Womanly tropes in Japanese fixed collocations

Gabrielle PIGGIN

レジュメ：日本語の固定化されたコロケーションにみられる女性的な文彩

近年の研究では、ある文化的、社会的文脈における価値観や信条が、言語使用、言語機能及び言語形式に影響を与えることが認識されている。比喩的表現は、社会規範と相互に作用する文化的価値観の概念化であると考えられている。そのため、固定化されたコロケーションは、使用される社会及び文化の中に広まっている信条体系を映し出すものとして機能している。本稿は、日本の現代社会において女性に求められている隠れた社会規範と文化の中で構築されてきた女性の役割を明らかにするために、日常談話における固定化されたコロケーションに内在する日本人女性を表現するものに見られる類似性とこれらの表現がどのように解釈され得るのかを解明する。

Abstract

Recent literature acknowledges the impact that cultural and societal context specific values and beliefs have on language use, function and form. Metaphorical expressions are recognised as conceptualisations of cultural values which are interrelated with societal norms; therefore such fixed collocations act as reflections and reiterations of belief systems particular to the socio-cultural context in which they are used. This article elucidates the parallels between representations of Japanese women that are inherent in the fixed collocations found in everyday discourses, and how these can be interpreted to reveal the embedded societal norms and culturally constructed roles expected of Japanese women in contemporary

society.
Keywords: cultural values, fixed collocations, Japan, metaphorical expressions, societal norms, women

Introduction

This paper explores Japanese cultural values that are reflected in fixed collocations; proverbs, metaphors, and other metaphorical expressions, which concern the depiction of Japanese women. The data herein of fixed collocations collected pertain to the social construct of gender and therefore; the implicit values, expectations, and beliefs specific to Japanese culture regarding women which are expressed through the fixed collocations' functions and use. Although social and cultural values can be considered separately, they are also inextricably connected as are, thought and language, and language and culture. The seminal anthropologist Geertz (cited in Moore, 1997, p. 243) depicts the interrelationship of culture and society as:

> Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes, the actually existing network of social relations. Culture and social structure are then but different abstractions from the same phenomena.

Through the examination of the data and related literature, the congruence between Japanese cultural values and the social roles and expectations which are embedded in the fixed collocations are analysed. Arguably, social norms and gender roles are constitutive of the culture, thus the language in which such norms and roles are embedded can be interpreted as significant and meaningful for its users. Accordingly, the social norms which intersect with cultural behaviours can be seen

as reproduced in the fixed collocations.

Literature review

The forthcoming discussion of how culture affects the function and use of fixed collocations in Japanese society is informed by a literature review of six articles which consider; cultural key words, metaphor and metaphorical expressions, and proverbs and how they intersect with socio-cultural values and beliefs;

Core values = key words

Wierzbicka's (1991) article discusses how every culture possesses specific key words which "reflect the core values of the culture" concurrently with how "cultures can be revealingly studied, compared, and explained to outsiders through their key words" (p. 333). Wierzbicka (1991) proposes that to operationalise such a study of culture and words "a culture-independent analytical framework" is advantageous (p. 333). The 'natural semantic metalanguage' (NSM) framework is one which makes use of the "(limited) isomorphism in the grammar and in the lexicon" (Wierzbicka, 1991, p. 336) of languages which therefore allows a 'de-ethnocentrisised' analysis. Wierzbicka (1991) asserts the applicability of NSM through the examination of previous literature and studies of cultural key words, and then demonstrates NSM's usefulness and insight by analysing six Japanese cultural key words which are thoroughly contextualised and analysed within the NSM framework. The antecedent explanations of these key words' semantic and pragmatic equivalents in English, Wierzbicka recognises as "valuable" (1991, p. 381) although flawed in their attempts "to explain unique concepts of a culture in terms of unique concepts of another" (Wierzbicka, 1991, p. 381). She concludes that through the use of NSM a clearer and more precise "description and comparison of cultures" can

be achieved in the study of cultural key words (Wierzbicka, 1991, p. 382).

