

A Study on the Japanese Adverbs “Zenzen” and “Mattaku” in Terms of Pragmatics

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Abstract: Japanese is known as one of the complex languages which has many *ruigigo* (synonyms). “Zenzen” and “mattaku” are adverbs that are also synonyms, and they have the same meanings which are complete negations. In English, those have the same meanings as “not at all”. However, lately, many younger people use it to express positive responses indicating that the meaning and function of these adverbs had already changed pragmatically. This pragmatical change becomes a challenge for Japanese learner and it is important to be studied further to prevent misuse which can lead to misunderstanding on the usage of these adverbs. This study aimed to examine pragmatic function changes on adverbs “zenzen” and “mattaku”. The data of this study were collected from Corpus Spontaneous Japanese. The data of these adverbs were then sorted into three types: negation, negative connotations, and new function. Then, the data were analyzed using descriptive analysis method. The result of this study showed that it could be understood that the negative connotations had huge frequency on the “zenzen” and “mattaku” functions. “Zenzen” was mostly used for something that is relative and could be changed if seen from different point of view, while “mattaku” is absolute no matter what, and also “mattaku” has a tendency to underestimate something.

1 INTRODUCTION

Japanese is a complex language that has different syntax, grammar structure, and writing system from another language. Written Japanese is complex and inherently ambiguous for many reasons. Writing or typing Japanese typically involves the use of a combination of three orthographic scripts—kanji, katakana, and hiragana. (Bjarnestam, 2009).

Also, Japanese has many words with same meaning (synonyms) called *ruigigo*. To understand what the meaning of these synonyms, learners should know the whole of context of the sentences. The distributional hypothesis states that words with similar meanings tend to appear in similar context (Harris, 1968).

This study discussed about “zenzen” and “mattaku” which have same meaning as a negation in negative context. In English these words have the same meaning with “not at all”, “completely”, and “any”. “Zenzen” and “mattaku” are located on the scale of gradient from degree to intensity (Yamauchi, 2012). Even though that these adverbs have negative meaning, lately many young people use it to express

the positive response which means there is a language change happening.

This language change can cause many problems for Japanese learners. Because what they learned in the class could be different from what is being used in reality. Many studies show learners to be highly sensitive to pragmatic in function (Ohta, 2001). Students are often trained with “academic” vocabulary. Even though many students establish a non-academic vocabulary they still need to be able to distinguish between functional and non-functional language (Solano-Flores, 2006). But, not only for Japanese learner, can this language change be a problem for the teacher too. Therefore, this study of “Zenzen” and “Mattaku” is important to be discussed to prevent misuse which can lead to misunderstanding on the usage of these adverbs.

Some Japanese language learners sent to Japan will experience obstacles in interpreting the meaning of the word *zenzen* and *mattaku*. Not only had the limitations of knowledge possessed but also because its use has changed. Changes in written language occur but not very significantly as occurs in spoken language. So research on *zenzen* and *mattaku* adverbs should be investigated to prevent errors in their use

which can lead to misunderstandings in meaning interpretations.

The use and change of *zenzen* and *mattaku* can be investigated using its pragmatic function and seen how it relates to one adverb with another adverb. Therefore, the authors raised this topic into the theme of research.

2 JAPANESE ADVERBS

There are Japanese adverbs that contain negative meaning which have always been used in negative context sentence. For example, in Japanese nouns, “*nanimo*” (nothing), “*dare mo*” (nobody), and “*dokomo*” (anywhere) which have “*mo*” (also in negative meaning) particle behind. Another example is “*shika~nai*” (only-neg.), “*kessite~nai*” (never) and “*kanarazushi mo~nai*” (necessarily), these negative adverbs are followed by “*~nai*” which have minus image in the sentence. In English, the words that have a negative meaning are any (anybody, anything, anymore), ever, yet, and at all (Sano, 2012).

The opposite of this expression is positive adverb, like “*kanarazu*” (certainly) in Japanese and some (somebody, someone, somewhere) in English.

