

The Evolution of Linguistic Expression in Japanese and English Societies: From 'situation-tied' to 'culture-independent' expression

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Abstract

In this highly interactive situation of the world we need to seek the way to communicate with people who have different accumulation of cognition/words reflecting their action/life and society. Whether this is successful or not depends upon how people realise, cultivate and use the descriptive power of language by fully developing its representational function. This paper discusses contrastively this issue in Japanese and English. At the primary stage of its use, language is situation-tied and has no independency. In an analysis of Japanese, we find the condensed/folded way of expression which is mainly used for uttering a speaker's subjective condition. This has been fostered by long-lived homogenised society. Bernstein found the restricted and the elaborated codes in English spoken language. We show that this is used for expressing objective matters and is fostered by cross-cultural situation of the society. While folded way of expression in Japanese is culture-tied, the elaborated code in English is culture-independent. They are respectively generated through different mental activities reflecting their distinctive characters of societies.

Keywords : Evolution of linguistic expression, Culture-independent expression,
Situation-tied expression, Folded expression, Japanese and English societies

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is considered to originate from uttering what a speaker has in his/her mind, or recognises, while acting/living, and language functions as a device to deliver it to a hearer with a help of symbolic signs. We would like to start our studies from confirming this universality that all human languages have. However, what a speaker has in his/her mind or recognises varies reflecting his/her action/life. It also reflects a particularity of the group of society in which a speaker lives and acts as we are gregarious or social animals. It is thus easily imagined that people's action/life and society restrict their cognition and, as a result, their words. We could say that culture, more specifically mental culture which is divided from material/physical civilization, exists as the accumulation of people's cognition/words. Thus culture is inseparable from cognition and words.

In the current global situation, many different parts of the world are increasingly becoming interactive each other politically, economically and culturally. While we can gain favours from cross-cultural interaction, it may potentially produce a negative situation, including so-called 'culture conflict' and this has become an issue more important as human beings interact more closely. It is now requested for languages to have a power to communicate with people who may have desimilar

cultures and languages. We need to make each of the languages communicative enough for substantial cultural interaction among heterogeneous groups of people.

However, we should notice that fully transparent and colourless globalisation does not exist. A situation where the world is enforced to be tried to become homogenised has even a danger. This is because what is called "globalisation", particularly in the last quarter of the twentieth century has been motivated exclusively by nations/cultures which are economically/politically dominant. As a result, the rest of people and societies are forced to either receive disadvantages or to be excluded from the interactive activities. We might occasionally learn that there exists fairly hard obstacles in communicating among heterogeneous groups of people. As far as they are removable, however, we should and do seek the way to communicate with people who have different accumulation of cognition/words reflecting their action/life and society.

Whether this is successful or not depends upon how people realise, cultivate and use the descriptive power of language by extensively developing the representational function of language; this is the basic standpoint of our study in this paper. As is seen in the following sections, we discuss two sorts of 'descriptiveness' and analyse how they are respectively generated and brought up in their social backgrounds and also how this influences

slinguistic expressions, with having a focus on the Japanese language. Our approach to linguistic descriptiveness is based on Bühler's classification of the linguistic functions of three different levels, that is, the uttering/expressive, the appealing and the representational functions. The uttering function, in most languages, follows the appealing function and we can find these two functions working even when the higher mammals or birds communicate each other (Lorenz 1977:160). The representational function of language has been realised by the use of symbolic signs only in human language. In some linguistic societies, however, uttering itself can exhibit the appealing function because of a speaker's and people's long-lived collectivistic (Hofstede 1997:49 ff.) life style, and consequently the representational function has been allowed to develop mainly to express a speaker's subjective world (Ujiié 1998, 1999). In some other societies, on the other hand, the representational function has developed, which eventually has led to the development of the argumentative function which was first defined by Popper (1975). Once a language acquires those functions for objective matters, its communicative power to other people/society would be enhanced.

In the following sections we first look at the primary stage of language use where language is situation-tied and has insufficient independency. The abbreviated way of expression which is described in

section 3 is an extended form of situation-tied expression. We will see the circumstances where this sort of expression is dominant. In sections 4 and 5, we examine a condensed way of expression which is culture-tied and discuss what conditions make it possible. This is done on the basis of analysis of Japanese, and then we compare it with the restricted and elaborated codes of English spoken language which has been first found by Bernstein. A Japanese-type society seems to develop a language to be able to utter or express a speaker's subjective conditions. On the other hand objective matters are described in the elaborated code in English. In section 6, we glance at linguistic acquisition by 'a wild-child' in which an evolution from subjective utterances to objective description is found. Finally we argue the elaborated code which can describe things in culture-independent way and the role of society, and then summarise the discussion.

