DEVELOPING NATURAL JAPANESE: COMMUNICATION
STYLES AND SITUATIONAL CONSTRUCTION

A Thesis
Presented
to the Faculty of
California State University, Chico

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Teaching International Languages

by
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Spring 2013
DEVELOPING NATURAL JAPANESE: COMMUNICATION

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Erina Ikuta Romanowich

Spring 2013

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents:

Makoto and Eiko Ikuta.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Hilda Hernández. Without her support, this thesis would never have been completed. She is also my coordinator and advisor for the Teaching international languages program, and provided me excellent assistance and knowledge in teaching foreign languages.

I would also like to thank Dr. Kimihiko Nomura. His passion for teaching Japanese as a foreign language encouraged me to learn more about Japanese.

Last, but not least, my special gratitude goes to my husband, Paul. His unwavering support made this thesis possible.
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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING NATURAL JAPANESE: COMMUNICATION STYLES AND SITUATIONAL CONSTRUAL

by

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Master of Arts in Teaching International Languages

California State University, Chico

Spring 2013

The Japanese language is often described as subtle and vague by non-native Japanese speakers. Even simple Japanese sentences can cause difficulty for non-native Japanese speakers. One reason for this difficulty may be differences in the cognitive process of verbalization. Specifically, there are different roles for speakers and listeners in Japanese and English. Unlike English, native Japanese speakers prefer using monologue type communication that often omits subjects and objects. Thus, non-native Japanese speakers have difficulty decoding native Japanese communication. In addition, non-native Japanese speakers lack knowledge about how native Japanese speakers capture and verbalize certain situations. A textbook analysis reveals that three current Japanese textbooks do not adequately address these two important cognitive linguistic differences between Japanese and English. Without proper explanation and application of these cognitive linguistic concepts, developing natural Japanese is difficult.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The following quotation from 流れる (Flowing) by Aya Kouda is a simple phrase for native Japanese speakers. “このうちに相違ないが、どこからはいっていいか、勝手口がなかった。” (1956, p. 3) (Kono uchi ni soui naiga doko kara haitte iika katte guchi ga nakatta.). The literal translation reads as follows: this house no discrepancy, where to enter, no back door existed. According to Ikegami (2007), this phrase is difficult for many advanced Japanese foreign language (JFL) students, or speakers from Western cultures, due to different rules of semantics and different ways of interpreting the situation. This difficulty indicates that there is a gap between what current JFL students are taught and how native Japanese speakers communicate. In addition, it is clear that this phrase contains something beyond what JFL students learn from their classroom and textbooks.

A first language’s influence on learning a second language is inevitable. Lightbown and Spada (2006) found that mistakes made by second or foreign language learners could be explained by problems with first language transfer. Linguistic differences between Japanese and English are taught through grammar lectures and pronunciation lessons. However, the cultural aspects of communication differences are rarely taught in language classrooms.
This study explores both the probable reasons for this communication gap, and how JFL teachers and instructors can begin to fill-in these missing components for JFL students.

Background

My sister once told me that my Japanese had become strange and robotic after living in the U.S. for many years. This may have been because I lost the proper Japanese conversation style while living in the U.S. Takeharu (2009) pointed out that when native speakers of Japanese live outside of Japan for a certain period of time, they need to pay closer attention to their use of Japanese when they return to Japan. The knowledge and influence of the second language makes their Japanese use seem unnatural. I am a native Japanese speaker. Therefore, my Japanese conversation style becomes more normal after staying in Japan for a few days. However, non-native Japanese speakers who learn Japanese as a foreign language have fewer opportunities to listen to and participate in authentic natural Japanese conversations. Additionally, textbooks do not provide much information about how Japanese speakers and listeners typically interact during a conversation. As a consequence, many Japanese textbooks and handbooks guide JFL learners through unnatural Japanese conversations and communication activities (Himeno, 2007). Thus, it is easy to imagine that even advanced JFL learners may appear robotic and/or off-key during their Japanese conversations.

So, why did I sound robotic and awkward speaking Japanese? From my own assessment, the answer is that I used complete sentences in more of an English language manner. Clearly defining subjects and pronouns makes Japanese sound robotic and
awkward to native Japanese speakers. This is because the subject is often omitted in Japanese during both written and oral communication. However, English almost never omits the subject. Komori (2000) stated:

日本語の話しことばは、決してそれ自体として完結するような、主語と述語がはっきりしたような言い切りの形をとらない...言っていることの半分以上をあいてにゆだねるような、微妙なあいまいさの中でことばが交わされている。(p. 24)

The following is the English translation: ‘Japanese conversational language style neither concludes by itself nor states a clear subject and object. The conversation exchange is both subtle and vague, because the speaker entrusts the listener to understand what the speaker’s intention is for more than half of what the speaker says.’ Thus, the answer for why I sounded awkward and robotic can be explained by the different roles of speakers in Japanese and English (or other Western languages). Listeners expect to receive different kinds of information in Japanese and English. Furthermore, the reason that non-native Japanese speakers may have difficulty understanding the sentence from Koda may be the vagueness of the sentence, at least from the perspective of a person raised in a Western culture.

These differences in communication roles and styles are explained by John Hinds (1987) as the speaker’s and listener’s responsibility. Hinds (1987) points out that in English, the speaker is responsible for making clear and well-organized statements. In Japanese, the listener is responsible for understanding what the speaker wants to convey. Therefore, he categorizes English as a ‘speaker responsible’ language and Japanese as a ‘listener responsible’ language. Older versions of Chinese and Korean languages have the same communication characteristics as Japanese, where the listener has more
responsibility for interpreting meaning during a conversation (Hinds, 1987). However, Yoon (2010) pointed out that in Korean conversations, the listener does not have as much responsibility as Japanese listeners. Thus, the roles between speaker and listener are unique in Japanese language. I believe the difference between the speaker’s and listener’s responsibility is the key to closing this gap.

**Statement of the Problem**

The quotation from Koda (1956) in the introduction is expanded in Japanese Language and Case of Japanese Language (Ikegami, 2007). According to the author, Domenico Lagana, a linguist from Argentina was the first person to bring attention to this difficult-to-interpret quotation. He spent a lot of time trying to accurately translate the sentence, yet failed to do so on his own. Ikegami analyzed why Mr. Lagana could not understand the sentence. One reason was because of the formality of Western languages. Mr. Lagana’s first language, Spanish, made him particular about finding a subject in a sentence (Ikegami, 2007). In the original Japanese sentences, there is no particular subject. A possible subject in the sentence could be “私の探している家は” (The house which I am looking for), yet this is not expressed in writing. The Japanese reader can understand the unwritten subject in the sentence without any complex thinking process. Clearly, the author of this book entrusts readers to decode her intention, even though the subject has been omitted. However, when a reader is not used to decoding limited information from a speaker (or, in this case, a writer), the reader will have trouble understanding the speaker’s intention. This case is now known as Mr. Lagana’s confusion.
As a result of subject and object omission, Japanese communication exchanges are less verbal exchanges of information, and more exchanges of overall contextual information (Takeharu, 2009; Kaiho, 2010). However, what about a situation where there is little context presented? Koda’s quotation, at the beginning of this paper, was taken from the beginning of her book, 流れる (Flowing). Therefore, there is no context to use in decoding the sentence. So, how can Japanese people understand the sentence? According to Ikegami (2007, 2008), native Japanese speakers and native Western language speakers construe situations in different ways. The difference is that a speaker places himself/herself in part of the situation (subjectively), or outside of the situation (objectively) when speaking (Ikegami, 2007, 2008). Ikegami (2005a, 2007, 2008) also stated that Japanese language “indulges” (Ikegami, 2005a, p.132) subjective construal rather than objective construal. In other words, native Japanese speakers prefer to capture a situation subjectively. Therefore, native Japanese listeners expect subjective construal statements from the speakers. In contrast, Western languages, including English, tend to use objective construal to produce conversation (Ikegami, 2007, 2008). This distinctive cognitive process also relates to the different role of the speaker’s and listener’s responsibility in Japanese and English. This difference in construal likely resulted in Mr. Lagana’s confusion.

Japanese as a foreign language normally teaches the following parts of language: phonology, morphology, phonetics, semantic, and pragmatics. However, communication style and the role of the speaker and listener are rarely taught. Teaching the cognitive process of Japanese language is also neglected in many Japanese language
classrooms (Moriya, 2009). Even though a JFL student can speak Japanese with perfect grammar and pronunciation, he or she may still sound unnatural to native Japanese speakers. Thus, to gain effective communicative competency in Japanese, learners must acquire the unique communication style and cognitive processes that are essential.

Purpose of the Study

The speaker’s and listener’s responsibility are not common communication strategies taught during instruction, but they are fundamental in how different cultures communicate. This is especially true when comparing English and Japanese, as they appear to be polar opposites in terms of how they differ in the exchange of information. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to introduce the concept of speaker’s and listener’s responsibility, and describe how distinctive cognitive processes can help JFL students master natural Japanese. The following questions are investigated in this study: (1) What are the speaker’s and listener’s responsibilities in Japanese and English?; (2) When and why are the subject and object omitted in Japanese?; (3) How are the cognitive processes for producing languages different in Japanese and English?; and (4) How could these communication styles and cognitive processes be incorporated in Japanese instructions? Based on answers to the above questions, I will offer recommendations on how speaking styles can be included in the JFL classroom to teach students more effective Japanese communication exchanges.

