



Political Debate and Expressing Disagreement in Japan

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Research Questions

- How do Japanese people in political contexts express disagreement ?
- Concerning face-threatening statements and face-saving statements:
 - What kind of utterances are considered face-saving and face-threatening acts?
 - How does it affect further political discourse between the participants?

Data Source

- Recorded videos of political debates in Japan.
- The debate in one recording was conducted in the following manner:
 - Total of 20 interactions
 - Two people per debate
 - Each opponent gets the opportunity to ask a question to another opponent. They have a minute or two to do so.
 - The opponent being asked the question has a minute to answer.
 - The person who asked the question has 30 seconds to provide commentary on their opponent's response.

Data Collection Methods

- Transcription
- Marked phrases/utterances that seem to indicate:
 - Disagreement
 - Agreement
 - A statement of an opinion
 - Uncertainty
 - hesitation

Theories and Other Helpful Research Used

- Speech Act Theory
- Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory
 - Face-saving and face-threatening acts
 - Politeness strategies
- *Applicability of Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory to a Non-Western Culture: Evidence From Japanese Facework Behaviors.*
 - This study was done on interactions between strangers and friends
- *Discourse and politeness ambivalent face in Japanese*
 - Study of disagreement discourse between high school teachers

Politeness Strategies Identified in Discourses

Positive (addressing hearer with appropriate amount of familiarity)

- Use of official titles or ~san (Mr./Ms.) when addressing opponents

Negative (avoidance of imposition on hearer)

- Passive sentence structures (e.g. ~rareru)
- Honorific speech

On-record (clear, direct, concise speech) → Face Threatening Act

- **Statements that use neutral polite forms (desu/masu), especially when talking about matters directly concerning the opponent (even if the opponents' involvement is *not* explicitly stated)**

Off-record (ambiguous, indirect speech)

- A bit more unclear in the data, but it seems statement

Sample : Izumi (48 y.o.) to Prime Minister Kishida (65 y.o)

Izumi:

Mata: (additionally) Sakihodo (a moment ago) sōri (Prime Minister) wa (TP) a: : Happyō (announcement) sa reta (been done) to omou (think) ndesu (be) ga (but), komugi (wheat) taisaku (countermeasure) aratamete (once again) yatteru (doing) ka (question particle) no ('s) yō ni (so as to) itteru (saying) ndesu (be) ga (but), yon (four) tsuki nijuunana (twenty-seven) -pāsento (percent) ageta (rose) mono (thing) o (PP) tada (ordinary) sueoiteiru (leaving as is) dake (only) dearimasu (exists due to).

Translation: Also::, The Prime Minister has just, uh, announced that he is taking measures for wheat, but he has only kept the 27% interest rate that was raised in April unchanged.

Ike Minshutō (Japan Democratic Party) ga (SP) uttaeru (bring one's attention) yō ni (so as to) sokuji (prompt) hikisage (reduction cut) o okonau (conduct) beki (should) da (be) to (QP) omoimasu (think).

Translation: I believe that the government should immediately lower the wheat price as the DPJ has been calling for.

Ike Minshutō (Japan Democratic Party) wa (TP) aratamete (once again) desu (be) ga (subject marker), kono (this (adj.)) kinri (interest) zero (zero) kinri (interest) no possessive particle) minaoshi (reconsideration)to (QP) iu (say) koto (matter) ni (PP) seifu (government) wa (TP) torikumu (grapple with) beki (should) to (QP) kangaemasu (consider).

Translation: *The DPJ is once again asking for a review of the zero interest rate, and we believe that the government should take action.*

Observations:

- Prime Minister Kishida's response consisted of less speech markers indicative hesitancy or contemplation.
- Also, his expressions during the video remained more neutral.
- This may indicate that Izumi's approach to disagreement was effective in terms avoiding face-threatening acts and using sufficient face-saving acts.

General Findings

Expressing disagreement usually happens in a couple of ways:

- 1: Younger addressees tended to:
 - Statement of fact that involves the addressee (i.e. mentioning something that was said in a publicized proposal by the addressee) by addressor.
 - Before or after statement of fact regarding addressee, addressor states their opinion which is usually a statement of fact, their own ideas and/or thoughts that are contradictory to statement about the addressee.
 - These statements are mostly said using **“omoimasu”, “deshouka”, “kangaemasu”**. These terms add uncertainty and subjectiveness to the speaker’s utterances.
 - →Implicative of disagreement so it less imposing on the addressee’s policies, opinions → negative politeness strategy and off-record politeness theory.

General Findings

- 2: Older addresses tended to:
 - Statement of fact that involves the addressing very similar to above.
 - The addressor may add an opinion, although the opinion evaluative and direct.
 - Makers of uncertainty like “omoimasu” are hardly used. Instead, typical neutral polite desu/masu that can be considered too direct are used instead.
 - →perceived as a assertive and are highly imposing on addressee’s policies, opinions, etc.
→on-record politeness strategy

Conclusions

- It seems that a general way for Japanese to express disagreement across different contexts is to voice contrasting statements that do not explicitly state disagreement right after stating an objective truth about their opponent, however, the contrast markers and speech markers used differ from everyday conversation. One reason seems to be because of the political context, but possibly also some social factors (e.g. age and government position) could be at play.
- Challenges
 - Transcribing process of foreign languages
 - Lack of back and forth dialogue, so understanding a lot of additional context regarding the verbal exchanges was necessary.

Works Cited

Kiyama, Tamaoka, K., & Takiura, M. (2012). Applicability of Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory to a Non-Western Culture: Evidence From Japanese Facework Behaviors. SAGE Open, 2(4), 215824401247011–. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244012470116>

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