai wa meaning “this time” in English in utterance (5) expresses negative intention, on this occasion in particular with the possibility of past and future acceptance. Kedo of kasenai n dakedo helps to mitigate directness of this utterance. Ima in utterance (6) implies future possibility of acceptance, although it expresses the impossibility of lending it at that time. Chotto is a mitigator as stated before in another situation.

The most frequent indirect formulas are ‘Criticize’, ‘Statement of negative feeling’, ‘Excuse’, ‘Regret’, and later ‘Statement of alternative’ of asking another person for notes.

Situation #10: refusals of invitation for dinner at friend’s party

In this situation, the refuser and the inviter are friends but the refuser can’t stand this friend’s husband or wife. Only 13% of the subjects accepted a friend’s invitation and did not use any direct refusal. Only one subject refused directly with an utterance of negative ability, such as yūshoku ukagae nai no after explaining the reason for inability.

Most subjects replied with ‘Confirming’ the contents of the invitation and then ‘Acknowledgement of understanding an interlocutor’ in the first turn. Next, they briefly explained the reasons saying such things as “I have another appointment” but most of their interlocutor asked for further details about the appointment. After getting more information from refusers, some inviters saw the possibility of acceptance, and continued inviting. Then some subjects used ‘Hedge’ strategy, such as “I don’t know exactly when another meeting will finish.” These seemingly ambiguous attitudes are supposed to be due to a desire not to offend an interlocutor’s feeling by telling them that the real reason is that he/she can’t stand the interlocutor’s husband or wife. They finished their conversations with ‘Regret’ and ‘Statement of alternative’ of another kind of appointment for the future.

Situation #9: refusals of offer of a piece of cake

The refuser and the offerer are friends in this situation. The refuser feels full after a big lunch. Only one subject accepted an offer.

73% of all subjects refused directly. Refusers seem to find it easy to refuse an offer of a piece of cake by explaining they are full. They replied with ‘No’ or ‘Excuse’, later ‘Statement of alternative’, such as taking it home, and ‘Future acceptance’ in case they get hungry later.

Situation #5: refusals of suggestion of trying a new diet

The refuser and the suggester are friends in this situation. After the refuser had stated that he/she had been putting on weight and that his/her clothes no longer fit him/her, the suggester began to suggest a new diet. Only two subjects, that is, 13% of all subjects, accepted a friend’s suggestion because the interlocutor was worried about the

refuser's health.

27% of all subjects refused directly, but one of them failed to refuse and accepted an interlocutor's suggestion. Examples of direct refusals are as follows:

(7) Yada ne, sonna no.

'(I) hate it.'

(8) Chotto ima daietto suru toiu kimochi niwa narenai n danâ.

'(I) can not bring myself to try (a new) diet now.'

As refusing a friend's suggestion to go on a diet does not cost the refuser or the suggester, directness was expressed.

Various kinds of indirect formulas were used including 'Confirming', 'Statement of negative opinion or feeling', and 'Self-defense', such as "I'm doing my own exercise", and later 'Statement of future acceptance' and 'Statement of alternative'.

Lower-status refuser's strategies

Situation #12: refusals of request of stay late at night for job

The requester is the refuser's boss at a company and the refuser is one of requester's men working with her/him in this situation. 43% of all subjects accepted their boss's request, even though they wanted to leave work and none of them used direct refusals.

21% of all subjects refused directly. Some examples are as follows:

(9) Dôshiyô mo naranai n desu kedomo.

'It is impossible, indeed.'

(10) Kyô wa chotto zangyô wa muri nandesu yo.

'It is a little bit impossible (for me) to do overwork today.'

Desu of naranai n desu in (9) and desu of murinandesu in (10) are honorific expressions used to show respect to a boss, and kedomo in (9) and chotto in (10) show hesitation to refuse. These expressions help to express that refusers wish to follow their boss's instruction, but actually cannot because of another obligation.

In this situation, most refusers used 'Excuse/Explanation' and 'Regret' several times through a stretch of discourse and later 'Statement of alternative', such as doing the job early the next day. Some of them stated 'Positive opinion' or 'Request for empathy'.

Situation #4: refusals of invitation of boss's party

In this situation, the refuser is one of top executives at a very large accounting firm, and the inviter is the boss of top executives there. The refuser had an important appointment with one of his/her friends on the same day of the boss's party. The boss invited him/her immediately before the party. 29% of all subjects accepted the invitation.