Omnipresent metaphors

Dansei and Perron's (1999) work explores the relationship between cognitive and communicative processes which are found in metaphor and metaphorical expressions whose pervasive use in everyday interaction in English speaking culture is discussed in light of past studies. Dansei and Perron (1999) define metaphor as "the sum and substance of abstract thinking" (p. 162) and discuss its' varying grammatical forms and uses while drawing upon the seminal work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) to elucidate how conceptual metaphors are used to conceptualise discourse and ideas, shape meanings and therefore thinking. The authors argue that metaphors' accessibility make "[m]etaphorical codes (...) powerful shapers of worldview" (Dansei & Perron, 1999, p. 183). They also address how conceptual metaphors are culturally specific as "they are interconnected to other domains of meaning-making in a culture" (Dansei & Perron, 1999, p. 176) and also discuss research which has "documented cross-cultural similarities" in the use of conceptual metaphors source domains (Dansei & Perron, 1999, p. 183).

Mapping 'office flowers'

Takada, Shinohara, Morizumi and Sato's (2000) article considers Japanese conceptual metaphors that use women as the source domain to convey "socio-cultural values" (p. 301). The authors background their study in seminal theories of conceptual metaphor such as Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) work, before illustrating how perceived roles and beliefs about the behaviour of the different genders, especially that of women, in Japanese culture's social structure are "reflected in the

metaphorical expressions" (Takada et al., 2000, p. 304). Their study introduces a model of 'socio-cultural metaphors' and demonstrates that "socio-cultural interpretations of the source and target concepts play a crucial role in their mapping" (Takada et al., 2000, p. 303). The authors conducted a qualitative survey of Japanese speakers to investigate if a list of Japanese metaphors' were identified as gender specific or neutral (Takada et al., 2000, p. 308) in order to examine if the changes in social norms will be reflected "in the use and interpretation of the language" that can be inferred from the results (Takada et al., 2000, p. 307). The authors conclude that an increased awareness of metaphors is needed "that involve socio-cultural background in their mapping" (Takada et al., 2000, p. 310) and that "metaphor, and thus cognition, is deeply related to our understanding of society and culture" (Takada et al., 2000, p. 310).

'Proverbios' as social tools

Zormeier & Samovar's (1997) article argues the power proverbs have to embed cultural values in everyday interaction as they "repeat those assumptions on which a culture operates" (p. 235). Through the review of literature concerning proverbs they assert that cultural values such as honesty fall into a 'universal' category of proverbs (Zormeier & Samovar, 1997, p. 235), whereas other proverbs such as those found in the Mexican-American culture are related specifically to "the perceptions and behaviour found within this culture" (Zormeier & Samovar, 1997, p. 236). To establish a clear link between proverbs and cultural values in this specific cultural context they describe proverbs which frame important value systems by giving an interpretive account of sample proverbs and the function they have in society. They conclude that these proverbs reflect "the most important aspects of the Mexican American culture" (Zormeier & Samovar, 1997, p. 239).

Pedagogic Proverbs

Penfield and Duru's (1988) article deals with "the role that language plays in the development of children" specifically the everyday pedagogic and social use of proverbs in south-eastern Nigeria's Igbo society (p. 119). The authors discuss numerous theorists who have investigated proverb use in various African societies and adapted Bascom's (1965) "suggested major social functions which proverbs serve" to their study (Penfield & Duru, 1988, p. 119). The paper discusses how; 1) through everyday interaction "the metaphorical nature of proverbs introduces children to abstract thought as well as moral stances" (Penfield & Duru, 1988, p. 119), 2) proverbs use is "to socialize children into "ways of a culture"" (Penfield & Duru, 1988, p. 119), 3) proverb use teaches "the connection between social and religious rituals and language usage" (Penfield & Duru, 1988, p. 119). The data is sourced from two earlier "separate ethnographic studies" the authors conducted through interviews, observation and elicitation and is used to illustrate proverb use, form and function (Penfield & Duru, 1988, p. 119). They draw further conclusions in the re-examination of their data of the participants' "interpretations of the contextual or interactional factors for each situational usage" to culturally contextualise the language use and functions (Penfield & Duru, 1988, p. 124). Penfield and Duru (1988) study of proverbs in the Igbo society surmise that "this sacred metaphorical way of speaking teaches children abstract thought and social rules in a natural, culturally relevant interactional context" (p. 127).

