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 tenisu si-yoo. B: Sore-yori-(mo) syukudai-wa owa-tta?
   ‘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) \[ [[\text{yori}_{\text{GOAL-SHIFT}}]]: <a^d_t^d, t^d> = \lambda UU’[g \text{ related to } U’ >_{\text{Des}(a)(c)} g \text{ related to } U] \]

\[ >_{\text{Des}(a)(c)} \] 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 *a* (the speaker) desires the goal *g* related to *U’* in *c* is greater than the degree *d’* to which *a* 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) \[ [[\text{yori}_{\text{sore}}]]: <a^d_t, t> = \lambda U’[g \text{ related to } U’ >_{\text{Des}(a)(c)} g \text{ related to a previous utterance}] \]

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.

**Sonno-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) \([\text{sonna koto]}]: a^a \times t^t = \text{a previous utterance} \quad \diamond \quad \text{I consider the goal of the utterance negatively} \quad \text{(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