

PECULIAR FEATURES OF NEGATION IN JAPANESE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

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Communication is a multifaceted process of developing connections that arise from the need for interaction between individuals engaged in joint activities. In the process of communication, the exchange of information—i.e., the communicative factor—plays an important role. During a conversation, it is essential for participants to perceive and understand each other. When engaging in joint activities, individuals must unite with others when necessary, achieve mutual understanding, obtain required information, and provide responses accordingly. Communication involves not only verbal expression but also nonverbal means such as gestures and facial expressions. Thus, communication is a process of interaction between individuals through verbal and nonverbal means.

Any activity requires complex cooperation among individuals, including communication, information exchange, and the clash of ideas. Therefore, a person's role in society and the success of their work are directly related to their ability to communicate effectively. At the same time, communication has various forms and stages, which also require analysis.

A person shapes communication through social interaction, monologues, conversations, thinking processes, and dialogic speech. Additionally, communication occurs in spiritual-educational activities, ethical-legal relations, and psycho-emotional states. T. Shibutani, in his work *Social Psychology*, noted that “only when a person is able to understand themselves, even slightly, can they give instructions to themselves.” This highlights that self-awareness and sufficient knowledge are essential prerequisites for communication.

Communication with any interlocutor implies the ability to interact harmoniously with members of society. The richness and duration of our conversations depend directly on our internal dialogue with ourselves. However, excessive self-communication may lead to social isolation and difficulties in interacting with others.

Living in a human society requires mastering language skills when engaging in communication. During language learning, negation is an important grammatical component that must be mastered thoroughly. This skill enables learners to respond negatively and construct negative sentences, thereby enhancing the expressiveness of speech. As often emphasized, language reflects the culture surrounding it. In Japanese, negation is not inherently complex, but it has specific features that must be considered. In Japanese culture, where politeness and respect are highly valued, directly saying “no” is often considered rude and may hurt others' feelings. To avoid conflict and maintain harmony, Japanese people use indirect ways of expressing negation.

The scope of negation in Japanese is indeed a complex topic. Due to conflicting and insufficient empirical data, some researchers consider syntactic analyses of negation to be unproductive. Nevertheless, certain perspectives exist. According to Storoshenko, the negative morpheme *-na* negates only the preceding verb and does not extend beyond it. Kuno revisits

this view and suggests that if the sentence has a unified meaning, the negation -nai may also extend to the object. Shimoyama further argues that negation can have a broader scope, affecting both subject and object, and even the entire clause.

Negative expressions in Japanese have a long history dating back to ancient times. Negation is formed by attaching nai or masen to the verb stem, a method used for over eight centuries, as seen in the Man'yōshū. In classical Japanese, negation differed in usage; for example, -zu indicated prohibition or negation, while -wanai or dewanai expressed complete absence of an action.

During the Edo period (1603–1868), Japanese underwent significant changes. The negative form -nai became standardized and widely used. However, negation was not limited to a single morpheme; various forms were used depending on context and speaker intention. Overall, the history and use of negation in Japanese are complex and intriguing, reflecting the evolution of the language and culture.

Scholars have long studied verbal and nonverbal communication. According to Polivanov, extralinguistic factors—economic, cultural, and material—affect language as a whole rather than individually. When comparing distant languages such as Japanese and Indo-European languages, differences become evident in everyday communication practices.

Polish Japanologist W. Kotanski explains that linguistic expressions in Japanese depend heavily on context, speaker attitude, and social position. For example, in response to questions like “Is this your bag?” or “Do you mind if I open the window?”, Uzbek or Russian speakers might say “No, it’s not mine” or “I don’t mind.” However, Japanese speakers might respond “Yes, it’s not mine” or “Yes, I don’t mind,” reflecting a logic-based response to the statement rather than the polarity of the question.

For instance, when asked “Won’t you eat?”, responding “no” may imply agreement with the negative assumption (“I will eat”). Only when combined with context or behavior does it clearly indicate refusal. This demonstrates the importance of correctly interpreting “no” in Japanese, as it can carry multiple meanings.

Learning any language often begins with simple words like “yes” and “no.” While “yes” is usually straightforward, “no” in Japanese can be ambiguous and context-dependent. For example, to the question “Did no one call me?”, a Japanese speaker might answer “Yes,” followed by “No one,” whereas Uzbek or Russian speakers would simply say “No.” This reflects a preference for logical rather than purely negative responses.

Japanese communication prioritizes politeness, attentiveness, and maintaining a positive atmosphere. Learners often find negation challenging due to the wide variety of expressions. There are numerous forms of address, greetings (around 50 types), farewells (about 40), apologies (about 20), and expressions of gratitude, as well as over 20 forms of negation.

The famous Japanese writer Tanizaki Jun’ichirō noted that spoken communication does not fully align with Japanese cultural nature, as nonverbal communication is often preferred. This can create challenges for interlocutors. Rhetorical expressions such as dewanai deshou, (ja nai)



ka to omoimasu kedo, and iwasona ki ga shimasu ga are used to soften negation and infer attitudes.

Double negation structures such as nakereba naranai, nai demo nai, and nai koto mo nai are also common. These constructions often convey obligation or strong affirmation rather than simple negation. For example, ashita wa benkyou shinakereba naranai means “I must study tomorrow.” Double negation thus intensifies meaning and expresses necessity or inevitability.

In communication, softening negative statements helps maintain harmony. Expressions like sessaku, settaku, and gumai are used to mitigate harshness. Observing the interlocutor’s facial expressions also helps interpret whether the communication is positive or negative.

In Japanese, the final part of a sentence—often containing the negative form—plays a decisive role in meaning. Linguist Horikawa Namoyishi emphasized that Japanese grammar remains unchanged because it reflects ancestral usage.

Modern Japanese negation is expressed through lexical, semantic, and grammatical means, including affixes and verb conjugations. For example, the verb shiru (“to know”) behaves differently in affirmative and negative forms: shitte imasu (“I know”) vs. shirimasen (“I don’t know”), while shitte imasen is less natural in this context.

Negative forms also appear in adjectives and verbs across different tenses, such as arimasen, arimasen deshita, nai, and nakatta. They can function as predicates, modifiers, or connectors in complex sentences. Forms like nakute and naide connect clauses, while naide kudasai expresses prohibition.

Additionally, the morpheme nashi is used in both formal and informal styles to indicate absence before nouns.

Although Japanese people may sometimes adopt Western customs like handshaking, they generally maintain their traditional practices, requiring others to adapt accordingly.

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