

ЯЗЫКИ НАРОДОВ ЗАРУБЕЖНЫХ СТРАН (С УКАЗАНИЕМ КОНКРЕТНОГО ЯЗЫКА ИЛИ ГРУППЫ ЯЗЫКОВ) / LANGUAGES OF PEOPLES OF FOREIGN COUNTRIES (INDICATING A SPECIFIC LANGUAGE OR GROUP OF LANGUAGES)

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LINGUISTIC CONCEPTUALIZATION OF LYING IN JAPANESE

Research article

Chironov S.V.^{1,*}

¹ ORCID : 0000-0003-4960-3294;

¹ Moscow State Institute of International Relations, Moscow, Russian Federation

* Corresponding author (s.chironov[at]jinno.mgimo.ru)

Abstract

This paper uses corpus data to track the interpretation of the act of lying as conceptualized by the Japanese speakers. To this end we review the lexical environment of relevant speech verbs, namely their argument structure, modifiers and upper predicates. The semantic field, described on the basis of these data, is structured by the parameters of degree of cognitive status of the communicators, intentionality, interpersonality damage and scope of distortion. For example, interpersonal vs. institutional principle of nomination is reflected in transitivity. Secondary parameters include shift of focus (to the technical or the ethical aspect), legal sanctions or, more broadly, social acceptability, reflected in modification patterns. The dominance of the neutral lexeme USO carrying a minimal set of semes can be explained by sociopragmatical, beside purely structural, reasons.

Keywords: Japanese language, speech verb, corpus data, lying, collocations, semantic field.

КОНЦЕПТУАЛИЗАЦИЯ ЛЖИ В ЯПОНСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ

Научная статья

Чиронов С.В.^{1,*}

¹ ORCID : 0000-0003-4960-3294;

¹ Московский Государственный Институт Международных Отношений МИД РФ, Москва, Российская Федерация

* Корреспондирующий автор (s.chironov[at]jinno.mgimo.ru)

Аннотация

В статье используются корпусные данные для исследования языковой концептуализации речевого действия «ложь» в лингвосообществе современной Японии. Для этого релевантные речевые глаголы тестируются на лексическое окружение, включая модели управления, модификаторы и место в цепочке высказываний. Проведённый анализ указывает на структурированность данного семантического поля в японском языке по параметрам когнитивного статуса коммуникантов, интенции, межличностной направленности, вреда и объёма фальсифицируемой информации. Так, преобладание межличностного или институционального принципа в номинации прямо определяет задействие транзитивных конструкций. Среди фоновых параметров выявлены сдвиг фокуса на оценку этических последствий или технических средств фальсификации, юридическая определённость и, шире, социальная приемлемость, что сказывается на закономерностях модификации и сочетаемости. Базовая лексема поля *uso* с минимальным набором сем получает наиболее широкое распространение также по социопрагматическим факторам помимо структурных.

Ключевые слова: японский язык, речевой глагол, корпусные данные, ложь, сочетаемость, семантическое поле.

Introduction

Speech actions (GENGO KOODOO, *речевые действия*), as opposed to speech acts (HATSUWA KOOI, *речевые акты*), comprise a broader scope of instances of language use, including the usage of specific articulative devices (covered by verbs of phonetic realization, such as *whisper*, *howl*), or certain attitudes and descriptions of speech tactics and linguistic behavior of an individual in general (resulting in a series of speech verbs with in-built evaluative elements). Verbs depicting lying fall into the latter category. Their broadest prototype in a metalanguage d'après Wierzbicka [15] would look like 'to say what is false', for history and discussion see [10]. What differentiates verbs inside the group, all sharing this one feature, is a set of secondary components, corresponding to elements of the speech situation and their subjective assessment by the nominator. Speaker's knowledge, intention and eventual purpose of the act of lying, degree of social acceptance are some universal parameters that spring to mind first, see more detailed analysis in [16]. However, it is the way their realization is charted in ethnospecific realizations that is essential in understanding both the differences in national mentalities if such exist [13, P. 167] and the common traits of our linguistic concepts (thus further sharpening the universal analytical tool-set). To this end, this study follows in the steps of a series of programmatic works on Japanese speech verbs in using corpus data that yield, in an aggregated form, important information on the linguistic environment of such verbs, mirroring a relevant fragment of linguaspecific outlook on language and society. A particular context for the current paper is set by recent work on the significance of lies and lying in the Japanese culture [3]. An alternative approach in more specific detail from a purely linguistic prospective might be in order.

Research methods and principles

The basic set of lexical realizations for the study are picked via bilingual and explanatory dictionaries [9], [12], [14]. Based on their construals, non-strict and circular as they are in their own right for their own purpose, we come up with a primary distribution of semantic features as figured in the list below. Beside sheer speech verbs I mix in the noun realizations (in brackets) as well, all of which either cozily fit in well-formed verb groups, or can be a priori seen as derivatives for the name-of-action, as is ‘lie’ itself.

