# Lexical non-correspondence in Japanese and English: Adjectives

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Abstract

It has long been recognized that simple translation on a one-to-one basis is an insufficient way to describe the way any given language stands in relation to any other given language. Any two languages, whether they closely related within a language family (e.g. Italian and Spanish) or whether they are from completely different language families (e.g. French and Japanese) will differ in a large number of ways, from phonology and speech timing to grammar and vocabulary and in other ways connected to culture, worldview and pragmatics. This paper takes two languages, English and Japanese and one word class, adjectives and examines some common areas of non-correspondence across the two languages, illustrating the wide range of differentials that may pertain when comparing the lexis of one language to that of another. The paper outlines differences of coverage, where a single item in one language has a number of words covering a similar meaning in the other language. The paper also refers to pragmatic differences, examines issues of usage, grammar and collocation that reveal the multidimensional nature of language in use and highlights the challenges facing language learners, and their teachers, when going beyond rudimentary accounts of any particular language item.

This paper outlines some of the ways in which adjectives and other words in English and their supposed counterparts in Japanese may differ in coverage, usage, collocation or connotation.

Even the most cursory glance at two different languages reveals striking differences in the way each language goes about encoding reality, creating categories, selecting salient features of a cognitive entity and so on. This tendency of languages, even closely related ones, to conceptualize the world differently was noted by John Locke in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding.

> Nay, if we look a little more closely into this matter, and exactly compare different languages, we shall find that, though they have words which in translations and dictionaries are supposed to answer one another, yet there is scarce one of ten amongst the names of complex ideas […] that stands for the same precise idea which the word does in dictionaries it is rendered by. (1690/2008, p. 263)

The precise interrelationship between a lexical item in one language and its nearest counterpart in another language may be complex and nuanced. There may, in some instances, be a complete one-to-one perfect mapping across the two languages, or the two words may exist anywhere along a cline from very close, but not exact, synonymy to very loose and partially overlapping meaning. Even when words are closely matched, the range of uses that speakers of a language will put a word to, its collocations, connotations and so on, will vary considerably from one language to another. Almost inevitably for language learners at the early stages of study, a simple one-to-one mapping of a word from their L1 onto the target language, and vice versa, will contribute to acquiring that word into their linguistic repertoire. This is probably an inevitable starting point for most language learners. This tendency to orient to a one-to-one mapping schema for vocabulary is

illustrated by a question that is a mainstay of all language learning situations: *How do you say (Word) in (Language)?* The question may be addressed to the teacher, a native speaker who is not a teacher, or any person who is projected to know the 'answer'.

As anyone with any experience of language learning and teaching will know, the answer to such a question is not always straightforward. The answer may be 'It depends' or 'They don't really have a word for that', or 'It is X but this is a kind of unusual word in that language' and other non-straightforward answers.

The major parts of speech may present differentials is accessibility to language learners and their teachers. As Ye, ( 2017, p.1) states:

> The primacy of nouns in language, and in people's lives, is clearly mirrored in the similar acquisition patterns that have been observed among children of different linguistic backgrounds. Research has shown that in first language development, nouns dominate children's first words and are learned before verbs.

For second/foreign language learners, nouns may be the most cognitively undemanding items in the target language, especially words for discrete entities that exist in the environment and can be pointed at or quickly illustrated. Holding up a screwdriver, a corkscrew or a battery and giving its name, or asking for its name, in the target language leaves little room for error in a learning situation. Abstract nouns may be more challenging in terms of their accessibility at the L1/L2 interface and nouns may have subtle complexities of meaning that are more challenging when examined in detail. (See the selection of essays in Ye, 2017.)

Verbs may be similarly varied in their accessibility. At one end of the spectrum, a word like *walk* can be easily demonstrated to (or by) language learners by mime or some kind of performance. At the other end of the spectrum, verbs

like *renegotiate* or *concede* will probably be a lot more difficult to model. In addition, the differences between certain very high frequency verbs may be extremely difficult to tease out, even for native-speaker teachers. (See Campbell-Larsen, 2017 for an account of *See*, *Look* and *Watch* in English). Similar difficulties exist for *say*, *speak*, *talk and tell* and, most native English speakers would probably be hard pushed to give a comprehensive account of *bake*, *grill* and *roast*, especially to Japanese learners for whom the translation would most likely be *Yaku* in Japanese.