14% of all subjects who used direct formulas managed to refuse. Some examples follow:

(11) Dôshite mo nnhh tsugô ga tsuki masen.

‘Well, (I) can not manage to do (it) at all.’

(12) Chotto konkai wa muri desu ne.

‘It is a little bit impossible this time, isn’t it?’

Nnhh in (11) is a Pause-filler, expressing hesitation to refuse and dôsitemo in the same sentence shows the refuser’s careful consideration. Masen of tsuki masen in (11) and desu in (12) express deference. Ne in the end of (12) helps to get empathy from an interlocutor.

Most subjects started with ‘Pause filler’ or ‘Acknowledgement of understanding an interlocutor’ after the invitation, and then ‘Excuse/Explanation’ ‘Regret’ several times through a stretch of discourse. Some used ‘Statement of alternative’ such as suggesting attendance of another person in place of him/herself. Three subjects used the expression “yoroshiku o-negai shimasu” as an ending signal. This expression, which is difficult to translate into English, helps to accommodate the relationship between an inviter and a refuser by expressing a refuser’s hope of maintaining a good relationship after the refusal.

Situation #11: refusals of offer of promotion with move to distant town

In this situation, the refuser works in an advertising agency and the offerer is the refuser’s boss. The boss offers the refuser a raise and a promotion which involves moving to a distant location but the refuser does not want to go. No subjects accepted the offer but many of them postponed their decision in order to discuss it with their family. It is unclear whether or not they would be able to complete refusing at the next meeting.

21% of all subjects used direct formulas. Some examples follow:

(13) Konkai wa o-kotowari shitai n desu ga.

‘(I) would like to refuse (it) this time, but (is it okay)?’

(14) Chotto ima tenkin surunowa muri nandesu yo.

‘It is a little bit impossible (for me) to transfer now.’

O of o-kotowari, desu of shitai n desu in (13) and desu of nandesu in (14) are honorific expressions showing respect to the boss. Grammatically speaking, ga in the end of (13), which is a conjunction, should follow the next sentence but it is omitted here. This tendency of omission sometimes appears in conversations when a speaker might feel bad about speaking clearly and wants to express hesitation so that the interlocutor can infer the omitted words. Chotto in (14) is a mitigator of directness.

Many subjects started with ‘Pause filler’ and used ‘Gratitude’ and ‘Positive opinion’ after an offer. Most of them stated ‘Excuse/Explanation’ several times until the boss’s reason for wanting to transfer became clear. Most reasons for refusals concerned family problems, such as parental sickness or the education of children but as they found it difficult to persuade the boss, they later used ‘Postpone’ to answer the offer. Two sub-

jects stated go-enryo sasete itadakitai to omoi masu as a strategy of 'Modesty'. This word enryo, which is difficult to translate into English, is used to show that the offer is too good for a speaker but requires careful consideration.

Situation #6: refusals of suggestion of writing little reminders not to forget important things

In this situation, the refuser is a company worker and the suggester is the refuser's boss. The refuser is trying to find a report which the boss asked him/her about before. The refuser's desk is messy.

50% of all subjects could not complete the refusal but accepted the suggestion. They explained after the role-plays that they could not refuse it because keeping things messy is also one of their own faults.

14% of all subjects used direct formulas and managed to refuse. One such direct formula is iyaiya meaning "no" and another follows:

(15) Nakanaka seikaku-teki ni dekinakutte.

'It is not easy (for me) to be able (to do it) because of (my) nature'
The combination of nakanaka and dekinakutte implies the experience of having made efforts to do it but failing and by stating that the reason for the failure is due to her nature, she emphasized her difficulty with writing reminders.

Most of the subjects used 'Self-defense', such as having their own organizing style but as the boss would not relent, some subjects used 'Negative consequence', 'Negative opinion' or 'Regret'.

Research Question 3. "How are the utterances in process of refusals interpreted as refusals?"

In this section, some utterances collected in this study are analyzed, using Sperber & Wilson's method of inference interpretation (1986), to clarify some implicated premises in Japanese refusals that did not appear in a comparable study of refusal strategies in English (Furumura, 1998) and seem to be specific to Japanese.

According to Sperber & Wilson (1986:195) "implicated premises must be supplied by the hearer, who must either retrieve them from memory or construct them by developing assumption schemas retrieved from memory... Implicated conclusions are deduced from the explicatures of the utterance and the context..." From this point of view, if a hearer cannot supply an implicated premise of a speaker's utterance, he/she is likely to fail to understand an implicated conclusion. That is, if a Japanese intends to refuse something by stating an indirect utterance, but a non-Japanese hearer cannot supply an implicated premise of the utterance, he/she might not understand Japanese intention of refusing. For this reason, some implicated premises in Japanese refusals are clarified here.

