

Comparative Textual Study on Newspaper Advice Letter Columns in English and Japanese

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1. Introduction

In everyday life, we ask for some 'sort' of advice from other people intentionally or unconsciously. Other people also give their advice to the would-be advice-seeker; this is done intentionally or unconsciously, or indirectly or directly. Exchanging advice, which is one of the speech acts (cf. Searle 1969) takes place at all times everywhere in our society.

This common linguistic behavior, giving 'advice,' contains diversity in term of the problem type, the communication mode, the relationship between an advice-seeker and an advice-giver, and the situation. Specifically speaking, there are different kinds of problems that advice-seekers deal with; from a tiny problem occurred in our ordinary life, to a troublesome issue caused by annoyance with their job, love, marriage, children, etc. The communication mode between an advice-seeker and an advice-giver also varies; from informal written/spoken text to formal written/spoken text. Sometimes the subjects have known each other and share solidarity, or they are just expert advice-givers and advice-seekers by chance. The circumstances where advice exchanges occur also show the various settings; in a dyadic interaction, in a public setting, and so on.

2. Purpose

In this paper, I will focus on the public and solicited advice (DeCapua and Huber 1995: 120-126) in written discourse; advice letter columns in Japanese and English newspapers. The purpose of this paper is to analyze their textual characteristics and find similarities and differences between Japanese and English.

The form of newspaper advice columns is a letter-text which consists of two elements, the question letter and the answer letter. One in which the unknown reader seeks advice from the columnist, and the other in which the columnist gives the sender the related advice. They are different from ordinary private advice letters. First, the advice-givers and the advice-seekers are strangers (DeCapua and Huber 1995:121). However, the advice-givers have already taken the authority in public to provide any advice with others. The advice-givers are not required to establish the solidarity with the advice-seeker, as opposed to the private case. Second, as the advice letters appear in public, the advisers target two different clients; a particular advice-seeker without a name

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nor enough personal information, and the general readers of the newspaper who may have similar problems. Third, as for the textual constraint, the length and the style of the advice letter are limited because of the nature of the newspaper column.

If we consider face threatening acts (FTAs: Brown and Levinson 1978) with reference to the advice exchanges, giving advice has a potential risk to violate the advice-seeker's both positive face and negative face that Brown and Levinson (1978: 62) define as "the want of every member that his wants to be desirable to at least some others," and "the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others" respectively. Because advice is usually to give a hint, suggest or order something to 'do' or not to 'do' to others, which eventually tend to violate the hearer's positive face. Even though the advice-seeker asks for solicited advice, giving advice itself threatens the negative face of the advice-seeker who wants freedom of action and freedom from imposition.

I think that there might be some specific linguistic features especially in the advice parts which reflect the cultural differences between English and Japanese. Even though the way of giving advice obviously depends on what the problem is, I will concentrate on analyzing the linguistic features of the advice letters to explore the underlying differences.

3. Background

Previous studies on the public and solicited advice were conducted by DeCapua and Dunham (1993) and Hudson (1990) both by analyzing radio calling advice programs. The former analyzes the types of strategies of the advice-seekers and givers, the latter examines the semantic and syntactic features in the speech of a particular advice-giver. As for written texts, DeCapua and Huber (1995) briefly point out the advice column in newspapers as one of the many sources where the solicited advice appear. Any specific research focusing on the newspaper advice columns has yet to be conducted.

On the other hand, many contrastive studies between Japanese and English spoken discourse have been attempted (e.g., Maynard 1990) in the past years. However, any comparative study has not focused on comparing the newspaper advice columns which are commonly viewed in our daily life in both countries.

In order to attack the cross-cultural analysis of texts in Japanese and English, although the present data is limited, I would like to start by examining the linguistic features in the advice letter columns in detail.