Another word class that is almost universally accepted as causing difficulties for language learners is the class of prepositions (or, depending on the language, postpositions). Extremely high frequency items like *in*, *on* and *at* are used to delineate relations in time and space, but the cross-linguistic correspondence often seems to defy logic. Taylor (2003a) outlines some differences in preposition usage between English and its close relative German:

> In German you go *auf Urlaub* you live *auf dem Lande*, and you meet people *auf einer Party*, while in English you go *on* holiday, you live *in* the country, and you meet people *at* a party. (p.112)

Similar non-correspondences exist in Dutch (See Van Staden, Bowerman and Verhelst, 2006, p. 487) where the English preposition *on* can be rendered as *op* or *aan*, depending on the positioning of the item in reference to its environment, including distinctions between horizontal and vertical support that are not made in English. Among the many non-correspondences between English and Japanese, the postposition *Ue* covers both the contact relationship encoded by English *on* and the non-contact relationship encoded by English *above* (See Kita, 2006) Even language learners with advanced level proficiency may have systematic infelicities in their use of prepositions and native speakers may be hard

pressed to give any comprehensive explanation of preposition use in their own language. Even if systematicity is present (see, for example, Brugmann, 1988 on the semantics of the preposition *over* and Tyler and Evans, 1993 for an overview of English spatial prepositions) it is often at a level of abstraction, complexity and nuance that is inappropriate for language learners and usually beyond the intuition of their teachers.

This brings us to the class of word referred to as adjectives. Taylor, (2003a, p. 220) comments that '… what are called adjectives constitute a heterogeneous class of items which by no means share the same set of properties.' The category covers a wide range of concepts, from perceptual, bodily-experienced categories such as color and taste, to physical attributes of concrete entities such as length, shape and texture to more abstract concepts such as *friendly*, *unwieldy* or *repetitive*. There is extensive literature on the cross-linguistic relationship of the adjective class of color and the ways various languages refer to the color spectrum in different ways. (For an overview, see Deutcher, 2010). For example, where English has the word *blue* to cover a section of the spectrum at the shorter wavelength, Russian uses two distinct words; one for what English speakers would call light blue, (*goluboy*), and one for dark blue (*siniy*). Although the color categories seem to be a very productive domain for comparisons of cross-linguistic differences, other adjectives can reveal interesting cross-linguistic differences of cognition, usage, pragmatics and culture. It is to these I will now turn.

## Japanese and English adjectives

The following analysis was based initially on a pragmatic point of comparison between Japanese and English as it relates to Japanese learners of English. In a widely referenced paper, Pomerantz (1984) details the ways in which speakers of English display an orientation to agreeing with assessments. Not only do

speakers primarily agree (rather than disagree) with the assessments of prior speakers, they often do so by means of an upgrade of the assessing term that was used by the speaker who performed the assessment. Pomerantz gives the examples (p.65) of a speaker assessing a day as being *beautiful* and the next person agrees by upgrading to *gorgeous*, an assessment of something sounding *good* is receipted with the word *lovely* and *cute* is upgraded to *adorable*. In contrast, although Japanese also tends towards the preference structure of agreement with assessments, agreement is very commonly carried out by repetition of the original assessing term. Thus, positive assessment of the taste of food is voiced with the word *oishii* (delicious) and the agreeing response is also given as *oishii*. A common form of greeting is to assess the weather, so in winter a sequence may unfold as follows:

A: Samui desu ne? ( It's cold, isn't it?)
B: Samui. (Cold).

Repetition of the assessing term is quite common in Japanese (in the author's experience) and seems to be rather unusual in English, although repetition of parts of a prior speaker's turn can be used for purposes such as topic closing, de-greeting, and 'savoring' a joke's punchline. (For a discussion of the pragmatic, epistemic and cultural implications of repetition partial-repetition and non-repetition in English assessments, see Thompson, Fox, and Couper-Kuhlen, 2015, pp. 139-214.)

Several implications for language learners emerged from this comparison of assessment and response sequences between Japanese and English. Firstly, there is the question of awareness of the varying practices in the two languages. The use of repetition to agree may have certain unintended pragmatic consequences if carried over piecemeal from Japanese into English. Simple repetition

may be interpreted as ‘mirroring’ or a kind of un-autonomous alignment with whatever the assessor says, showing a certain lack of commitment to the interaction. Or, it may make a claim of understanding where none exists. Implicit within the upgraded agreement is a demonstration (rather than just a claim) that the assessing term is understood, as it is clearly impossible to select an appropriate upgrade adjective if the initial assessing term was not understood. Thus, the deployment of an upgrade assessment signals an orientation to the preference for agreement, a demonstration (rather than just a claim) that the assessing term is understood and also a knowledge of any upgrade vocabulary that is an appropriate match to the initial assessment term. In broader terms it may signal an orientation to maintaining the progressivity of the interaction and signaling autonomy and epistemic stance in a more nuanced way than just repetition.

