

บทบาทของภาษาศาสตร์สัมพัทธภาพในการสอน ภาษาญี่ปุ่น

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาบทบาทของภาษาศาสตร์สัมพัทธภาพที่ส่งผลต่อการสอนภาษา ครูผู้สอนภาษาไม่ควรสอนแค่เพียงแต่ภาษาเท่านั้น แต่ควรถ่ายทอดวัฒนธรรมและทัศนคติการมองโลกของภาษาเป้าหมายให้แก่ผู้เรียนด้วย อีกทั้ง ครูผู้สอนควรสนับสนุนให้ผู้เรียนทำความเข้าใจกับภาษาและวัฒนธรรมของตนเอง ฉะนั้นแล้ว ผู้สอนจึงควรศึกษาทำความเข้าใจและนำแนวคิดเรื่องภาษาศาสตร์สัมพัทธภาพมาประยุกต์ใช้ในห้องเรียน

คำ

สำคัญ

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The Role of Linguistic Relativity for the Teaching of Japanese Language

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Abstract

This article aims to introduce linguistic relativity and consider its role in language teaching. Language teachers should teach not only language but also culture and world perspective behind the target language. Furthermore, teachers should encourage learners to understand their own language and their own culture. For this purpose teachers should understand and apply the concept of linguistic relativity in the classroom.

Key words

Characteristics of Japanese grammar, Japanese world perspective, Linguistic relativity, Language teaching, Language learning

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1. Introduction to Linguistic Relativity

Language learners may find some similarities regarding grammar in comparison to their native languages. Especially in the different part of language grammar, it might reflect the peculiar world perspective of the speaker of the target language because language reflects their culture. This is the thought of linguistic relativity. In addition, teachers lead their learners to understand their language and culture. Teachers should let the learners understand their language and culture and to tell them about other culture. For this reason language teachers should understand the importance of the relativism of language.

In this article, linguistic relativity will be introduced first. Then some examples of characteristics of Japanese grammar will be examined introducing Japanese world perspective. Finally we will discuss the necessity to apply this relativism in the classroom.

The theory of linguistic relativity was first known as the theory of ‘The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis’ advocated by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf, which asserts that the thinking of the person is influenced by the person’s language(s). Sapir (1949, p. 69) describes ‘the “real word” is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group.’

The theory of ‘The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis’ has two versions. The first is ‘linguistic determinism’, and the second is ‘linguistic relativity’. Although the linguistic determinism is not accepted at the present time, the second linguistic relativity which insists that language and culture influence the people’s thought. This does not mean that language determines one’s thinking that language influences one’s thinking.

The theory of linguistic relativity is a field of linguistics relating to anthropology. The phenomena itself has its own parameters. However, the phenomenon is recognized in various ways. The articulations of the phenomena are variable. The viewpoint is variable and it depends on a person’s culture. For instance, the color of the sun is perceived as red in some cultures while in other cultures the sun may be perceived as yellow. Not only visualized colors but the thinking manner is also influenced by language. Language influences perceptions of reality.

According to Humboldt (1999, p.215) all languages are, in their inner concepts and linguistic forms, the same. However, languages are also diverse. Although languages are the same in essence, all languages are not the same, because of human freedom and different mental endowments, diverse mental develop-

ments, and the inexplicable role of emotion and imagination in language - making. It asserts that culture and language constrain people's understandings of the world. It means that the world is recognized in different ways from culture to culture and language to language. Language reflects culture. Thus, different languages have different categorization of the world.

The differences between languages influence people's world perspectives (Ikegami, 2009b, p.4). Steiner (1998, p.79) describes that this difference creates different perspectives of the world and it reflects the different world perspectives of people.

Language and thinking are inseparable. The origin of the study of the relationship between cultures and languages has a long history, although scholars have also considered the relationship between language and thought. This consideration regarding linguistic relativity started in the eighteenth century.