2. THE PRIMARY STAGE OF LANGUAGE USE

Before discussing various functions of language, we first take up the feature of primary language use. Many languages started from 'nowness and here-ness' communication: where a speaker and a listener were together when they spoke about matters emerging in front of them. Understanding what the speaker meant by

simple words was thus assisted greatly by its situation. Primary language use here means both that for human beings and that for the individuals. In this stage of language use, priority of the uttering function is high, the appealing function is high and the representational function is low. Words can accomplish the role of communication; the sender conveys to the receiver some pieces of information relating with objects or states of affairs in front of them. Thus language has no need to possess powerful independency.

Communication with this mode can be called 'situation-tied' communication. Namely, utterances are understood with a support by the situation, and thus language has not to be independent. Starting from this point, people have cultivated the representational function in various different directions depending on their communities' historical conditions. This feature of possessing the same time and space or, in short, 'now-ness and here-ness' is the original point of communication where we should turn back to in considering the properties of language. At the same time, language becomes able to acquire other functions after getting independent of this 'now-ness and here-ness'.

3. COMMUNICATION USING ABBREVIATED WAY OF EXPRESSION

The primary language use is

maintained in a homogeneous community where a situation similar to 'now-ness and here-ness' still exists. For instance, the abbreviated way of expression which needs the help of situational context is undertaken in personal life or in every day life in such a community. Sympractical use of language being often helped by action and so on can be included in this classification. Family conversation, where the individual starts acquiring language, is a typical example of language use in situational context. Family is one of the smallest sub-society where people live together and exchange words. In such use, there is no need to describe things, because a listener can easily guess what a speaker wants to mean by using simple words.

As another example of the abbreviated way of expression, we may point out the restricted code in English. According to Bernstein, this is characterized by restricted use of adjectives, simplicity of verbal form, low proportion of subordination, and so on (Bernstein 1973:109). Although he first related it with social classes, he later negated this relation and gave rather objective interpretation as is cited in the following. He says that the restricted code is used in:

- 1) Peer group of children and adolescents
- 2) Criminal sub-cultures
- 3) Combat units in the armed services
- 4) Senior common rooms
- 5) Married couples of longstanding

(Bernstein 1973:77)

People belonging to a certain group act or live together for a certain duration of time. They have the same situational / verbal context, and this assists a hearer to understand what a speaker means by words which are not necessarily sufficiently descriptive. In this sense the language used in a closed, small society retains primary feature of language. However, the language use in such a community is not always 'situation-tied' in a narrow definition. When people talk about something which is related to a common knowledge or past experience commonly possessed by a speaker and a listener, they scarcely describe it. We may call this mode 'context-tied' mode of communication.

If language is continued to be used only in these 'situation-tied' / 'context-tied' mode of communication, its function remains limited. As far as English is concerned, such a mode is used in a closed sub-society. Bernstein says that the restricted code is used on the basis of sense of 'we-ness'. This 'we-ness' is interpreted to be able to apply to a small sub-society. 'Situation-tied' / 'context-tied' communication is thus found to be used only within a limited community. In so far as a language a speaker is bound to use could acquire significantly descriptive and communicative power, people can supply necessary amount of information by words to a different group of people. Judging from many facts including ones that we will see in Section 7, the English language seems to

have successfully acquired such significantly descriptive and mentally communicative power.

4. COMMUNICATION USING CONDENSED WAY OF EXPRESSION

Next we turn to another way of expression which has developed in another sort of homogeneous society. That is a condensed way of expression. Japanese society is highly homogenized and has continued to be so for more than one thousand years. This duration of time has let a society develop a characteristic way of expression, 'condensed expression'. As one example of condensed way of expression, we can point out the folded way of expression in Japanese. There are a group of words characteristic in having the structure of word which enfolds the speaker's mental processes [SEMP] (Ujiié 1986). This cultural background being fostered by thousands of years may greatly assist, influence, or even determine what one utters.

As shown in example sentences in the following, English equivalents need a clause to express a speaker's mental processes.

Ex.1 YAPPARI (YAHARI) *Okinawa-wa atsui.*

As I expected (As people say, As you said, and so on), it is hot in Okinawa.

Ex.2 SASUGANI *Okinawa-wa atsui.*

As might be expected of Okinawa, it is hot here.

We call this particular way of expression using words with SEMP the 'condensed' way of expression in this paper in order to make clear the difference from the 'abbreviated' way. SEMP is used very efficiently to communicate among people who have the same emotional / mental world. Japanese had no need and was not used to explain things to 'others'. In other words, the Japanese language was not driven to develop descriptive power of language.

