A Contrastive Analysis of Some Words on Living
in Japanese and French

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1.   Aim

I selected four French words, *maison*, *chez-soi*, *foyer* and *famille*, taking the four Japanese words discussed in Yoshikawa's paper into consideration. The reason why I chose these four French words is that they are listed as basic and important words on living and dwelling expressions in French dictionaries. However, it is not obvious how the meaning categories of these words differ from each other or overlap each other. I, therefore, investigated them in relation to their co-occurrence with adjectives, adjectival phrases, and give several comments to the present usage of the housing and dwelling expressions in French language which I inferred from my investigation.* I hope that this kind of research will make a small contribution to the French language education in Japan and the understanding of French people and culture. [1]

2.   Collocability with other terms
2.1   Physical space

		maison	chez-soi	foyer
(1)	un (une) grand(e)… (a big …)	●	? X	O ?
(2)	un (une) large… (a wide …)	?	X	? X
(3)	un (une) allongé(e)… (a long and narrow…)	O ?	X	X

	maison	chez-soi	foyer

(4) un (une) … avec sous-sol (which has a basement)	●	X	O
(5) un (une)…a un étage (two-storied)	●	X	O
(6) un (une) … en béton armé (of a reinforced concrete)	●	X	O

In the examples from (1) to (6), we can see a very contrastive result between *maison* and *chez-soi* . It is usually said that *chez-soi* refers to <u>my (own) dwelling </u>in English, but it seldom occurs with the words which are generally used for modifying a real or concrete space. According to this, therefore, I can guess that *chez-soi* does not have a semantic feature (a real space).

Some of the informants, however, mentioned that they feel a certain difficulty for using the word *chez-soi* as a noun, because it was diachronically given by the nominalization of the adverb phrase *chez soi* and does not have a fixed function as a noun. Therefore, the rare co-occurrence with the adjectives might be caused by this grammatical constraint. On the contrary, the word *maison* shows much better co-occurrence with these modifiers.

On the word *foyer*, most of the informants said that they imagined a public building like *foyer d' étudiants* (a student dormitory) or *foyer de vieillards* (a home for the aged) in this case.

2.2   Empathy

	maison	chez-soi	foyer	famille
(7) un (une) … plaisant(e) (a pleasant…)	●	O ?	●	O ?
(8) un (une) … triste (a sad …)	●	?	O	●
(9) un (une) … effrayant(e) (a fearful…)	●	? X	?	O
(10) un (une) … solitaire (a solitary or lonely…)	O	? X	?	O
(11) un (une) … heureux(se) a happy …)	O	?	●	●

In the examples (7) to (11), the *maison* constantly indicates a good occurrence with

the adjectives which express emotion.

The word *chez-soi*, however, does not co-occur well by the same syntactic reason mentioned before.

Like *maison*   it is also remarkable that the word *foyer*   shows a good co-occurrence here, especially, in (7) and (11) where 100 % of the informants approved them. I can say that this situation is similar to that of the Japanese word *katei*.   The word *famille*   shows almost the same tendency of co-occurrence as *maison*. It is because that *famille*   can be intuitively understood since it has a semantic feature (animate) as all the informants pointed out.

2.3   Positivity

		maison	chez-soi	foyer	famille
(12)	un (une) bon(ne) … (a good …)	●	O ?	O	●
(13)	un (une) mauvais(e)… (a bad …)	●	X	O	O
(14)	un (une) … tranquille (a quiet…)	●	O	O	●
(15)	un (une) … bruyant(e) (a noisy…)	●	X	O	O

In the examples (12) to (15), the positive version usually indicates better co-occurrence rather than the negative one like the situation in Japanese which Professor Yoshikawa mentioned before.

In French, however, the gap between the positive and the negative is smaller than that of Japanese or English though I cannot find any reasonable cause for it.

2.4   Continuity

		maison	chez-soi	foyer	famille
(16)	un(une) vieux (vieille)… (an old…)	●	? X	O	●

		maison	chez-soi	foyer	famille
(17)	un (une) … réputé(e)	O	? X	?	O

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	maison	chez soi	foyer	famille
		(a reputable…)		
(18) Un (Une) … est prospere.	●	X	O ?	●
(… is prosperous.)				
(19) hériter…	O	?	?	?
(to inherit …)				

As I expected, the word *maison* can easily co-occur with the adjectives and predicates which are semantically related to a continuation of time. I suppose that *maison* can still imply <u>continuity,</u> namely, lineage, even though the royalty and nobility have already disappeared in France. It is natural that *chez-soi* cannot be used here because of the possession of the semantic marker (objectiveness) that I discussed before. The reason why the word *foyer* shows a considerably good co-occurrence with this kind of adjectives here is that it is used to express a public building as I mentioned in subsection 2.1, and so the continuity of *foyer* exists as a part of a public building. *Famille* in the example (19) can be only used in the context *hériter quelque chose d'une famille* (to inherit something from a family).