In surveys of Japanese students of English, (See Campbell-Larsen, 2016) it was discovered that although learners usually had a fairly extensive knowledge of English adjectives, the vast majority of known adjectives were of the ‘daily’, i.e. non-upgraded, category. Upgrade adjectives were only sparsely known. This, it was felt, constituted a distinct gap in their knowledge and an opportunity for teaching. With these points in mind, I created a list of adjectives and their upgrade counterparts for the express purpose of enabling Japanese learners to carry out upgraded agreement. The list is presented in the appendix. The list items were chosen in a more or less random fashion, trying to capture a broad spectrum of commonly used and useful items.

Although the initial purpose of the list was to provide students with a list of upgrade counterparts to ‘daily’ adjectives, it also emerged that many of the adjectives (and adjective-like terms) were not in a one-to-one relationship with their supposed equivalents in Japanese. Rather, there were numerous cases where nuances of meaning, usage and grammar had to be explained to the students, sometimes in response to student generated questions, sometimes after hearing

student talk which seemed somehow infelicitous. The following sections will detail some of the areas where overt explication of the items seemed to be in order.

## Grammar

The initial purpose of the list was to enable felicitous upgrading of adjectives used in assessments and one starting point was the explanation that there exists a scale of upgrading utilizing different intensifiers. The scale can be represented by the following:

Cold < Very cold < Freezing < Absolutely freezing

In this schema, the adjective can be upgraded initially with an intensifier (*very*). The next level of upgrade comes with the switch to the upgraded adjective *freezing*. This is then upgraded to an extreme case formulation with the intensifier *absolutely*. It has to be explained to learners that generally the intensifier *very* collocates with the 'daily' adjectives and the intensifier *absolutely* collocates with the upgraded adjectives. Thus, it is seemingly ungrammatical to say 'absolutely cold' or 'very freezing'. A search of the British National Corpus (Davies, 2004) reveals one instance of 'very freezing' versus 264 instances of 'very cold'. There are 8 instances of 'absolutely freezing' in the corpus and zero instances of 'absolutely cold'. This seems to be strongly supportive of the differentials in collocation class between *very* and *absolutely*. The case is not entirely clear-cut, however, as can be seen with the adjective *delicious*. In this case, corpus searches revealed five instances of 'very delicious' and 13 instances of 'absolutely delicious'. It seems to be the case that some adjectives tend towards a more rigorous adherence to the intensifier collocation distribution than others.

A second point related to the grammar of adjectives is the way that some English language adjectives related to reactions and feelings inflect in one way to indicate the source of the feeling and in another way to indicate the effect on those exposed to the source. For example, the sentences 'The teacher is boring. The students are bored.' uses the 'ing' suffix to indicate the source of the reaction and the 'ed' suffix to indicate effect of that cause. This is problematic for Japanese students for two reasons; Firstly, Japanese does not encode the cause/effect schema by means of suffixes on the adjective. The above example sentences in Japanese would be:

*Sensei wa taikutsudesu. Seito wa taikutsudesu.*

The first sentence references the teacher (*sensei*) and he is described as '*taikutsudesu*'. The second references the students (*seito*) and again uses the word '*taikutsudesu*' unlike the English examples where the adjective form is different in each case as it refers to the cause of a feeling/reaction and the persons experiencing the effects of that cause. Japanese speakers would infer from context what the case is. So, not only does English grammaticalize some adjectives in a way that is not done in Japanese (as in this case) it does so by re-use of the 'ed' and 'ing' suffixes that also apply to regular English verbs, but with different functions. The 'ed' suffix in *bored* serves a completely different function to the 'ed' suffix on the verb 'walked', as does the 'ing' suffix on *boring* and *walking*. Japanese learners of English initially learn the function of these suffixes as they apply to verbs and these functions may transfer over and be misapplied to the adjective usage. A further complication is that some adjectives follow the same cognitive schema (cause and effect) but do not utilize the 'ing' ending, for example the pair *offended/*and *offensive* or item 12 on the list, *scary* and *scared*. There is much potential for confusion here and errors in this area are common.