4. Procedure.

4.1 Data

I selected two newspapers and randomly collected each of the ten advice columns, "Ann Landers" from English, 'the Washington Post': [E], and "Jinsei Annai" Life guidance from Japanese 'Yomiuri News': [J]. Both of them are regarded as the representatives of the public opinion leader in each country. "Ann Landers" from the Washington Post has a million readers and it appears not only in the Washington Post but also in many other newspapers in the USA. *Jinsei Annai* 'Life Guidance,' from the Yomiuri News, has ten million readers; this is the biggest newspaper readership in Japan. The authorship is different between them; "Ann Landers" is written only by Ms. Landers, however "*Jinsei Annai*" is written by several specialists, such as counselors, lawyers and novelists.

4.2 Coding

I will analyze the advice letters by using my own coding of 'combined categorical analysis' which categorizes each sentence appeared in advice letters into (1) *positive* vs. *negative* advice, and (2) *explicit* vs. *implicit* expression.

Positive advice [P] is determined as "Do X", whereas *Negative Advice* [N] is regarded as "Do not do X." In addition, we have *Others* [O] which mark only a comment or description of the problem. The adviser can suspend to answer the problem and does not refer to the problem solution or advice by saying that, for example, "I wish you luck", '*Iwayuru yarite yori mo, hoto kara aisareru plus-men mo arunodesu*' "'You have such advantage that the people feel solidarity with you than an aggressive guy", and "Go to the counselor."¹⁾

On the other hand, *explicit expressions* [E] show certain syntactic features (Imperatives, modals {should, must, have to...}) and lexical features (e.g., *hitsuyoo* 'necessary', best, totally, etc.). *Implicit expressions* [I] are also distinguished with certain syntactic features (Declaratives, Interrogatives and If-clause) and lexical features (e.g. *kenkoo* 'healthy'). See Table 1:

Table 1. Categorical Coding: Positive vs. Negative, Explicit vs. Implicit Advice.

(A) *Positive vs. Negative advice:* [+/- Positive]

- (1) Positive Advice [P]: "Do X".
- (2) Negative Advice [N]: "Do not do X".
- (3) Others [O]: not advice but comment (e.g. I wish you luck.)

(B) *Explicit vs. Implicit advice:* [+/- Explicit]

- (1) Explicit Expression [E]:
 Syntactic: Imperatives, modals (should, must, have to.)
 Lexical: ex. *hitsuyoo* 'necessary' 'totally'
- (2) Implicit Expression [I]:
 Syntactic: Declaratives, Interrogatives, If-clauses.
 Lexical: ex. *kenkoo* 'healthy'

Based on these five categories in the two linguistic levels (semantic and syntactic), I make up six combination types for categorizing the advice parts, shown in Table 2. When the sentence is not applicable for all types, it goes to [-] which means 'not applicable'.

Table 2. Six Types of 'Combined Categorical Analysis' in Advice Letters.

- [PE] : Positive & Explicit advice
- [PI] : Positive & Implicit advice
- [NE] : Negative & Explicit advice
- [NI] : Negative & Implicit advice
- [OE] : Other comments in Explicit expression
- [OI] : Other comments in Implicit expression
- ([-] : not applicable.)

5. Results

The total number of advices and the rate at which each type of the advice occurs are shown in Table 3:

Table 3. The number of tokens and the rate of the frequency of the occurrence.

Category	English Advice % (N)	Japanese Advice % (N)
<i>Positive & Explicit:</i> [PE]	31.6% (18)	24.7% (20)
<i>Positive & Implicit:</i> [PI]	15.8% (9)	27.2% (22)
<i>Negative & Explicit:</i> [NE]	3.5% (2)	7.4% (6)
<i>Negative & Implicit:</i> [NI]	1.8% (1)	12.3% (10)
<i>Comments in Explicit:</i> [OE]	3.5% (2)	1.2% (1)
<i>Comments in Implicit:</i> [OE]	36.8% (21)	22.2% (18)
[-]	7.0% (4)	4.9% (4)
<i>Total</i>	(57)	(81)

5.1 English Advice Column

First, the English advice data marks that the most frequent expression is not 'advice' but 'other comments in declarative' which is implicit, [OI]: 36.8% (N=21 out of 57). (1) shows the instances of [OI]; *comments in implicit expression* in English advice columns:

- (1) a. I admire your willingness to admit your true feelings about this child.
- b. Perhaps I can help you see things more clearly.
- c. His blushing was strictly psychological, but my thanks to all who wrote with suggestions.