“*Zenzen*” and “*mattaku*” including to Japanese gradable adverbs. Gradable adverb is connected with norm aberration, marking a ‘more than the norm’ or ‘less than the norm’ situation. Intensification is not only norm deflection, but also a kind of evaluation. The role of context is by all means of paramount importance when defining positive or negative types of evaluation (Subich *et al*, 2014)

2.1 The Function of “*Zenzen*”

Zenzen is one of the negative polarity items (*hiteikyokuseikoumoku*), also known in Japanese grammar as *chinjutsufukushi* or statement adverb (Sano, 2012). So, the word after *zenzen*, it always has negative words such as *~nai* (negative form in Japanese).

In the late Meiji period up until the early Showa period, the usage included both negative and affirmative functions (Yamada 2014). In early Showa, the use of *zenzen* in conjunction with an affirmative word was deemed incorrect for unknown reasons and this usage dropped (Suzuki, 1993). However, lately, there has been an increase in the affirmative usage of *zenzen*. The use of *zenzen* with affirmation is observed especially among the younger

generation, and it occurs with adjectives or adverbs to emphasize degrees, as in *example* (1).

Example (1)

このケーキは全然 {美味しい・美味しくない}

Kono Keeki wa zenzen {oishii / oishikunai}.

This cake (tasty / untasty) at all.

Both can be used in the use of the word *zenzen* in this modern. In contrast to the period of showa which strongly prohibits the use of the word *zenzen* in a positive response even if only for affirmation.

Younger people recently use expressions such as *zenzen daijoubu* (absolutely fine), *zenzen OK* (absolutely OK) or *zenzen ii* (absolutely good) frequently in spoken language. The “*zenzen* + positive word” usage which has increased in recent years often contains more modern expressions, but it is still seems to be the same affirmative usage that used more than 100 years ago (Wallgren, 2015).

That positive function was never used before in Japanese. But nowadays, many people is using it even they know that function is wrong grammatically. But it can be used in pragmatic view.

2.2 The Function of “*Mattaku*”

Sunagawa (1998, p.544) cited that *mattaku* divided to be two types: *mattaku* with “*~nai*” ending and *mattaku* that emphasizes the degree. The meaning of *Mattaku* can be seen from the words that followed. “*Mattaku* + negative functions” mean it emphasizes the overall negative meaning.

Mattaku which has almost the same meaning as *totemo*, used to emphasize the degree and show feelings about emphasis on facts / assessments. *Mattaku* which shows meaning similar to “*sukkari*” (entirely) is something that entirely takes place like conditions at that time. *Mattaku* in the function of “*mattakuda*” and “*mattakudesu*” used to strengthen confession or disclaimer of the other person’s words in the conversation. The category of *Mattaku* can be divided into 4 groups, there are:

- 1) Adverbial *mattaku* which followed by negative form words such as *nai*, *zu*, *nashi*, *mai*, *n* or negative expressions such as *dame*, *mu* ~, *fu* ~ .. Emphasizing the overall negative meaning.
- 2) Adverbial *mattaku* which has almost the same meaning as *totemo* 'very' *hontouni* 'really' and *jitsu ni* 'really'. In this category also includes *mattaku* with the addition of particle *no* in *mattakuno*. Used to emphasize degrees and show feelings about emphasis on facts / judgments.

First, we classified all of the sentences that use *zenzen* and *mattaku* words in oral Japanese corpus system or Corpus Spontaneous Japanese. The data is script of the conversations which are available in Corpus Spontaneous Japanese program.

After all of the data has been collected, it was sorted to 3 types: negation, negative connotations and new function. Negation function is the one which followed by *~nai*. Negative connotations function is the affirmative words such as *chigau* (different), *dame* (useless), *betsu* (another or distinction), etc. Lastly, the new function is the positive response d function like *ii* (good), *daijobu* (all right), *heiki* (unconcern), and more.

