Different Strategies in Apologetic Situations: A Contrastive Analysis of Functionally Equivalent Routine Formulas in Japanese and German

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***Abstract*:** By comparing some functionally equivalent routine formulas in Japanese and German in corresponding situations, it is hypothesized that different strategies are reflected in formulation patterns of routine formulas in both languages. For example, different expressions are used by parents in Japanese and German if their child bumps into a post. The two expressions are often used in corresponding situations in both Japan and Germany and can therefore be regarded as functionally equivalent, although the used strategies differ, i.e., the Japanese expression is based on sharing the dangerous situation between the parent and the child, whereas the German one focuses on providing an appropriate direction to the child. Comparing such functionally equivalent routine formulas suggests that they reflect different strategies, including politeness, in corresponding situations. This study tested this hypothesis by comparing functionally equivalent routine formulas uttered in corresponding apologetic situations in the socialization process of controlling children's social behavior in Japan and Germany. The results confirm the hypothesis and suggest that the difference in strategy influences the communicative behaviors of Japanese and German speakers. Concerning politeness, the results reveal the aspects considered polite in corresponding routine formulas of the two languages. Furthermore, the communicative normality of each language is also reflected in its respective routine formulas and focus of attention in interactions. This information may be applied toward more efficient foreign language teaching.

***Keywords*:** Routine formula, apology, strategy, politeness, Japanese, German

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

It has often been pointed out that each language has a preferred style of linguistic expression (Gumperz & Levinson, 1996; Ikegami, 2000; Nakamura, 2004). In the past, these differences were discussed in relation to thought in the framework of Sapir-Whorf's linguistic relativity theory. Later, the relativity theory concerning the direct relationship between language and thought was questioned from the viewpoint of linguistic universals. However, cognitive linguistics has shed new light on the relationship between language and cognition, discussing it as a reflection of the human cognitive process of formalizing linguistic expressions.

Various languages have been compared from a cognitive linguistic point of view, including English and Japanese. According to Nakamura (2004, pp. 4-7), English belongs to the set of

subject-preferential languages and Japanese to topic-preferential languages. Therefore, English speakers prefer transitive constructions such as *I broke a string on my guitar*. In contrast, Japanese speakers prefer a topic and intransitive construction, as in *Watashi no guitar wa gen ga kireta* [As for my guitar, a string broke.] Furthermore, languages can focus on different perspectives, from which linguistic expressions are formulated. Many studies have addressed such perspectives (Kuno, 1976; Ikegami, 2000; Kanaya, 2004; Nakamura, 2004; Narita, 2009; Nomura, 2010; Nishijima, 2010). Among them, translation-based comparisons have often been made; for example, Ikegami (2000) compared Japanese sentences with their English translations, and Narita (2009), Nomura (2010) and Nishijima (2010) analyzed and contrasted Japanese and German correspondences. Indeed, these studies clearly demonstrated that Japanese differs from English or German with respect to the perspectives from which sentences are formulated. For example, Ikegami (2000, pp. 290-293) compared the first sentence of a Japanese literary text, *Yukiguni* [Snow Country] by Kawabata Yasunari, the first Nobel Prize winner for literature in Japan, with its English and German translations and pointed out that the corresponding sentences were formulated from different perspectives as follows:

1. *Kokkyo-no nagai tonneru-o nukeru-to yukiguni*
   Boundary-POSS long tunnel-OBJ go.through-when snow.country
   deatta.
   be.PAST

Sentence (1) can be translated literally, word for word, as "When going through the boundary long tunnel, the snow country was." As seen immediately from the word for word translation, the original Japanese sentence has no clear surface-level subject. Therefore, it is not apparent who went through the tunnel into the snow country. In the scene, the event of going through the tunnel into the snow country is depicted from a perspective inside the situation, that is, from inside the train, probably from/through the eyes of the main figure of the story. It is namely described subjectively or experientially. How then can the Japanese sentence be translated into English and German?

2. *The train came out of the long tunnel into the snow country.*
   (translated by E. G. Seidensticker)
3. *Als der Zug aus dem langen Grenztunnel herauskroch,*
   as the train out of the long boundary.tunnel out.creep.PAST,
   lag das Schneeland. (translated by O. Benl)
   lie.PAST the snow.country

Examples (2) and (3) are the English and German translation of (1), respectively. A word for word translation of (3) is "When the train crept out of the long boundary tunnel, the snow country lay." The English and German translations have subjects, *the train* and *der Zug*, respectively. Therefore, it can be observed that the corresponding scenes in English or in German are both described objectively from a perspective outside the situation where the main figure is located.