Higher-status refusals

Situation #1: refusals of request of raise in pay

Speaker A (male) is a bookstore worker and speaker B (male) is the owner.

A: Mô sukoshi kyūryō o agete itadaitara totemo tasukaru n desu ga.

'If (you) raise (my) pay a little, it would be very helpful (for me).'

(16) B: Chotto muzukashii n dakedo ne.

'It is a little bit difficult (to raise a pay).'

Explicature of (16): Speaker B finds it a little bit difficult for him to raise the hearer's pay.

Implicated premise: If someone finds it a little bit difficult for him to raise your pay, he will not raise your pay.

Implicated conclusion: Speaker B does not raise speaker A's pay.

Situation #3: refusals of invitation of fancy restaurant (bribe)

Speaker A (female) is a salesperson and speaker B (female) is a buyer as the president of a company.

A: Kondo rutiche de oshokuji demo shinagara go-keiyaku no hanashi o susume sasete itadake nai de shōka

'With having dinner at 'Lutece' next time, couldn't I carry forward the discussion of contract (with you) ?'

(17) B: Sore wa komari masu nê.

'It bothers (me).'

Explicature of (17): The hearer's invitation bothers speaker B.

Implicated premise: If your invitation bothers a person, she will not accept it.

Implicated conclusion: Speaker B does not accept speaker A's invitation.

Equal-status refusals

Situation #2: refusals of request to borrow class notes for next day's test

Speaker A (female) and B (male) are friends.

A: Anatano nōto o mô ichido kashite kurenai kana.

'Will (you) lend (me) your notes again ?'

(18) B: Ima hoka no hito ni kashite shimatte ite itsu kaette kuruka wakaranai desu yo.

'As (I) lent (it) to another person, (I) don't know when (it) will come back (to me).'

Explicature of (18): As speaker B lent the notes the hearer wants to borrow to another person, speaker B does not know when it will come back to him.

Implicated premise: If someone does not know when the notes you want to borrow will come back to him, he will not lend you the notes.

Implicated conclusion: Speaker B does not lend his notes to speaker A.

Situation #5: refusals of suggestion of trying a new diet

Speaker A (female) and speaker B (female) are friends.

A: Nê kono aida watashi ga oshieta ano daietto dakedo are o tameshite mitara.

‘Hey! why don’t you try that new diet I’ve been telling you about?’

(19) B: Watashi motto i yûjin shôkai suru, watashi yori motto hutotte iru hito, sono hito ni susumete agete.

‘(As) I’m going to introduce a more suitable person who is fatter than I, will (you) suggest (it) to her?’

Explicature of (19): Speaker B is going to introduce the hearer to a more suitable person for a new diet the hearer is suggesting to her, and hopes that the hearer will suggest it to another person instead of her.

Implicated premise: If someone is going to introduce you a more suitable person for a new diet you are suggesting to her, and hopes that you will suggest it to another person instead of her, she will not accept your suggestion.

Implicated conclusion: Speaker B does not accept speaker A’s suggestion.

Lower-status refusals

Situation #12: refusals of request of stay late at night for job

Speaker A (male) is a boss and speaker B (female) is one of his workers at a company.

A: Yokereba konya ato ichi nijikan hodo zangyô shite kureru to kono sigoto ga owaru n da kedo nâ.

‘If (you) do not mind doing overwork more one or two hours, this work will be finished.’

(20) B: Hoka no hi dattara yorokonde suru n desu keredo.

‘If (you requested) another day, (I) will be willing to do overtime work.’

Explicature of (20): If the hearer requested speaker B to do overtime work another day, she would be willing to do overtime work.

Implicated premise: If you request someone to do overtime work not another day, but today, and she is not willing to do overtime work, she will not do overtime work.

Implicated conclusion: Speaker B does not do overtime work today.

Situation #4: refusals of invitation of boss’s party

Speaker A (male) is the boss of top executives at an accounting company and speaker B (female) is one of top executives there.

A: Kondo no nichiyô-bi uchi de chotto shita pâtî o yaru tsumori nanda kedo ne. Anata no tsugô wa dô desu ka.

'Next Sunday my wife and I are having a little party. What do you say ?'

