

INTERPRETATION OF JAPANESE FINAL PARTICLES: KA, NE, AND YO —ON COGNITIVE MODALITY AND POLITENESS—

การตีความหมายคำช่วยท้ายประโยคภาษาญี่ปุ่น: KA NE และ YO
—วิเคราะห์การแสดงความตนภาวะความคิดและความสุภาพ—

Saowaree Nakagawa

International Relations Center, President Office, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep

Abstract

The objective of the present study is to find the meanings and the usage of final particles in Japanese, namely KA, NE, and YO. Most linguists have focused their explanations around the possession of information or the territory each of these particles belongs to; that is, YO is used when the knowledge belongs to the speaker, and so forth. However, there are many cases that cannot be explained by these traditional definitions. For example, (7) Chotto yuubinkyoku ni itte kuru NE. (I'll go to the post office and come back, OK?) proves that the speaker knows the information but NE is used. This sentence expresses politeness by not using YO or finishing without a particle. The framework proposed in the present study consists of the application of speech act theory of modality—Cognitive Modality—and the theory of politeness. The findings are as follows: 1) In semantic level, KA is used when the speaker thinks his/her knowledge is zero (0%). When the speaker believes that the listener shares the information, NE is used to show the speaker's knowledge of 50%. If the speaker thinks he/she knows well, YO which indicates 100% of knowledge is used. 2) In pragmatic level, when the speaker has just learned the information from the listener, KA will not be repeated when making confirmation since it will result a – in the meaning of politeness. KA with a falling intonation has a + in politeness. To avoid causing a face threatening act to the listener, YONE (a two-word particle) is used to moderate the content. YO used with an imperative sentence gives a + in politeness. 3) Having a nuance of being neutral, NE has a + in terms of politeness.

Keywords: Final particle, Modality, Cognitive Modality, Politeness

บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาความหมายและการใช้คำช่วยท้ายประโยคในภาษาญี่ปุ่น กล่าวคือ คำช่วย KA NE และ YO ในการอธิบายความหมายของคำเหล่านี้ นักภาษาศาสตร์ส่วนใหญ่มักจะให้ความสนใจของเจ้าของข้อมูล หรือข้อมูลนั้นอยู่ในอาณาเขตของผู้พูดหรือผู้ฟัง ในการศึกษาพบว่า คำจำกัดความตามที่ได้ปฏิบัติกันมานั้นไม่สามารถนำมาอธิบายกับทุกกรณีของการใช้คำช่วยเหล่านี้ ตัวอย่างเช่น ประโยค (7) Chotto yuubinkyoku ni itte kuru NE. (จะไปทำการไปรษณีย์หน่อยนะ) ประโยคนี้เป็นข้อมูลของผู้พูดแต่ใช้คำช่วย NE ซึ่งคำช่วยคำนี้มักจะอธิบายกันว่าเป็นข้อมูลของผู้ฟังหรืออยู่ในอาณาเขตผู้ฟัง เป็นต้น กรอบแนวคิดที่นำเสนอในการศึกษานี้ประกอบด้วย การประยุกต์ใช้ทฤษฎีทัศนภาวะ—Cognitive Modality (ทัศนภาวะความคิด)—และทฤษฎีความสุภาพ การศึกษานี้ได้พบผลจากการวิเคราะห์ดังต่อไปนี้ 1) ในระดับอรรถศาสตร์พบว่า ผู้พูดจะใช้คำช่วย KA เมื่อคิดว่าตนเองมีข้อมูลหรือความรู้ใดๆ เท่ากับศูนย์ (0%) เมื่อผู้พูดเชื่อว่าผู้ฟังมีส่วนร่วมรู้ในข้อมูลก็จะใช้คำช่วย NE โดยให้ความหมายว่า ความรู้ของผู้พูดมีเพียง 50% และหากผู้พูดคิดว่าตนเองมีความรู้ในเรื่องนั้นดี คำช่วย YO ซึ่งบ่งชี้ความรู้ 100% จะถูกนำมาใช้ 2) ในระดับวัจนปฏิบัติศาสตร์ หากผู้พูดได้รับข้อมูลจากผู้ฟังแล้วต้องการทวนข้อมูลนั้น คำช่วย KA จะไม่นำมาใช้ซ้ำอีกเนื่องจากจะส่งผลเป็นลบ (–) ในเชิงความสุภาพ คำช่วยท้ายประโยค KA นั้น หากออกเสียงต่ำลงจะให้ความหมายในทางบวก (+) ในเชิงความสุภาพ เพื่อหลีกเลี่ยงการคุกคาม (การทำให้เสียหน้า) (Face Threatening Act) ผู้ฟัง คำช่วยซ้อนสองคำ เช่น YONE จะถูกนำมาใช้เพื่อให้เนื้อหาที่ต้องการเน้นฟังดูนุ่มนวล และนอกจากนั้น YO ที่ใช้กับประโยคคำสั่งจะทำให้เกิดผลบวกในเชิงความสุภาพ 3) NE มีความเป็นกลางในด้านความหมาย ดังนั้นจึงให้ผลเป็นบวกในเชิงความสุภาพ