1.2. Description of Problem

Previous studies have compared semantically corresponding sentences in two languages. With the help of translations, corresponding sentences of two languages, such as Japanese and English or Japanese and German, can be compared because they refer to the same event (Ikegami, 2000; Narita, 2009; Nomura, 2010). However, translations are necessarily influenced by the translator's individual dispositions or the peculiarities of the source language. As a result of these influences, the use of translation for comparison of linguistic expression patterns of different languages has methodological problems in terms of comparability and objectivity (Nishijima, 2013b).

Figure 1. No-entry Sign

Figure 1 is a photo the author took in a hot spring resort in Kyushu, southwest Japan. It is a no-entry sign for tourists. The first sentence on the sign is written in Japanese and can be explained as follows:

4. *hodō gai tachiiri kinshi*（步道外立入禁止）
   Walking.path outside entry forbidden
   "entry outside the walking path is forbidden"

It means "No entry outside the walking path." The Japanese sentence is formulated from the perspective of a person who is on the walking path and sees the sign directly in that situation. The expression tells a visitor who is reading it not to enter a place outside the area of the walking path. This Japanese sentence is translated into three languages. The English one is placed directly under the Japanese expression:

5. *Keep within the boundary fences.*

Sentence (5) is indeed grammatically correct, but it is apparent that its meaning differs from the Japanese sentence above, although it is expected that both sentences are functionally equivalent. The English sentence was mistakenly translated concerning the perspective because

an incorrect preposition was selected for the context. It can be considered as a typical example of negative transfer of the preferred perspective of the translator's native language, i.e., Japanese. The incorrect translation gives the instruction that visitors should stay in the dangerous area. An appropriate translation would be:

6. *Keep behind the boundary fences.*

In this way, translation-based comparison could be problematic.

To compare corresponding expressions between two languages more objectively, therefore, one must use functionally equivalent, conventionalized expressions that are spoken in corresponding situations in the respective societies where the languages are spoken, such as expressions commonly found on signs in public spaces or spoken in routine formulas in the family and socialization process.

1.3. Routine Formulas

1.3.1. Sign Expressions

Below are examples of expressions that commonly appear on public signs in Japanese and German. Suppose that you are on an omnibus. If it stops at the next station, the following messages might appear at the front of the bus:

7. *Tsugi tomarimasu.*
   next stop.POLITE
   '((I/we) stop (at the) next (station)).'
8. *Wagen hält.*
   vehicle stops

As in the sentence at the beginning of *Yukiguni* (Snow Country), discussed in Ikegami (2000), the Japanese expression (7) does not have a surface-level subject. It simply conveys that I, we, or the bus we are on is going to stop at the next station. The scene is described from the perspective inside the situation (i.e., from within the bus, which we are in) and the bus itself is not mentioned explicitly. Note that the expression in Japanese involves a polite form. The German expression (8), on the other hand, has a third-person subject, *Wagen*. The bus (*Wagen* in (8)) is observed from a perspective outside the situation because the bus is mentioned as *Wagen* in the third person. By comparing these corresponding sign expressions, different perspectives can be revealed in a more objective fashion (see Nishijima, 2013b).

1.3.2. Routine Formulas for Communicative Behavior

In addition to expressions on public signs, various types of routine formulas are used in everyday life. For example, in the socialization process, expressions such as *Say* "*please*" and *Did you say "thank you?"* are often spoken to children. These can be called routine formulas for controlling

communicative behavior because they are used in socialization processes that teach children to behave appropriately in particular situations. Different languages have functionally equivalent routine formulas for controlling communicative behavior, for example, *Arigatoo wa?* [Did you say "thank you?"] in Japanese, and *Hast du danke schön gesagt?* [Did you say "thank you?"] in German. Furthermore, consider a parent walking with his or her child and the child bumping into a post; a Japanese parent and a German one will cry out *Abunai!* [Dangerous!], and *Vorsicht!* [Caution!], respectively (Nishijima, 2010). Because these expressions are often used in corresponding situations in Japanese and German to remind children to avoid danger, they can be regarded as functionally equivalent. As mentioned above, these routine formulas inform children of appropriate behavior in particular situations. It can then be expected that comparing the routine formulas in two languages reveals which aspects of communication receive attention in each language, in addition to the difference in perspectives from which sentences are formulated.