(21) B: Shinseki no hôji ga ari mashite, yakusoku shitemo moshi ukagae nai to iukoto ni naru to o-komari ni naru to omoi masu shi.

'I suppose (you) will be annoyed in case (I) promise but can not come (to your party), (as I) have (my) relative's Buddhist memorial service (on that day).'

Explicature of (21): Speaker B supposes the hearer will be annoyed in case she promises but cannot come to the hearer's party, as speaker B has her relative's Buddhist memorial service on the same day of the hearer's invitation.

Implicated premise: If someone supposes you will be annoyed in case she promises but can not come to your party, as she has her relative's Buddhist memorial service on the same day of your invitation, she will not accept your invitation.

Implicate conclusion: Speaker B does not accept speaker A's invitation.

Summary and Conclusion

So far in this study, stretches of Japanese refusal discourse have been examined to identify their main characteristics. Many researchers have sought to explain or argued about the nature of Japanese society and culture. This study provides some evidence of the characteristics found in previous studies and seeks to furnish further details so as to deepen understanding of Japanese.

The result that in a lower-status situation, about half the subjects accepted their boss's suggestion and request in a company setting, is evidence for Tate-shakai 'vertical society' and preference of harmony in a group. The result that some subjects used direct formulas to refuse in all situations, even in a lower-status situation, goes against the assertion that Japanese is ambiguous but these direct formulas are also accompanied by tact, such as mitigating directness, showing politeness with deference, and expressing hesitation of refusing not to offend an interlocutor's feelings.

While many native speakers of English have been observed using various kinds of indirect refusal formulas (Furumura, 1998), in this study the Japanese are also observed to use the same strategies as in English, although some of them differ in linguistic expressions.

However, some formulas not found in role-plays collected in a previous study (Furumura, 1998) were found in this study. They were analyzed for the implicated premises in inference interpretation of refusing. This analysis revealed that, in Japanese, referring to difficulty, annoyance, unclearness and unwillingness to do something an interlocutor proposed, tends to imply the speaker's intention of refusing. Beebe,

Takahashi, & Uliss-Welts (1990) found evidence that Japanese people transferred Japanese strategies of refusals into English. The tendency of implying found in this study might happen in English when Japanese are speaking English.

In this study, 174 stretches of Japanese discourse, collected by role-play, were analyzed. Only 12 subjects were used, which is too few to generalize about the results found in the study but nevertheless, the data analyzed is helpful for us to understand Japanese because it was produced by the real interaction of several Japanese speakers.

Although data collected in role-play may differ slightly from natural discourse, it is very difficult to collect naturally occurring data without violating ethics. From this point of view, role-play is a more helpful tool for gathering data about real discourse than written questionnaires. It is necessary to plan settings in which subjects can produce more natural conversations for data gathering purposes.

By analyzing a large number of interactive utterances, values underlying language will be revealed shedding light on members of a society who have different personalities but exhibit consistent patterns of discourse. Revealing such patterns will make it easier for people to understand each other in a world where people from different cultural backgrounds often communicate on different premises. One way of resolving such difference is through analyzing discourse and conversation.

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How can Japanese be considerate to their interlocutor in refusals ? :

A study of pragmatic strategies in Japanese discourse

日本語の談話はこれまでに数多く研究されてきている。日本人の会話のスタイルは例えばアメリカ人にとっては論理的でないと感じられても、日本人自身にとっては独自の論理性を含み、曖昧な発話であってもその含意された意味を日本人は推測しながら相互にコミュニケーションを行っている。本研究では、「断り」の談話を12場面設定し日本人母語話者によるロールプレーを実施し、日本人の「断り」方略の特徴を明らかにした。自分より地位が上の人に対しては、本当は断りたいにも関わらず「断り」を貫き通すことができない場面がいくつかあり、「タテ社会」の特徴が被験者の方略に影響を与えていることが確認された。一方、「タテ社会」であっても地位が上である相手の感情を害さずに「断り」に成功している例を挙げ、その特徴を明らかにした。自分より下の地位や同等の地位の人には「直接的」に断っている場面も数多く観察された。これは、日本人が「曖昧さ」を好むという通説を覆す結果であるが、その「直接的」な表現には相手の感情に配慮した工夫が数多く観察された。本研究の最後の部分では、日本人母語話者が「断り」の意図をもって発した間接的な「断り」表現を、聞き手がどのようにして「断り」として推意するのかという過程を、Sperber & Wilson (1986)の関連性理論を用いて明らかにし、その発話を発した被験者のもつ推意前提のいくつかを例示した。