

**STIMULUS OF REQUEST IN JAPANESE AND ITS RELATION TO WAKIMAE
AS A CULTURAL CONTEXT:
A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON CULTURE IN CONVERSATION**

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Abstract

This paper discusses stimulus-response in Japanese conversation and its relation to Japanese culture. It focuses on how Japanese linguistic features in stimulus used in conversation request correspond to culture, called as *wakimae*. Hence, the understanding of the *wakimae* surrounding the stimulus will bring the proper responses. By using the qualitative method, this research uses 30 video-taped Japanese talk shows as data. The analysis covers the lexical/morphosyntactic/prosodic features and cultural context/norms/values that are used in the form of request as the stimulus. As the result, two types of stimulus are found. They are (i) syntactically finished utterances and (ii) syntactically unfinished utterances. In syntactically finished utterances, we find five types of request pattern for information: (i) Q-word type, (ii) declarative form, (iii) polar type with question particle *ka* marker, (iv) polar type with final particle *ne* marker and (v) tag-question type. In syntactically unfinished utterances, there are four types of request pattern for information: (i) unfinished utterances marked by topic particle *wa*, (ii) unfinished utterances marked by nominative particle *ga*, (iii) unfinished utterances marked by conjunctive form, (iv) unfinished utterances marked by quotative particle *tte*. These characteristics of stimulus are not only ruled by speaker's intention but also by cultural values. These cultural values become an important consideration for a speaker when choosing utterances both stimulus and response. Therefore, the notion of *wakimae* can explain the utterance choice from the perspective of cultural context.

Key words: conversation, stimulus, response, cultural context, *wakimae*

1. Introduction

In a communication event, there are elements of communication, namely the speaker, the addressee, and the context. Communication shows exchanges of ideas realized through stimulus-response. Stimulus in this research is limited to the idea which is expressed by the speaker and requires a response in the form of utterance from the addressee in the speech context. The characteristics of stimulus-response in a language are interesting to study because stimulus-response is not only determined by what will be uttered, but also by the value of culture existing in the community of the speakers. It is the cultural context which is taken into consideration in choosing utterances. Here are some examples of stimuli in Japanese.

→YH: *これが*

Kore ga
this NOM

'this'

(while looking at IY who is holding an object)

MR: *今(.)実物持っているのは(.)あの:あべさんの家で使われていたものと
(.)同じ(.)そのもの(.)実物じゃないです(.)同じような(.)水道管*

Ima(.)jitsubutsu motteiru nowa(.)ano:
now object actually being held GEN TOP filler

Abe-san no ie de tsukawareteita mono to(.)
(name) GEN house in used object with

onaji (.) sono mono (.) jitsubutsu
same that object actual object

janai desu(.) onaji yoo na (.) suidookan
not COP same like COP water pipe

'The object which is now being held (IY) is not a water pipe from the Abe's house, but it is the same type as the pipe used in Abe's house.'

(Asaichi Talk Show, 1 March 2011)

The stimulus expressed by YH, *kore ga* 'this' (*kore* 'this', the 'nominative particle' *ga*), is interpreted by MR as a request to MR to provide an explanation to YH. The interesting thing is apparently YH felt that he did not need to finish his utterance because by saying *kore ga* 'this' YH assumed that MR would already know the purpose of his utterance based on the context of the situation. In the example of expression of stimulus in Japanese above, YH

indirectly conveyed his intention. This can also be observed from the quantity of YH's utterance; he just said *kore ga* 'this'. *Kore* is a demonstrative pronoun which means 'this', while *ga* is a nominative particle which follows the subject. Since *ga* follows the subject, if it had followed the grammatical rule, the speaker should have continued his utterance like in (b) or (c).

- (a) *Kore ga ...*
this NOM
- (b) *Kore ga nandaka wakarimasu ka.*
this NOM do understand QP
'Do (you) understand what this is?'
- (c) *Kore ga nandaka shitte imasu ka.*
this NOM do know QP
'Do (you) understand what this is?'

The question is why the speaker did not finish his utterance. At a glance, YH's unfinished utterance is caused by a cultural factor, namely the notion of *wakimae*. *Wakimae* is the expected norm among the Japanese speaking community. Any members of a community behave according to the expected norms because they are watched by other members. What is the relationship between unfinished utterance and *wakimae*? This paper among other things will discuss this.