2.5   Life space

	maison	chez soi	foyer	famille
(20) éduquer un enfant dans…	O	●	O	O
(to educate a child in/at…)				
(21) élever un enfant dans…	O	●	O	O
(to bring up a child in/at…)				
(22) cuisiner dans	O	●	?	O ?
(to cook in/at…)				
(23) manger dans…	O	●	O ?	O
(to eat in/at…)				
(24) se coucher dans…	O	O ?	? X	? X
(to go to bed in/at…)				

	maison	chez-soi	foyer	famille
(25) mourir dans	O	●	O ?	O ?
(to die in/at…)				
(26) accoucher dans	O	●	? X	? X
(to bear a child in/at…)				
(27) naître dans…	●	O	O ?	O

(to be born in/at…)

(28) se reposer dans…	•	O	O	O
(to take a rest in/at…)				
(29) jouer aux cartes dans…	•	O	O ?	O
(to play cards in/at)				

We can see that every word shows a good acceptability in examples (20) and (21) where verbs concerned with education are used. From (22) to (27) in which all the verbs express routine acts in our daily life, *maison* gives a good co-occurrence with them but "*foyer*" does not. This means that the word *foyer* cannot be an objective private space though it can be used as an objective public space as argued before. In the case of refreshment like (28) and (29), every word shows a good co-occurrence. I think I have to refer to the co-occurrence of *chez soi* and verbs. From (20) to (29) I used *chez soi* not a hyphenated *chez-soi*. In a prepositional phrase where a noun *chez-soi* is used every example phrase here is not acceptable. This is probably caused by the grammatical constraint which I mentioned before. In the case that an adverbial phrase expressing a space is required an original adverbial phrase non-hyphenated *chez soi* is used as an antecedent. [1]

3.   Conclusion

Generally speaking, it can be claimed that the word *maison* constantly indicates a good co-occurrence among the four words. This implies that *maison* has a wide range of semantic categories which can semantically cover the three Japanese words *ie, uchi*, and *katei*. A semantically extended usage of the word *maison* can be seen in some compound expressions like *maison de campagne* (house in a countrystyle) for *villa* (villa), or *petite maison de banlieue* (small house in a suburb) for *pavillon* (pavilion). This is also one of the examples which shows a wider range of the meaning of *maison*.

Foyer is one of the most difficult words to be translated. Anthropologist Margaret Mead says in her book *Themes in French Culture* :

"... a clear view of *le foyer* is crucial to understanding of French national culture... if we translate *foyer* into house, home or family in English, it comes to distorting the total meaning."

In my investigation, there were also many cases where the informants became confused in judging the acceptability of *foyer*. As a matter of fact, *foyer* was etymologically derived from the Latin word *focus* which has come to be <u>fire</u> in English.

In those days, sometimes even nowadays, fire was located in the center of a house and family members usually gathered there like a traditional Japanese house which is discussed in Nishikawa's article in this issue.

Fireplaces in the Western world also played an important role in the house and added symbolic meaning to a private dwelling. And then the expanding semantic feature "symbolic or abstract space" like in a household or home in English was given. Now the style of life in France has changed and there are fewer chances that people gather around a fireplace. The *foyer*, therefore, lost one of its meanings, namely, "an objective private space." The other symbolic connotation is still retained.

We have to say that the word *chez soi* has a special grammatical constraint as I mentioned before. Therefore, the expressions like *mon chez-soi* or *son chez-soi* where *chez soi* is used as a noun, are probably idiomatic or exceptional. I can say that the nominal usage of "*chez-soi*" is not fixed yet.

Notes

*   The investigation was carried out by asking nine well-educated French native speakers to judge the possibility of co-occurrence with other terms.

1.   Mermet(1985) is a kind of report of a nationwide poll. In the Japanese translation of his report, I can notice that *katei* is given as a word which corresponds to several original French words like *maison, foyer, ménage, famille*, and *couple*. This is one of the examples of how difficult it is to define differences and similarities between two languages at the level of vocabulary. In his report, *foyer* and *ménage* are given as a plural form with an article like *les foyers* and *les ménages.* I used a singular form without an article in my questionnaire to the informants. I guess, therefore, they were slightly confused and their responses might be influenced by this grammatical choice.

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