2. Hypothesis

2.1. Hypothesis in General

As mentioned above, functionally equivalent routine formulas used in corresponding situations in Japan and Germany depict the same event in different styles or fashions, especially with respect to perspectives and politeness. Furthermore, they can also be formulated interactionally in different ways because what is considered relevant to the communication of each language differs from the other. It can then be hypothesized that different interactional aspects are focused on in corresponding situations in Japanese and German culture (cf. Ehlich & Rehbein, 1986).

Routine formulas for controlling communicative behavior tend to be constructed from a perspective typical of each language and to convey what is culturally relevant for communication. If perspectives can be conventionally acquired through repeated hearing and speaking of routine formulas as part of the socialization process, the formulas must be typically constructed in accordance with the perspective each language prefers. In order to test this hypothesis, a questionnaire survey was administered in Japan and Germany.

2.2. Operational Hypothesis

Japanese routine formulas are constructed as follows: for a sentence formalizing perspective, opposition between the speaker and hearer is not preferable; integrated perspective is required; the perspective is located within the situation. German routine formulas, on the other hand, are constructed as follows: opposition between speaker and hearer is required; the speaker indicates a direction to the interlocutor; competitive fashion is preferred; the perspective is located outside the situation.

3. Methods

In order to test the hypothesis and find out what aspects are considered relevant to the

corresponding interactional situation in socialization processes in Japan and Germany, a questionnaire was carried out in January 2011 in primary schools in midsize German cities, including Heidelberg, Regensburg, and Düsseldorf. A total of 56 valid responses were provided by the German participants. A corresponding survey was carried out in primary schools in Kanazawa, Japan in February 2011, and 77 valid responses were received from Japanese participants. All the participants were recruited from among the parents of eight to nine-year-old children attending the selected schools. The questionnaire was distributed to the parents, and they were asked to complete it and mail it back to the researcher.

In the questionnaire, respondents were requested to write any appropriate linguistic expressions in response to the following question: "What would you say to your child if he or she did the following in each of these eight situations?"

This paper focuses on one particular situation presented in the questionnaire: "Your child ran on the sidewalk and bumped into a small child. The small child fell down and began to cry. But your child did nothing and stood still."

4. Results

4.1. Classification

The data were analyzed in terms of functional and semantic criteria and classified according to the relevant items. The analysis also considered whether the parents indicated that they would say something directly to the crying child.

The expressions in both languages were divided mainly into six groups on the basis of their contents as follows:

(4-1) Refers to Apology
In this type, apology was requested, such as *chanto ayamari nasai* [Apologize properly (to the child)] in Japanese, and *Bitte entschuldige Dich sofort bei dem Kind* [please apologize to the child immediately] in German.
(4-2) Refers to Apology and Ok?
In this type, apology was made, and then the crying child was asked whether he or she was ok, with a question such as *gomenne. daijōbu datta?* [I'm sorry. Were you ok?] in Japanese. This type was not available in German.
(4-3) Refers to Ok?
In this type, it was questioned whether the crying child was okay, with e.g. *daijōbu?* [Were you ok]' in Japanese. This type was also not available in German.
(4-4) Refers to Apology and Fact
In this type, the fact that the child was responsible for the incident was pointed out and apology was requested, such as *warui nowa anata. ayamari nasai* [The one to blame is you. Apologize (to the child)] in Japanese, and *Hast du das Kind nicht gesehen? Entschuldige dich mal* [Didn't you see the child? Apologize (to him or her)] in German.
(4-5) Refers to Help/Care and Apology
In this type, help to the child was instructed and apology was requested, such as with

ayamari nasai. okoshite agenasai [Apologize (to the child). Help up the child] in Japanese, and *Würdest Du bitte dem Kind aufhelfen und dich entschuldigen*! [Would you please help up the child and apologize to him or her!] in German.

(4-6) Refers to Help/Care

In this type, help to the crying child was ordered with something like *Kümmere dich und tröste das Kind* [take care of the child and comfort him or her] in German. This type was not available in Japanese.