คำสำคัญ: คำช่วยท้ายประโยค ทัศนภาวะ ทัศนภาวะความคิด ความสุภาพ

Introduction

The characteristics of Japanese language

Japanese language is said to have the characteristics of reflecting the speaker's consideration towards the listener. This implies that modality is an essential element in explaining the meanings of expressions, especially those of polysemy—a word that has many possible meanings.

Final particles KA, NE, and YO

Final particles such as KA, NE, and YO in Japanese are also known as representatives of modality markers. Many linguists have tried to explain the meanings of these expressions by paying their attention to the possession of the

information by the speaker or the listener.

Look at the traditional definitions and some examples below¹:

Definition of KA: the information of the listener. Look at the following sentences:

(1) A: Kore wa Taimoji desu KA. Is this a Thai character?

B: Hai, soo desu. Yes, it is.

(2) Taroo: Konna kantan na yarikata nara seito wa minna waku daroo na. If it's so easy to operate, I guess all students would understand.

¹ Examples included in this paper are of the writer unless otherwise indicated.

Ken: Dakedo, Shuuta kun ni wa waku

KA ↓ NA (or KANE)².

But I wonder if Shuuta would understand it.

In (1), the speaker uses KA as a marker for an interrogative sentence to ask for the information from the listener. However, in (2), Taroo expresses his opinion on the students' capability of operating something, and Ken does not think that Shuuta would understand as other students do. Therefore KA in (2) does not express a question seeking information in the same way as KA in (1). It is used in a two-word particle, and in this sentence NE is used to ask the listener's opinion. KA in (2) is expressed with the low intonation.

Definition of NE: the information of the speaker and the listener

Take an example of NE, it has been explained by many linguists that this final particle expresses the speaker's uncertainty in the information he/she has, so he/she wants to ask for the opinion of the listener who has the information.

Look at the following sentences.

(3) A and B are having lunch together at a restaurant and they order the same dish:

A: Kono suup wa oishii desu ne. This soup is good, isn't it?

B: Soo desu ne. Yes, it is.

A in (3) thinks the soup tastes good and expects that B shares the information of 'tastes good' and B would agree with her so she uses NE. In (3), B agrees with A, therefore the word NE is also used.

However, there are cases that the listener of the conversation do not share the same information as shown in (4):

At the Barbeque party in the yard:

(4) A: Kyoo wa samui ne. Today is cold, isn't it?

B: E, samui? Cold? Attakai yo. It's definitely warm.

Example (4) proves that at the same place, speaker A and listener B may have different information or opinions. This indicates that possession of information alone cannot explain the meanings and the usage of KA, NE, and YO.

The objective of the present study is to find the meanings and usage of these final particles; especially to examine the mental attitude of the speaker that makes the determination of selecting these final particles of KA, NE, and YO to express for interacting in communication.