2. The historical review of Linguistic Relativity

The idea of linguistic relativity is not new. The consideration of 'language and thought' sprouted since the age of ancient Greece.

Long before then though, Plato's 'Cratylus' is the first text to describe

the influence of language on thinking. In 'Cratylus', Plato did not describe this relationship clearly. However, his writing shows that, in his view, language and thought are related. 'The signification of words is given by custom ... custom and convention must be supposed to contribute to the indication of our thoughts ...' (Plato, 1970, 435b, p.188).

Aristotle (1941, p. 40) also describes in 'De Interpretatione' that humans' mental experiences are the same, but humans' expressions produced by speech or writing are different from one another.

The study focusing on language and thought started in Germany in the eighteenth century. Johann Georg Hamann (1730-88) and his companion, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), are the foundational names in the area of linguistics relativity. According to Penn (1972, p. 72), Hamann is the first scholar who advocated that language and thought were closely related.

Herder is also known as insisting that language and thought are the same. In 1766 he published his idea in '*Fragmente über die neuere deutsche Literatur*' asserting that languages have a power to form speakers' particular culture and life. Thus language is the medium of thought (Herder, 2002, p.211). Therefore for Herder, language to thought is strongly related and it is

said his idea is the basis of 'The Theory of Linguistic Relativity'. From these scholars' assertions which are as Berlin (2000, p.194) describes in his work, language to thought is the same. These thinkers influenced Humboldt and Humboldt developed this idea.

Humboldt advocates that 'there is no thought without language, so all thoughts must be influenced by language' (Beek, 2006, P. 9). Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767 - 1835), a philosopher and linguist, developed the idea of Herder and Hamann. In his writings, *Über die Entstehung der grammatischen Formen und ihren Einfluss auf die Ideenentwicklung*, 1822. And in *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaus und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts*, 1830-1835, he presented the idea of the theory of linguistic relativism. He presents the idea of linguistic relativity and makes it a clear treatise insisting that 'language is the formative organ of thought' (Humboldt, 1969, p.190), and thus thought and language are impossible to separate from each other (Humboldt, 1999, p. 54). Further, in his writing a German linguist, Leo Weisgerber who is also influenced by Humboldt, wrote that one's mother tongue forms human mentality (*Das Menschheitsgesetz der Sprache* in 1964).

On the other hand, in France, *Cours de linguistique générale* which is authorized

by Ferdinand de Saussure was published in 1916. In it, Saussure advocates the difference of word signification and value between languages. Charles Bally, a student of Saussure, describes mental differences between French and German speakers. These studies define the basic premise of Linguistic relativity.

3. Japanese language and Japanese culture

According to linguistic relativity, language reflects its culture. It is that Japanese culture influenced language. Some peculiar characteristics of Japanese language are influenced by Japanese people's life circumstances. In this section, two peculiar expressions of Japanese will be listed and their cultural backgrounds will be considered. The first is the proper noun 'I' and the second is the verb 'give' in Japanese language.

Historically rice cultivation in small communities, on a family by family basis, made people manage themselves emotionally in order to survive in the community. Selflessness and submission to both authority figures and the will of peers was seen as the best way to live in these close communities. Among people in such communities, attention was always focused on making sure that one was part of the majority, thus appearing to be different or

in a minority was avoided. People were cautious and curious of those outside of their immediate community. This attitude reflected to early Japanese language (Kindaichi, 1990, p. 13).

The leaders of early Japanese communities used rules to control their communities. For the people in the community thought the safe way is to follow the rules. To follow was the safe way to survive in the community. To be the same with others in behavior, in thoughts was the safest way otherwise he or she would have been discriminated upon and banished (Miyahira, 2005, p.142; Nakano, 2006, p. 62). To have been considered an outsider would have meant death. The ruler had authority and to follow the ruler was the best way to survive in the communities. Thus people followed their rulers without criticism or question.

