

Negative response words and expressions in discourse

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Negative responses to the utterances of a partner pertains to actions that may infringe on the face of the partner, such that using appropriate expressions and considerate behavior is necessary for maintaining a positive relationship and smooth communication. However, research on negative responses mainly focuses on response words, and less research elucidates other forms of or considerate behavior. To address this research gap, this study aims to provide an overview of negative response expressions in natural conversations. It then analyzes the factors that explain why they are considered difficult to understand for non-native speakers.

Chapter 1 presents a review of previous studies and points out the abovementioned problems. In addition, it elucidates the position that a certain type of negation is made for four response verbs that are widely used as “ie-type response words” and avoided to be called “negation response words,” although differences exist in the object and degree of negation for each.

Chapter 2 provides an examination of the historical transition of the use of “iya,” “ie,” “ie,” and “uun” in the Meiji and Taisho periods using the “Corpus of Historical Japanese” to determine how they were used differently. The study also compared the results with “The Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese” to investigate their differences from those of the present day. The results indicate that “ie” was used more frequently than “ie” for a while after its appearance but then the use began to decline. Furthermore, the usage characteristic of the present-day “iya” was also observed in other response words in the modern period; thus, the study infers that the historic use of the three other response words were more extensive than that in the modern period. Lastly, the study highlighted the differences between the spoken and written language and listed the characteristics of each.

In Chapter 3, I re-examine the usage of the four response words using data unbiased by the gender of the speaker and analyze them from the perspective of gender differences. The result implies that men used more negative response words than did women. In addition, differences exist in the response words used according to the gender of the user in which “iya” is more common among men, whereas “uun” is more common among women. The results of politeness analysis, which is related to gender differences, also indicate that “ie” and “ie” are used to denote politeness, while “uun” is used in plain form, which supports the high levels of politeness of “ie” and “ie.” However, the study also found that none of them necessarily co-occur with specific sentence-final forms. Furthermore, the results reveal that the most frequently used response word “iya” is used in both forms.

Based on previous research that found that negations that do not use response words are more common, in Chapter 4, the study considers what types of negative response expressions could be considered apart from response words. I defined negative response expressions and proposed a classification based on their relationship with the preceding sentence and the expression form of the response sentence. The classification in relation to the preceding sentence was reclassified on the basis of previous studies, and the viewpoints of the object of negation and the level of burden of the negative responses were added to the classification. The classification of the expression form of response sentences was dichotomized according to whether or not the sentence contains the meaning of negation and further subdivided into seven forms.

Chapter 5 focuses on negative responses to the Yes–No interrogative and investigated their usage using the classification proposed in Chapter 4. The study found that the most frequently used form was one that could be called pragmatic negation, which requires an understanding of the context. Furthermore, in terms of whether or not the form was used alone, the study noted that the majority of the respondents did not use the form alone; instead, they used multiple forms, including the affirmative. Notably, the characteristics of negation in a form that presents the meaning of negation were the use of strategies considered considerate of the other person such as fillers, laughter, and co-talk.

To examine whether or not the relationship with the other person influences response expressions, the study analyzed negative responses to the Yes–No interrogative in Chapter 6 and emphasized the age difference between the person and the other person. At the time, the study considered which strategies are used from the perspective of politeness in older, same-age, and younger partners. The study observed that the strategies that people tend to use differ according to the age difference between them and their partner. Furthermore, direct formality is used with a partner without age difference, whereas direct formality is less likely to be used with a partner with an age difference.

The final chapter highlights the characteristics of the four negative response words and their roles. This study provides its views on why “iya” is overwhelmingly used in the spoken and written language and cites its ambiguity as a contributing factor. I also pointed out that the common presentation of “ie” in Japanese textbooks is due to the strong normative awareness among native Japanese speakers that it is the negation of a question and that its background is its narrow and limited nature in terms of meaning and function.

As a summary, I additionally examined the reason underlying the notions that understanding negative responses from native Japanese speakers is difficult for non-native speakers and that miscommunication is less likely to occur between native speakers. Based on the results, the study proposed recommendations for native speakers in a multicultural society.