

A Study on the Ambiguous Meaning of Some Usages in Japanese Language

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Abstract

The national character of people can be known by studying the language they use as language represents the culture of people who use it. Why Japanese people use the expressions which have ambiguous meaning? They are very humble and polite in dealing with other people. For example they are very polite when someone gives them presents or when they invite someone for dinner to their home. They never say “No” to refuse even small requests. Instead they use other ambiguous roundabout ways of saying “No” not to annoy other people. This paper presents the ambiguous usage of Doozo, ii, desu, Tyotto, Kekko in Japanese language. Foreign learners of Japanese language may confuse with the use of these expressions when they come to use them. In Japanese, they are called AimainaNihongo. If a learner doesn't understand them clearly, he will misinterpret them. This paper aims to present some ambiguous usages in daily expressions of Japanese language, which reflect their culture, to Myanmar learners of Japanese language. In this study comparative analysis is used to compare similar expressions in Myanmar language with those expressions in Japanese language.

Keywords: Doozo, ii, desu, Tyotto, Kekoo

1. Introduction

Manners of people can be studied by studying a language which represents the national character of that people. Typically Japanese people use the polite form of language or they may try to be polite as civilized citizens. Therefore, foreign learners of Japanese language may find difficulties in understanding these polite expressions. The aim of this paper is to help teachers teach their students to understand these expressions easily. It also describes the features of Japanese language and its culture briefly. In this paper, common expressions of Japanese language such as ‘Doozo’, ii, desu and Tyottoetc, and the way teachers should explain them clearly not to misinterpret them are presented.

2. Aim

The aim of this research is to study the ambiguous expressions in Japanese Language and to help Myanmar learners of Japanese Language in learning the correct use of these expressions.

3. Literature Review

According to 岡本佐智子, in his article 日本語 副詞「ちょっと」における多様性と技能 (2006), described that non-native speakers of Japanese language may have misunderstanding when they communicate with Japanese people using Japanese language. They tend to make mistakes in the use of the expression “Tyotto” as it has many different meanings.

For example, “Sukoshidake” in Japanese language means (a little). However, the use of “Sukoshidake” is different. “Kore wa tyotto muzukasii na” means “It’s a little bit difficult.” Although there is an expression

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“ Mizikaizikandake” (for some time), “Tyotto” is used instead. Another example is “Tyotto Kangae sasete hosii” “Let me think for a while.”

In the article “ Tyotto : A little words with a lot of ambiguity” , Momi Suzuki (2018) described the seven types of meanings of the word “ Tyotto” is one of the most useful and commonly used words in the Japanese Languages. Seven Meanings of “Tyotto” are

1. A little (Quantity, Amount , Degree , Extent)
2. A little (time)
3. A little, but not really
4. Hard to (do)
5. Excuse me / May I?
6. Hey! (Attention, Blame, Irritation)
7. I’d Rather Not Say ... (Ambiguity)

In the paper “A PRAGMATIC RESEARCH ON JAPANESE AMBIGUITY AND POLITENESS IN INVITATIONS” written by “Margherita Cianci “(2017), the researcher analyses nine lexemes of ambiguity and vagueness which commonly appear in replies to invitations. Starting from the Brown and Levinson (1987) model of politeness strategies the aim of the present work will be focused on indirect utterances called “off record acts” which are connected with ambiguity. The purpose of the present work is to discuss about the pragmatics and the semantics of such lexemes in order to understand which the limit between uncertainty and courtesy is; whether politeness is preferred and where there is an effective doubtful situation.

4. Research Questions

1. What are the features of Japanese language which are different from Myanmar language?
2. How does this study of ambiguous expressions help learners learn Japanese language?

5. Materials and Methods

In this study, ambiguous expressions in Japanese language, *Doozo*, *ii*, *desu* and *Tyotto* are studied from the books of daily expressions in Japanese language. Example sentences are taken from BA Second year Intermediate Level (Lesson 23). Comparative study is used to compare with similar Myanmar expressions and explain the chosen expressions of the study.

6. Findings and Discussion

In Japanese spoken language, the listener must interpret the meaning of a vocabulary depending on the speaker, listener, time, place and the topic they are talking about.

1. Doozo

At School	At Home
Gakusei : Sensei haitte mo ii desu ka.	Musuko : Kore tabete mo
Student : May I come in, Teacher?	ii !Son : Can I have it?
ကျောင်းသား : ဆရာမ ဝင်လာလို့ရမလား	သား : ဒါစားလို့ရလား
Sensei : <i>Doozo</i> .	Okaasan : Hai, <i>doozo</i> .
Teacher : Come in.	Mother : Yes, of course.
ဆရာမ : ဝင်လာပါ	မိခင် : စားစား

“Doozo” can be used in daily expressions as offering something to do or to have, such as “Please have it.” or “Take your seat. “It is similar to Myanmar expression “ စားပါ သောက်ပါ ထိုင်ပါ .. ” (လုပ်ပါ Yes, you can) .This is the similar feature of Japanese and Myanmar languages.