Then, it using the distributional and change methods to distinguish the use of the word *zenzen* and *mattaku*. After that, we compared of the differences and similarities of the use of *zenzen* and *mattaku* annotations obtained from corpus and summed up the result of the research.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are 7.608.368 words available on CSJ program, and there could be found 1704 words of *zenzen* and 1435 words of *mattaku*. Then, *zenzen* and *mattaku* function sorted into three groups, negation (*~nai* or *~masen*), negative connotation (*dame*, *chigau*, etc) and new function (positive functions). Then it was analysed based on pragmatic functions with descriptive analytic using distributional and change method.

The figures (3) and (4) show about the function of *zenzen* and *mattaku* in Japanese daily life conversation. Japanese tend to use *zenzen* and *mattaku* as a negation and avoid the positive function of these adverbs.

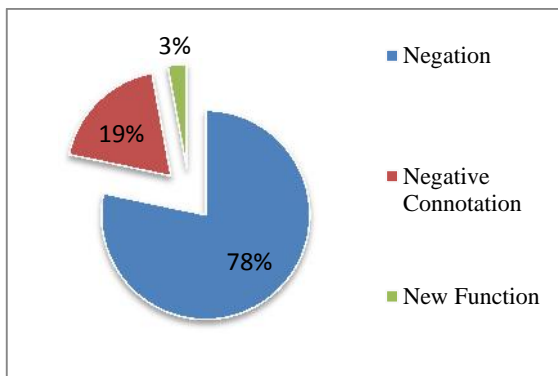


Figure 3: The Function of Zenzen.

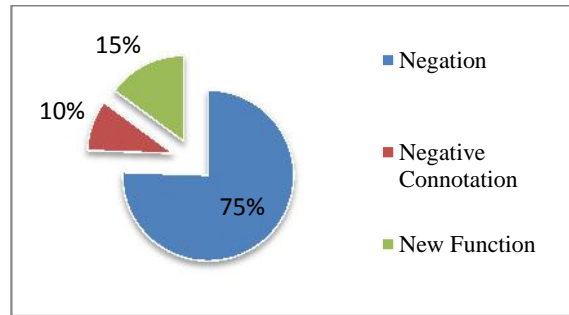


Figure 4: The Function of Mattaku.

Figure (3) shows that the function of *zenzen* as negation has the highest frequency, 78% or used 1334 times. Negative connotation only appeared 19% or 320 times, and the new function used only 3% or 50 times. While Figure (4) shows that Japanese tend to us *mattaku* as negation is high. The negation function appeared 75% equals to 1.084 times, negative connotation function appeared 10% equals to 137 times, and new function appeared 15% equals to 214 times. According to data from figure 1 and figure 2, *zenzen*'s new function is being used less than its negative connotation while on the contrary, *mattaku* as a new function is being used more than its negative connotation.

From figure (3) and (4), it can be understood that the negative connotations has huge frequency on the “*zenzen*” and “*mattaku*” function.

The data in this section from Examples (2) until (7) is analysed based on the 3 different function of *zenzen* and *mattaku* that has been aforementioned above, negation, negative connotation and new function.

Example (2)

その行き方が全く分からなくて地図とか見ても全然分からない。

Sono ikikata ga mattaku wakaranakute chizutoka miteitemo zenzen wakaranai.

I do not understand the directions (at all) and I do not understand it at all even if I look at a map (Women, 25-29 years old).

Example (2) shows the usage of negative context shown by the using of *~nai* following the usage of *zenzen* and *mattaku*. The using of “*mattaku/zenzen + wakaranai*” could be found in CSJ, there are 545 usages of *mattaku* and 743 usages of *zenzen*. On example (2) we could see 2 different function of *zenzen* and *mattaku* on 1 sentence, the meaning of those 2 phrases are different, the one with “*mattaku wakaranai*” means that the speaker did not understand and the “*zenzen wakaranai*” means that

the speaker has did some effort but the speaker still do not understand.

Example (3)

それまでは海外での生活と言うか仕事の経験全くありませんでした。

Soremade wa kaigai de no seikatsu to iu ka shigoto no keiken mattaku arimasendeshita.