The remainder of the paper is divided into three chapters. Chapter II focuses on the speaker’s and listener’s responsibility. Hence, research questions 1 and 2 are answered in Chapter II. This chapter includes definitions of the speaker’s and listener’s
responsibility, and characteristics of the listener’s responsibility in Japanese language. The unique communication style of Japanese as it relates to the roles of responsibility in authentic Japanese materials is also examined. Additionally, the chapter compares Japanese and English to highlight the differences in the role of responsibility.

Chapter III focuses on cognitive processes of Japanese and subjective construal. Research question 3 is addressed. This chapter explains the distinctive cognitive processes used in Japanese and English, and how native Japanese and native English speakers interpret and construct situations differently. This chapter also investigates what subjective construal is and how it is related to the speaker’s and listener’s responsibility in Japanese. This is accomplished by examining authentic materials highlighting the differences between Japanese and English. Lastly, this chapter analyzes how these differences affect native Japanese speaker’s utterances and listener’s expectations.

Finally, chapter IV provides an overall summary of the research and recommendations for future studies, including research question 4. This chapter explores how these findings affect learning and teaching Japanese as a foreign language. It also suggests how to teach students about the speaker’s and listener’s responsibility in the classroom, and provides useful knowledge about the Japanese language.

Limitations of the Study

This paper focuses on one aspect of Japanese communication style: the speaker’s and listener’s responsibility. While this is not the only aspect of communication that defines Japanese communication style, I do believe that it plays an important role in
understanding authentic Japanese communication for JFL students. The recommendations for the JFL classroom apply mainly to intermediate and advanced JFL students, because beginning JFL students still lack knowledge of Japanese. However, introducing the concept of Japanese communication style applies at all levels of JFL students.

Many of the books and articles needed for this study are available only in Japanese, and some of them are not accessible through the California State University Chico’s library system, both digitally and non-digitally. Thus, this study is based only on the literature and materials that could be retrieved through the current library system and internet. However, the study is based on sufficient research from literature reviews both in Japanese and English.

The analysis is based on the findings from both research and literature reviews. Naturally, more research should be conducted before applying the specific recommendations in actual JFL classrooms. However, the general recommendations would be beneficial in helping students master a more natural Japanese communication style in JFL classrooms.
CHAPTER II

COMMUNICATION STYLES

Overview

This chapter focuses on the speaker’s and listener’s responsibilities in English and Japanese. The first section describes what the speaker’s and listener’s responsibilities in each language are, and how they are different from each other. This section also describes how these responsibilities fit into everyday conversation and each language’s grammar structure. After this categorization and comparison, four types of communication situations are examined and used to identify conflicts that may occur during communication between learners from a speaker-responsible language and those from a listener-responsible language.

The second section focuses on subject and object omission in both English and Japanese languages. Examples from Japanese informal conversation, news media, and literature illustrate how subjects and objects are typically omitted. Also, these ‘information rule’ differences between English and Japanese are described in terms of how and when the subject and/or objects are omitted. Finally, the influence of these differences on the communication of speakers and listeners in both a speaker-responsible and a listener-responsible language are described.
Speaker’s and Listener’s Responsibilities

Definition

What are the speaker’s and listener’s responsibilities during a conversation? John Hinds (1987) argues that communication tendencies are divided into two categories: the speaker’s responsibility and listener’s responsibility. If a language tends to place more responsibility on the speaker, the speaker is responsible for clearly informing the listener about meaning during the conversation (Lim, 2002; Takeharu, 2009; Kaiho, 2010). As a result, the speaker’s communication style is less dependent on context, but more dependent on content. By contrast, when the language gives the listener the burden of responsibility, the speaker expects the listener to infer the speaker’s point of view. Therefore, the listener relies more on context than content. Thus, the listener is responsible for decoding the meaning of the conversation. Yoon (2010) measured utterances during conversations and found that if a language demanded that the listener be more responsible, the number of utterances was noticeably less than when the language demanded more responsibility from the speaker.

Responsibilities in English and Japanese

Hinds (1987) categorized English as a speaker’s responsible language because the speaker is typically expected to inform the listener about the meaning of the conversation. Conversely, Japanese is a listener’s responsible language, similar to Korean and Old-Chinese. Takeharu (2009) noted that Japanese people exchange noticeably less verbal information through conversation, when compared to English verbal communication. This also confirms Yoon’s claim related to the numbers of utterances.
between speaker- and listener-responsible languages. Furthermore, when native English
speakers and native Japanese speakers describe the same situation, native Japanese
speakers tend to choose an expression with fewer utterances compared to native English
speakers (Takeharu, 2009). Accordingly, native Japanese speakers transfer less verbal
information to listeners. So, what about native Japanese “listeners”?

There is a Japanese proverb that characterizes native Japanese “listeners”: 一
を聞いて十をしる (ichi wo kite jyu wo shiru), which translates to ‘listening to one thing
and understanding ten things’. A Japanese listener is responsible for understanding the
speaker’s message because the source of information (the speaker) only transfers a
limited amount of verbal information. Thus, the listener has to pay attention to everything
including content, context and nonverbal cues to understand the speaker’s intentions. By
contrast, native English “listeners” are already given enough verbal information from the
speaker to understand the speaker’s intentions. Native English listeners decode fewer
nonverbal cues than native Japanese listeners.

Ikegami (2007) explained this responsibility difference from a grammatical
standpoint. The first critical grammar component is that English is a subject-prominent
language, a feature dictated by the sentence structures and grammar rules (Hinds, 1987;
Ikegami, 2007). Words are placed in a specific order to complete a sentence. Thus, native
English speakers are constrained by grammar to produce detailed sentences. By contrast,
Japanese is much more flexible in terms of sentence structure and grammatical rules.
Sentence order is especially flexible when compared with English. Therefore, a minimum
number of words can create effective communication in Japanese. For English, the
speaker is responsible for making clear and well-organized statements based on sentence structure and grammatical rules. Meanwhile, a Japanese speaker, with fewer restrictions, can create sentences with fewer words. The Japanese listener has the responsibility to understand what the Japanese speaker wants to convey (Hinds, 1987). In summary, grammatical and structural rules dictate that English is a speaker’s responsible language while Japanese is a listener’s responsible language.

**Communication Conflicts**

There following four types of communication situations will illustrate how information is transferred and decoded by speakers and listeners from both speaker-responsible and listener-responsible languages. In the first situation, a speaker from a speaker-responsible language transfers information to a listener from a speaker-responsible language. The speaker and the listener both have the same communication techniques and assumptions. Therefore, the listener does not have to actively assume the speaker’s point of view, because the speaker transfers information in a clear and well-constructed manner. Hence, the information will be easily transferred and clearly decoded by the listener. In the second situation, a speaker from a listener-responsible language transfers information to a listener from a listener-responsible language. Even though the speaker does not actively transfer clear and well-constructed information, the listener will actively infer the speaker’s point of view from context. This communication is successful in the same manner as communication between a speaker and a listener from a speaker-responsible language. In the third situation, a speaker from a speaker-responsible language transfers information to a listener from a listener-responsible
language. The listener may potentially be overwhelmed by the amount of information. However, the communication will still be successful. In the fourth situation, a speaker from a listener-responsible language transfers information to a listener from a speaker-responsible language. Successful communication is hardly possible, as the speaker does not transfer an adequate amount of information, and the listener will not actively assume the speaker’s point of view. If native English JFL students follow the same speaker-responsible rules that they are accustomed to, they can still transfer information as speakers of Japanese. However, they may not actively infer Japanese information, such as contextual cues. As a result, this communication may not be successful. Moreover, communication is will seem unnatural to native Japanese speakers.

These different communication styles are acquired unconsciously by both native English and Japanese speakers. Therefore, when native English and Japanese speakers communicate, they unconsciously assume that the other person follows the same communication styles as they do (Takigawa, 2006). And as a result, they may misunderstand each other. Hinds (1987) provides an example to illustrate this situation:

An American woman was taking a taxi to the Ginza Tokyu Hotel. The [Japanese] taxi driver mistakenly took her to the Ginza Daiichi Hotel. She said, “I’m sorry, I should have spoken more clearly.” This, I take to be an indication of her speaker-responsible upbringing. The taxi driver demonstrated his listener-responsible background when he replied, “No, no, I should have listened more carefully.” (p.144)

This example illustrates how the American woman and the taxi driver assumed that other person shares the same communication style. In the end, they both realized their mistake. These differences create a gap in understanding, similar to the sentence in Chapter I from Aya Koda between native Japanese speakers and non-native
Japanese speakers. The Japanese language is often described as an ambiguous language by English speakers (and other languages that rely on the speaker to clearly articulate meaning), because less information is transferred during a verbal exchange (Takigawa, 2006; Takeharu, 2009). However, if Japanese is spoken as a speaker-responsible language, Japanese becomes unnatural and tedious to native Japanese speakers. Thus, without recognizing the difference in communication styles, people from different cultures may have conflicts during a conversation.