## Coverage

Several items on the list were particularly noticeable for the difficulty of providing a one-to-one translation, with Japanese having several variants of an English word or vice versa. Item 21 on the list, *embarrassed*, was one such case. In general terms, the adjective refers to some sense of being publicly judged for some aberrant behavior. A common translation of this word into Japanese yields the word *hazukashii*. However, English also has the closely related terms *ashamed* and *shy* which are also generally translated as *hazukashii* in Japanese. The distinction between *embarrassed*, *ashamed* and *shy* in English is not immediately accessible to most native speakers, but it is fair to say that the words are not interchangeable. Whilst all three seem to cluster around the base concept of a person suffering negative reactions from the wider social group, examination reveals a more fine-grained meaning for each item. The adjective *embarrassed* is used to refer to the feeling that a person experiences when they have broken some social or cultural norm, usually accidentally, and their action is subject to scrutiny and assessment by others. A woman leaving a public toilet with her skirt tucked into her underwear would be a canonical example of being embarrassed (once she has noticed her transgression, or had it pointed out to her.) By way of contrast, a person who has been arrested for shoplifting and is being led away in handcuffs and is seen by some persons, may (or may not!) be feeling ashamed. In this case the violation was not of some cultural norm, but of some ethical or moral standard and the action was not accidental, but purposeful. The person who is embarrassed is seen as careless, unwitting or foolish and may be the subject of laughter or, less kindly, mockery, whereas the ashamed person is judged as a bad person and is subject to moral censure and perhaps punishment. In the case of shy, the feeling is based on issues of confidence and a fear of others, as with small children meet-

ing unknown adults, or even adults entering new situations where they feel they might be judged negatively by others. When presenting images of the three situations given as exemplars above, Japanese respondents agreed that *hazukashii* would be an appropriate word for each situation, indicating that the Japanese word *hazukashii*, although centered on the same 'external negative assessment' schema has a wider coverage than the English word *embarrassed*.

The opposite case is illustrated by item 8 on the list, *disgusting* and its Japanese counterparts. In Japanese, there is a distinction made between negative sensory reactions depending on the mode of sensory input. For negative gustatory judgments, Japanese has the word *mazui*. For negative olfactory judgments the word *kusai* is used and for negative tactile or visual experiences, or offenses against general sensibility, the term *kimochi waruii* (literally 'bad feeling') is used. In English, all senses can utilize the same word, *disgusting*. A food that is rotten, or is just disliked by the individual, the smell of excrement or a giant cockroach crawling up a wall could all be described using the word *disgusting* (or its near-synonyms as per item 8 on the list.) The English word has a wider coverage than the sense specific Japanese words. There does exist a range of sense specific adjectives in English, for example, *stinky* or *smelly* for negative olfactory assessments, but these are lower frequency words in the BNC corpus compared to *disgusting*. (disgusting = 2204, stinky = 462, smelly = 777. (See Campbell-Larsen 2016.) It seems to be the case that in English, negative sensory assessments are commonly made with general class adjectives rather than sense specific adjectives, if such adjectives are available.

With reference to the sensory perception terms, the positive/ negative assessing terms in items 7 and 8 on the list also hint at other differences between Japanese and English. It will be noted that the word *delicious* appears as an upgrade adjective, primarily collocating with the intensifier *absolutely*. Apart from novel metaphoric and inventive usages, the word *delicious* is relevant primarily

to the gustatory sense. On the non-upgrade side of the list, it will be noticed that positive gustatory assessments in English are carried out with general class positive assessment adjectives such as *nice* and other non-gustatory restricted positive upgrade adjectives, such as *great*, *wonderful*, fantastic are also commonplace. Apart from the word 'tasty', a gustatory, sense-specific and non-upgrade adjective does not readily suggest itself in English. In Japanese the positive gustatory assessor *oishii* is in general usage and seems to cover foods that are truly upgradeworthy and also more mundane foods such as potato chips, fizzy drinks and fast foods. (Although it must be noted here that Japanese *oishii* and English *delicious* can drift away from pure taste considerations and be used to represent satisfaction, such as drinking ice-cold water on a hot day.)

In the case of positive gustatory assessments, the non-upgrade class of assessors regularly borrows from the general class of positive assessment adjectives, and the negative gustatory assessment seems to have a lacuna in the non-upgrade slot as can be seen in item 8 on the list. Non-upgrade negative gustatory assessments are similarly carried out with general adjectives, often in conjunction with a sense verb, rather than any gustatory specific adjective, e.g. '*it tastes bad*'. There seems to be no general use, sense specific, non-upgraded word in English to refer to a bad taste and English speakers have the option of upgrade with multisense adjectives (disgusting, gross, etc) or non-upgrade with a general-use negative adjective assessor such as *bad*.