4.2. Speaker-inclusive or -exclusive

In the answers, two types of behavior were distinguished: 1) parents would go to the crying child and apologize directly instead of instructing their child to do it; 2) parents would instruct their child to apologize to the crying child. The former and the latter can be called speaker-inclusive and speaker-exclusive, respectively. Table 1 shows the results that Japanese parents (about 30%) would go to the crying child directly more often than German ones (about 10%).

Table 1. Speaker-inclusive or -exclusive

Language	Speaker-inclusive or -exclusive	Rate (Number)
Japanese parents (N=77)	speak to crying child directly (speaker-inclusive)	28.6%*(22)
	instruct his/her own child (speaker-exclusive)	71.4% (55)
German parents (N=56)	speak to crying child directly (speaker-inclusive)	10.7% (6)
	instruct his/her own child (speaker-exclusive)	89.3% (50)

Significant difference (*t*-test): * $p < .05$

4.3. Speaker-inclusive Case

In this section, expressions of the speaker-inclusive type are shown. The type can be further divided into two subgroups: 1) Parents would go to the crying child alone; 2) they would go to him or her with their child.

Table 2 shows the results of Japanese parents' behavior.

Table 2. Japanese Parents

To Crying Child		28.6% (22)
Alone	Ok? + Apology	10.4% (8)
	Apology	9.1% (7)
	Ok?	6.5% (5)
With his or her own child	Apology + Ok?	2.6% (2)

Elementally, they would apologize to the crying child directly and ask him or her whether he or she is ok.

Table 3 then demonstrates the results of German parents' behavior.

Table 3. German Parents

To Crying Child		10.7% (6)
Alone	Help/Care	5.4% (3)
	Apology	1.8% (1)
With his/her own child	Help/Care	3.6% (2)

In contrast to Japanese parents, German parents would not always apologize to the crying child but would give help to him or her.

4.4. Speaker-exclusive Case

In this section, the results of speaker-exclusive case are presented. Table 4 shows the results when Japanese parents address their own child and what they would instruct him or her to do.

Table 4. Speaker-exclusive Type in Japanese

Speaker-exclusive Type	**71.4% (55)**
Apology + Fact	29.9% (23)
Apology	22.1% (17)
Apology + Ok?	6.5% (5)
Question	5.2% (4)
Fact	3.9% (3)
Ok?	2.6% (2)
Other	1.3% (1)

Most of Japanese parents would instruct their child to apologize to the crying child. The sum of the top three is 58.1% and accounts for more than 80% of the exclusive type.

On the other hand, German parents would instruct their child to apologize to the crying child less than Japanese (67% of the exclusive type), as shown in table 5. Instead , they would request that their child help or care for the crying child.

Table 5. Speaker-exclusive Type in German

Speaker-exclusive Type	**89.3% (50)**
Apology	30.4% (17)
Apology + Help/Care	28.6% (16)
Help/Care	14.3% (8)
Fact	12.5% (7)
Other	3.6% (2)

4.5. Significant Difference (*t*-test)

4.5.1. Parents-inclusive

Significant differences (*t*-test) were found for parents-involvement in the event and apologizing to the crying child directly by themselves.

Parents are involved in the situation: Japanese > German
Japanese (28.6% (22/77)) * vs. German (10.7% (6/56))
Parents apologize to the crying child by themselves: Japanese > German
Japanese (22.1% (17/77)) ** vs. German (1.8% (1/56))

4.5.2. Parents-exclusive

Significant differences (*t*-test) were found for *Apology*, *Fact*, *Ok?* and *Help/Care*.

Referring Frequency of *Apology*: Japanese > German
Japanese (81.8% (63/77)) ** vs. German (60.7% (34/56))
Referring Frequency of *Fact*: Japanese > German
Japanese (33.8% (26/77)) ** vs. German (10.7% (6/56))
Referring Frequency of *Ok?*: Japanese > German
Japanese (28.6% (22/77)) * vs. German (0% (0/56))
Referring Frequency of *Help/Care*: Japanese < German
Japanese (0% (0/77)) vs. German (50.0% (28/56)) **
Significant difference (*t*-test): **$p < .01$
*$p < .05$

5. Discussion

5.1. Speaker-inclusive Type

In this case, the parents indicated that they would go to the crying child directly.

Japanese parents reported that they would actively involve themselves in the event 28.6% of the time. About 30% of these responses indicate that the parent would apologize to the child or ask if he or she was all right, even though they themselves did not hit the child. The relevant act in Japanese in this situation is the apology (significant difference (*t*-test): $p < .01$).