There have been several studies which are related to the stimulus-response, especially with regard to the question-response. Stivers (2010) reported his research in a paper entitled "An overview of the question-response system in American English conversation." The primary research question is on types of questions in natural, spontaneous conversations. In addition, he also observed the social conduct of the speakers when asked and how responses were obtained. Levinson (2010) conducted a study on the question-response in Yéllî Dnye language, the Papuan language spoken in Rossel Island. Based on his observations, the findings meet the universal expectation in which questions in Yéllî Dnye language can be categorized into polar questions dan wh-questions. However, he found a number of particularities, one of which is in Yéllî Dnye language, polar questions (yes-no questions) do not have morphosyntactic and prosodic markers. A study about the general overview of the question- response in Japanese was conducted by Hayashi (2010). Like the other two studies mentioned, Hayashi started his observations of the lexical, morphosyntactic and prosodic properties. The data observed were 350 question-response sequences from more than 10 video recordings of spontaneous conversational interactions. The result of the observations of

lexical, morphosyntactic and prosodic properties is the classification of question-response types based on the logical semantic structure as follows: (i) polar (yes/no) questions, (ii) content (WH) questions, (iii) alternative questions. Stivers (2010), Levinson (2010) and Hayashi (2010) conducted a study on the types of questions, but they did not examine the structure of the stimulus and its relation to the cultural values that influence the stimulus. Therefore, in this research, the following are the research questions.

- (1) What is the structure of stimulus utterances in Japanese?
- (2) Which function of utterance triggers the structure of stimulus utterances in Japanese?
- (3) Which cultural aspect triggers the structure of stimulus utterance in Japanese?

The objective of this research is to find the structure and functions of stimulus utterances in Japanese which are influenced by the cultural context which is called *wakimae* in Japanese. As it has been mentioned before, it is assumed that the values held by the speaking community affect the expression of stimulus. Therefore, this research also aims at demonstrating the cultural value held by a speaking community through linguistic evidence.

2. Research Theory and Methodology

The term stimulus-response has been closely associated with the study of psychology. This term is also used in physics and is often associated with the concept of causality. In linguistics, the term stimulus-response is described in verbal communication situations. The description of language communication situations related to the stimulus-response effort is realized in the effort of the sender and the receiver of a message. Bühler (1934, 1982) describes verbal communication in his Organon model. There are three functions of language spoken by the sender of the message, i.e., symbol, symptom and signal. A symbol is a sign that refers to an object and a state of event (the representative function). A symptom can be interpreted as an attempt by the sender through his thought and expression (the expressive function). A signal is a form of language conveyed to be receiver of a message and to generate responses to the receiver of a message. Bühler termed the third function as the appellative function. This research focuses on the appellative function which is the focus of this research.

In Japanese society, *wakimae* is a norm which is expected by the local community from the speakers who should behave as they expect it. The term *wakimae* can be considered equivalent with the term *kearifan* (which means wisdom) in Indonesian language or discernment in English. However, Hill disagreed with this English translation of the term. According to him, the notion of *wakimae* has a richer meaning. A person is considered polite

when he/she adapts to the expected social norms. Apparently this is universal. However, the norm as to what concretely is expected to be followed by members of the community will vary from one to another community. When we talk about *wakimae*, it is not about an action which expresses the speaker's act firmly (Ide, 1990). In other words, what draws the attention of the speaker does not necessarily his personal intention, instead it is the intention of the people or what is expected of him by the people. The reason that makes the speaker obedient and compliant with *wakimae* is that the speaker is observed by the public, the eyes of the people are on them. This study examines linguistic evidence which reflects *wakimae*.

The data used in this research was the conversations on Asaichi talk show on NHK TV in Japan. The reasons for the election of Asaichi talk show as a corpus are: (i) the conversations are not scripted and unedited, in which every participant is given the freedom to speak after the host starts the conversation, or in other words, both the host and the guest have the opportunity to ask questions, give opinions or explanatory information; (ii) the talk show had three permanent and temporary hosts. The talk show hosts take turn in the talk show so that the researchers were able to observe the strategy of these hosts in providing stimuli to request information; (iii) the topics of conversation vary; they are about real, daily problems faced by the people.

In classifying the data, this study uses the codification of Stivers and Enfield (2010). This codification is considered suitable for use by this study since Stivers and Enfield (2010) made a stimulus-response coding scheme which is focused on the question-response sequences. The title of this research uses the term stimulus of request, and request here means a request for information needed by the speaker. A request for information may be in the form of a question. Nevertheless, the question is not necessarily expressed in an interrogative form. In this research, utterances which are categorized as a stimulus of request for information are the host's questions at the beginning and middle of the discussion of the topic and the shift of topic.