Another area where sensory assessments do not align between the two languages comes from item 1 on the list, *cold*. In English, *cold* can be used to describe weather, drinks, one's specific body feeling and all judgments of low temperature. In Japanese there exist two words for cold that are used in distinct ways. The word *samui* can be used to refer to the weather or a room that is unheated in winter and the like. The word *tsumetai* is used to refer to things that are specifically cold to the touch, i.e are restricted to the tactile domain of sensory experience. If a man

had no gloves on a winter day he could say that his hands were *samui*. A person who shakes hands with this gloveless person could comment that his hands were *tsumetai*. In English both instances would prompt use of the word *cold*. Another aspect of temperature assessments that differ between the two languages is the word deployed when touching something that burns such as a boiling kettle or the like. In English, any sudden contact that causes pain may me expresses with the exclamation 'ouch' or 'ow', or a taboo word. In Japanese speakers differentiate between the source of the pain in their immediate reaction. Stubbing one's toe on a chair leg, pricking one's finger on a thorn and the like will prompt the exclamation *itai!*, literally 'pain', which is analogous to *Ouch!* However, touching a hot kettle or spilling hot coffee on one's hand will prompt the exclamation *atsui* (or its abbreviation *atsu!*), literally *Hot!* It is remarkable that even in the situation where an immediate, unplanned exclamation occurs, Japanese differentiates between the source of the pain, isolating heat-caused pain from other sources of pain.

Item 18 on the list provided a further example of difference in coverage between the two languages. In English the word *tired* has a broad area of coverage. If it is late at night and the person feels the need for sleep, then that person could say *I'm tired. I'm going to bed.* Similarly, a person who has expended a deal of effort, either mental or physical, on some activity and they feel that they have depleted reserves of energy left, could also use the word *tired* to describe their condition. A marathon runner in the last stages of the race, an office worker nearing the end of the working day could use the same word, *tired*, to describe their condition. In Japanese daily usage, a distinction is usually made between the feeling that one wants to sleep, and the feeling that one has expended a large amount of physical or mental energy, with *nemui* being used to describe the former, and *tsukareta* or *shindoi* to describe the latter. It is true that English has the adjective *sleepy* to describe the feeling of the need for sleep, but this is a relatively low

frequency word in English compared to *tired*. (A search of the British National Corpus reveals 3,821 hits for tired versus 412 for sleepy, and the Corpus of Contemporary American English reveals a similar proportion of hits, 25,733 and 3,364 respectively) Many of the instances of *sleepy* in both corpuses are of a more metaphorical sense such as *sleepy town or sleepy backwater*. Japanese, it seems, is more likely than English to foreground the distinction between the need/desire for sleep and the feeling of having expended a large amount physical and/or mental effort on some activity and the resultant state.

Other items on the list also require a certain amount of explication to highlight differences in coverage between words in the two languages. Items 5 and 9 on the list (*interesting and funny*) are probably seen by most native English speakers to represent two distinct reactions to a situation. *Interesting* centers around a positive orientation to some topic, utterance or action, centering on intellectual stimulation, and a sense that uptake of the content, a change to an epistemic K+ state, will enable greater understanding on the part of the person who finds some content *interesting*. By contrast, the word funny, whilst also orienting to a positive reaction to some material, downplays the intellectual aspect of the material and foregrounds the sense that the material is humorous and provokes laughter in the person who finds some action, situation or utterance *funny*. (For an account of the socio-psychological underpinnings of humor, see Simler and Hanson, 2018.) It is, of course, possible to find some action, utterance or the like, both funny and interesting, but the two are not necessarily co-present in every reaction. *Funny* also extends its meaning from laughter provoking stimulus to an assessment that something is strange or incongruous. English speakers can mark the correct meaning by referring to '*funny ha ha or funny peculiar*'.

In Japanese, the contexts or stimuli that an English speaker might assess as *interesting* and those that an English speaker might assess as *funny* would not be so rigorously differentiated, with the Japanese speaker having the option to

assess both situations with the word *omoshiroi*. Japanese-English dictionaries offer both *funny* and *interesting* under the entry for *omoshiroi*, indicating a difference in coverage in Japanese and English this area of subjective judgment and assessment.