Literature Review

KA, NE, and YO and possession of knowledge or information

Masuoka (1995) adopts Oso's explanation of NE and YO who explains that these particles indicates who possesses the knowledge or information; the speaker or the listener. Masuoka (1995) explains that NE shows the matching of the knowledge of the speaker and the listener while YO indicates the opposition of the judgment

² The difference between KANA and KANE in (2) is not the subject of the present study. However, it should be noted that KANA shows the speaker's feeling of uncertainty while KANE shows the speaker's strong doubt.

between the speaker and the listener. Masuoka gives the following examples:

(5) A: Amerikajin wa amari hatarakimasen NE.

American people do not work so much.

B: Iya, hatarakimasu YO. Yes, they do work.

(The speaker objects to the listener's judgment by using YO.)

Takiura (2008) argues that the criteria of matching and opposing cannot explain all cases by giving the following examples:

A teacher is telling a difficult problem to the students and the information is new to the students. Yet, NE is used and it does not mean to match the listener's information.

(6) Teacher: Kantan soo dakedo, kono mondai wa machigaeru hito ga ooin desu NE.

The problem looks easy, but it seems that many people make a mistake on it.

(7) Chotto yuubinkyoku ni itte kuru NE³. I'll go to the post office and come back.

In (7), Takiura points out that the speaker is the one who knows he/she is going to the post office, but NE is used and not YO. In fact, Kato (2004) explains earlier that in the case of (7), although only the speaker knows he/she is going to the post office, NE is nevertheless used to give an impression to the listener that he/she does not know the information. Kato

³ Example (7) is the same example as given by Kato (2004: 237). In this sentence NE is used only to show the speaker's mental attitude; or modality of politeness. Thus, there is no exact equivalent word in English.

does not explain why the speaker wants to give such an impression.

KA, NE, and YO determine territory of knowledge

Kato (2004) comments on Kamio's concept of Territory (1990) for explaining the meanings of NE and YO. That is, NE is used when the information is in the territory of the listener and YO is used when the information is in the territory of the speaker.

Kato gives example (8) to prove that the concept of Territory cannot be applicable for the explanation of the NE and YO:

(8) Kyoo wa samui NE. Today is cold, isn't it? (The speaker says to the family who are at the same place in one morning in winter)

Kato explains that in this situation the speaker utters the phrase for the first time but it does not mean that the speaker is the only one who has the information, other members of the family share the same feeling of the weather of that situation as well. This means that not only the speaker but the listener as well has the information in his/her territory that it is cold. Kato argues that one cannot say that this sense of the weather belongs to any territory.

However, Kato seems to have forgotten the fact that if one of the family members does not agree, he/she could say:

(9) Iya, attakai yo. No, it's warm.

The fact is that different persons may have different feelings towards the same situation. This proves that although the speaker expects

the listener to agree with him or her, the actual world may be different from what he or she imagines. This sentence is similar to sentence (4) mentioned before. It should be noted here that what the speaker utters is something to do with modality.

Feature Specification (+ or – knowledge) of KA, NE, and YO

According to Kinsui, 1993 (cited in Takiura, 2008: 124-154) the feature specification of NE and YO shown below cannot explain their meanings and the usage:

Speaker (+) YO (The speaker has the information)

listener (–) YO (The listener does not have the information)

listener (+) NE (The listener has the information)

He gives the following example:

(10) Megane, koko ni oita YONE. My spectacles were left here, weren't they.

Kinsui explains that in (10), YO denotes listener (–) while NE denotes listener (+), therefore by using the feature specification, YO would contradict NE. However, Takiura (2008: 140) argues that this can be explained since the particle YO is in the embedded sentence of proposition and NE is outside of the proposition as shown below:

{[proposition] YO} NE

= {[proposition] + speaker's unilateral statement} + making confirmation/adding the information shared by the listener.

Takiura (2008: 140) explains that YONE means

the speaker declares the information he/she knows then confirms or adds the information shared by the listener.

However, Takiura's explanation actually concerns the meanings on two levels – YO at the semantic level and NE at the pragmatic level-; which will be discussed later.

Conceptual Framework

As seen in the previous section, the traditional explanations of KA, NE and YO cannot explain all the meanings and usage of these particles. The present study proposes a comprehensive framework which includes the consideration of modality towards information which will be called Cognitive Modality and the modality expressing politeness which will be called Politeness.

