

Response with Particle *ne* in Japanese and Its Relation to *wakimae* as a Cultural Context: A Discourse Analysis on Culture in Conversation

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Abstract—This paper discusses responses with particle *ne* in Japanese conversation and its relation to Japanese culture. It focuses on how Japanese linguistic markers in response used in conversation correspond to culture, called as *wakimae*. Hence, the understanding of the *wakimae* influences response realization. By using the qualitative method, this research uses 30 video-taped Japanese talk shows as data. In Japanese linguistics, particle *ne* known as particle confirmative. It means, speaker believes that hearer knows well than speaker, and then speaker confirm to hearer. But why in giving response, hearer (who become next speaker) needs to use particle *ne*? The use of particle *ne* in response has opposite meaning to confirmatory function. Particle *ne* implies that the speaker who are in the territory of information. In the same time, speaker engages hearer because of alignment and respect. Particle *ne* in response shows *wakimae*, the norm that are expected to be obeyed by Japanese speaker. This characteristic of response is not only ruled by speaker's intention but also by cultural values. These cultural values become important consideration for a speaker to choose utterances of response. Therefore, the notion of *wakimae* can explain the utterance choice from the perspective of cultural context.

Index Terms—Conversation, response, cultural context, *wakimae*.

I. INTRODUCTION

The characteristics of response in a language is interesting to study because a response is not only determined by the idea to be uttered, but also by cultural values that exist in the community of the speakers of the language. A cultural context is taken into consideration in the selection of the utterance to respond. In Japanese the particle *ne* is known as a confirmative particle (Moriyama, 2003; Iori, 2001). As a confirmative particle, the use of the particle *ne* in an utterance shows that the speaker assumes that the addressee has better information than the speaker does. Therefore, the speaker feels the need to ask for confirmation from the addressee. In conversations observed, it appears that the use of the particle *ne* in the response shows a different meaning from its semantic meaning. This can be seen in the following sample responses.

- (1)
{The topic of the conversation is fertility treatment. OT (guest) responded to the utterance of UY (host).}

UY: え:: ゲスト皆さん(.) この不妊

治療について(.) 大田さんは不妊治療について取り組んでいらっしゃる

E:: gesuto minasan(.)
filler guest everybody

kono funin chiryoo
this infertility therapy

ni tsuite(.) Oota-san
on about (name of person)-SUF

wa funin chiryoo
TOP infertility therapy

ni tsuite torikunde
about currently

irassharu
undergoing-HON

'Mmm everybody, about this fertility treatment, Mrs Oota is currently undergoing fertility therapy.'

→OT: あの:: (.) もう: (.) 一度(.) ちょっと(.) あきらめてるんですが(.) 三十三(.) 四のときから四年間近く不妊治療はやってたんですね(.) で (.) ま(.) あの: (.) タレントはちょっと(.) 急に売れたというタイミングがあつて(.) で(.) そこでやっぱり(.) 自分も疲れてしまっていたし

Ano: (.) moo:(.)
filler already

ichido(.) chotto(.)
once little

akirameru n
desperate VN

desu ga(.) sanjuu(.)
COP but thirty

san shi no toki
three four GEN time

kara yon nen kan
of four year during

chikaku funin
close to infertility

chiryoo wa yatteta -n
therapy TOP do VN

desu **ne**(.)
COP FP

de(.) ma(.) ano:(.)
then filler filler

talento wa chotto(.)
artist TOP little

kyuu ni ureta
suddenly with much work

to iu taimingu ga
QUOT say stated time NOM

de(.) soko de yappari(.)
then that there in of course

jibun mo tsukarete-
self also tired-

shimatte-ita-shi=
(the expression when something
negative happens)-PAST-CONJ

'Mmm, (I) felt disappointed,
at the age of 33, 34 years,
(I) have undergone a fertility
therapy for 4 years
ne, mmm, mmm, but for an
artist there is a time when
she is engaged to work a lot,
at that time I felt tired.'

In his response OT used the particle *ne*. The particle *ne* here does not seem to have a confirmatory meaning. What is the meaning of the particle *ne* in this utterance? The particle *ne* is generally used when the speaker assumed that it was the addressee who had the information, so the speaker would confirm it. However, in the context of conversation (1), it is the speaker who had the information. In his response, the speaker was explaining something related to him. Then, does the speaker need to confirm it while it is actually him who had the information? The use of the particle *ne* beyond its function the confirmative particle associated with the underlying cultural context. This cultural context can be seen from *wakimae* or the norm which is expected to be followed by the Japanese speaking community. This is the topic of this paper: Responses with the particle *ne* and its relationship with *wakimae* as a cultural context.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data used in this research was a conversation on the

Asaichi talk show on NHK television in Japan. The reasons for the selection of the materials from Asaichi talk show as a corpus are: (i) the conversations are not scripted and unedited, in which every participant is given the freedom to speak after the host starts the conversation, or in other words, both the host and the guest have the opportunity to respond; (ii) The number of participants of the speech event is more than two persons, so researchers were able to observe how the strategy used in responding; (iii) the topics of conversation vary; they are about real, daily problems of the people.

The type of data used is the responses which use the particle *ne*. The data is later transcribed and presented in its transliteration and translated using the method of communicative translation. Utterances which use the particles *ne* are semantically and pragmatically analyzed and its relation to the cultural context of *wakimae* is examined.

III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Based on the data consisting of 181 stimulus-responses, the number of responses using the particle *ne* is 54. Some sample responses using the particle *ne* can be seen in data (2) below.

(2)

{YH (host, male) ask YY (guest star, reporter) about small fish affected by radiation.}

YH: 今: あの: 見つかったというの
は小女子ですね↓

Ima: ano: mitsukatta
now filler found
to iu no wa
QUOT say GEN TOP

koonago desu **ne**↓
anchovy COP FP

'Now, the anchovy has been
found, right?'