On the other hand, German parents did not report that they would involve themselves in this way. Some reported that they would help the crying child stand up or take care of the child so that he or she would stop crying.

The responses of the Japanese parents reveal that parents and their children are not always psychologically distinguished (i.e., from the integrated perspectives of parents and their child), and confirm that Japanese speakers are involved in the scene and see it from a perspective inside the situation.

5.2. Speaker-exclusive Type

In the case of the speaker-exclusive type, the parents indicated they would address their own child and give them instruction.

The Japanese parents used mainly two types of expressions as strategies for apology: *Apology* and *Apology + Fact* (significant differences (*t*-test) for *Apology* and *Fact*: $p < .01$). The formal pattern for the first type is focused on an apology and an attempt to have the parents' child express regret to the crying child. The second type requires the parents' child to express regret and let the crying child know the fact that he or she did something bad (e.g., *meiwaku* [nuisance] or [unpleasant feelings]) to the crying child. It focuses on a feeling of regret for the bad action toward the crying child. This case can be interpreted as parents' attempt, based on empathy toward the crying child, to make their child recognize that he or she caused the crying child to suffer unpleasant feelings.

The German parents tended to use two types of expressions as strategies for apology: *Apology* and *Apology + Help/Care*. The first type was also used by the Japanese parents. However, the second type requires their child to express regret and to try to repair the situation by helping the crying child stand up or trying to make the small child stop crying. Thus, one can assume that German parents encourage their child to bring the crying child back to his or her physical state before the incident (significant difference (*t*-test) for *Help/Care*: $p < .01$).

5.3. Politeness in Routine Formulas

5.3.1. Japanese

In Japanese routine formulas, the following forms were often used.

Abbreviated imperative forms: *-te*
e.g., *okoshiteagete* [help (the child) up]
Polite imperative forms (honorifics): *-nasai*; *-chodai*
e.g., *chanto ayamarinasai* [apologize properly, please]
Inviting forms: *-ō*
e.g., *chanto ayamarō* [let's apologize properly]

Japanese parents usually express routine formulas relatively baldly, i.e., in imperative form. They seem to communicate with their child in an imposing fashion.

5.3.2. German

In German routine formulas, the following forms were frequently utilized.

Interrogatives with modal auxiliaries:
Kannst du …? / Würdest du …?
Interjection for politeness: *bitte*
Softeners: *etwa*; *ein bisschen*; *mal*, etc.

German parents tend to use polite expressions with forms such as *bitte*, *würdest du*, *kannst du*, etc. to their children. They seem to treat their children as adults already and avoid imposing on them.

6. Conclusions

This paper analyzes only a portion of the data obtained from the questionnaire responses. However, the study hypothesis is partially confirmed by this data. The present study demonstrates that Japanese and German routine formulas for controlling communicative behavior demonstrate the preferred perspective of each language. The discussion revealed that two types of perspectives emerge when comparing routine formulas for communicative behavior in Japanese and German.

Japanese routine formulas display a perspective of being within the situation. The speaker views a scene through the eyes of someone involved in the scene. Further, the speaker uses psychological expressions that convey closeness to the hearer and empathy toward both the interlocutor and the other.

German routine formulas display a second perspective, which is external to the situation. The speaker and listener stand in opposition of one another, and they use expressions that convey distance by requesting the hearer to act physically toward the other.

Furthermore, it can be suggested that different interactions are expected in corresponding situations in Japanese and German culture (cf. Ehlich & Rehbein, 1986). In Japanese culture, if one person has injured another, he or she should repair the situation by giving an apology and expressing an ostensive understanding of the feeling of the interlocutor. However, in German culture, help is offered, not only an apology. In short, in Japan it is expected that one will apologize to the other person immediately, whereas in Germany it is considered desirable for one to help the other person and take care of him/her. Thus, comparing functionally routine formulas for controlling communicative behavior can reveal what is considered the communicative norm in particular societies. Concerning politeness, it is pointed out that differences in politeness can be explained by the different relationships between parents and children as well as the difference in perspectives from which the expressions are formulated between Japanese and German. However, the results coming from the survey reflect a hypothetical situation rather than real experiential data. For future study, we expect to analyze how the children behave linguistically and non-linguistically in near-real communication.

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