Methodology

This study is conducted by library research based on the speech act theory of modality and the theory of politeness.

Modality in Speech Act theory

From the viewpoint of speech acts, Palmer (1986: 16) compares the propositional element and the modality as follows:

"The distinction between proposition and modality is very close to that of locutionary act and illocutionary act as proposed by Austin (1962: 98). In the locutionary act we are 'saying something', while in the illocutionary act we are 'doing something'—answering a question, announcing a verdict, giving a warning or making a promise. ...Modality in language is, then,

concerned with subjective characteristics of an utterance, and it could even be further argued that subjectivity is an essential criterion for modality...”

Nakau (1994: 33) explains that modality is the speaker’s attitude at the time of speech.

In the present study, at the semantic level, modality is determined for the interpretation of the meanings and usage of final particles KA, NE, and YO. When the speaker is certain that he/she knows the information, YO is used. If the speaker believes that the listener also shares the information, NE is used. And if the speaker believes that the listener knows the information, KA is used to ask for the information. Nakagawa (2004) proposes the model of Cognitive Modality to explain the speaker’s mental attitude towards the realization of the protasis (P) (the antecedent clause) of a conditional sentence: “If I have time this evening, I will go to the movies.” Nakagawa proposes the model and explains that the event in the apodosis (Q) (the consequent) of the conditional sentence will actually occur or not depends on whether at the time of speech, the speaker believes that the protasis is the Causal Prototype (whenever P occurs, Q will occur as a result; this is expressed to inform a habitual event and not an actual-concrete occurrence.), the Temporal Prototype (Q will actually occur (will actually be realized) after P has occurred), or the Hypothetical Prototype (if P occurs, Q would occur (not actually realized)).

In this study, modality holds a broad sense of attitude which may refer to the speaker’s belief regarding the possession of knowledge

or information or it may refer to the speaker’s consciousness towards politeness. To differentiate the meanings of modality, the term Cognitive Modality adopted from Nakagawa. (2004) will be used for the mental attitude towards the information which is at the semantic level in the deep structure. The modality indicating the speaker’s consciousness towards politeness will be called Politeness in the present study which is at the pragmatic level in the surface structure and this will be discussed in the following section.

The Concept of Politeness

Brown & Levinson (1987: 13-62) propose a theory of politeness for communication. The main ideas of politeness are the desires to be accepted and to have freedom in one’s action, they are:

1. positive face: the wish of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others
2. negative face: the want of every competent adult member that his actions be unimpeded by others

In the theory of politeness, an FTA (Face Threatening Act) is the act that threatens the positive or negative face of the speaker or the addressee (listener).

Analysis

Cognitive Modality

Look at the sentences in the previous section again:

(1) A: Kore wa Taimoji desu KA. Is this a Thai character?

B: Hai, soo desu. Yes, it is.

In (1), at the time of speech, the speaker believes that the listener holds the information, therefore KA is used.

Look another example of (5):

(5) A: Amerikajin wa amari hatarakimasen NE.

American people do not work so much.

B: Iya, hatarakimasu YO. Yes, they do work.

Masuoka explains that in (5), the speaker objects the listener's judgment by using YO.

(11) Uwagi ni nani ka tsuite imasu YO. Look, there's something on your jacket.

When considering the cognitive modality of YO both in (5) (11), the speakers are certain in their knowledge; in other words, they believe that they have the knowledge or information and want to convey it to the listener. YO in (5), however, might cause an FTA (Face Threatening Act) against speaker A by not agreeing with A if they do not know each other well enough.

Politeness

Sentence (12) is a conversation on the phone:

(12) A: Meiwa Seisakusho no Yamada to mooshimasu ga, eigyoo bu no Tanaka san o onegai shimasu.

I am Yamada from Meiwa Seisakusho, can I speak to Mr. Tanaka of the Sales Department, please?

B: Meiwa Seisakusho no Yamada sama desu NE. Shoo shoo omachi kudasai. Mr. Yamada from Meiwa Seisakusho, right? Just a moment, please?