Subject and Object Omission

Overview

The subject and object are often omitted in Japanese. As a result, native Japanese speakers transfer less information than native English speakers. Although native Japanese speakers often drop the subject and object from a conversation, native Japanese listeners are able to retrieve these omitted subjects and objects. However, retrieving subjects and objects is difficult for native English speakers, due to the different roles of the speaker’s and listener’s responsibilities. In this section, the discussion addresses subject and object omission in Japanese. Furthermore, this includes how and why subjects and objects are omitted.

Omission in Japanese

Outside of transferring less information, non-native Japanese speakers often describe Japanese as a language without subjects and objects (Takeharu, 2009). Non-verbalized subjects and objects are important characteristics of the listener inferring meaning during a Japanese conversation (Takigawa, 2006; Ikegami, 2007; Takeharu,
Subject and object omission is also prevalent in literature and media. One-word utterances are a specific example of a listener-responsible communication style that omits both the subject and object. According to Takeharu (2009), Japanese is not the only language using the one-word utterance as part of communication style. However, he argued that many other languages classify the one-word utterance as a childlike communication style. Thus, there are very few accepted situations where a one-word utterance is appropriate. In these languages, adults have fewer opportunities to use the one-word utterance than Japanese adults have in everyday conversation.

The well-used and famous Japanese word is Onegaishimasu. This is a concrete example of the one-word utterance. 「お願いします」(Onegaishimasu) is a very useful and convenient word for Japanese people. There is no perfect translation into English, because the word can be used in many different kinds of situations. The closest translation is “please” in English. For example “can you deposit this money into my account?” or “can you look after my baggage?” are perfectly replaced by the single word “Onegaishimasu” (Takeharu, 2009). However, “please” does not perfectly replicate those examples in English. People may understand what the speaker wants to do through the context, but “please” by itself is not a complete sentence. This is one of many examples where a Japanese word can replace an entire sentence. As stated above, the one-word utterance does not only belong to children in Japan. Japanese adults use one-word utterances in everyday conversations. This is an example from Takeharu’s (2009) article:

Wife: “doko?” where? (Where are you going?)
Husband: “Ebisu-tei” (name of a bar) Ebisu-tei (I am going to Ebisu-tei.)
Wife: “mata?” again? (Are you going there again?)
Husband: “hisashiburida!” a while (I haven’t been there for a while) (p.179)
The underlined English is the direct translation, whereas the part in parentheses is the extrapolated meaning, given the context. Examples like this can be found everywhere in Japanese communication. Takeharu (2009) hypothesized that Japanese people tend to avoid verbally addressing an obvious object between speaker and listener. This mutual understanding of an “obvious object” can be different, depending on the speaker’s and listener’s culture background.

The following phrases have been translated as closely as possible to the literal translation. Because I tried not to lose the meaning and structure of the original Japanese sentences, the translated sentences are grammatically incorrect.

A・マリーは昨年の全米決勝で競り勝ったジョコビッチにリベンジを許し、四大大会2連勝はならなかった。第1セットを先取したが、続く3セットを奪われて逆転負け。「前回の（全米の）勝利が精神的に助けてくれる」と話していたが、思い通りにはいかなかった。(“マリー、四大大会2連勝ならず” 2013)

Translation of the preceding sentences: A. Murray, who won the U.S. open after a close runoff with Djokovic, did not win two consecutive the four most important tennis tournaments. Won the first set, but lost next three sets, and lost at the end. Although said “previous (U.S. Open) can help me mentally.”; never work out as expect.

This quotation is from an online news source about the Australian Open tennis competition. This sentence defines the subject, A. Murray, but the rest of the sentences do not have a subject. This is because the subject was made explicit in the first sentence.

The second quotation is from the beginning of a famous Japanese novel.

朝、目が覚めると泣いていた。いつものことだ。悲しいのかどうかさえ、もうわからない。涙と一緒に感情はどこかへ流れていった。しばらく布団
の中でぼんやりしていると、母がやって来て、「そろそろ起きなさい」と言った。(Katayama, 2001, p. 1)

Translation of the preceding sentences: Morning, when wake up, crying (past tense). Usual thing. Do not understand whether sad or. Tears and feelings together flowed somewhere. For a moment, while stealing into space in a bed, mother came and said “get up by now”.

The only subject stated in the quotation is in the third sentence. The other sentences do not have an explicit subject, yet Japanese readers can understand the hidden subject “I”. As a rule, if a Japanese speaker asks about a listener’s actions, the speaker will not specify a subject in the sentence, since the subject of the sentence is already readily apparent. More specifically, in Japanese the first person (‘I’ in English) and the second person (‘you’ in English) are hardly used (Takeharu, 2009). Hence, the speaker does not say something if it is clear from the content and context. English also omits the subject if the content and context are unambiguous. For example, harsh commands and imperative sentences normally omit the subject. Other European languages, such as Spanish, also commonly omit the subject when it is morphologically clear. This type of subject omission is definitive (Takeharu, 2009).

The example above, お願いします(onegaishimasu), does not have either a subject or an object. The object is also non-verbalized when it can be inferred from context. Thus, the speaker would be acting in an inconsiderate manner by giving too much information to the listener. From this perspective, English may be a repetitive language for Japanese speakers (Takeharu, 2009).
Ikegami (2007) argued that beyond the grammatical rules, both native English and native Japanese speakers drop subjects and objects from their verbal exchange when the subjects are “already-appeared information” and “recoverable information”. An object is also omitted following the same rule. However, the processes of how the information is acknowledged and dropped from the exchange are quite different among native Japanese speakers and native English speakers.

**Already-appeared Information**

As a general rule, new information cannot be omitted from a conversation in both English and Japanese. On the other hand, when a speaker and a listener share the same “already-appeared information”, it is dropped from the conversation, and communication is smooth without subjects and/or objects (Ikegami, 2007). This “already appeared information” is one aspect that differentiates native English and Japanese speakers. Ikegami (2007) explained that the main difference comes from grammatical subject and psychological subject. For example, in the following sentences John is the grammatical subject.

- English: John eats an apple.
- Japanese: ジョン(John)は(particle)リンゴ(apple)を(particle)たべます(to eat).

In English, John indicates the third person singular, and this inflects ‘eat’ to ‘eats’. Therefore, John is the grammatical subject in this sentence. John is also the grammatical subject in Japanese, but the word “John” does not lead to inflection. Both English and Japanese have the grammatical subject at the beginning of the sentence.
By contrast, the psychological subject is the topic or theme of the sentence (Ikegami, 2007). An example of the psychological subject can be seen in the following sentence.

- English: John did not come. / I did not see John.
- Japanese: ジョン(John)は(particle)きませんでした。(did not come) / ジョン(John)を(particle)みませんでした。(did not see)

In both English and Japanese, the two sentences describe aspects of John’s behavior. Hence, the topic of both of these sentences is John, and this is the psychological subject. As a general rule, the topic or theme is usually located at the beginning of the sentence (Ikegami, 2007). When comparing the location of “John” between the English and Japanese sentences, “John” is at the end of the sentence in the second English phrase, while it is at the beginning of both sentences in Japanese. Furthermore, John, the psychological subject, is in fact a grammatical object in the second sentence of both the English and Japanese sentences. In English, grammatical objects are never located at the beginning of the sentence. Therefore, if a grammatical object is a psychological subject, it is difficult to overwrite the grammatical subject, which is located at the beginning of the sentence. Also, grammatical subjects inflect verbs. So, without subjects, English sentences are difficult to compose. As a result, native English speakers have difficulty differentiating grammatical and psychological subjects (Ikegami, 2007). However, native Japanese speakers can easily differentiate grammatical and psychological subjects, because Japanese grammar structures can locate both grammatical and psychological subjects at the beginning of the sentence. Among native Japanese speakers, once the
psychological subject (also known as a topic or a theme) is set and assumed by the speaker (that is, already-appeared information), the psychological subject will no longer be verbalized. Thus, in many cases native Japanese speakers do not repeatedly state the subject and/or object. Meanwhile, the grammatical subject is difficult to omit because grammatical rules constrain removing the subject from a sentence. Therefore, a subject-prominent language such as English, where the grammatical and psychological subjects are rarely distinguished, does not usually omit the subject.

Recoverable Information

According to Ikegami (2007), when a speaker considers an expression that is recoverable from the context, the speaker does not have to specify the expression. The quotation from Chapter I, “このうちに相違ないが、何処からはいっていいか、勝手口が無かった” (Koda, 1956, p. 3) (Konouchi ni soui naiga, dokokara haitte iika, katteguchi ga nakatta.), is difficult for non-native Japanese speakers to understand, because its subject is not explicitly expressed. This difficulty may be explained by a perception gap of what is recoverable information between native and non-native Japanese speakers (Ikegami, 2007). Recoverable information can be divided into two types.

The first type is recoverable information from the listener’s point of view. In this case, a speaker considers what is recoverable information based on the responses and perceptions from a listener’s point of view. Therefore, the speaker proactively provides information to help the listener understanding the speaker’s intent. This communication type is called dialogue (Ikegami, 2007). Examples of this type of recoverable information...
are subject omission of harsh commands and imperative sentences. In these cases, the subject is very clear. In this type of communication, there are two people with a different purpose: a speaker and a listener. The speaker recognizes the listener by paying attention. This is a typical pattern for native English speakers in a speaker-responsible language.

