

Linguistic tools for interpersonal relationships: Hungarian, Slovene and Japanese

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Abstract:

In conversation, the participants' language use manifests their strategies when negotiating and maintaining interpersonal relations: seeking for the aimed distance between conversation partners and setting up a suitable hierarchy (Locher & Graham 2010). It is a constantly dynamic process expressed with various linguistic tools (Tátrai 2011, Verschueren 1999).

This research is based on a Hungarian satirical film, "A tanú (The Witness)", and its Japanese and Slovene subtitles. The three languages in comparison are typologically diverse. Based on our detailed overview of language-specific linguistic tools for interpersonal relationships (IPR), the most prominent and worth discussing are:

- **predicate forms:** The choice between V- and T-forms, pronouns and other elements in Hungarian and Slovene, because of the person and number distinction. Both Hungarian and Slovene have an additional semi-formal choice, namely, the *tetszikelés* and the semi-V-form (Toporišič 2004). Corresponding distinction in Japanese is the choice among several predicate forms, formal/informal with addition of honorifics (Pardeshi & Kageyama 2018).
- **greetings and addressing:** Their use is usually conventionalized in each society or community. The gender distinction is particularly present in Slovene. The use (or non-use) of various titles in addressing is important in all three languages.

Within the framework of the film setting and chosen scenes, the language in original Hungarian and the subtitles in Japanese and Slovene were linguistically analysed, and the analyses further compared in discussions.

We could observe the development of constructing IPR in several situations: **negotiation, establishment and maintenance of IPR** in personal and public environment. The latter partly depended on the unique background of the communist setting, thus more demanding for Japanese subtitling. Both cases of development confirmed our previous overview of linguistic tools, and further led to findings as below:

- a shift to a closer/informal relationship greatly increases the use of interjections and modal particles in all languages and the choice of T-forms;
- short or truncated sentences are used in all languages when the speaker is in doubt or there is communication friction;
- being sarcastic in opposite directions: formal to informal/vulgar in Hungarian and Slovene vs. informal to formal in Japanese;
- there is the space constraint in subtitling, but the audial and visual elements of the film may compensate for missing linguistic means in a certain language.

Above findings are to be further utilised in:

- translation theory and the methodology of subtitling, and
- cross-cultural pragmatics and foreign language teaching.

References:

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A tanú (The Witness) (1969), a film directed by Péter Bacsó (and subtitled by students at the Osaka University in 2015, and at the University of Ljubljana in 2020).