2. iidesu

Saying “No”

Nani ka tabemasu ka ? (ဘာစားအုံးမလဲ) What would you like to have?
Ii desu. (ရပါတယ်) It’s OK. (It means ‘No)

Ii desu has two different meanings.

The above sentence means ‘No’.

When you agree to do something,

(1) Kore wa doo desu ka? (ဒီဟာဘယ်လိုလဲ) How about this one?
Hai, sore de *ii desu.* (အင်း.. ဒါဆိုရင်ရတယ်) Yes. It’s OK.
(2) Kyoo anata no uti e itte mo *ii desu* ka? (ဒီနေ့မင်းအိမ်လာရင် ရလား) How about coming to your house today?
ii desu. (ရပါတယ်) It’s OK.

The expression “ ရပါတယ်” in Myanmar is slightly different from Japanese expression. It does not mean “Yes” or “No” clearly.

- (1) To save time
- (2) When situation is ambiguous
- (3) When you really agree

There is also another expression “ဒီလိုပါဘဲ”

3. Tyotto

Two students are talking on the train

DanshiGakusei ; ashitaeigaikanai
Male Student : Will you come along with me to cinema tomorrow?
ကျောင်းသား : မနက်ဖန်ရုပ်ရှင် လိုက်မလား။
Zyoshi Gakusei : Ashita wa tyotto
Female student: Tomorrow?
ကျောင်းသူ : မနက်ဖန်?

Words to follow after Tyotto must be “ မနက်ဖန်တော့မအားလို့မလိုက်နိုင်ဘူး ”. (Ashita wa tyotto isogashikute ikenai.) (မနက်ဖန်တော့မအားလို့မလိုက်နိုင်ဘူး)

Sorry, I am not free tomorrow.

(Soo, Zennen desu ne. Mata kondo issyo ni ikoo ne.)

(ဟာဟုတ်လား။ စိတ်မကောင်းစရာ။ နောက်ခါတူတူသွားကြတာပေါ့။)

Oh, Sorry. May be next time.

However, Ashitawatyotto does not mean exactly ‘No’. It means ‘Not tomorrow but may be the day after tomorrow.’ The negative word ‘ie’ in Japanese language is similar to ‘no’ in English. However, other vague expressions are used in the place of ‘ie’ because it is much stronger than ‘no’. It is because Japanese people are very considerate for other people and they don’t want to hurt other people’s feeling.

4. Kekkodesu

It means “No, thank you.”

Another expression is “Moo irimasen” which means “မလိုတော့ဘူး”(Its OK.)

It means the same as “Sore nishimasu”.

eg. (myan) The host treated us with plain tea when we paid a visit.

Otya o moo ippaiikagadesuka Some more plain tea? ရေနွေးချမ်းနောက်ထပ်ယူအုံးမလား <i>Kekkodesu</i> (ယူအုံးမယ်) Yes, please.	Otya o moo ippaiikagadesuka Some more plain tea? ရေနွေးချမ်းနောက်ထပ်ယူအုံးမလား <i>Moo kekkodesu</i> (မယူတော့ဘူး). No, thanks.
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Meaning is ambiguous that one cannot know exactly whether it means “Yes” or “No”.

Japanese people think that the ambiguous expressions can attract other people’s attention and knowledge of these expressions is very important in communication in Japanese society. Unlike Japanese people, Americans don’t expect other people to understand their feeling as their society is multi-national. Therefore, they also say bluntly and clearly to avoid making mistakes.

7. Conclusion

The expressions in this study are not very important for the learners at the beginner level of Japanese language. However, for advanced level students, they should pay particular attention to these expressions to become proficient in Japanese language. The purpose of this study is to give detail descriptions of ambiguous expressions in Japanese language. The general feature of all languages is that one word may have more than one meaning. The study on the ambiguous meanings of the words under study such as Doozo, ie, desu, Tyotto, ect is very interesting. It is hoped that this study will be a great help for the teachers to teach Japanese language as a foreign language. Foreign learners may become less confident when they are explained that it can also mean “No” because at the beginner level, the use of “Tyotto” is not explained in detail. They know it as having the meaning “for a while” or “a little”. eg Tyotto matte kudasai (ခဏလောက်စောင့်ပါအုံး။) (Wait for a while.

By practicing similar expressions in the classroom repeatedly, they are able to use them in their conversation. They have to study the other meanings of this expression in Intermediate level. This paper presents the negative meaning of ‘Tyotto’. It can be seen in the following example. Ashita wa tyottomeans

(မနက်ဖန်ဆိုရင်တော့...) (Tomorrow will be----) In negative sentences, they use “tyotto” and stop without ending the sentence. It must be understood as rejection.

There are some other expressions that can cause difficulties in interpreting such as daibu, Yukkuri, mama Sakki, Anotoki, etc. Further researches should be done on these expressions.

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