The second type of recoverable information is from the speaker’s point of view. In this case, the speaker considers what is recoverable information based on the speaker’s own perception. Hence, it is the listener’s job to proactively seek out what the speaker’s intention may be. Ikegami (2007) described this type of recoverable information as a monologue type of communication. Even though there is a speaker and listener, the speaker lacks a full understanding of what the listener has already inferred. This is prototypical of a listener-responsible language, such as Japanese. Native Japanese speakers assume that the speaker’s intention can be inferred by the listeners. Therefore, Japanese communication is more likely to be oriented to integrate the speaker’s and listener’s perceptions (Ikegami, 2007). Furthermore, the situation where the speaker and the listener can integrate their perceptions is supported by the concept of 甘え (amae). Amae means mutual dependency, which is a unique phenomenon in Japanese culture. As a result, a listener-responsible language is typically described as an egocentric language (Ikegami, 2007). If individuals are used to a dialogue-type of communication, they may be confused by a monologue-type of communication.

Takigawa (2006) studied intercultural communication between Japanese and Americans to examine common misunderstandings that may be caused by different communication styles. The participants were a married couple, in which the husband was
American and the wife Japanese. They used Japanese as their mutual communication language. The proficiency of the husband’s Japanese was considered to be at the advanced level, because he had been living in Japan for 13 years and had been participating in meetings conducted entirely in Japanese. Takigawa analyzed how the Japanese wife told her husband about main points in their conversations, and how her husband reacted (responded) in these conversations. The data indicated that the wife normally did not get to the main points until the end of the conversation. For example, she gave her husband two pieces of background information before she described how big and crowded Seeyou (the Japanese version of Wal-mart) was. To get to the key point, she started explaining why she did not shop at Kichijooji. She then shifted her topic to when she went to Seeyuu in Kunitachi, and found an ATM that was open until nine pm. Finally, she told her husband that she was amazed by Seeyuu, which was actually the key point of this conversation. Until she mentioned the ATM, her husband thought that her main point was the reason why she had come home late. The husband was confused by the quick topic switch from Kichijooji to the ATM in the Seeyuu store in Kunitachi, without seeing a clear relationship. At this point in the conversation, he still thought that the reason why his wife had come home late was related to the ATM. Finally, when his wife shifted topics from the ATM to how big and crowded Seeyuu was, he lost it. He noticeably stopped participating in the conversation at this point. This may have been a sign of his loss of interest, or decreased motivation (Takigawa, 2006). The wife seldom completed her sentences in the conversations. Specifically, she frequently omitted subjects during the conversations. Thus, her husband had trouble identifying referential
terms (i.e., ‘there’) in the conversation. Clearly, the wife was using monologue-type communication. She expected her husband to follow what she was talking about. She switched topics and omitted subjects, assuming that they shared the same information. Therefore, she dropped recoverable information from her point of view, not considering her husband’s point of view. At first, her husband tried to decode what she was talking about. However, he could not keep up with her intentions and could not recover information from context and her non-verbal cues. Evidently, she and her husband had different communication techniques which created this gap. From her husband’s perspective, she did not give him clear and well organized information to understand. On the other hand, she thought that she had given him enough information to explain herself.

This example may help to explain what happened to Mr. Lagana when he tried to understand Koda’s sentence. The quotation from Koda was written in a monologue-type communication. Therefore, Koda expected the readers to infer her intentions and point of view. However, people who use a dialogue-type of communication can easily get lost without explicit descriptions of intention.

Summary

In this chapter, the speaker- and listener-responsible languages were defined, and definitions were applied to describe English and Japanese norms. At first glance, the differences may not have much affect on language proficiency. However, the examples show how the different types of communication styles can significantly influence how people communicate. English and Japanese are antithetical to each other in terms of who
is responsible for providing and inferring information during communication. This difference can make Japanese difficult for JFL students to master.

Looking more closely at the content of communication, the omission of subject and object are described as having two rules, whereby “already appeared information” and “recoverable information” are omitted from a sentence. Whereas both English and Japanese define “already appeared information” in a similar manner, “recoverable information” is recognized in an almost opposite manner. To native English speakers, “recoverable information” is normally clear for both speakers and listeners, because a speaker makes an effort to make sure that a listener understands. In addition, situations where recoverable information is recognized and omitted are very limited. On the other hand, “recoverable information” for native Japanese speakers is ambiguous, because the judgment of what is recoverable information is based purely on the speaker’s perspective. In addition, situations in which recoverable information is recognized and omitted occur more frequently.

The next chapter examines how the cognitive processes for producing language are different in Japanese and English, and how native Japanese speakers interpret and construct situations differently than native English speakers in terms of the listener-responsible type of communication.
CHAPTER III

COGNITIVE PROCESS OF
NATIVE JAPANESE
SPEAKERS

Overview

The previous chapter defined what the speaker’s and listener’s responsibilities are, and how these responsibilities affect Japanese and English communication. Specifically, this difference in responsibility influences when and how subjects and objects are omitted in Japanese and English. From this analysis, native Japanese communication style was described as a monologue and an egocentric language (Ikegami, 2007). This is primarily because the Japanese communication style puts more emphasis on the speaker’s point of view, as compared to English communication. This chapter focuses on native Japanese speakers’ cognitive processes, including how they perceive and verbalize a situation.

The first section begins with a sentence from a famous Japanese novel, comparing the Japanese version of the sentence with the translated English sentence. This comparison indicates how Japanese and English capture and verbalize situations in different ways. Language preferences (fashion of speaking) between Japanese and English are also compared. The examples included confirm that different languages have different preferences in capturing and verbalizing a situation. Understanding the target
language’s manner of speaking is necessary to acquire an authentic second/foreign language. Examples are used to illustrate how native Japanese speakers comprehend a situation, based on what they can see and feel at that moment. The examples are intended to elaborate upon native Japanese speakers’ preferences.

The second section focuses on how a situation is construed in both English and Japanese. A study by Okugawa (2007) investigates native Japanese speakers’ and non-native Japanese speakers’ observation points in perceiving and verbalizing a situation. Finally, there is a description of how native Japanese and native English speakers construe a situation differently.

雪国 (Yukiguni / Snow Country)

_Yukiguni (Snow country)_ is a Japanese novel by Yasunari Kawabata that won the Nobel Prize in Literature. The first sentence of the novel is an excellent example of the perception of native Japanese speakers. The original sentence is: “国境の長いトンネルと抜けると雪国であった” (Kawabata, 1956, p. 6). The literal translation is: ‘through boundary’s long tunnel, snow country was there.’ However, the formal English translation is: “the train came out of the long tunnel into the snow country” (Ikegami, 2007, p. 317). In the original sentence there is no mention of a train, yet the English translation has “the train” as the subject of the sentence. The original Japanese novel subsequently mentions that the leading character is on a train a few lines after the initial sentence. Therefore, Japanese readers know that the leading character is on a train and that he is looking outside as the train goes through the tunnel. Ikegami explains why the original sentence does not specify the subject of the sentence:
Now, imagine yourself on the train, looking out of the window and watching the successive scenes as they fly past you. And imagine yourself reporting what you see—what is directly perceived by you. Since you are in the train and are moving with the train, the train is part of your expanded self, so to speak. You don’t have to, and actually can’t, see the train (that is, in its entirety, to be more precise). The train is not an object of your perception. Hence, the train doesn’t have to be encoded. This, in fact, is a subjective construal. The conceptualizer-speaker (here, the hero of the novel) is embedded in the environment and he sees his environment but not himself, hence he is encoded as zero…. They [the English translations] let the hero of the novel in the train undergo a self-split, one part of him stepping out of the train and perceiving from the outside the train carrying his counterpart. This is an objective construal. (Ikegami, 2008, p. 232)

Kawabata’s original opening sentence did not have to have a subject for the readers. This is because he would mention it a few sentences after the initial sentence, and also because he assumed that Japanese readers could project themselves into the mind of the leading character of the novel. In other words, Kawabata made the listeners (readers) responsible for projecting themselves into the mind of the leading character and decoding the subject of the sentence without explicitly stating it.

Moriya (2009) asked Japanese as foreign language (JFL) and Japanese as second language (JSL) students from western countries and China to draw a picture of how they interpreted the original Japanese sentence of Snow Country. Many of them drew a picture of a train coming out from a mountain tunnel, even though no train was mentioned in the original sentence. By contrast, native Japanese speakers drew a picture from the perspective of someone on the train. Even though both non-native Japanese speakers and native Japanese speakers read and comprehended the same general story, they did not understand the situation from the same perspective. Thus, it appeared as if the non-native Japanese speakers did not fully understand the situation conveyed by the native Japanese writer (Ikegami 2009, Moriya, 2009). This same difference in
perspectives may also arise during conversations between native and non-native Japanese speakers. Such gaps can interfere with Japanese language students’ acquisition of natural and authentic Japanese communication skills.