Table 1 - Primary distribution of semantic features

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	intent	mislead	damage	partial	compensate
(USO)					
ITSUWARU	+				
AZAMUKU	+	+			
DAMASU	+	+	+		
(SAGI)	+	+	+		
(PETEN)	+	+	+	+	
MAGIRAWAS U	+	+	+	+	
GOMAKASU	+	+	+	+	
CHAKASU	+	+	+	+	
TABURAKAS U	+	+	+		+

Below are offered some observations on how this framework fill out with data available from an open-access corpus of written Japanese [7]. Each speech verb (or paramount nominals mentioned above, same below) is viewed in context, including firstly its arguments as reflecting the typical participants and configuration of the situation depicted by verb. What makes these data clearer is the word order in Japanese, allowing to pick case-marked noun groups in immediate left proximity of the verb. Left-adjacent are also adverbial modifiers informative of how each speech action is conceptualized. To the right more important information is found on placement of such action in the overall patterns of behavior, including perlocutive intentions (in constructions of sequence or cause-effect) or gradational / antagonistic relations with other speech performance (negation, substitution and comparative constructions). Let us briefly overview the verbs discussed.

Main results

1. **USO**, generally translated as ‘a lie’, in fact rather relates to basic definition of falsehood [4, P. 17] – that is, merely the token of content’s dissociation with truth, speaker’s intentions notwithstanding. Isolated usage without a verb tends to be interpreted in such manner, as in a clichéd colloquial reaction USO DA! = *Oh no!*

Another typical context for non-intentional construal is a simile:

昨日の朝の天神さんの境内。前夜の喧騒が嘘のように静かである。 = *The grounds of Tenjin Shrine yesterday morning. It was so quiet that the hustle and bustle of the night before **all seemed unreal**.*

Non-intentional falsehood is furthermore clear with the colloquial MITAI:

ブランド物でも在庫処分て嘘みたいに安く買えますから。 = *Even branded items can be bought at **ridiculously** low prices due to inventory clearance.*

This doesn’t hold, apparently, in verbalized idioms such as USO O TSUKU, that, being an intentional verb, cannot lose the principal component of ‘intent’ even in a construction with an aspectual SHIMAU, generally striking out the intentionality: 私 は嘘をつかなくてもいい場面でもより条件がいいように嘘をついてしまいます。 = *Even in situations where I don’t need to lie, I still **end up lying** to make things better for myself.*

With USO qualifying a noun the abovesaid feature appears context-dependent. On the one hand, in collocations of USO NO JOOHOO/ MEIJIN = *false information/ star* an element of intentional deception seems difficult to rule out. On the other, with SEKAI = *world* (not supporting intentionality as a non-artificial entity) or KOTO/ HANASHI = *talk/ statement* it can remain neutral or, in the latter cases, quite well convey the peculiar situation referred to as ‘knowledge-lies’ [11].

Modified, USO bends to a meant falsehood, as with intensifiers MATTAKU NO or MAKKANA (*bright red*), covering the notion of ‘blatant’. SHIRAJIRASHII (*whiteish*) fall close to the ‘white’, or ‘innocent’ (but nevertheless intentional) lies, though more often an expression with a counterfactual component would be used to describe the speaker’s actions, as TORITSUKUROU = *smooth the situation over*.

All in all, USO fits beautifully with the notions of prototype semantics that were posited on its English counterpart [5]. There is little doubt a certain blurriness of contours here is sociopragmatically beneficial and determined.

2. **DAMASU** rather stands apart from the rest of the verbs in its overwhelming orientation towards the partner, reflected in its transitive status. As such it focuses on the effect of the liar’s action unto the victim, the blame for which the former has to face fully. It is by far the most common-used transitive verb of lying, with its 1135 entries in the corpus against 938 with GOMAKASU and 263 with AZAMUKU.

AZAMUKU, being transitive, unlike DAMASU, accepts not only humans, but also mechanisms or (generally hostile) outer forces as its direct objects. SHINRI O AZAMUKU = *to speak up against the truth*, SONO BA O AZAMUKU = *to save the situation [by a false pretense]* would have been unacceptable with DAMASU. This difference is traceable to AZAMUKU's semantic feature 'betraying expectation' [8] – contrary to DAMASU, which well describes a situation where a lie falls on a tabula rasa as pertains to the addressee's expectations. For this reason AZAMUKU fits in context where 'expectations' would be interpretable as some system, a mechanism's intrinsic design and function. This accounts for a heavier stress on the liar's guilt in this case – as his action involves a lasting grief, a broader transgression. See the shift in modification, as DAMASU yields many more pairs with UMAKU = *cleverly* than HIDOKU = *badly*, and AZAMUKU takes the latter only in one example.

