

How to express (indirect) speech acts in English and Japanese: A perspective from the three-tier model of language use

Naoaki Wada

University of Tsukuba, Japan

Indirect speech acts implied by utterances containing modals can be illustrated by the interrogative sentence (1), which implies a request/order, or by the declarative sentence (2), which implies a recommendation.

(1) Will you open the window?

(2) You must visit us when you come to London.

The mechanism for this phenomenon has been considered widely, especially from a pragmatic and/or cognitive-linguistic perspective. For example, Searle (1969, 1979) analyses the phenomenon in speech act theory, claiming that it is derived from the interaction among the semantic content of the utterance involved, the illocutionary point it conveys, and its felicity conditions. This line of account has been developed by Panther and Thornburg's (1998) analysis with speech act scenarios and metonymy, Hernández and Mendoza's (2002) analysis with idealised cognitive models, and relevance-theoretic analyses with pragmatic saturation and enrichment, e.g. Papafragou (1998).

However, these analyses cannot explain why (3) and (4), which are, respectively, Japanese literal counterparts of (1) and (2), are hard to interpret as implying the same types of indirect speech acts.

(3) (Anata-wa) mado-o akeru(-tsumori)-ka.

(you-Top) window-Acc open(-will)-Q

(4) (Anata-wa) London-ni kuru toki-wa wareware-o

(you-Top) London-Goal come when-Top us-Acc

tazune-nakerebanaranai.

visit-must

As long as the explanatory devices adopted in those analyses are cognitive and/or pragmatic, there should be no a priori reason why they should not be applied to Japanese data unless otherwise specified.

The three-tier model of language use by Hirose (2013, 2015) can provide a basis for a systematic explanation of the phenomenon at issue. I argue that the phenomenon is based on the different default combinations of the three tiers of English and Japanese summarised in Hirose's paper. English, by default, requires the situation construal tier to combine with the situation report tier, but the interpersonal relationship tier to be independent of the other two. This enables us to assume that the basic mode of language function in English, which causes its default linguistic phenomena, is situation report and therefore the modal utterances

observed above are normally interpreted as “automatically” directed to the addressee; the relevant interpersonal-relationship information, which is not necessarily expressed as linguistic expression due to the tier’s independence, is obtained based on e.g. Leech’s (1983) “cost-benefit” scale or paralanguage. From these, there is room for the addressee to infer that the speaker intends to convey something extra in his/her utterance. Thus, indirect-speech-act phenomena can show up in English.

In contrast, Japanese requires the situation construal tier to be independent of the situation report tier. This enables us to assume that the basic mode of language function in Japanese is situation construal, which implies that the speaker must change modal notions used for situation construal into the addressee-directed types if he/she intends to convey the modal utterances involved to the addressee. In this process, the speaker has a chance to decide on his/her expressions suitable for his/her purposes and is required to express the intended modal notions due to the unification of the situation report tier with the interpersonal relationship tier. It is therefore hard for indirect-speech-act phenomena to show up in Japanese.

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