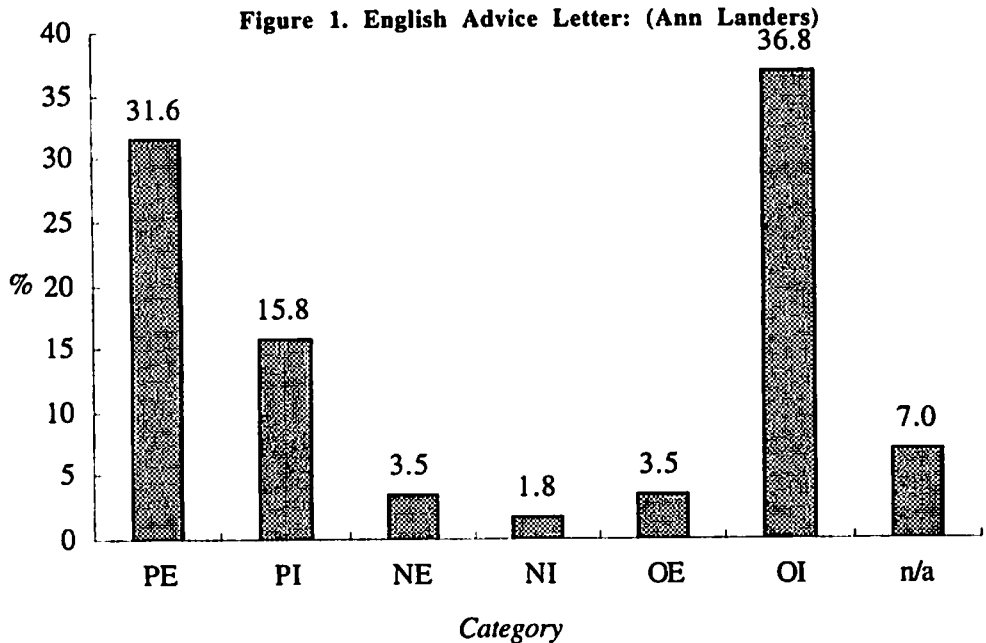
Second, the occurrence of *positive & explicit* [PE] advice shows next highest frequency, 31.6% (N=18 out of 57). Many imperative forms are used without expressing 'please' which could make the sentence soft. See the examples of [PE] in (2):

- (2) a. Look for ways to be of help to others.
- b. Keep fighting, for the sake of your children.
- c. You must tell Lucas that living together hasn't worked out and you want him to buy your share of the house.

As for other categorical factors, such as [NE], [NI] and [OE] are relatively low: 3.5%; N=2, 1.8%; N=1 and 3.5%; N=2 respectively. Each example is shown in (3), (4) and (5):

- (3) [NE]: To the men out there who are not being treated fairly, I say don't give up.
- (4) [NI]: If that devoted father knew the damage he was doing to his young daughter, he would surely stop the horseplay.
- (5) [OE]: I urge you to get counseling at once.

Figure 1 shows the frequencies of the occurrence of each category in English advice column. Examine Figure 1:



The results of the English advice letter show their preference to make comments instead of specific advice and give *positive advice*, especially in the *explicit* expressions. This tendency and preference can be regarded as one of the features of 'Ann Landers' column.

5.2. Japanese Advice

On the contrary to the English data, the most frequent advice in Japanese is *positive & implicit* type [PI]:27.2% (N=22 out of 81). See (3) of [PI] in Japanese advice columns. Figure 2 also shows the details of the occurrence of each category in Japanese advice columns:

(3) a. *Kare ni "arigatoo" "ureshii" nado to iu kotoba o kaketa no wa itsu desu ka.*