3. DAMASU still reveals one secondary pattern of exception when the direct object is the piece of false information provided, as in NENREI O DAMASU = *lie about [one's] age*. Similar double pattern is characteristic of further several verbs where it dominates in frequency, with persons as direct objects relatively less common. Among those, **ITSUWARU** would be closest to DAMASU in its designate, or, for that matter, USO. Unlike those, it has a more salient feature of an intentional lie, socially condemnable, see in formal contexts like GENSANCHI/ SHOKUMU KEIREKI O ITSUWARU = *forge country of origin/ falsify work history*. A more striking difference with both DAMASU and USO (O TSUKU) is in the apparent non-existence of affected passive construction: DAMASARETA = *deceived*, even AZAMUKARETA, but *ITSUWARARETA. This shows less concern with interpersonal damage than with the ignoble act of lying as such, see also adjectivized patterns as ITSUWARI NO CHUCHOO/ JOOHOO = *false pretense/ infos etc.*, all more harshly critical than USO NO with its allowance for sheer phantasmizing.

This latter is all the more apparent in nominations of concrete unlawful actions, specifying their technical side, such as NETSUZOO = *forgery*, KAIZAN = *[illegal] tampering with documents*. Personal damage is peripheral here while breach of rules becomes central. Opposed to it, SAGI = *fraud*, while a strict penal code term, related the perpetration to breach of a person's trust (but seen through the prism of law). This mindset, however, focused on the factual detail, does not rule out such 'neutral' (purely practical) characteristics as with left-edge KANTAN-NI or right-edge KANTAN (DA) = *easy*, MUZUKASHII = *difficult*. These are not found at all with ITSUWARU, in contrast with DAMASU, GOMAKASU and even AZAMUKU.

4. A group of transitive verbs show a different pattern where the focus moves to the substituted value, the intentional 'lie' thus retreating from the centre of the conceptualized situation. That leads to a complete exclusion of the defrauded person (from the verbalized horizon). Such are **YOSOOU** (reconstructed from 'putting on' a costume, originally), and **MISEKAKERU** (a compound verb with the MISE stem for *show*). In the former case the direct object is either an untruthful state of the speaker (MUKANSHIN = *indifference*, CHUUJITSU = *loyalty*) or someone else's identity (KEIKAN = *a cop*, KYAKU = *a customer*), 記憶喪失を装ってしどろもどろの言い訳をして = *feigning amnesia to make up some lame excuses*. In fact, this pattern is also shared by ITSUWARU, see in NISEMONO O HONMONO TO ITSUWARU = *to pass off a fake as the real thing*. With the following group it would yield only rare and exceptional hits, as HI O ZE TO GOMAKASU = *disguise the evil as the good*.

This type of transitivity conveys the idea of substitution. As follows from the right-adjacent material (see example), the point of naming the actual communicative practices of deception is to elaborate on the technicalities of such tactics. This starkly contrasts with the DAMASU group, where it is the motif of the liar's profit that is stated, so that the utterance as a whole takes on a strong nuance of blame for unacceptable action. Not only are unsightly goals of lying uncovered in the material that follows to the right, but the most commonly observed contraptions make it into amalgamated verbs like DAMASHITORU/ URU/ KATSU/ UCHI = *to defraud, to sell/ win by deception/ surprise attack* with the second element becoming head.

5. The prominent feature of **GOMAKASU** is contrary to that discussed in AZAMUKU – here it is not the mental frame challenged, but a zone of inattention (of the victim). This opens to more expressions corresponding to Carson's instances of withholding or Concealing information, Keeping in the dark, and Half-truths [4]. Such are **TABURAKASU** (with the person deluded by kind words, as animate direct object) and **MAGIRAWASU** (inanimate object refers to the area of knowledge made unclear, see similar above). The former yields an example of conceptualized give-and-take relations in communication, when a misinformation is rooted in the move to compensate negative impact by its positive representation. The latter corresponds to qualitative nouns FUNSHOKU / PETEN = *fraud* (penal code/ colloquial term).

That no direct and full-front challenge neither to a concrete person's beliefs nor to the socially established order in general takes place becomes an obvious factor mitigating the blame for such actions (GOMAKASU is broadly modified with UMAKU, again, and right-adjacent MURI = *useless* by far outnumber YOKUNAI = *not good*). It is still frowned upon, but already there are entries where its use in the 1st person is not limited to confessions of guilt, as is the case with ITSUWARU and DAMASU. Moreover, specific inanimate targets actually are allowed to be cheated upon not just for some higher purpose but as such, see ITAMI O GOMAKASHITE = *to conceal/ ignore the pain*, FUMAN O MAGIRAWASU = *to vent frustration*. In transitive phrases with action names the legal offense is considerably lighter, as in 議論をずらして説明をごまかす = *cheat with the explanation by shifting the argument*.