Until then I have no experience of work or job abroad (Men, 55-59 years old).

Example (4)

そんなに悪いことなんか言ってる訳では全然ありませんでした。

Sonnani waruikoto nanka itteruwaku dewa zenzen arimasen deshita.

I was not saying anything bad (Women, 45-49 years old).

Example (3) and *(4)* shows the usage of negative sentence shown by the using of “*arimasen*” following the use of *zenzen* and *mattaku*. In the CSJ could be found 28 sentences using “*zenzen arimasen*” and 56 sentences using “*mattaku arimasen*”. Although both sentences are using *arimasen* but their meaning are different from each other. From *example (3)* we could see that the speaker dont have any experience of working abroad for his whole life, while the usage of “*zenzen arimasen*” on *example (4)* could mean relative, she did not say anything bad at the time but has probably say something bad before at one point of her life.

Example (5)

父親に座ってもらったりするんですけどももう全然ダメですね。

Chichioya ni suwatte morattari surundesukeredomo mou zenzen damedesune.

I have my father sit down, but it's no good at all (Women, 25-29 years old).

Example (6)

女性二人というのがもう全く英語がダメです。

Jousei futari toiu no ga mou mattaku eigo ga dame desu.

Those two girls are really bad at english (Women, 30-34 years old)

The usage of “*zenzen/mattaku + dame*” is for showing a negative connotation. “*Dame*” has the same meaning with “*yokunai*” (it is not good). In the CSJ There are 18 sentences using “*zenzen dame*” and 6 sentences using “*mattaku dame*”. In *example (5)*, the speaker said that the speaker has did some effort but it is pretty much useless, while on *example (6)* the

speaker said that the object being talked about by the speaker is not good or bad at something and the speaker could do nothing about it. This result is reinforced by Taguchi (2009) theory. According to Taguchi, the usage of *mattaku* is often used following the feeling of emotion within the speaker because of its function as a strong negation.

Example (7)

俺の一年だったともう全然大丈夫だよ。

Boku no ichinendatta to mou zenzen daijoubudayo.

My whole year have no problem. (Men, 20-24 years old)

In CSJ could be found 18 sentences using “*zenzen daijoubu*” but no usage of “*mattaku daijoubu*” could be found. *Example (7)* shows that the speaker dont have any problem at all, but the usage of “*zenzen daijoubu*” could mean relative as there are probably some minor problem on the speaker’s year, and there is no way that one person could get through a year without any single problem at all, because of that *mattaku* could not be used because *mattaku* is absolute.

Seeing *example (2)* through *(7)* we could understand that *zenzen* mostly being used for something that is relative and could be changed if seen from different point of view while *mattaku* is absolut no matter what, and also *mattaku* has a tendency to underestimate something.

Despite the changes in use in both adverbs, the use of positive meanings is more commonly found in the use of *mattaku*. Conversely, positive words that have a negative meaning can be seen in the use of *zenzen*.

Therefore, we can know that the use of *zenzen* using a positive word has a denial of the previous sentence as seen in *example (7)* which shows that there is a denial that life is not working. Although logically, it is impossible for a person to have no problems throughout the year in his life.

While the use of *mattaku* has an emphasis for the sentence that explained. As the phrase described in *examples (5)* and *(6)* in which *example (6)* has an emphasis and satire on a third party, and he cannot do anything for the object of speech. Where *example (5)* shows more of an effort and point of view of the speaker.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study is focusing on the function of *zenzen* and *mattaku* on different usage such as negative connotation, negation and new function. For both

zenzen and *mattaku*. Its usage as a negation is the most used one, while on the negative connotation and new function they got different result. *Zenzen* is mostly being used on a negative connotation while on the contrary *mattaku* is mostly being used by its new function as a positive connotation. *Zenzen* is mostly being used on something that is relative or temporary from the speaker’s point of view while *mattaku* tend to be something that is absolute no matter from what point of view.

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