Fashion of Speaking

The concept of fashion of speaking was introduced by Whorf (1956). He stated:

They [the nature of the language or languages] do not depend so much upon ANY ONE SYSTEM (e.g., tense, or nouns) within the grammar as upon the ways of analyzing and reporting experience which have become fixed in the language as integrated “fashions of speaking” and which cut across the typical grammatical classifications, so that such a “fashion” may include lexical, morphological, syntactic, and otherwise systemically diverse means coordinate in a certain fame of consistency. (Whorf, 1956, p. 158)

There are connections but not correlations or diagnostic correspondences between cultural norms and linguistic patterns…. There is a relation between a language and the rest of the culture of the society which uses it. There are cases where the “fashions of speaking” are closely integrated with the whole general culture, whether or not this is universally true, and there are connections within these integrations, between the kind of linguistic analysis employed and various behavioral reactions and also the shapes taken by various cultural developments. (Whorf, 1956, p. 159)

Within the same language, a given situation can be construed and verbalized by a speaker in different ways. However, within a specific culture there is a general preference in constructing situations. Thus, when speakers of different languages assess the same situation, the manner of construal and kind of verbalization can be different.

Japanese is often described as an ambiguous language (i.e. beating around the bush too much) by non native Japanese speakers, especially westerners (Ikegami, 2005b, 2009; Takeharu, 2009; Kaiho, 2010). From the perspective of most western cultures,
ambiguity lacks accuracy and hides the truth. Thus, it is dishonest (Ikegami, 2005b). However, from the perspective of Japanese culture, ambiguity avoids being obtrusive. Basically, ambiguity is a sign of politeness in Japanese culture (Ikegami, 2005b). Therefore, ambiguity is preferred by native Japanese speakers.

There are other preferences specific to Japanese language. The following examples illustrate differences between Japanese and English.

Die or Be Killed

- Example in Japanese: 彼は、戦争で死んだ。(He died in a war.)
- Example in English: He was killed in a war. (彼は、戦争で殺された。)

Although this situation can be also expressed in English as “He died in a war”, in Japanese 彼は、戦争で殺された。(He was killed in a war) sounds very unnatural. In English, “He was killed in a war”, implies the reason he died: the enemy killed him. However, “he died in a war”, allows ambiguity as to how he died. If the person was, in fact, actually killed by the enemy, native English speakers will choose “He was killed in a war” rather than “He died in a war.” Even so, “He was killed in a war” sounds unnatural in Japanese. The Japanese sentence focuses on the event, the death, but says nothing about what caused the death. On the other hand, the English sentence includes both the event and the cause.

Explaining a Situation

- Example in Japanese: お財布を、盗まれました。(Wallet was stolen.)
• Example in English: Someone stole my wallet. (誰かが、私の財布を、盗みました。)

People can say “My wallet was stolen” in English, which is similar to the Japanese expression. However, if the person says “someone stole my wallet” in Japanese at a Japanese police station, it is perceived as somebody else's problem and more distant. Again, the Japanese expression just states the event, while the English expression includes both the event and its cause.

Change in Moods and Feeling

• Example in Japanese: うれしいです。 (Happy)

• Example in English: The news made me happy. (そのニュースが、私をうれしくしました。)

When moods and feelings are expressed in English, the passive is normally used. Some examples are “to be disappointed, to be satisfied, and to be surprised.” Using the passive gives the impression that these emotions are made (or caused) by something outside of the person describing their emotions. In this example, the English expression indicates that something happened to make this person happy. By contrast, emotions are rarely described using the passive in Japanese. As far as native Japanese speakers are concerned, changes in moods and feelings happen spontaneously (Ikegami, 2009). Therefore, feelings and moods come from inside the person, so that the Japanese expression only needs to state the feeling itself.

Where?

• Example in Japanese: こここ、どこですか。 (Here is where?)
Example in English: Where am I? (私は、どこですか。)

The Japanese translation of the English sentence will never be expressed by native Japanese speakers, because Japanese speakers assume that a person should know where they stand. It is there (here)! The person may not know a specific location or the exact name of the location, but the person should know where they are standing, such as in front of a coffee shop or next to a post office. The difference between Japanese and English is how a speaker perceives the situation (Himeno, Kondo, Niimura, & Moriya, 2009). In Japanese, the speaker expresses ongoing experience from the observing point within the person. Therefore, the person is not verbalized in the expression. By contrast, native English speakers express their ongoing experience from an observing point outside of themselves (Ikegami, 2007, 2008, 2009; Himeno et al., 2009). As a result, the English expression is the same expression used in explaining one’s location to others. The Japanese expression is the same as the English expression, 彼/彼女は、何処ですか。(Where are they?).

In the first three examples, English tended to express both the event and the cause of the event. On the other hand, Japanese tended to express either the event, or a feeling, but not both. Ikegami (2009) explained that Japanese people express what exists naturally, whereas English-speaking people express what exists because of something else. In the first two examples, Japanese and English expressions are not that different. The main difference is that English expressions contain more information than Japanese expressions. The third example indicates markedly different perceptions about feelings and moods. Specifically, the fundamental attitude towards how feelings and moods arise
is different between Japanese and English. In Japanese, changing feelings and moods come from inside of the person who reports them. By contrast, in English, changing feelings and moods are caused by something outside of the person who reports them. Therefore, native Japanese speakers consider changing feelings and moods as more subjective events, whereas native English speakers consider changing feelings and moods as more objective events.

The previous examples clearly show that a person’s perception of a given situation can create different verbalizations of the same situation. These perceptions and verbalizations influence the acquisition of natural Japanese language for non-native Japanese speakers. It has been shown that acquiring the Japanese manner of speaking in Japanese leads JFL and JSL students to produce more natural Japanese language. However, for a long time, the teaching of natural Japanese locutions was neglected in JFL and JSL classrooms (Moriya, 2009). Differences in the manner of speaking in Japanese and English reflect the roles of the speaker and listener in each language. In the next section, the focus is on the speaker’s point of view, and how native Japanese speakers process a situation differently than native English speakers.

Cognitive Processes of Producing Language

This section explains how native Japanese speakers perceive and verbalize a given situation differently than English speakers. Examples from the previous sections highlight the fact that native Japanese speakers prefer certain expressions that are not as common in English. Therefore, direct translations from English to Japanese may seem unnatural to native Japanese speakers. Understanding how native Japanese speakers
process an expression is critical to acquiring a more natural Japanese language. Okugawa (2007) conducted a study that identified different points of view (i.e., perspective taking) between native and non-native Japanese speakers. The perception of a given situation starts with the speaker’s point of view, and the verbalization is based on that perception. This study also confirmed that native Japanese speaker’s process of perception and verbalization is subjective relative to native English speakers. This subjective perception is a unique feature of the Japanese language, and further investigation is warranted (Okugawa, 2007).

As You See and As You Feel

Native Japanese speakers have a strong tendency to perceive and verbalize, based on what is in front of them at that moment (Himeno et al., 2009). This is called “臨場” (Rinjyo) in Japanese, “attendance” in English. Native Japanese speakers verbalize a situation as if they are actually in the situation. Therefore, the original observation point, “I”, is not verbalized, because “I” is not in front of the speaker. Native Japanese speakers construct a sentence from what they can see (Himeno et al., 2009). Using the same example from the previous section:

- Japanese: ここはどこですか。 (Here is where?)
- English: Where am I? (私はどこですか。)

When a native Japanese speaker explains their situation, the speaker captures whatever they can see. Thus, in the Japanese sentence, the scene in front of the speaker is unidentifiable. This is because the speaker cannot see himself/herself. The speaker can see his/her hand, feet and other body parts, but they cannot see themselves. Therefore, “I”
is dropped here. In English, there is a person (I) who is lost, and there is another person (the speaker) observing the person who is lost. The speaker asks the listener where this person (I) is. Therefore, in theory, the speaker is looking at himself/herself objectively, and explaining the situation in the third person (Himeno et al., 2009).

The initial sentence of Snowy Country by Yoshinari Kawaba conveyed what the main character could see. In the original sentence, there was no mention of “I” and “train,” even though the main character was on a train. Of course, he could not see himself, so “I” was not verbalized. He could not see the entire train either, as he was on the train, and “the train is part of your expanded self” (Ikegami, 2008, p. 232). Therefore, both “I” and “train” were dropped from the sentence.

The following sentences, quoted in chapter II, also show how native Japanese speakers verbalize what they can see and feel:

朝、目が覚めると泣いていた。いつものことだ。悲しいのかどうかさえ、もうわからない。涙と一緒に感情はどこかへ流れていった。しばらく布団の中でぼんやりしていると、母がやって来て、「そろそろ起きなさい」と言った。（Katayama, 2001, p. 1）

Translation of the preceding sentences: Morning, when wake up, crying (past tense). Usual thing. Do not understand whether sad or. Tears and feelings together flowed somewhere. For a moment, while stealing into space in a bed, mother came and said “get up by now”.

As described in chapter II, this quotation has only one explicit subject (the mother), while every other sentence omits the explicit subject. The main character of this quotation only verbalized what he could see and feel at that moment.
These examples confirm that native Japanese speakers tend to verbalize only what they can see when explaining their situation. In the above examples, speakers were explaining their own experiences, what they could see and feel at that moment. However, native Japanese speakers also explain someone else’s events as if they were the person in that situation. The next section, explain how native Japanese speaker’s point of view moves when describing someone else’s situation.