Proverbial Women

Storm's (1992) article uses data from Suzuki and Hirata's (1963) collection of traditional and post-World War II Japanese proverbs about women to discuss the perceived role and characteristics of women in

Japanese society. Storm views proverbs as a linguistic site which "reveal many hidden aspects of a people's culture and way of thought" and aims to explain how Japanese culture is reflected in proverbs (1992, p.168). For the study, she delineates a selection of proverbs concerning women into categories of characteristics and roles with an aim to discuss what they "reveal regarding traditional Japanese attitudes toward women" (Storm, 1992, p. 167). The results of a qualitative research questionnaire about accurate depictions of women in proverbs of 105 Japanese participants "found at random using a snowball method" (Storm, 1992, p. 177) are then presented and examined with the aim to "clarify contemporary perceptions of women"(Storm, 1992, p. 167) The survey results are also compared quantitively to determine if age, gender, and overseas living experience affected the participants' perceptions and evaluations which were expressed in the proverbs of both Japanese, and women in general (Storm, 1992, p. 167)., Storm concludes the study proves "that gradual change is occurring" (1992, p. 181) in the perception and evaluation of Japanese women's traditional roles. For example, the proverb 'No women are wise' was evaluated as "untrue" by 100% of the male participants (Storm, 1992, p. 177).

The data

A non-ethnocentric and emic approach was pursued to collect a sample of data pertaining to contemporary fixed collocations about women (see Appendix One) from a variety of Japanese public texts such as websites. The pragmatic interpretation of the data intends to fall as closely as possible to what Martin and Nakayama (1999) describe as the "interpretive paradigm" (p. 5). Headland, Pike, & Harris (cited in Martin & Nakayama, 1999, p. 6) explain that within the interpretive paradigm "[r]esearch is often conducted from an "emic" or insider perspective, where the framework and interpretations emerge from the cultural community." Correspondingly, all of the articles in the

literature review are considered 'interpretive' as the authors' research was attempted from an emic approach to a greater (Penfield & Duru, 1988), or lesser extent (Zormeier & Samovar, 1997).

The fixed collocations data is listed in three parts: Part A 1-6 are fixed collocations that were selected from a Japanese encyclopaedia-like website and are used as proverbial idioms ("Kotowaza (SPACE ALC),"n.d.); Part B 1-8 were sourced from a Japanese multi-blog website's discourse and are often used in everyday interaction ("Web magazine (honeyee)," n.d.); Part C 1-3 were sourced from an academic review of two recent popular Japanese books (Yamaguchi, 2006). After compiling the data it was emailed to two English speaking Japanese 'informants', of differing ages and genders, to ascertain whether they agreed that the Japanese language form and function, and the English translated conceptual meanings are relevant to contemporary Japanese culture from an 'inside' view, which they both confirmed. The data of contemporary fixed collocations which refer to women is considered a small but valid sampling of what is posited as culturally acceptable and desirable for contemporary women's behaviour, characteristics, and social roles in contemporary language use.

Discussion

This discussion aims to compare the literature and the theories the authors purport in relation to the data of fixed collocations (Appendix One). Apart from Wierzbicka's (1991) work which examines 'cultural key words' in detail, the other articles all refer to 'metaphor' or 'proverb' in an inclusive sense which supports situating the data as fixed collocations. For example, Storm's (1992) article considers proverbs in a "broad sense, including not only maxims, and popular sayings but certain clichés and idioms as well" (p. 168). This inclusiveness is also seen in Dansei and Perron's (1999) article that focuses on metaphor but defines a range of fixed collocations as coming under this label (p. 162-

163), and Takada et al.'s (2000) study also includes shorter, everyday fixed collocations in their consideration of socio-cultural metaphors (p. 304). For the purpose of this discussion, fixed collocations will be defined as encompassing metaphor, proverb and any other metaphorical expressions.