→YY: 小女子という生ですね(.)なん
か非常に小さな魚でプランクト
ンの種族で食べる魚なんですね
(.)どうしてもその現象が最初
で放送生物もこれ小さいもの
なので(.)ま:プランクトンが
付着したり(.)プランクトンが
取り込んだりする(.)
そのプランクトンを最初食べる
のは小さな魚なので(.)
魚が出た(.)
あと: 小女子はあの: まだ当
然小さい(.)それほど普通の魚
より力がないので(.)
海面の方泳ぐではっしゅでん
しょうから出てる水もですね
(.)だいがあの: しんしょうに

行くというよりもひょうそうの方へ流
れているというふうに考えられている
ので(.)ちょうど海の上の方泳いでる
小さなそのこなごという魚(.)最初に
出たということなんです↓

Koonago to iu sei
anchovy QUOT say creature

desu **ne**(.)
COP FP

nanka hijooni chiisana
something very small

sakana de purangton no
fish COP plankton GEN
shuzoku
type

de taberu sakana
COP feed on fish

nan desu **ne**(.) dooshitemo
N COP FP however
sono genshoo ga saisho
that symptom NOM first time

de hoosoo seibutsu mo
COP broadcast creature also

kore chiisai mono na
this small thing COP

node(.) ma: purangton
because filler plankton

purangto ga torikondari suru(.)
plankton NOM taken

sono purangton o saisho
that plankton ACC first time

taberu no wa chiisana feed on VN
TOP small

sakana node(.)
fish because

naka demo koonago to
in even though anchovy QUOT

iu sakana ga
say fish NOM

deta(.) ano: konago wa
appear filler anchovy TOP

ano: mada toozen
filler still normal

chiisai(.) sore hodo futsuu
small that more regular
no sakana yori
GEN fish from

chikara ga nai node(.)
power NOM none because

kaimen no hoo
sea surface GEN towards

oyogu de hasshudensho
swimming COP eight kinds

kara deteru
from appear

mizu mo desu **ne**(.)
water too COP FP

daibu ano:
quite a lot filler

shinsho ni iku to
deep layer in going QUOT

iu yori mo hyoosoo no
say from on also surface GEN

hoo nagareteiru
direction flowing

to iufuuni kangaerareteiru
QUOT like can be thought

node(.) choodo umi no
because appropriate sea GEN

ue no hoo oyoideru
above GEN direction swimming

chiisana sono koonago
small that anchovy

to iu sakana saisho
QUOT say fish first time

ni deta
in appear

to iu koto nan desu **ne**
QUOT say thing N COP FP

'Anchovy, this very small fish feed on a type of plankton. Since the small fish are on the water surface, it is the small fish that first fed on the plankton (containing nuclear radiation from the Fukushima nuclear power plant). So it just happened to be the first to be taken was the small fish found in the surface of sea water and having fed on plankton which had been exposed to radiation.'

(17:53 - 20:32)

(Appendix 7, AI20110407, pages. 4-5)

The speaker YY began his response by saying *koonago to iu sei desu ne* 'living thing called koonago (anchovy), right'. The use of the particle *ne* in this utterance shows the attitude of the speaker who involved the addressee his utterance. This utterance was delivered by the speaker before giving further explanation about *koonago*. Furthermore, YY said *nanka hijoo ni chiisana sakana de purangton no shuzoku de taberu sakana nan desu ne*(.) 'What, very small fish, fish that feed on plankton, right'

The use of the particle *ne* at the end of this utterance shows the attitude of the speakers (including the addressee) in the utterance. It also shows that the speaker was trying to maintain the atmosphere of the conversation with the

addressee. This is *wakimae* shown through the linguistic evidence. Actually, it is fine for the speaker to give an explanation without him involving the addressee. However, YY felt the need to take into account the existence of addressee through his utterance. The speaker wanted to create an impression that he would not want to speak alone, so he involved the addressee to cooperate in the conversation. This shows, the speaker had the intention to keep the conversation going. In other words, the particles *ne* at the end of the utterance implies that the speaker did not have an intention to stop the conversation. The use of *ne* in the utterance above also implies that the speaker did not want to show the attitude that the information being conveyed only belongs to the speaker. In addition, the particle *ne* contained at the end of YY's utterance shows that the addressee was given the opportunity to interrupt or give a comment.

The use of the particle *ne* in the response as explained above implies the attitude of the speaker in accommodating the addressee. The accommodation provided by the speaker are: (i) involving the addressee to, (ii) maintaining the atmosphere of the conversation, (iii) attempting to be in harmony with the addressee, (iv) giving an opportunity to interrupt the addressee. This accommodation is in line with the cultural aspect *wakimae*. In the concept of *wakimae*, the speaker is expected to follow certain norms of Japanese community in general. *Wakimae* expected from the speaker is that the speaker has to be gentle, polite and create a harmony with the addressee (Ide, 2006).

IV. CONCLUSION

The notion of *wakimae* (expected norms of Japanese society) that is followed Japanese speakers can be seen in their use of linguistic evidence in the form of the particle *ne* in giving a response. Its use in a response to a stimulus shows the giving of accommodation from the speaker to the addressee. This accommodation is considered proper and appropriate because the speaker should give affection to the addressee through an utterance. The accommodation implied by the use of particles are (i) the effort to involve the addressee in the speaker's utterance, (ii) the effort to maintain the atmosphere of conversation, (iii) the effort to be in harmony with the addressee, (iv) the effort to provide the addressee with the opportunity to interrupt. This is what is expected from the Japanese society as they are represented by the addressee in this context.

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