**Observational Point of View**

Okugawa (2007) conducted a discourse analysis that compared how native Japanese speakers and JSL students explained an event by focusing on their observational point of view. The participants were categorized into three different levels of proficiency in Japanese: native, advanced and intermediate. Non-native Japanese speakers were all native Chinese speakers. All participants watched a short animated film. To avoid language and culture-based bias, the main character in the film was a penguin, and no human language was used. Okugawa (2007) asked the participants to write a short essay that described the story for anyone who had not seen the film. The pertinent scene was divided into three sections. The first section included events after the penguin woke up, and before it left its house on a journey. The next section started after the penguin left its house until the penguin arrived at its uncle’s house. The third section encompassed events after it arrived at its uncle’s house until it went to bed. Okugawa (2007) was specifically interested in analyzing how the participants explained the second section. In the second section, the penguin traveled to its uncle’s house, where it drew a picture, saw a baby penguin and the baby’s mother, and observed a letter-carrier who dropped a package.
when the letter carrier drove by the penguin. The penguin let the letter-carrier know about
the dropped-package, and the letter-carrier gave the penguin a ride in appreciation.

Okugawa (2007) divided the observational point of view into the observer's
point of regard and the observer’s standpoint. The observer’s point of regard draws the
observer’s attention, such as the agent of actions or events. The observer’s standpoint is
anything that an observer projects (i.e., person or object). This is usually the main
character of a story. In many languages, including English, those two points usually focus
on the same object or person. However, they are two different points in Japanese. The
following sentence demonstrates both the observer's point of regard and the observer’s
standpoint:

- Japanese: 郵便屋さん(The letter-carrier)が(particle indicating the letter-carrier
is a subject)、お礼に(in appreciation)ペンギン(penguin)を(particle)車(car)に(particle)
乗せてくれました(received a ride).

- English as: the letter-carrier gave the penguin a ride to show his appreciation.

The observer's point of regard is the letter carrier, because this sentence is
about the letter carrier and attention is focused on what the letter carrier did. The
observer’s point of regard was determined when the subject of the sentence was marked
with “が” (ga). “Ga” denotes new and unknown information. Therefore, when a subject
is marked with “ga”, the subject indicates that the observer's point of regard has switched
to the new character (Okugawa, 2007). The observer’s standpoint is the penguin, because
the Japanese sentence indicates that the penguin is the one who received the ride. If the
Japanese sentence above was presented by itself and only described what the letter carrier
did, the sentence should have used the giving expression. As a consequence, further analysis of syntactic choice would be necessary. However, this sentence was embedded in a paragraph describing the penguin’s actions, which were expressed from the penguin’s point of view. Therefore, the speaker’s standpoint had already been established, and the receiving expression is appropriate in keeping this sentence consistent with other’s in the paragraph. English specifies that when the letter carrier is the subject and the penguin is the object of the sentence, the ride must be given by the letter carrier. The observer’s standpoint is set as the letter carrier, because the letter carrier gave the penguin a ride. A native Japanese speaker’s observing standpoint stays on the main character, even though the sentence subject is the letter-carrier. To summarize, in Japanese the observer's point of regard is the letter carrier, but the observer’s standpoint is the penguin. If this sentence were written in English, both the observer's point of regard and standpoint would be the letter carrier.

The result of Okugawa’s research (2007) showed that native Japanese speakers changed their point of regard whenever a new character, such as the baby’s mother or the letter carrier, appeared in the film. However, the Japanese speaker’s observer standpoint never shifted from the penguin. Thus, the native Japanese speakers’ standpoint was fixed, whether or not the subject of the sentence (observer's point of regard) was changed (Okugawa, 2007).

Intermediate Japanese students rarely used the marker “ga” to indicate the observer's point of regard. Only 10% of the participants used “ga”. Therefore, it was difficult to determine if the observer's point of regard had changed based on the
appearance of new characters. In addition, the observer’s standpoint could not be
identified from participants’ sentences due to their lack of Japanese language (Okugawa, 2007).

Advanced Japanese students were similar to intermediate Japanese students. They used “ga” to indicate the observer's point of regard 35% of the time, relative to native Japanese speakers. However, their observer’s standpoint was not fixed. It switched from the penguin to the letter carrier when the subject (the observing point of regard) moved from the penguin to the letter carrier.

This discourse analysis indicates that native Japanese speakers explain someone else’s events as if they attend to the story while identifying themselves with the main character. Hence, their standpoint is expressed within the scope of the penguin, the main character. This is why their observing standpoint is fixed on the penguin. When a new character appeared in the film, the observing point of regard switched to the new character. On the other hand, as new characters appeared, non-native Japanese students switched the observing point of regard and standpoint. Consequently, explanations by non-native Japanese speakers are difficult for native Japanese speakers to understand (Okugawa, 2007).

Native Japanese speakers verbalize a situation based on their observational point of view, which is different than that of native English speakers. As a result, native English speakers learning Japanese cannot verbalize the same situation in the same way as a native Japanese speaker. Verbalized sentences from native English speakers learning Japanese sound unnatural to native Japanese speakers. Likewise, verbalized sentences
from native Japanese speakers can be difficult for native English learning Japanese to understand. In such cases, the observational point of view can affect the role of the speaker’s and listener’s responsibilities in Japanese and English. These different observational points of view lead to different situation construal in English and Japanese.

**Situation Construal**

Situational construal is an interpretation of how a speaker perceives and verbalizes a situation. Langacker (1990) stated that “an expression’s meaning cannot be reduced to an objective characterization of the situation described: equally important for linguistic semantics is how the conceptualizer chooses to construe the situation and portray it for expressive purposes” (p. 313). When a person verbalizes a situation, he/she unconsciously (or sometimes consciously) selects which parts of the situation should be verbalized. This happens regardless of the degree of subjectivity in any language (Ozono, 2007). However, each language has different ways in which a speaker subjectively construes a situation. Speakers may also prefer to use certain expressions to describe the situation.

There are two different conceptualizations: subjective construal and objective construal (Ikegami, 2005a, 2007, 2008; Ozono, 2007; Shimizu, 2010). According to Ikegami (2005a, 2007), during subjective construal, speakers place themselves into a target situation whether or not they actually experience it. They assess the situation as if they are attending and experiencing it as the party in charge. The speaker then verbalizes the situation based on how he/she assess the situation. In other words, the speaker is “embedded in the situation… [where the speaker] is perceiving and experiencing”
During objective construal, speakers disconnect themselves from the target situation, whether or not they actually experience it. They assess the situation objectively as a third person, or an outside observer, even if the speaker actually attended and experienced the situation.

The previous sections confirm that native Japanese speakers tend to capture a situation or event, based on what they can see at that moment. Furthermore, they describe a situation more subjectively, relative to native English speakers. Langacker (1990) also used the following examples to illustrate different levels of subjectivity. “Vanessa is sitting across the table from me. Vanessa is sitting across the table” (Langacker, 1990, p. 328). According to Langacker, the first sentence can be understood as the speaker explaining the situation, while he/she was looking at a picture of himself/herself. The speaker did not look at the situation while at the table, but from a different location. Therefore, the speaker captured the situation objectively. On the other hand, the second sentence can be understood as if the speaker were sitting at the table in front of Vanessa. Therefore, the second sentence was expressed subjectively.

Subjective and objective construal can also be seen in Okugawa’s (2007) study. Non-native Japanese speakers often expressed sentences objectively when they described the penguin’s actions, such as “ペンギンが郵便屋さんを見た” (the penguin looked at the letter carrier). By contrast, native Japanese speakers explained the situations subjectively as if they were the penguin. For example, “郵便屋さんが(ペンギンのほうに)やって来た” (The letter carrier came [towards me/the penguin]). Native Japanese speakers explain a situation from the point of view of the main character (the penguin), or...
a party in charge, even if they are bystanders. However, non-native Japanese speakers explain the situation by disassociating themselves from the penguin. As a result, native Japanese speakers drop the subject (the penguin), because they are explaining the sentence from the point of view of the penguin. Non-native Japanese speakers do not know why native Japanese speakers drop the subject in this situation. This is why non-native Japanese speakers are confused when they try to identify the unexpressed subject.

Aya Koda’s (1956) sentence was verbalized based on subjective construal. The literal translation is: this house no discrepancy, where to enter, no back door existed. According to Ikegami (2007), this sentence was a monologue. Thus, the speaker had no intention to communicate with someone else. As a result, the subject of this sentence was not verbalized. Mr. Lagana could not decode the unexpressed subject in the sentence, because he did not know how native Japanese speakers perceive and express situations differently than Spanish.