Similarly to cultural key words (Wierzbicka, 1991), Japanese fixed collocations are important in regard to functioning as a 'cultural insider', as they frame specific cultural values which are linguistic conceptualisations of the underlying dominant norms of society (Penfield & Duru, 1988). As Zormeier and Samovar (1997) assert, fixed collocations, such as proverbs, "offer valuable insight into the culture" (p. 235). Therefore, as a 'cultural insider', if you come across the following fixed collocation while you are in the Japanese workplace, you would realise that a point is being made about the conventional gender hierarchy of physical or mental strength:

A2) 男尊女卑 *dansonbyohi*
Man superior, woman inferior
(Men are stronger, women are weaker)

In the Japanese socio-cultural context, both Storm's (1992) and Takada et al.'s (2000) research deduces a slow shift away from the 'traditional' negative and oppressive fixed collocations. However, many are in the process of shifting very slowly, especially those that delineate women in terms of the domestic sphere, or in terms of attractiveness, passivity (B2), or ineffectualness (A1):

B2) 淑女 *shukujyo*
lady-like
(A woman who behaves as a traditional lady; passive and gracious)

A1) 女心と秋の空 *onna gokoro to aki no sora*
Woman heart is autumn sky
(A women's mind changes as quickly as the autumn sky)

The Japanese informants' confirmation of the data and its' public availability conveys that the following (and antecedent) fixed collocations are still in contemporary use which reinforces that societal expectations of women, in general, remain in 'traditional' norms and expectations. For example, women performing roles that are peripheral, or decorative in the workplace (B3) and the expectation that all women should, and want to get married to a man (B8) (Storm, 1992):

B3) 職場の花 *shokubano hana*
office flower
(A young woman office worker who does no work other than making a 'good impression' by being attractive and gracious to staff and guests)

B8) クリスマスケーキのうれのこり *kurisumasu ke-ki no urenokori*
Christmas cakes that are left unsold after Christmas day
(From the 25th of December Christmas Cakes in Japan (sponge cakes) do not sell. They are likened to women who are not married by the time they are 25 years old; every passing year they become more unmarriageable)

As demonstrated in both the 'office flower' (B3) and women as Christmas cake analogy (B8) it is evident that "[m]etaphorical codes are powerful shapers of worldview because they are so understandable. They make thinking easy" (Dansei & Perron, 1999, p. 183). Perhaps this is why the enduring use of traditional fixed collocations like 'women as housewives' (A3; A4) continue to be prominent in Japan today despite the statistics of working women (Yamaguchi, 2006). Worldviews that reside in linguistic practices such as proverbs that are "[b]ased on

accumulated experience and transmitted from generation to generation" (Storm, 1992, p. 168) are difficult for a society to reconceptualise or ignore:

A3) 男は外　女は内　*otoko wa soto onna wa uchi*
Man outside woman inside
(Men go to work and women stay at home)

A4) 内助の功　*naijyo nokou*
Inside support benefits
(The housewife is the husband's main support)

However, Takada et al. (2000) convincingly argue that "changes in the socio-cultural sphere (its structure, norms, and expectations) should cause changes in the language" (p. 310). Thus, Storm's (1992) claim that there is an "increasing number of couples in which gender-based role distinctions are becoming blurred" (Storm, 1992, p. 181) is reflected in the recent coinage and use of:

B4) バリキャリのおんな　*barikyari no onna*
determined career woman
(A woman who is very career driven)

B6) 肉食女子　*nikushokujoshi*
carnivore woman
(A woman who is outspoken and assertive towards men, especially sexual relationships)

Additionally, there is the recent re-conceptualisation of the following fixed collocation (B5) amongst women which suggests a positive re-evaluation of its function, relative to Japanese women's growing independence being considered in a newly affirmative light, rather than

socially 'abnormal' (Yamaguchi, 2006):

B5) 強い女 *tsuyoi onna*
strong woman
(Traditionally used by men derogatively to describe a woman who acts assertively. Recently women have started using it as a form of praise with their friends).