In (12), although B has just heard the name of the caller, she would use NE to make confirmation, and not KA, to ask his name again. This is to avoid positive face threatening to the

listener. This indicates that besides the cognitive modality of NE at a semantic level, it holds the pragmatic function of expressing politeness as well.

Look at another sentence below as an example of NE. The host invites the guest to come again by using NE or YO:

(13) Mata asobi ni kite kudasai NE. Please come again, will you?

(14) Mata asobi ni kite kudasai YO. Do come again.

Sentence (13) and sentence (14) are originally imperative sentences. Both sentences have the proposition which is the information from the speaker. In comparing to YO in (14) which gives the nuance of the emphasis of the speaker's opinion, NE in (13) moderates the nuance of the imperative sentence which shows the attitude of being polite.

Consider again sentences (6) and (7):

(6) The teacher:

Kantan soo dakedo, kono mondai wa machigaeru hito ga ooin desu NE.

The problem looks easy, but many people make a mistake on it, don't they.

In (6), the information is new to the students so the speaker can use YO because the speaker's cognitive modality is that he/she is certain of what he is saying. However, NE is used to avoid criticizing the students who make the mistake. NE in this sentence has a pragmatic function denoting Politeness of positive face.

Let's look at sentence (7):

(7) Chotto yuubinkyoku ni itte kuru NE. I'll go to the post office and come back, OK?

Kato (2004) explains that in (7), although only the speaker knows his/her action of going to the post office, he/she uses NE in order to give an impression to the listener that he/she does not know it.

Kato's explanation is insufficient since this sentence has to be analyzed at two levels; the semantic level and the pragmatic level. When considering the cognitive modality at the semantic level, (7) is an affirmative sentence for which the speaker is 100% certain that he/she knows the information. Thus, YO can also be used in this sentence as shown in (7):

(7) Chotto yuubinkyoku ni itte kuru YO. I'll go to the post office and come back.

If the speaker uses (7) or even using the sentence without any final particles, it may sound like an imperative sentence declaring that "You must know that I am going to the post office." Thus, at the pragmatic level, the speaker chooses to use NE to avoid the risk of causing any FTA to the listener for the straightforward expression. NE in this sentence indicates the pragmatic function of expressing Politeness.

Cognitive Modality and Politeness in two-word final particles of KA, NE, and YO

Look at sentence (2) again:

(2) Taroo: Konna kantan na yarikata nara seito wa minna waku daroo na. If it's so easy to operate, I guess all students would understand.

Ken: Dakedo, Shuuta kun ni wa waku
KA ↓ NA (or KANE).

But I wonder if Shuuta would understand it.

As explained before, in (2), Taroo expresses his opinion on the students' capability of operating something. Instead of asking directly, 'Dakedo, Shuuta kun ni wa wakarimasu ka (But does Shuuta know how to operate?)', Ken avoids the rudeness of a direct question, instead selecting NE to express uncertainty about Shuuta's ability.

Another example involves a conversation between two strangers who are using the same vending machine:

(15) A: Kono kikai no ji wa usukute amari miemasen ne.

The letters on this machine are not clear.
It's hard to read them, isn't it?

B: Soo desu YONE. That's very true.

In (15), listener B uses a two-word particle YONE, in which the second particle NE is used to express agreement with A in what A has said. At the same time, B wants to convey to A that he/she also has his/her own original opinion that the letters on the machine were not clear. This is shown by YO in the inner part of YONE which is at the semantic level. Particle NE can be used instead of YONE in this sentence, however, YONE gives a stronger confirmation of B's agreement. To the proposition mentioned by A. In other words, using NE is not strong enough to show B's intention of agreeing with A. To avoid positive face threatening towards speaker A who is a stranger, YONE is selected at a pragmatic level to show a friendlier attitude in the agreement in order to express Politeness.

Masuoka gives some more examples as shown in (16) and (17):

(16) Byooiin ni ike YO. Go to the hospital, will you?

(17) X Byooiin ni ike NE. Masuoka explains that in (16) YO can be used because it is an imperative sentence, and YO moderates the forcefulness in the imperative sentence. He points out that NE cannot be used because a command does not need the agreement of the listener. From the point of view of Cognitive Modality and the theory of politeness, the speaker adds YO to express politeness by moderating the nuance of command.