People do not want to make trouble in a community. They avoided confrontation. For this reason, people never expressed decisive expressions such as 'I ..., You ...'. When people spoke in this way in Japanese, it would have sounded aggressive, direct and forceful. They would, rather, prefer to use indirect expressions. In Japanese communication, the use of 'I' and 'you' usually unnecessary. Thus they did not use personal pronouns frequently. They tended to use passive expressions

because with these expressions, the subject is ambiguous. Japanese choose selflessness.

The Japanese language shows us that the Japanese world perspective is more structured around 'selflessness' compared to European cultures. Sugiman (2010, p. 23) holds those cultures appear to have more emphasis on the elevation of the self and individualism.

Takahashi (2005, p.7) advocates that lack of idea of individuality has reason. People live in a small island and make their living through agriculture and fishery. People have to help each other during the seasons of harvest or fishing; therefore, collective life style is a necessity. In such a community, people have to live together to ensure a living society of order. It is essential to pay respect to elders to establish and maintain good relationships within a small community. To ensure a life with a sense of direction, people rely on each other in such a community.

Japanese people focus on human relationship rather than individuality. According to Suzuki (1992, p.127, p.148, p.203), the vocabulary in Japanese relating to human relationships is rich. In Western culture human beings are seen as independent and individual, and the ideal of being an 'individual' has a strong cultural presence. However, in Japan, human rela-

tionships are relative (Miyahira, 2005, p.131). Thus, 'I' is situationally changeable.

In Japanese, originally, there were no personal pronouns. Thus the word 'I' could be translated into many words in Japanese. There is no 'I' but there are many 'I's' in translation, 'I' is variable and 'I' is not fixed. A man calls himself 'otōsan' (father) to his children. 'A person sometimes refers to himself as 'sensei' (teacher) to his students, it means 'I'. Where is 'I'? There is no absolute 'I' but a situational 'I'. The 'I' is in the human relationship. Thus it is relative (Suzuki, 1992. p.148; Miyahira, 2005, p.130, p.144). The reason that there is no necessity to assert the 'I' is that selflessness is a social norm. Thus, for Japanese, the consciousness toward the idea of individuality is lesser compared to European culture (Sugiman, 2010. p. 25).

There is no proper pronoun for 'I' or 'You'. Not pronouns but proper nouns are used in forms of address in Japanese. The usage of the noun is secondary. 'Watashi (I)', is originated from 'private' as opposed to public, and this word is rarely used by the Japanese in conversation. They do not like to use it often, as in Japanese culture it has connotations of selfishness. It is avoided due to it being seen as demonstrating overbearing self-assertion. Rather, the Japanese use common nouns to signify themselves.

Japanese people do not like to use 'I' often in conversation. The overuse of 'I' is, for Japanese, over self-assertion, and the Japanese do not like to over self-assert themselves (Araya, 2013, P. 12). They do not want to oppose 'I' to 'You'. Toda holds that the Japanese language instead aims at harmony and fusion (Toda, 1996, p.46). This is an important part of Japanese culture. Thus in Japanese the concept of 'I' is different to that of English: it is not absolute but relative. The individual is not an absolute entity but is relatively expressed in relation to others.

According to Moriya (2009, p.119), usually people do not refer to the subjects of the action. She gives some examples: 'I will marry' in actual Japanese the 'I' does not refer to the 'I'. They say 'It became to marry (今度結婚することになりました。kondo kekkon suru koto ni narimashita)'. On this point, Ikegami (2009a, p. 22) advocates that to clarify the subject or to not clarify the subject is strongly rooted in the culture.

The politeness formula is a system of expressions to be used when with others. To maintain a well-functioning community and personal relationships, there are four systems of expressions within the formula. They are honorific forms, humble forms, polite forms and familiar forms. This system shows clearly the significance of human relationships in a community rather than

the self-assertion of individualism. The system of how to treat other people in conversation is a trait of the Japanese language. In this manner, Japanese culture and language are strongly focused on human relationships.

