

The degree of the speaker’s negative attitude in a goal-shifting comparison

Introduction: In Japanese, the comparative expression *sore-yori* (-*mo*) ‘it-than-MO’ can be used at the non-truth conditional/pragmatic level, as shown in (1B):

- (1) A: Ima-kara tennis si-yoo. B: Sore-yori-(mo) syukudai-wa owa-tta?
 Now-from tennis do-let’s It-than-MO homework-TOP finish-PAST
 ‘Let’s play tennis from now on.’ ‘*Sore-yori-mo*, did you finish your homework?’

In terms of discourse structure (e.g. Roberts 1996, 2012), *sore-yori-mo* in (1B) shifts the goal of the conversation. What is interesting, however, is that in addition to shifting the goal, the speaker also expresses a negative attitude toward the addressee. This type of negativity does not arise in typical goal-shifting expressions such as *tokorode* ‘by the way.’

In this paper, we investigate the meaning and use of goal-shifting comparisons in Japanese and consider the source of negativity in a goal-shifting comparison.

The meaning of goal-shifting comparison: As for the meaning of the goal-shifting *sore-yori-mo*, I will argue that, similar to a metalinguistic comparison (e.g., “Bill is more of a psychologist than a linguist”), it involves a speaker’s preferential attitude (Giannakidou and Yoon 2011). However, unlike a metalinguistic comparison, a comparison made with *sore-yori-mo* is one made i) between two utterances (not between two propositions) and ii) at the non-at-issue level (i.e., at the level of conventional implicature (CI)). For example, in (1B), a comparison is being made between a “suggestion” and a “question,” and the meaning does not affect the truth condition of the given sentence.

I propose that, in a goal-shifting use, the standard marker *yori* in *sore-yori* compares different goals (*g*) related to utterances (*U*, *U'*) based on a scale of “preference” at the CI level (*a* is a type for speech act):

- (2) $[[\text{yori}_{\text{GOAL-SHIFT}}]]: \langle a^a, t^s \rangle = \lambda U \lambda U' [g \text{ related to } U' >_{\text{Des}(\alpha)(c)} g \text{ related to } U]$

$>_{\text{Des}(\alpha)(c)}$ is a preference ordering function (Giannakidou and Yoon 2011) such that for *U* and *U'* and degrees *d* and *d'*, the degree *d* to which α (the speaker) desires the goal *g* related to *U'* in *c* is greater than the degree *d'* to which α desires the goal *g* related to *U* in *c*. The marker **yori**_{GOAL-SHIFT} is then combined with *sore* ‘it’, which refers to a previous utterance, at the level of CI based on the shunting operation (McCready 2010), which is a resource-sensitive application (cf. Potts’s 2005 resource-insensitive CI application):

- (3) $[[\text{yori}(\text{sore})]]: \langle a^a, t^s \rangle = \lambda U' [g \text{ related to } U' >_{\text{Des}(\alpha)(c)} g \text{ related to a previous utterance}]$

Crucially, the use of the goal-shifting *yori* often induces the speaker’s negativity toward the addressee. The speaker’s negative attitude comes from the relationship between the speaker’s goal and the addressee’s goal. I will claim that the more irrelevant the speaker’s utterance and the hearer’s utterance (the previous utterance) are, the stronger the speaker’s negative attitude becomes.

***Sonna-koto-yori* ‘such a thing-than’:** There is a similar expression *sonna koto-yori* ‘such a

thing-than’, and if we use it, a speaker’s negative attitude becomes stronger:

- (4) {Sore-yori-mo /sonna koto-yori-mo} kinoo-no shaken-wa doo-da-tta?
That-than-MO / such thing-than-MO yesterday-GEN exam-TOP how-PRED-PAST
‘Sore-yori-mo/sonna koto-yori-mo, how was yesterday’s exam?’

I propose that *sonna koto* is mixed content (e.g. McCready 2010; Gutzmann 2012) that means semantically “a previous utterance” and conventionally implies that the speaker construes the goal of the previous utterance negatively:

- (5) [[sonna koto]]: $a^a \times t^s =$ a previous utterance ♦ I consider the goal of the utterance negatively
(at-issue) (CI)

These discussions suggest that in a goal-shifting comparison there are two ways to convey a speaker’s negative attitude toward the addressee, i.e., by using a specific lexical item (*sonna koto*) or by a pragmatic inference, and there are various degrees of emotion in a goal-shifting comparison.

Selected references

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