Unfortunately, Yamaguchi (2006) also points out recent popular neologisms (C1-3) which reflect "current Japanese society" due to the declining birth rate and also by the growing number of unmarried women (p. 110):

C1) 負け犬 *make inu*
loser dog
(Single women in their thirties without children)

C3) オニババ *onibaba*
demon hags
(Older childless women who are 'scary' and 'unattractive')

The preceding contrastive examples of linguistic representations of women from the data reiterate Storm's (1992) point that fixed collocations such as proverbs "reflect the views and temper of the times, and can thus be expected to evolve as social conditions alter" (p. 181). Therefore, as emerging unconventional fixed collocations come into thought, language and culture, new conventional alternative stereotypes (C2) may be created to try and reinforce former social structures:

C2) 勝ち犬 *kachiinu*
winner dog

(Women who are married)

Both Penfield and Duru's (1988), and Zormeier and Samovar's (1997) articles highlight the use of proverbs in the socialisation of children into the learning curves of life which Zormeier and Samovar (1997) elucidate as; "[r]egardless of the culture, proverbs teach children what to expect from life and what life expects in return" (p. 235). If this is indeed the case, pretty Japanese girls will be learning hard lessons about attractiveness and kindness (A7):

A7) 八方美人は薄情　*happou bijin wa hakujyou*
Eight-sided beautiful woman heartless
(A beautiful woman who is nice to everybody is untrustworthy)

Zormeier and Samovar (1997) also assert that traditional proverbs are "ongoing reinforcement for the most important aspects of culture" (p. 235). This somewhat, idealised notion may be true for proverbs concerning lessons that are intrinsic to the development of children's ethics, or for societies who are exempt from the postmodern, globalised world, but as Storm (1992) and Takada et al. (2000) illustrate in their research such 'assumptions' are likely to need to change at some point for the greater good of the culture's members. The notion also implies that if linguistic practices are not mutable, neither is the culture; the contemporary changes in societal, and subsequently cultural values are always paralleled to some extent in language which Takada et al. (2000) posit as the "dynamic nature of socio-cultural metaphor" which was confirmed in this data analysis (p. 308).

Conclusion

In regards to future considerations, to further examine how changes in society and culture impact upon the form, use, and function of fixed

collocations, the next stage of this study would be to utilise the NSM framework (Weirzbicka, 1991) to position the data's pragmatic and semantic equivalences in English to "reach for the level of conceptual universals" (p. 381). To otherwise extend the data, Storm's (1992) and Takada et al.'s (2000) studies could be used as a model to conduct qualitative research into Japanese participants' interpretation and the frequency of use of fixed collocations, which would prove beneficial for further evidence of the validity and function of the data. Additionally, 'fieldwork' which emulates Penfield and Duru's (1988) method "to collect the texts in their interactional contexts and to engage respondents in their interpretations" would also be an effective method (p. 124). A wider scope of contemporary public discourse that is available on blogs, websites, print media, films, and television could also be looked to as an invaluable source for contextualising and collecting supplementary data for researching the form, functions, and use of fixed collocations concerning women in contemporary Japanese culture.

In sum, the aforementioned literature acknowledges the potent impact social and cultural values have upon language use, form, and function in each study's contextual setting (Penfield & Duru, 1988; Wierzbicka, 1991; Storm, 1992; Zormeier and Samovar, 1997; Dansei and Perron, 1999; Takada et al., 2000). In this paper, links between contemporary Japanese socio-cultural values and the sample of Japanese fixed collocations were established thus, echoing Takada & et al.'s (2000) conclusion that fixed collocations "are not independent of socio-cultural settings" (p. 310).

References

Bascom, W. (1965). Four functions of folklore. In A. Dundes, (Ed.), *The study of folklore*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Dansei, M., & Perron, P. (1999). *Analyzing Cultures: An Introduction and Handbook*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University

Press.

Gudykunst, W. B. (1997). Cultural Variability in Communication: An Introduction. *Communication Research*, *24* (4), p. 327-348.