According to Kindaichi (1990, pp.194-204), vocabulary in Japanese relating to the human state of mind is also rich. This reflects the significance of human relationships in a community, especially the stress on attitudes found in Japanese social relationships. Human relationships are significant. To keep these relationships functioning smoothly is a necessity from the standpoint of a Japanese people.

A verb – ‘*sassuru* (察する)’ – describes this attitude of Japanese culture. This word reflects the Japanese world perspective. It is important to have human relationships ‘by heart’. ‘By heart’ means communication by fewer words, and to guess, or to sense what the others may want one to do. It must be understood from the immediate context of the situation, and the speaker’s appearance or body language during communication is contributing factors.

The Japanese frequently consider what others think about them, and how others feel towards their attitudes and behavior. They consider how they are being

judged and appraised. This is the standard of social manners in Japan. It is concentrated on the performance and behavior of selflessness.

Here is another example referring to verbs. ‘To give’ is changeable, as well. The relationship between speaker and listener is more important than that of English communication for example. English concentrates on the subject in sentences. Regarding this, Kato shows an example. There are two sentences. 「私は彼に本をあげた。(watashi wa kare ni hon o ageta ‘I gave him a book’)」「私は彼に本をもらった。(watashi wa kare ni hon o moratta ‘He gave me a book’)」 In English the verb ‘to give’ is used, however in Japanese ‘to give’ is translated into 「あげた (ageta)」 or 「もらった (moratta)」.

In case of a speaker as the giver, the verb 「あげる (ageru>ageta)」 is used and in case of a speaker as the receiver 「もらう (morau>moratta)」 is used. In English the verb ‘to give’ is used. Regardless of the subject ‘I’ or ‘He’, specifically, whoever the giver is, the verb ‘to give’ is used. In Japanese communicators do not focus on the subjects, instead relationship dictates the appropriate language form. When a speaker is the subject of the sentence, 「あげる (ageru)」 is used and when a receiver is the subject, 「もらう(morau)」 is used. This is

a typical example of the importance of the communicators' relationship rather than subject itself (Kato, 2012, p. 9).

These ideas described above are the idea based on the language relativity. Kindaichi and Suzuki introduced this idea on language relativity through a plenty number of books since the middle of 20th century.

4. Japanese language and contextualized culture

Language reflects culture. Then is it possible to apply this idea of language relativity to the teaching and learning of the Japanese language and culture? In this section, 'ambiguity', a typical factor of Japanese culture, will be considered for the application to language teaching and learning.

Ambiguity, according to Takahashi (2005, p. 6), is an important factor to understand Japanese. It is quite different from European culture. Liu et al. (2011, p.78-84) advocate that ambiguous expressions are the distinguishing characteristics of the Japanese language and Japanese communication. These ambiguous expressions reflect Japanese human relationships in the society. In Japanese society, 「和 (wa)」 'harmony' is the dominant factor. This factor is paramount to maintain a peaceful harmony amongst the people.

This thought developed into these ambiguous expressions. These expressions reflect their thought of the harmonies among human relationship.

The idea of 「和 (wa)」 'harmony' originated from Confucianism. It is found in the Seventeen-article constitution which is authorized by Prince Shōtoku in 604 describing 'Harmony'. Harmony is to be valued, and the avoidance of wanton opposition to be honored'. This philosophy was most appreciated among the people of China. Later the philosophy spread to Japan where it became a significant aspect of Japan and Japanese society up to present day.

Context plays a significant role in deciding the meaning of the word. Here is an example of an ambiguous word; 「けっこう(kekko)」。 The interpretation of the meaning depends on the situation. A Situation includes time, place, person, expression of speaker, tone of voice and so on. For example 「けっこう(kekko)」 means sometimes 'acceptable' in the sentence of 「今夜いっしょに食事しませんか? (Let's go to dine out!)」 「結構ですね。(kekko desu ne or sounds nice!)」, however, sometimes it means 'unacceptable' in the sentence of 「もういっぱいいかがですか? (Would you like to have some more?)」 「もう結構です。(mo kekko desu or I am full now)」.

