

日本語的な発想、英語的な発想の視点から

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Knowledge of the different ways of thinking (i.e., strategies, styles, etc.) between Japanese and English speakers can help both groups better achieve their own communicative goals and understand the goals of the other group. In Japanese, speakers tend to assume a more common cultural context with their listeners (i.e., HIGH CONTEXT), whereas English speakers assume a less common cultural context (i.e. LOW CONTEXT). The Japanese speaker, thus, relies more on the listener to interpret what is said (or written), than in the case of the English speaker, who takes greater responsibility for the success of the communication. The use of these differing strategies between the two groups, even assuming a high degree of grammatical and lexical accuracy, can lead to cross-cultural misunderstanding.

The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, in its simplest form, theorizes that language and culture are intertwined; that our culture influences our language and vice versa. What we say, then, is related to how our upbringing and values affect the premises upon which our thoughts are based. Thus it is possible to trace our way of thinking, working back from the utterance to the thought process behind it. In short, our culture and values shape our interpretation and presentation of reality.

If we are conditioned, as in English, to communicate directly, explicitly, frankly and assertively by our listener, we will most likely do so. On the other hand, if we are conditioned, as in Japanese, to be more concerned with our listener's feelings, preconceived notions, and 'face,' we are likely to show more reticence, formality, and consideration in our language.

Japanese has been compared to 'bowling', with each participant getting an equal turn and attention. Japanese Native Speakers (JNS) are expected to be polite, listen attentively, offer consideration and not interrupt. English, on the other hand, has been compared to 'tennis,' with each participant trying to return the volley, and perhaps 'smash' the other party. Thus, English Native Speakers (ENS) are expected to challenge, impress, or convince, and are allowed to be sarcastic, interrupt, and overwhelm their listener. With such different styles it is no wonder there is often confusion, frustration and anger among JNS and ENS.

Outline of Differing Communication Premises and Strategies**A. High context vs. Low context**

- 1) JNS and ENS will often select different ways to describe the same situation. The JNS will generally select an expression containing less information, relying on earlier schema / and high contextual agreement with the listener.
- 2) JNS often fail to clarify or question their premises, and base conclusions, if given at all, on the assumption of shared premises.
- 3) JNS belong to the 'Listener Talk' group, making the *listener* more responsible for the understanding
- 4) ENS belong to the 'Speaker Talk' group, making the *speaker* more responsible for understanding.

- 5) To the JNS ambiguity (vagueness) and/or indirectness are often associated with politeness and formality.
- 6) According to Takeo Doi, the author of *Anatomy of Dependence*, “for the Japanese, verbal contribution is something that accompanies non-verbal communication and not the other way around. In other words, they are very sensitive to the atmosphere surrounding human relationships.” JNS are able to take a minimal number of verbal clues and construct a rather elaborated scenario.

CONCLUSIONS

- 1) It is essential to be aware when and how one is using one’s native language speaking styles and strategies in another language.
- 2) In order to avoid misunderstandings, it is useful to adapt one’s communication premises and strategies to that of the target language.