3. Result and Discussion

As the result, two types of stimulus are found. They are (i) syntactically finished utterances and (ii) syntactically unfinished utterances. In syntactically finished utterances, we find five types of request pattern for information: (i) Q-word type, (ii) declarative form, (iii) polar type with question particle *ka* marker, (iv) polar type with final particle *ne* marker and (v) tag-question type. In syntactically unfinished utterances, there are four types of request pattern for information: (i) unfinished utterances marked by topic particle *wa*, (ii) unfinished

utterances marked by nominative particle *ga*, (iii) unfinished utterances marked by conjunctive form, (iv) unfinished utterances marked by quotative particle *tte*. Below is an example of stimulus in a declarative form. Semantically, this utterance does not show the function of requesting information. However, pragmatically, the illocutionary force of the utterance shows the intention of speaker is to ask the addressee to provide information.

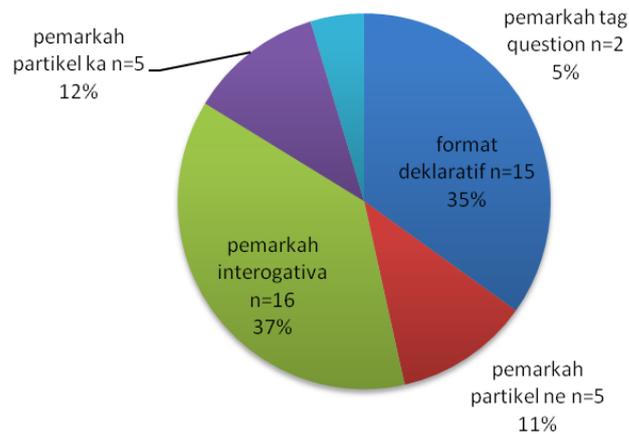


Figure 1 Distribution of Stimulus of Request in Syntactically Finished Utterances

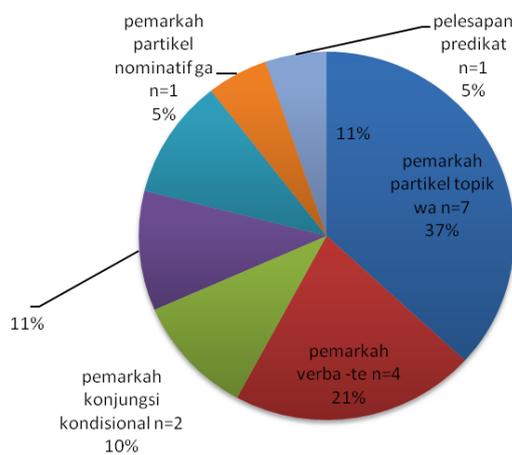


Figure 2 Distribution of Stimulus of Request in Syntactically Unfinished Utterances

The data below represents the stimulus of request for information in syntactically finished and unfinished utterances.

Data (1) is classified as stimulus of request for information in syntactically unfinished utterances. The following data is a stimulus to request for information in an unfinished utterance with the quotative marker *tte*.

(1)

{IY (host) asked HR (reporter who covered cholesterol problems) regarding plaque in blood vessels.}

→IY: プラックって
Purakku tte
plaque QUOT

'What is called plaque...'

HR: あのま(.) ちょっとしたあの老廃物なんかたまったこう少し盛り上がって
くる

Ano ma(.) chotto shita ano roohaibutsu
filler little filler (dental) dirt

nanka tamatta koo sukoshi moriagatte-kuru
what deposit like this little accumulate -appear

'Mmm, there is some deposit of (dental) dirt a little bit
below, which is finally accumulates mengumpul'

IY: あ::
Aaa
(*backchannel*)

(AI20110302-1, Appedix 3, p. 4)

The utterance of the host (IY) *purakku tte* 'which is called plaque' has the implicature of request for information from the guest (HR). The reason why the host used an unfinished utterance is because the host did not seem to want to openly reveal his directive act. He wanted to lighten the burden of the guest in responding his request and at the same time avoiding the responsibility. If the speaker had used a finished utterance, he would have borne the consequences of his utterance. However, when the speaker expressed it in an unfinished utterance (by only selecting elements with high relevance to the context), the speaker allowed the addressee to interpret his intention. The guest (HR) immediately responded to IY's utterance by saying *filler anoma*. The *filler anoma* in (3) shows that HR took a moment to think before giving an explanation about plaque. The question could be a challenge for the

addressee it requested the addressee to take an immediate action by providing an answer while the addressee would need the time to think about the answer. If the addressee had not recognized the intention of the speaker's unfinished utterance he could have confirmed to the speaker about the meaning of the question. In this case, the addressee would receive more time which would give him a chance to think to prepare to answer the question.

IY's utterance in (3):

IY: プラックって

Purakku tte
plaque what is called

'What is called plaque...'

(E-3)

IY said, "What is called plaque..." to the addressee (HR).

(I-3)

IY asked HR to explain what is called plaque.