Japanese characteristic is context dependent culture, as well. Japan is a small island nation and was essentially a single raced nation. People belonged to small agricultural communities, and so Japanese society is constituted from such communities. The lifestyle of the people is uniform. Thus their thoughts and behavior were, and still are today, similar in such small communities. These factors constitute a contextualized community. It is homogeneous thought and lifestyle. Contextualized community created wordless society.

Liu et al concludes that Japanese society is in fact a contextualized society. Communication depends on contexts. Japanese do not like direct expressions because of the existing contextual environment. Indirect expressions are preferable. This situation brought people to evolve into a contextualized society. Japanese people always communicate in a passive manner. This is another characteristic of Japanese language reflecting Japanese perceptions.

Thus the Linguistic relativity plays a significant role in language learning. Learners should perceive the background of peculiar expressions and understand the viewpoint of world perspective from the aspect of Japanese people. One of the purposes of learning foreign languages is to communicate with the people of the target

languages. However, the senses of values are different from culture to culture. To study language is to learn the culture of the target language. Thus to learn a new language is to learn a new culture or new world perspective. In the new culture the thoughts are different from the learners' world perspective. Differentiations are from the different articulation of categorization. Perception of the world is relative, which is the premise of linguistic relativity.

Nomura (1991, pp.219-220) points out those learners of foreign languages tend to assimilate the target cultures without criticism. They unconsciously absorb and follow the value of the target culture. Teachers should instruct relative viewpoints through language teaching. The target language is not an absolute world perspective. To know relativity is more important. This viewpoint helps learners to foster a tolerant attitude. Such an attitude ultimately leads to cross cultural or intercultural understanding. Learners have varied world perspectives, therefore teachers should be flexible and not absolute in approaches. Nomura warns that teachers should not convey their own sense of value to the learners' culture and learners should not think the target value is absolutely correct. To know the difference is more important than ignore to follow the target value of the culture. Oth-

erwise communication would be difficult to comprehend. This principle ultimately brings multi-diversity.

Nowadays our life is globalized and there are numerous opportunities to make contact with foreign cultures. To know the difference of value is to find that learners' traditional value is not absolute and common to the world. To acquire different viewpoints of world perspective is to learn the relativism of language which can be acquired through foreign language learning (Imanaka, 1997, pp. 42- 43).

5. Conclusion

I have divided my conclusion into two segments. First to learn foreign languages are to learn new world perspectives. Language is a tool of communication. However, learners should understand the culture behind the language, otherwise communication gaps are apt to occur. That is to say that to accept different values and world perspective is not to learn different language and culture is not to assimilate or exclude target culture (Nakano, 2006, p.62). Rather it is to accept the different language and culture. This attitude will enhance learners' attitude towards development, tolerance, and flexibility regarding different languages and cultures.

The second concept is to know yourself. Studying foreign language encourages learners to recognize their own language and culture. A learner of the target language may very well reflect on the contrasts relating to their mother tongue language. Every language has its own world perspective. This reflection to their own language and culture is another benefit of learning a foreign language through 'Linguistic relativity'. The Linguistic relativity concept suggests that the target language being learned and the language of the learner are interrelated to some degree. On this point linguistic relativity plays a significant role in teaching and learning a foreign language.

As a conclusion, I strongly insist that to teach or to learn a foreign language, not only Japanese but also other languages, is to build a global society. Global society means a society where various sorts of values can exist together. Through learning language, learners find and understand the diversity of culture. To understand cultural diversity is to concern others. Learners should understand the differences and diversity of language and culture is the basic principle of language learning through language relativity.

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