

Who is Responsible for Understanding
in a Conversation?
A Contrastive Pragmatic Analysis
of Utterances in Japanese and Korean*

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ABSTRACT

Korean learners of the Japanese language and Japanese learners of the Korean language not only feel that it is easier to learn the respective foreign language, but also acquire Japanese and Korean faster than learners from other countries because of the grammatical similarity between Japanese and Korean. However, the similarity of grammatical structures and culture does not assure the similarity in discourse style. In the present study, I examined the difference between Japanese and Korean with respect to the responsibility for understanding utterances to demonstrate the hypothesis that Japanese is a listener-responsible language and Korean is a speaker-responsible language, even though Hinds (1987) considered both Japanese and Korean as listener-responsible languages. A DCT was completed by Japanese and Korean university students who live in their own countries and who live in the U.S. The results showed that Korean speakers produce many more utterances (semantic formulas) and convey more information per utterance to the interlocutor to help the interlocutor's understanding of the utterances than Japanese speakers. Particularly, Korean speakers uttered semantic formulas REASON, ADVERB, ADDRESS TERM, and INTERJECTION more than Japanese in apologies or requests. Furthermore, the results showed that Japanese university students who live in the U.S. uttered more semantic formulas than Japanese university students who live in Japan.

Keywords: Speaker-responsible language, listener-responsible language, Japanese Korean apology

* This study is a part of my doctoral dissertation.