An utterance with the quotative particle *tte* like in (3) can be perceived from the phenomenon of ellipsis. Ellipsis is motivated by reasons of economy and efficiency (Crystal, 1997, p. 134). However, ellipsis is not only used to make an utterance shorter. The speaker used an ellipsis by deleting the argument of the utterance (predicate-annotation) in order to convey the focus, topicality or to "pack" the message, as we can see in (3) *purakku tte* 'what is called plaque'. Ellipsis also can be seen in an implicature, in which the utterance with ellipsis in (3), in addition to implying a request for explanation from the addressee, it also implies the attitude of the speaker who considered the position of the addressee. Haugh (2008, p. 434) argued that utterances with ellipsis show politeness (*teinei/reigi*) because the speaker considers *tachiba* (the place/position) of the addressee. Still according to Haugh (2008, p. 435), the notion of *tachiba* (the notion of someone's 'place'/position) in Japanese culture includes the position of a person and his group (uchi/group-based relationships of belonging, obligation (*gimu*), dependencies (*amae*)), the notion of *tachiba* is similar to the notion of the positive-negative face of Brown and Levinson (1987). However, in the context of politeness in Japan, the notion of Brown and Levinson's face should be added with the notion of *wakimae*. In the

notion of face, the politeness shown by the speaker is the intention of the speaker himself, whereas in the notion of *wakimae*, there is the expectation of the society in the politeness shown by the speaker.

4. Conclusion

The stimulus of requesting information is expressed in syntactically finished and unfinished utterances. The stimulus of requesting information in syntactically finished utterance is often found in declarative and confirmatory forms. Both forms were used by the speakers in conveying the intention of requesting information. There are quite a lot of declarative utterances because the speakers did not want to be seen doing a directive act. Basically a question negatively threatens the face of the speaker because it is classified as a directive act. By asking, the speaker interferes with the freedom of the addressee because the speaker requests the addressee to answer. Therefore, to disguise the threat to the addressee's face, the speaker uses a declarative form. If perceived from the cultural value (*wakimae*), disguising the threat to the addressee's face is part of the social expectation. The speaker complies with *wakimae* which is the expectation of the community because the "the eyes of the people" are on him. "The eyes of the people" are represented by the addressee. If we look at the link between the notion of face and the notion of *wakimae*, the speaker is taking *wakimae* into account by trying to reduce the threat to the addressee's face.

By using a confirmatory form in conveying the intention of requesting information, the speaker tried to reduce the burden of the addressee. Requesting information using a confirmatory form (with the particle marker *ne* or *tag question*) shows 'seeking an answer' as a collective activity. The speaker (who asked the question) also took part in answering the question. In other words, there is an active involvement of the speaker who asked the question in providing the answer. It also indicates the attitude of the speaker which seeks harmony with the addressee.

The Stimulus of requesting information in syntactically unfinished utterances are marked with markers such as the topic particle *wa*, the subject particle *ga*, the quotative particle, the conjunctive form and the conditional form. These utterances suggest a pragmatic meaning, among other things, implying that the speaker wants to pack his utterance in conveying the focus (for example, on the data the speaker only uttered the subject and the subject/topic particle and the topic particle). From the perspective of politeness, these unfinished utterances show the involvement of the speaker to reduce the

burden of the addressee because speaker did not use a directive act directly. However, on the other hand, the speaker can also be considered to avoid a commitment because he did not utter a finished utterance. In other words, he did not want to be responsible for his utterance. If the utterance had been finished, he would have had to be responsible for the consequences of it.

From the perspective of the notion of *wakimae*, unfinished utterances actually show the intention to cooperate on the part of the speaker with the addressee. This is slightly different from the fulfillment of the maxim of quantity in Grice's Cooperative Principles (1975). In the linguistic evidence in Japanese in this research, the unfinished utterances of the speakers are completed by the addressees. In other words, a complete utterance is realized by the speaker and the addressee, each contributing to completing the utterance. The beginning part of the utterance or the unfinished utterance is uttered by the speaker and the addressee or the second speaker completed the utterance. The phenomenon of unfinished utterances can be explained using the theory of relevance, which simply argues that the addressee understands the conversational implicature and chooses things that are relevant to the context of the conversation. The less effort required to process the new information, the greater the relevance and the more the contextual effects (Sperber and Wilson, 1995, p. 119).

In addition to showing the effort to cooperate, the stimulus of requesting information in unfinished utterances indicates that the speaker is considering the feelings of the addressee. Therefore, the speaker avoids the direct expression of his intention. The avoidance of direct expression of what is considered appropriate to *wakimae*. In *wakimae* said that the utterance appropriate to the context is an utterance in which "the speaker is burying himself" (Ide, 2006). The subject and the intention which is implicit is more expected by the Japanese speaking community.

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