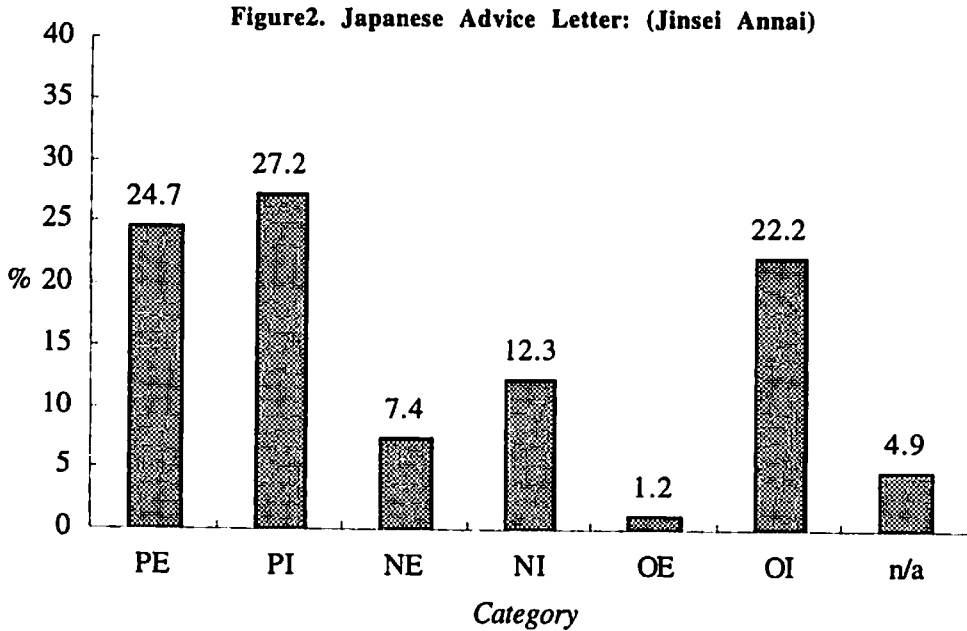
When was a time when you told him "thank you" or "I'm happy" or sometimes of the kind?

b. *Kodomo o kakaeta anata ga rikon shite, korekara seishinteki ni mo keizaiteki nimo doo ikinuite yuku ka.*

How are you and your children going to survive mentally and economically after the divorce?

c. *Sono ten ni tsuite anatawa, dokomade shinken ni kangaete orareru no deshoo ka.*

I wonder how seriously you are thinking on this point.



The second frequency is found in *positive & explicit* type [PE]: 24.7% (N=20 out of 81) and the third one is *comments in implicit* expressions [OI]: 22.2% (N=18 out of 81). See both examples in (4) and (5) respectively:

(4)[PE] a. *Muko ni kitekureta koto ni kansha suru hou ga, muko ni shite yatta no dakara, to ibaru yori mo unto futari no kankei wo yoku suru to omoimasu.*

I think that you should appreciate his coming to the family and it will make your relationship much better than if you are arrogant to him because he came to the family.

b. *Yoi tehon ni natte kudasai.*

Please be a good example.

c. *Shikashi, anata jishi no kimochi no nakani nanika ushirometai kanji ga aru to suru nara, kirei sappari sutete hoshii nodesu.*

However, you must throw away feelings that you are inferior.

(5):[OI] a. *Soreto, otokonoko to no kakawari ni otokooya ga toojoo suru jiki.*

And, this is the period that a father plays an important role in the interaction with his son.

b. *Konnakoto moushi ageru hitsuyoo mo naikoto desu ga, ningen wa ningen de atte, ningen igai no nanimono demo nai to iu koto.*

I don't need to say that humans are humans and nothing else.

c. *'Subete no kokumin wa hoo no shita ni byoodoo' to iu kenpoo wa, sudeni hanseiki mo mae kara, watashitachi ni minshushugi to kihonteki jinken o hoshoo shiteiru no desu yo.*

The constitution says "all citizens are equal under law" and for half a century has guaranteed us democracy and basic human rights.

Interestingly *negative* advice in Japanese is more common than in English. Japanese *negative* advice shows a rather high frequency in the overall occurrences of the sentences regardless of the explicit or the implicit modes of expression: [NE]; 7.4% (N=6 out of 81), [NI]; 12.3% (N=10 out of 81). Examine both [NE] and [NI] in (6) and (7) respectively:

(6) [NE]: a. *Desukara, 'kakushigoto' to kangaete ki ni yamu youna koto de wa arimasen.*
Therefore, you should not let this "secret" trouble you.

b. *Monogoto wa subete kangaeyoo de, ichimenteki ni mitewa ikemasen.*
It all depends one, how you look at it, don't be so one-sided.

c. *Tadashi, sooshita jibun no seikaku ni amaenai koto desu ne.*
But, you should not admit your personality as it is.