Although both the 'condensed' and 'abbreviated' expressions are categorized as the context-tied expression, their scales of space and time are different. Namely, the condensed expression has been used in a nationwide scale for hundreds of years. Thus, we can call it 'culture-tied'. SEMP is generated by either transforming the meaning or extending the grammatical functions of given words. Examples for the former are adverbs such as '*yappari*', '*sasuga(ni)*' and so on (Ujiié 1988), and ones for the latter are particles such as '*wa*' (Ujiié 1987) and '*no*' (Ujiié 1986).

We next consider the background of the fosterage of SEMP. Looking at geographical condition, the Japanese islands are isolated, and have small plains which occupies only 28% of the whole area. Productive activity which is rice crop leads to (a) domiciliation and also (b)

synchronous cooperation. These geographical condition and productive activity result in (c) high density of population. The effective density of population is 400 per square km in 1860 excluding northern most island, Hokkaido, and increased to 1000 per square km in 1980 (Berque 1982). The location of the islands and productive activity and high density of population result in (d) homogenized society.

Knowing the condensed way of expression and its background, we focus on the relationship among the social feature, mental world and communication. (See Table 1.) Social features of (a) domiciliation, (b) synchronous cooperation, and (c) high density of population cause people to have similar mental world including the same presuppositions. In such social features, it is easy to guess what others think. Looking at communication undertaken in such a society, especially in (d) homogenized society, it has a characteristic that information spreads quickly. The feature of (d) homogenized society gave people scarce chance to objectify and criticize themselves, and particularly under (e) the closed door policy, society gave people no need to describe themselves.

The closed-door policy undertaken during the Edo era generally enhanced such mental tendencies and matters relating communication. In Tokugawa Japan, 1603~1868, there were three important factors to consider, that is, the closed-door

policy, repression and feudal class system. Most people were forbidden to tell their opinions in public; they were urged to bow to the governor class's opinion. In public words were used for unidirectional communication and never used for discussion of things from different viewpoints. In people's daily life, words were mostly used to chat within a group a speaker belongs to. This tradition seems basically to be still dominant.

In other words, three important factors mentioned above brought about a dissociation. Namely, people had to be silent about what they really think, which is called 'honne' and say only what is expected or supposed to say by the society, which is called 'tatemae'. At the same time, people's consciousness tended to be self-defensive. This feature must have a strong relation with the unidirectional language use observed in official communication. It

is reasonably imagined that people were unsatisfied with their communicative interaction in the society. People chat a lot about inoffensive matters in inoffensive way in personal communication.

We may summarize the above discussion as a form of table as shown in Table 1.

5. DESCRIPTIVENESS IN JAPANESE

Now that we have seen the way of expression to be restricted by its historical background, let us discuss descriptiveness in Japanese. The primary language use in Japanese has been transformed considerably in long-lived homogeneous and static society, as we have seen above. The context-tied expression such as that using words with SEMP had been basically settled before the Edo era. Concerning descriptiveness in Japanese, there are three factors to be considered:

Table 1
Japanese Social Features, Mental World and Communication

Social Features	Mental World	Communication
Domiciliation Synchronous cooperation High population density	Having the same presupposition Easy to guess what others think	Quick information spreading
Domiciliation Synchronous cooperation Closed-door policy in Tokugawa Japan	Little chance to objectify oneself to criticise oneself	No need to describe oneself
Feudal class system and Repression in Tokugawa Japan -1603~1868-	Dissociation Unsatisfaction Self-defense consciousness	Silent about what one thinks ('honné') Saying what is expected to say ('tatemae') Unidirectional language use (Official) Chattering in inoffensive way about inoffensive matters (Personal)

1) There was no need to describe things, because people were used to use words sympractically during cooperative activities or in culture-tied situation.

2) There was no experience to describe things, because the society had been highly homogenized. Describing things presupposes the existence of 'others'. There was also no experience to discuss things among people having various standpoints, because unidirectional language use was undertaken by the government in Tokugawa Japan.

3) There was no ability developed to describe things, because of no opportunity to know 'others' and to objectify oneself. This ability could have been developed through interacting with people who have different cultural backgrounds.

People mainly used words to express their subjective world, and did not use them for changing reality, although this is the function that only human language can perform. This results in the enhancement of sensory / emotional expression. Especially in Tokugawa Japan, people were encouraged to use this sort of expression under the circumstances of repression. Sensory/ emotional expression is based on 'now-ness and here-ness', or rather 'here-now-I' as pointed out by Buhler (1990:169). This expression has high priority of the expressive and the appealing functions. Because of the homogeneity of Japanese

society, a speaker's utterance relating with his/her subjective world were able to be directly conveyed to a listener, even by the use of simple words which are not necessarily descriptive. Such use of language did not develop any powerful linguistic function such as Brown's message-oriented function in spoken language, for which Brown describes that the speaker intends to bring about some specific change in the listener's state of knowledge.