Result and Conclusion

From the result of the analysis, the meanings and usage of final particles KA, NE, and YO can be summarized as follows:

1. From the point of view of Cognitive Modality in the semantic level, when the speaker thinks that his/her knowledge is zero (0%), KA is used to ask for information. When the speaker believes that the listener shares the information, NE is used and shows his/her knowledge of 50%. If the speaker believes that his/her knowledge is 100%, YO is used.

2. At the pragmatic level, when the speaker has just learned the information from the listener, KA will not be repeated since it will result a – in Politeness. When KA is used with a falling intonation, the Politeness is + YO is risky to cause a face threatening act to the listener. Therefore, YONE (a two-word final particle) is used to moderate the content. YO, used with

an i imperative sentence, gives a + in Politeness.

3. NE generally shows the knowledge of being neutral, thus, it has a + in terms of Politeness.

The result can be summarized as shown in figure 1.

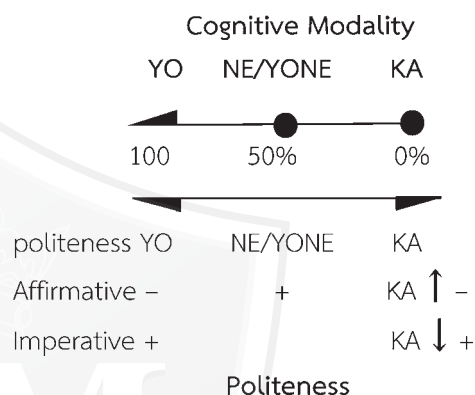


Figure 1 Cognitive Modality and Politeness of KA, NE/YONE, and YO at semantic level and pragmatic level

Figure 1 shows the cognitive modality of KA, NE/YONE, and YO at the semantic level. That is, at the time of speech, the speaker uses KA when believing that he/she himself/herself has the knowledge or information of 0%. The speaker will use NE/YONE when he/she believes that the listener shares 50% of the knowledge or information, and the speaker will use YO when believing that he/she himself/herself has 100% of the knowledge or information.

The lower part of figure 1 shows the modality of the speaker at the pragmatic level. The diagram shows + in Politeness of NE or YONE, and YO in an imperative sentence or KA in a low tone. By contrast, YO in an affirmation sentence and KA with a high tone in repeating

the question of the same information learned before may become a face threatening act towards the listener, thus, they have a minus (-) in terms of Politeness.

References

- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, P. & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kato, S. (2004). *Nihongo no goyooron no shikumi*. Tokyo: Kenkyusha. [in Japanese]
- Kitamura, N. (2000). Adapting Brown and Levinson's 'Politeness' Theory to the Analysis of Casual Conversation, *Proceedings of ALS2k, the 2000 Conference of the Australian Linguistic Society*. pp. 1-7.
- Masuoka, T. (1995). *Modality*. Tokyo: Kurosio. [in Japanese]
- Nakagawa, S. (2004). "Japanese and Thai Conditional Expressions-Cognitive Modality-Causal Prototype, Temporal Prototype and Hypothetical Prototype" Nagoya Working Papers in Linguistics Vol. 19, 2004 pp.95-135, Nagoya, Nagoya University Press. [in Japanese]
- Nakau, M. (1994). *Principles of Cognitive Semantics*. Tokyo: Taishukan Shoten. [in Japanese]
- Palmer, F. R. (1986). *Mood and Modality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Takiura, M. (2008). *Poraitonesu Nyuumon*. Tokyo: Kenkyusha. [in Japanese]



Name and Surname: Saowaree Nakagawa

Highest Education: Ph.D. (Linguistics), Nagoya University, Japan

University or Agency: Director, International Relations Center
President Office, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep

Field of Expertise: Linguistics, Japanese Language, English, Chinese

Address: 5/115 Soi 24 Muban Chaiyapruk, Soi Watchara Phon
(Soi Raminthra 55), Raminthra Rd., Bangkhen, Bangkok 10220