(7) [NI]: d. *"Mukono kuse ni teishukanpaku" toiu kimochi ga anata no naka ni aru nodewa kare toshitemo yoi kibun dewa nai deshou.*
If you feel that he is too demanding even though he came to the family, he might be uncomfortable, too.

e. *Watashi no kojinteki na kangaekata de wa, anatano goryooshin to onajini "Aete iu hitsuyoo wa nai" no kimochi ni katamuiteimasu.*
In my opinion, I feel like your parents that you do not necessarily need to tell him.

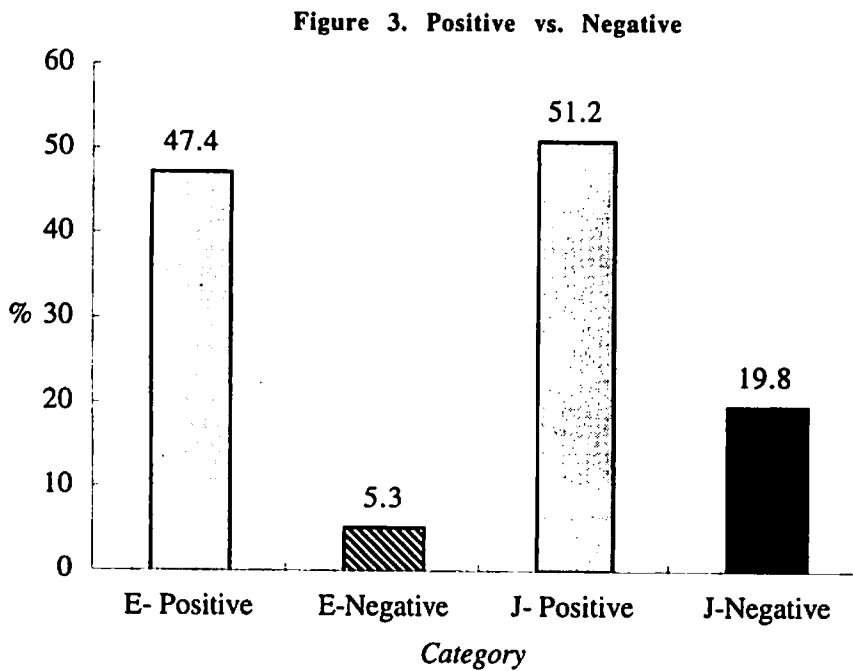
f. *Otto ga booryoku o furuitaku naru no wa, anata no kitai ga ookisugite jibun o muryoku ni kanjiru sei kamo shiremasen.*
It's possible the reason your husband abuses you is because he feels powerless in the face of your overwhelming expectations.

In contrast, in English, the negative advice appears relatively at the low frequency level as [NE]: 3.8% (N=2 out of 53) and [NI]: 1.8% (N=1 out of 53).