Kotowaza (SPACE ALC). [n.d.]. Retrieved from http://home.alc.co.jp/db/owa/

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Martin, J. N., & Nakayama, T. K. (1999).Thinking Dialectically about Culture and Communication. *Communication Theory. (9)*1, p. 1-25.

Moore, J. D. (1997). *Visions of Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theories and Theorists*. London: Altamira Press.

Penfield, J., & Duru, M. (1988). Proverbs: Metaphors that teach. *Anthropological Quarterly*, *61* (3), p. 119-128.

Storm, H. (1992). Women in Japanese Proverbs. *Asian Folklore Studies*, 51, p. 167-182

Suzuki, T., & Hirata, E. (1963). *Koji kotozawa jiten: Folklore and Proverb Dictionar*y. Tokyo: Toukyodou.

Takada, M., Shinohara, K., Morizumi, F., & Sato, M. (2000). *A Study of Metaphorical Mapping Involving Socio-cultural Values: How Woman is Conceptualized in Japanese*. Retrieved from**:** http://hdl.handle.net/2065/12164

Web magazine (honeyee). [n.d.]. Retrieved from http://www.honeyee.com/

Wierzbicka, A. (1991). Japanese key words and core cultural values. *Language in Society*, *20* (3), p. 333-385.

Yamaguchi, T. (2006). 'Loser Dogs' and 'Demon Hags': Single Women in Japan and the Declining Birth Rate. *Social Science Japan Journal*, *9* (1), p. 109-114.

Zormeier, S., M., & Samovar, L, A. (1997). Language as a Mirror of Reality: Mexican American Proverbs. In L. A. Samovar & R. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (8th ed., pp. 235-239). Belmont: Wadsworth.

Appendix One: Data

The fixed collocations are written first in Japanese, then in alphabetised Japanese. An English literal translation is followed by an English pragmatic interpretation:

Part A ("Kotowaza (SPACE ALC),"n.d.)

1) 女心と秋の空　*onna gokoro to aki no sora*
Woman heart is autumn sky
(A women's mind changes as quickly as the autumn sky)

2) 男尊女卑　*dansonbyohi*
Man superior, woman inferior
(Men are stronger, women are weaker)

3) 男は外　女は内　*otoko wa soto onna wa uchi*
Man outside woman inside
(Men go to work and women stay at home)

4) 内助の功　*naijyo nokou*
Inside support benefits
(The housewife is the husband's main support)

5) 美人薄命　*bijin wa kumei*
Beautiful woman short life
(Beauty will not last long)

6) 八方美人は薄情　*happou bijin wa hakujyou*
Eight-sided beautiful woman heartless
(A beautiful woman who is nice to everybody is untrustworthy)

Part B ("Web magazine (honeyee)," n.d.)

1) 良い子 *iiko*
good child
(Usually used to praise young women who are attractive and quiet)

2) 淑女 shukujyo
lady-like
(A woman who behaves as a traditional lady; passive and gracious)

3) 職場の花 *shokubano hana*
office flower
(A young woman office worker who does no work other than making a 'good impression' by being attractive and gracious to staff and guests)
4) バリキャリのおんな *barikyari no onna*
determined career woman
(A woman who is very career driven)

5) 強い女 *tsuyoi onna*
strong woman
(Traditionally used by men derogatively to describe a woman who acts assertively. Recently women have started using it as a form of praise with their friends)

6) 肉食女子 *nikushokujoshi*
carnivore woman
(A woman who is outspoken and assertive towards men (especially sexual relationships)

8) クリスマスケーキのうれのこり *kurisumasu ke-ki no urenokori*
Christmas cakes left unsold on Christmas day
(From the 25th of December Christmas Cakes in Japan (sponge cakes)

do not sell. They are likened to women who are not married by the time they are 25 years old; every passing year they become more unmarriageable)

Part C (Yamaguchi, 2006)

1) 負け犬 *make inu*
loser dog
(Single women in their thirties without children)

2) 勝ち犬 *kachiinu*
winner dog
(Women who are married)

3) オニババ *onibaba*
demon hags
(Older women who are childless are 'scary' and 'unattractive')