The roles of the speaker and listener are quite different between Japanese and western languages. Because native Japanese listeners are more responsible in decoding what the speakers’ intention is, Japanese listeners should know how speakers process and express a situation in general. Many JFL/JSL students lack the ability to perceive and express situations in a way that native Japanese speakers prefer. Likewise, JFL/JSL students do not know how to decode information from native Japanese speakers, because they do not know how native Japanese speakers process situations. This lack of knowledge creates a gap which may inhibit JFL/JSL students from acquiring natural Japanese language skills.
Summary

This chapter investigated how native Japanese speakers perceive and verbalize a given situation. The manner of speaking varies by language. There is a difference in how a situation is construed in Japanese and English. Analysis of Japanese literature and everyday conversations indicate that native Japanese speakers verbalize based on what they can see and feel at that moment. In addition, their expressions are more subjective. Okugawa’s study (2007) confirmed that even when native Japanese speakers do not experience a situation, they embed themselves into the situation and speak from the main character’s point of view. On the other hand, non-native Japanese speakers understand and verbalize a situation objectively, whether or not they actually experience the situation.

Ikegami (2007) explained that an individual’s perception of what they can see is influenced by feelings and moods. Thus, the same situation can be understood and expressed differently, depending on how the speaker feels. Furthermore, Ikegami (2007) believes that the individual can express changing feelings and moods indirectly through verbalizing the perception based on state of mind. This kind of indirect expression is preferred by native Japanese speakers, but not by native English speakers. Hence, when native English speakers learning Japanese hear these indirect expressions, they have a hard time understanding the unspoken messages.

Native Japanese speakers explain a situation using subjective construal, and native Japanese “listeners” attend to the expression while projecting themselves to the speakers. Native Japanese “listeners” are used to expressions based on subjective construal. Thus, subjective expressions are easy to understand for native Japanese
speakers. However, native English speakers prefer objective expressions, and native English “listeners” are not used to subjective expressions. As a result, understanding subjective expressions is difficult during communication between native Japanese speakers and native English speakers. When native English speakers learn Japanese, they apply their own communication roles and rules to Japanese communication. Unfortunately, this makes the Japanese communication unnatural.

The next chapter introduces current issues in Japanese textbooks that attempt to teach natural Japanese. It also analyzes popular Japanese textbooks that address information about native Japanese speakers’ speech processes and gives recommendations about how these issues can be corrected to help students acquire natural Japanese communication skills.
CHAPTER IV

TEXTBOOK ANALYSIS,
RECOMMENDATION,
AND SUMMARY

Overview

In the first part of this chapter, the focus is on the issues of subject/object omission and the speaker’s observing point of view as they pertain to current Japanese textbooks. Many researchers agree that these two issues are not included in many Japanese textbooks, even though neglecting them may directly affect student’s ability to learn natural Japanese. Next, a textbook analysis of three well-known Japanese textbooks is presented. Each textbook approaches the subject omission and speaker’s observing point of view differently. The results of the analysis suggest what improvements should be made to improve the textbooks. In the third part of this chapter, general recommendations to improve current Japanese language education in the U.S. are offered. It concludes with a summary of the thesis at the end of this chapter.

Issues in Japanese Textbooks

Current teaching methods and materials (including textbooks) for Japanese language classes emphasize grammatical form, which includes a focus on explaining grammar in a comprehensible way. As a result, example sentences in the textbooks
appear awkward and unnatural. Unfortunately, Japanese language learners acquire inappropriate Japanese as a direct consequence of this focus on grammar (Yokota, 2009). Current Japanese textbooks and materials do not have much information about native Japanese speaker’s situational construal (Himeno, 2007). Moriya (2009) has shown that unnatural Japanese occurs as a result of different perspectives on a situation between native Japanese speakers and non-native Japanese speakers. Researchers have also found that cognitive linguistic theory benefits foreign language education (Kourakata, 2006).

Yet, cognitive processes involved in native Japanese speakers’ speech are rarely discussed or presented in textbooks. In chapter 3, I discussed the importance of understanding native Japanese speakers’ preferences when they produce speech. Focusing on grammatical form is important in learning Japanese as a foreign language, but acquiring natural Japanese goes beyond knowledge of grammatical rules.

Himeno (2007) has highlighted some representative issues in current Japanese textbooks. The first issue is that “I” is expressed too often in textbooks. As previously noted, native Japanese speakers often omit “I” when speaking Japanese, because “I” is normally implied in contexts where the speaker cannot see himself/herself. However, the typical Japanese textbook often uses “I” in the very first chapter. For example, “私は鈴木です。私は日本人です。” (I am Suzuki. I am Japanese.). Using “I” in this way can give Japanese learners the impression that using the first-person singular pronoun is customary. According to Himeno (2007), students taught in this way often say “私は～です。” (I am …), when they give their name on the phone. However, native Japanese speakers almost never use “I” (わたし) when they give their name on the phone.
Furthermore, when native Japanese speakers express their feelings, they do not use “I”. Yet, many Japanese textbooks use expressions with “I” when feelings are expressed. As a rule, Japanese does not express an individual’s own experience and feelings using “I”. However, many Japanese textbooks do not teach this rule. Therefore, students often start sentences with “私は (watashi wa)” (I am), in the same way as they use “I” in their English sentences.

The second issue is native Japanese speakers’ observing point of view. As discussed previously, native Japanese speakers’ point of view is always fixed, while native English speakers’ point of view changes, depending on the subject of the sentence. Although this difference in observing point of view has been demonstrated, explanations of this difference are rarely provided (Himeno, 2007). In addition, the illustrations in many Japanese textbooks are not aligned with a native Japanese speaker’s observing point of view. Illustrations are often drawn to show a situation objectively (i.e., the American point of view) (Himeno, 2007). Such illustrations mislead students by providing incorrect expressions about native Japanese speaker’s observing point of view. The concept of observing point of view is tantamount to understanding subjective construal.

Textbook Analysis

This section describes a textbook analysis that examines how subject omission (focus is on “I”) and speakers’ observation points are presented in Japanese textbooks. The selection of textbooks is based on the four textbooks available through the Japanese program at California State University, Chico. From these four textbooks, I selected the
three series of Japanese textbooks that included both beginning and intermediate levels: *Yookoso!*, *Genki*, and *Japanese for Busy People*. The main criteria for textbook selection were the inclusion of information about subject omission and the speaker’s observing point of view (including receiving and giving expressions). In terms of subject omission, I looked at the first chapter of each textbook to determine whether the concept of subject omission was described. This is where subject omission typically appears in textbooks, when it is included. Regarding the speaker’s observing point of view, I looked at receiving and giving expressions, and checked to see whether or not explanations were provided for the expressions. The Japanese expressions of receiving and giving are quite different relative to English expressions. This is primarily because these expressions are determined based on the speakers’ observing standpoint and observing point of regard (see Chapter 3 for examples). In Japanese, the word “give” has two different expressions (あげます/agemasu and くれます/kuremasu). The difference is in the observer’s standpoint. “Agemasu” indicates that the observer’s standpoint benefits the giver (Jane). On the other hand, “Kuremasu” indicates that the observer’s standpoint benefits the receiver (John). According to Okugawa (2007), if the speaker recognizes John as the main character of this sentence, the native Japanese speakers will use “kuremasu” to express an action of giving. If I, as a native Japanese speaker, received an apple from Jane, I would use “kuremasu” to express Jane’s action of giving me an apple, because I benefit as a receiver. Analyzing how Japanese textbooks teach these receiving and giving expressions can show how the textbooks present the speaker’s observing point of view. Observation points of view were investigated in regards to how the receiving and giving
expressions were explained in the textbook, and how they were aligned with illustrations. For the omission of subjects and objects, I only investigated how “I” was used in sentences, and how it was explained grammatically. Investigating all subjects and objects in the textbooks would have been extremely time-consuming and beyond the purview of this thesis. In the following sections, three textbooks (*Yookoso!, Genki, and Japanese for Busy People*) are analyzed based on the criteria discussed above.

**Yookoso!**

Part one introduces how to perform a typical greeting in Japanese. Example sentences in the textbook do not express “I”. In addition, a note is provided that states the “subject may be left unexpressed in Japanese when it can be figured out from the context” (Tohsaku, 1999, p. 4). In the previous chapters, I described how different languages have different ways of perceiving a situation. Thus, describing an unexpressed subject needs more explanation than this short note. When the author explains the basic grammatical concept, X is/am/are Y in Japanese, “I (わたし/watashi)” appears in examples later on in the textbook. Also, following activities using X is/am/are Y, “I” appears regularly, such as わたしは 21さいです (I am 21 years old), わたしは 学生です (I am a student). Although the textbook initially introduces a natural Japanese greeting, once grammar concepts are introduced, examples become more unnatural. After the grammatical explanations are introduced in chapter one, “I” is used sporadically throughout the textbook. Again, when native Japanese speakers express their feelings, “I” is omitted. However, many examples in this textbook include “I” when expressing feelings, which makes the expressions unnatural to native Japanese speakers. In addition,
unnecessary subjects are frequently included with examples and classroom activities that make the activities unauthentic and unnatural.

In regards to the observing point of view, the receiving and giving expressions were explained with the statement, “the expressions are very different from English” (Tohsaku, 2006, p. 93). However, the authors do not explain how they are different. There are two types of sentences presented in English. One sentence includes a giver as the subject of the sentence and the other includes a receiver as the subject of the sentence. This explanation is based on the social relationship between the giver and the receiver. Instead of explaining how native Japanese speakers use receive/give expressions based on the speaker’s observing point of view, the textbook teaches how to express receive/give situations based on different social hierarchies. Unfortunately, the in-class activities do not match the explanations. One activity asks students to use a person’s (Mr. Hayashi) point of view to express what he receives and gives. The activity asks the students to complete sentences, where a subject for each sentence is provided (e.g., my mother…, my dog…). Up to this point, the textbook has not provided students any information about the speaker’s observing point of view. In addition, the difference between “agamasu” and “kuremasu” is not discussed. Therefore, students could easily confuse “agemasu” and “kuremasu” in this activity.