5.3 Positive vs. Negative Advice

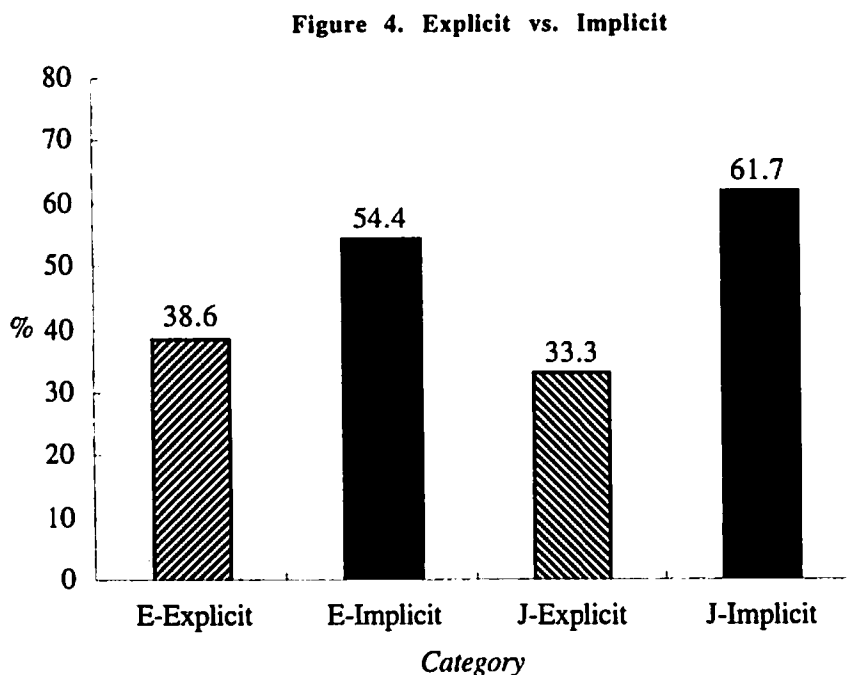
Specifically focused on *positive* and *negative* factors, the Japanese *negative advice* shows higher frequency of 19.8% (N=16 out of 81), whereas the English *negative advice* marks the lower frequency of the occurrence of 5.3% (N=3 out of 57).

As for the *positive* factor, the *positive advice* occurs in the overall advice phrases in Japanese shows the high frequency of the occurrence of 51.9% (N=42 out of 81). The English *positive advice* occurs at the similar frequency of 47.4% (N=27 out of 57). Refer to Figure 3:



5.4 Explicit vs. Implicit Expression

According to Figure 4, English and Japanese advice indicate these similarities in the relation between each *explicit* and *implicit expressions*. In both cases, more *implicit expressions* are found than *explicit* ones. Even though both English and Japanese advice show the similar tendencies, Japanese *implicit expressions* (61.7%; N=50 out of 81) are found slightly more often than in English (54.4%; N=31 out of 57). See the following Figure 4:



5.4.1 Explicit Advice vs. Implicit Advice

Furthermore, if compared only between *explicit advice* and *implicit advice* that exclude *other comments* factors, the frequency of the occurrence of Japanese *implicit advice*: 55.2% (N= 32 out of 58) is much higher than that of English *implicit advice*: 33.3% (N=10 out of 30). This result strikingly shows that the Japanese advice-giver prefers to use the implicit linguistic form than the explicit one. In contrast, the English adviser prefers to use the *explicit* linguistic forms at the frequency of 66.6% (N=20 out of 30), whereas the Japanese adviser uses the explicit forms at the lower frequency of 44.8% (N=26 out of 58).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the preceding results, I will point out some clear differences and similarities in newspaper advice column between English and Japanese.

First, Japanese data show their preference to use *implicit* expressions regardless of either positive or negative advice. On the contrary, English data show the opposite tendencies; they prefer to use *explicit* expressions throughout use of both positive and negative advice.

One of the possible interpretations for this tendency is that the Japanese people pay much more attention to avoiding FTA when they give advice to others. It is obvious that giving advice or a suggestion in the implicit way can reduce the imposition on others which causes the hearer's negative and/or positive FTA(s).

In contrast, it can be said that the American people like to use more direct expressions regardless of whether the advice is positive or negative. I assume that there might be some different notions of 'giving' advice to others, between the American and the Japanese culture, society and people.

Second, it is interesting that the Japanese advice contains the more *negative* content, which risks to violate the hearer's positive face. This is not an expected result knowing that Japanese language and society stress harmony or lack of conflict. However, before making the conclusion that Japanese advice tends to be more negative than English, it is necessary to conduct further study of what kind of questions are being asked.

Furthermore, we should differentiate the variables, such as the different inherent linguistic realizations, the different ritual constraints, the adviser's style and so on. For the future study, we should expand in order to find more general characteristics in the cross-cultural perspective.

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1) I regard the statement of "go to the counselor" as a comment and not as an advice because the advice-giver does not offer either positive or negative advice to the advice-seeker. The adviser seems to avoid giving advice to the seeker by way of marking such an open interpretation comment.

Acknowledgement

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