Negative attitude on the part of the speaker here appears rather hushed by the pragmatic focus either on the consequences or the means of deceit, or both, as in KUYASHIKATTA KEREDO WARATTE GOMAKASHITA = *disappointed, [I] just laughed it off*, or RAMERAME DE GOMAKASU = *to cover [it] up with glitter*.

All the mentioned features of this group confirm analysis highlighting social acceptance of lies within certain limits, as summarized in [3]. More evidence in support is found in collocations with degree adverbs, acceptable with this group as well as with the generic USO but not in *CHOTTO ITSUWATTA.

It comes as little wonder that the zone of ‘incomplete’ lying should be related to that covering the tactics of evasion. A criterion for delimiting the two can be tentatively posited at whether a falsehood has been effectively put forward, or only the truthful (but harmful) utterance withheld.

6. A discussion on deceit would not be full without a case of deliberate (and not hidden, as in cases above) flouting of Grice’s maxim of quality. In the English linguistics it has recently been largely covered by the concept of ‘bullshit’ [6] loosely based on ‘humbug’ [2]. However, for the case of Japanese (as witnessed by my native correspondents), this semantics seems to be default-covered by the rather ruder **FUZAKERU** (well, its corresponding expression in Russian does tip over into the obscene) and the more innocent **CHAKASU**. Both show predominantly intransitive usage aiming at characterizing the speech event.

Another branchoff is offered by the concept of Bluff, elaborated on by Carson [4]. Here, beside qualitative HATTARI and KYOSEI in the recent years we more and more come across the borrowed FEIKU. The three latter lexemes’ difference with the former two resides in the notion of prohibition. It is not strictly speaking forbidden to act in an irresponsible way (though the preference for ‘serious’ speech behaviour is confirmed in numberless examples), while bluffing is against the rules.

Discussion

Let me draw some conclusions. That language-based perceptions of lies and lying are deeply intertwined with social reality is underscored by the history of borrowings. See the English *mislead* with a subtle nuance accountable for a direct loan of MISURIIDEINGU in Japanese (none of the GOMAKASU group fits in with it). See, on the other hand, the reinvented, rather than borrowed, *дезинформация* in Russian, for decades serving as a (non-interpretible) ready rubber-stamp for a certain cliché in public discourse, denouncing something much more sinister than *misinform*.

Now, in the case of Japanese, as this study shows, nominations for types of deceit, heavy with qualitative semantics, are by and large structured around socially relevant features of the act of deceit. As follows from the analysis above, the principal criteria are graveness of offense (ranging from merely dispreferred to criminal) and degree of its interpersonal (or else institutional) nature. These in turn correspond to the more basic notions of cognitive statuses of both sides, intentionality, damage and distortion scope. As we could see, relevance of corresponding elements of the speech event is reflected in the governance models of verb and their derivatives. Below is how an enriched structure of this semantic field would look as a result.

Table 2 - An enriched structure of this semantic field

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	intent	mislead	damage	grave	criminal	duration	partial	small	recompense
(USO)									
AZAMUKU	+			+		+			
ITSUWARU	+	+							
DAMASU	+	+	+						
(GIMAN)	+	+	+						
(SAGI)	+	+	+	+	+				
(FUNSHOKU)	+	+	+		+		+		
(PETEN)	+	+	+			+	+		
MAGIRASU	+	+	+				+		
GOMAKASU	+	+	+				+	+	
CHAKASU	+	+	+				+	+	
TABURAKASU	+	+	+					+	+
MISEKAKERU	+	+	(+)	(+)	(+)				

YOSO OU	+	+	+		+				
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Conclusion

I will close with the remark that generally the pervasive domination of USO as non-verbally derived seems to fulfill largely a sociopragmatic task of avoiding confrontation in communication first and foremost by withdrawing excessive judgment. Furthermore, it is mainly at the level of USO that general discussion in terms of true-false is conducted (including rather subtle conclusions like USO DE WA NAI = *not [quite] false*). Similar trends, to be certain, are underway in Russian *врать* reconstrued in non-volitional contexts (such as hitting a wrong note in a musical performance, or a malfunction of measuring equipment), while in English *a lie* and *not true* seem to decouple more along the lines of politeness principles.

At the same time, all in all, for a culture allegedly tolerant to lies and lying [1], the Japanese appear highly sensitive to a minutely detailed range of speech and behavior tactics involving distorted information. Extensive corroboration of this point is found in the rich branching out of lexical realizations especially in borderline areas between the strictly prohibited and the merely dispreferred. The abovesaid holds for the Russian linguistic community as well, where a persistent humoristic coloring in highly idiomatized ‘in-or-out’ cases (*пудрить мозги, вешать лапшу*, cf. *pulling the wool* or else *someone’s leg*) may well be a rather conventional marker of social unease with these practices rather than their grudging acceptance.

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Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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