Genki

The first chapter introduces the basic grammar structure X は Y です。（X is/am/are Y.），similar to Yookoso!. However, the examples do not contain subjects. The textbook states that native Japanese speakers tend to omit subjects when they think they
are clear to the listener (Banno, Ohno, Sakane, & Shinagawa, 1999). This explanation is the fundamental reason why native Japanese speakers omit subjects. However, this explanation is very broad and vague. The process of omission, such as the kinds of rules applied to omit subjects, is not well explained. A potential problem emerges when the speaker’s perspectives are different, such as those between native Japanese speakers and native English speakers. In this case, the students may apply their own rules and perspectives as native English speakers. Even with this general explanation of why subjects are omitted, the concept of omission may still be unclear. Moreover, some sentences still include “私は” (I), even though there is no clear reason why those sentences would include “I”, as compared to other sentences without “I”. Regarding the expressions of feelings, “私は” is in parentheses to indicate that it is optional, yet no reason is explicitly stated.

The receiving and giving expressions used in the textbook focused on the direction of the transaction (Banno, Ohno, Sakane, Shinagawa, & Tokashiki, 1999). The textbook also states that a word “to give” in Japanese, has two expressions, “agemasu” and “kuremasu”. An illustration is provided to clarify how to use “agemasu” and “kuremasu”. However, the illustration does not address situations when a speaker expresses someone else’s experience. When the speaker embeds and projects himself/herself into someone else’s experience, the action of giving is expressed as “kuremasu”. Unfortunately, explaining the receiving and giving expressions in terms of direction cannot cover all possible situations. Identifying the observing point of view is
essential if learners are to fully understand the receiving and giving expressions in Japanese.

*Japanese for Busy People*

In the first unit, the authors state that the topic of the sentence is generally omitted when it is obvious to the other person what that subject is (Association for Japanese-Language Teaching, 2006). “The topic is often the same as the subject, but not necessarily” (Association for Japanese-Language Teaching, 2006, p. 2). Like the previous two textbooks, the explanation for subject omission is not very clear. Examples of expressions of feelings are frequently presented without “I”. However, practice exercises on how to express feelings start with “私は” (I) in parenthesis, which may give the students the impression that including “I” is optional. As described in the previous chapter, the only time “I” is included is to differentiate a speaker’s feeling from someone else’s. Therefore, an activity that only expresses the speaker’s feelings and includes “I” creates an unnatural Japanese sentence.

The receiving and giving expressions are explained in terms of social hierarchy (Association for Japanese-Language Teaching, 2007). The focus is on the relationship between a giver and a receiver. However, the explanation of social relationships only applies when a speaker is the one actually experiencing a situation. If the speaker is explaining someone else’s experience, this won’t help students. Identifying the observing point of view through situational construal is more likely to help students understand the receiving and giving expressions.
Summary of Textbook Analysis

Analyzing three major textbooks revealed that little attention was paid to certain fundamental Japanese expressions. As Yokota (2009) pointed out, grammatical explanation takes precedent over examples in most textbooks. Originally, grammatical rules and sentence structures were not as important in Japanese language, relative to English. Therefore, it was not necessary to teach Japanese with a strong emphasis on grammatical rules. All authors mention that the subject or topic of a sentence is omitted when it is clear to the listeners. However, there is no further expansion of this explanation. Such limited information about the omission of subjects does not help students learn how to omit subjects correctly. In addition, examples using (and omitting) subjects are not consistent within the textbooks. This inconsistency will no doubt lead to confusion on the part of students.

Based on this textbook analysis, explanations about receiving and giving expressions are of two types: the social hierarchy and the direction of the transaction. The receiving and giving expressions have a close relationship with the observing point of view. Students need to understand a native Japanese speaker’s observing point of view to correctly acquire these expressions (Yokota, 2009). Unfortunately, the observing point of view is not presented in any of the three textbooks. The explanations presented cover only specific aspects of receiving and giving expressions, and do not sufficiently help students produce the expressions in a natural Japanese way.
Recommendations

General recommendations can help to improve current Japanese language education based on the research reported in the previous chapters and text analysis. Japanese has a strong tendency for subjective construal. “I”, which is an agent of recognition and utterance, is normally not the target of construal. Therefore, unless a speaker wants to contrast his/her feelings with someone else’s, “I” is not verbalized. One of the most direct ways to teach the omission of “I” is to teach self-reported expressions of feeling. These kinds of expressions are also subjective expressions (Himeno, 2007). Teaching feeling expressions may be more effective if they are taught with exclamation sentences, such as “うれしい！”(happy!). When the ‘X is Y’ form is used to express feelings, it is a contradiction to teach the students to omit “I”. Besides feeling expressions, Japanese textbooks need to provide more explanations as to why “I” is omitted in native Japanese expressions (Himeno & Kondo, 2009). In doing the textbook analysis, I noticed that very little explanation is provided on subject omission. Even though general rules about subject omission are complicated for beginning level students, explaining the omission of “I” is manageable, as the rules are simple and straightforward. Therefore, textbooks should only focus on omission of “I” when self expressions are taught. The omission of “I” can then be used when explaining general subject omission later on.

The Japanese receiving and giving expressions are among the most difficult for non-native Japanese speakers (Yokota, 2009). Understanding the observing point of view is the key to understanding these expressions. However, none of the textbooks that I analyzed mentioned the observing point of view. Illustrations can help students
understand these expressions (Himeno, 2007; Yokota, 2009). Useful illustrations should include information about the speaker’s observing point of view. According to Yokota (2009), a native Japanese speaker’s point of view is analogous to a snake’s point of view. This is because native Japanese speakers verbalize a situation by shifting perspectives, just like a snake moving forward while changing direction. Japanese speakers only describe what they can see. Meanwhile, a native English speaker’s viewpoint is like a bird’s viewpoint (Yokota, 2009). That is, they are looking at situations from a distance. Thus, illustrations in Japanese textbooks should focus on the speaker’s point of view, instead of capturing the entire situation. For example, when a speaker receives a gift from someone, the illustration should be a picture of a speaker’s hands receiving a gift, instead of capturing the entire situation including the entire body of the speaker and giver. This could easily be accomplished using Japanese manga (cartoon). Manga are usually drawn from a speaker’s (or a main character’s) point of view (Himeno, 2007). Japanese cartoons are popular among JFL/JSI students, and can easily grab their attention.

My last recommendation is for additional research in developing natural Japanese with both subject and object omission and situational construal. Cognitive linguistic research in Japanese is a still new field. In order to apply the finding to Japanese language education, additional research will need to be conducted (Kourakata, 2006). This is especially true in terms of pedagogical viewpoint, where a curriculum needs to incorporate cognitive linguistic aspects in teaching Japanese as a foreign language. More specifically, the timing and technique of introducing subject and object omission should be examined. Additionally, activities for the proper use of subject and
object omission need to be developed to complement the existing curriculum. The methods for presenting subjective construal also need to be investigated further.

Summary

The communication style and rules of native Japanese speakers and listeners are different than the communication style and rules of native English speakers and listeners. In Japanese, a listener is responsible for decoding the meaning of information transferred from a speaker. Therefore, information from a native Japanese speaker cannot be easily decoded by a native English listener, who is following the rules and style of English communication. Some examples include Mr. Lagana’s confusion and the interpretive differences between native Japanese speakers and non-native Japanese speakers involving Kawabata’s *Yukiguni*. Because of these differences, Japanese is often described as a vague language. However, native Japanese “listeners” can still understand incomplete information from native Japanese “speakers”. This is because native Japanese listeners are also native Japanese speakers: they can decode incomplete information based on their communication preferences.

The literature review of native Japanese speaker’s preferences revealed that native Japanese speakers prefer to verbalize a situation subjectively, relative to non-native Japanese speakers. This phenomenon is called subjective construal. A characteristic feature of subjective construal is to omit the subject and/or object in a sentence. In addition to subject/object omission, the speaker’s observing point of view plays an important role in subjective construal. Many scholars agree that implementing subjective construal in Japanese language education can help JFL/JSL students acquire
natural Japanese. However, current Japanese language education focuses primarily on grammatical forms (Moriya, 2009). As a result, acquiring natural Japanese is more difficult in JFL/JSL classrooms. Japanese has fewer grammar restrictions, relative to English. Therefore, teaching Japanese based on rules of grammar is limited. In fact, the popular Japanese textbooks I examined used either ambiguous explanations of subject/object omission or neglected the speaker’s observation point of view. Both of these concepts are key characteristics of subjective construal.

Based on the results of the textbook analysis, improvements in JFL/JSL education, such as more meaningful illustrations and better teacher training are needed. According to Kourakata (2006) subjective construal in Japanese language from the point of view of cognitive linguistics has just began. Future cognitive linguistic research on subjective construal is needed in this area of Japanese language education.
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