6. FROM SUBJECTIVE UTTERANCE TO OBJECTIVE DESCRIPTION

For reference to consider the descriptiveness of language, I would like to mention linguistic acquisition by Genie which can be regarded as a transition from subjective utterance to objective description. Genie was found in 1970 in California, when she was thirteen years old. She had been left in so-called a "wild-child" situation and had a small receptive vocabulary in June, 1971. Since then, Curtiss taught Genie language and observed her linguistic acquisition for four years. (Curtiss, 1977)

Genie started using words for (1) connecting with past fearful experiences [January 1972] and then for (2) presenting unreal states (her desires, fantasies, lies) [January 1973, September 1973, March 1974]. Finally, she talked for (3) informing to the hearer somebody else (a neighbor)'s experience which Genie only heard from him/her (a neighbor) previously [May

1975]. (1) and (2) are subjective, egocentric utterance, while (3) is objective description. At the stage of (1) and (2) where the speaker's mental world is focused on her feeling / emotion, objective description as seen for (3) does not appear.

Less priority of objective description as found in earlier stages of Genie's linguistic acquisition process is similar to what we have just seen in limited descriptiveness in Japanese. The important point here is that the ability to describe things objectively is not innate, but is acquired and developed through interacting with people who have different experiences.

7. CONTEXT-FREE EXPRESSION IN ENGLISH

We next focus on the context-free expression which have been well developed in English. One example to show a contrast between Japanese and English in terms of the context dependence is 'As I expected,~' which was given in Section 3. While the meaning of Japanese expression 'Yappari~' is dependent on the context, English expression is unfolded, and its meaning is fixed, disregarding the context.

The elaborated code as introduced by Bernstein is often used for context-free expression in English. This code is characterized by frequent use of the first personal pronoun 'I', conjunctions, various adjectives and also high proportion of

subordinations. This can be regarded to be used among a variety of people ; such as governors, officers, managers, and so forth who ought to either use correct and exact expressions by means of what is called standard English, exchange important messages among heterogeneous groups of people, or write and understand letters. This was generated through the necessity for people to communicate with people having different cultures. Cross-cultural interaction emerges here. Under such circumstances, language has developed to gain the representational function in Buhler's term and the message-oriented function in Brown's term.

Taking account of such highly objective capability of the elaborated code, it would be reasonable that such language having representational function and message-oriented function, particularly English, is at a position to be able to further developed even a higher language power, namely, the argumentative function as defined by Popper. He says "Arguments are for or against some proposition/descriptivestatement."(Popper1972: 237)

Finally, we consider the relationship among social feature, people's mental world and the characteristics of the communication among them. In the situation of cross-cultural interaction, people encountered different cultures being associated with different presuppositions and different ways of expression, and they had

Table 2

Social Features	Mental World	Communication
Cross-cultural interaction	Objectifying oneself / one's presupposition	Objectifying one's way of expression
	Criticising oneself / other's statement	Fosterage of the argumentative function

strong reasons to objectify themselves and their presuppositions. At the same time, they had to criticize themselves and other's statements. Looking at the communication, they were motivated to objectify their ways of expression by using basically the restricted code. This has finally lead the language to gain the argumentative function.

We may summarise the above discussion in Table 2.

8. SUMMARY

We first surveyed the feature of primary language use by applying Buhler's view of the linguistic functions. Any language started from 'now- and here-ness' communication. While retaining this 'situation-tied' feature, each language obtains 'context-tied' communication which has been transformed from the former.

We have found two different ways of expression in context-tied communication. One is the abbreviated way and another is the condensed one. The abbreviated way may be observed in the use of language among members of community who act /live together for a certain duration of

time. The idea of the condensed way has been introduced through analyzing Japanese folded way of expression using SEMP. The condensed way has been generated in long-lived homogeneous society and is used in nation-wide scale for long duration of time. Thus, this expression can be said to be culture-tied.

Concerning descriptiveness, Japanese has developed to serve efficiently to communicate a speaker's subjective world. This fact is based on a particularity of society where context-tied communication continued to be dominant. A Japanese speaker had no need to describe things because of social feature of homogeneity, and had no experience to describe things to 'others' because of geographical and political isolation of the land.

Consequently, one scarcely recognized so far that things/affairs have the objective side.

On the other hand, English has been successfully developed to describe things using the representational function of language. This has been realized after having the experiences of cross-cultural communication during the history of evolution of English.

We find that the folded way of expression in Japanese very effectively works in a homogeneous society. Exchanging a speaker's subjective world by words effectively works to help continue members' relationships in a community.

However, in cross-cultural era, language should be used among people whose cultural backgrounds are different. We have seen that English has transformed itself into a language nearly independent of its cultural background, by spending fairly long time something like a few hundred years. In this regard, Japanese needs to continue to develop the representational function / the message-oriented function dependent on neither context nor culture. Such an effort is acceleratingly becoming important toward cross-cultural era.

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