## Size, distance and amount

Several of the items on the list refer to notions of size and distance. Items 14 and 15 deal with the domain of size, listing *big* and some of its upgrades; *huge*, massive, and *gigantic* and the antonym *small* with some possible upgrades; *tiny* and *microscopic*. These two adjectives are largely unproblematic in their usage and the Japanese equivalents *Ooki* and *chisai* are likewise unproblematic, being readily translated as *big* and *small* respectively. However, there are differences in some domains. Where an English speaker might describe an apartment as small or poky, in Japanese the word *chisai* would not be used. Rather the Japanese speaker might refer to it as *semai* which is usually translated as *narrow* in dictionaries. *Narrow* in English is specifically concerned with the dimensions of a referent that has canonical sides, such as a tunnel, corridor or gate. A room in a house or apartment (as distinct from classrooms and the like) does not canonically have a front/back versus sides configuration and thus would be less likely to attract the assessment term *narrow*. (Unless, possibly, if there was a marked and noticeable imbalance of dimensions creating an extremely elongated rectangular shape as opposed to a more canonical square floor plan.)

It may also be noted that two other adjectives dealing with physical extent, *long* and *short* do not feature on the list, even though they are commonly occurring words referring to a cognitively accessible domain of physicality. Their absence from the list is due to the fact that no upgrade adjective readily suggests itself for either of the two adjectives, and no suitable upgrade is produced in a the-

saurus search. They thus cannot be included in the agreement by upgrade pragmatic scheme like the other adjectives and expressions on the list.

The unavailability of upgrade terms for *long* and *short* (in their spatial as opposed to temporal sense) is an interesting case for future investigation.

This brings us to item 13 on the list, the word *far*. This word is often translated into Japanese as *tōi* and on a surface level the translation would seem adequate, However, the nuances of usage in English mean that some attention has to be paid to the explanation of this word. In Japanese it would not be in any way odd or marginal to make the statement:

*Ie*[1] *wa*[2] *eki*[3] *kara*[4] *tōi*[5] *desu*[6].

House[1] (topic marker)[2] station[3] from[4] far[5] is[6].
(My) house is far from the station.

However, an English speaker would probably avoid using the word *far* in this situation and would more likely express the idea as *My house is a long way from the station* or *I live a long way from the station*. Swan (1994, section 233) notes that the word *far* is probably used in questions (How far is it?), negative statements (*It's not far*) and sentences with *too* or *so* (*It's too far*, *let's take a taxi or It seems so far away*). In corpus searches the distance meaning of *far* is quite rare and the most common usage is in set phrases like *as far as I know* and in intensifiers of comparisons such as *far better*, *far earlier* and the like.

The same pattern of usage (questions, negatives, sentences with *too* and *so* tending towards one pattern and the positive unmarked utterances tending towards another pattern) also applies to measurements of time as per item 24 on the list, giving *How long did you wait?*, *We didn't wait long*, *It was too/so long to wait* and the positive, unmarked utterance, *we waited for a long time*. Although

we are moving more towards adverb usage in these cases, they were included in the list because they, like the adjectives, can be subject to upgrading. An upgrade of *far* is *miles* as in *My house is miles from the station* (as opposed to *My house is far from the station*) The distance measurement *kilometers* does not seem to be available as an upgrade for *far* in either its adjective of adverb sense. The upgrade for a *long time* is *ages* as in *We had to wait for ages.*

Another omission from the list is the term that would stand as an antonym for the English adjective *busy*. Dictionaries commonly list the word *isogashii* as the Japanese language equivalent of this word and the two words seem to cover more or less the same conceptual are. However, in Japanese there exists an antonym for this word: *hima*. An English speaker may describe their job as busy, or they may refer to having had a busy weekend of social activities, parties and the like. For the opposite state there seems to be no ready vocabulary item in English. A worker in a restaurant that has few or no customers would probably simply use the negated adjective term to describe themselves as *'not busy on Saturday night'*. Likewise, a person who spent the weekend at home alone does not have any ready way to describe their lack of activity. In both cases, the English speaker may borrow an adjective from the auditory sensory domain and describe the restaurant or the weekend (as oppose to themselves) and *quiet*. In Japanese the speaker may describe themselves as *hima* in both the restaurant with no customers situation and also the weekend devoid of social activities situation. The non-availability of a counterpart to *hima* sometimes finds expression in students describing themselves as being *free* in response to a question like 'How was your part-time job on Saurday?' In this case, even though they were not busy as such, they were not free as they presumably had to remain at their work station and could not go home, have a nap or watch TV. They were simply *NOT busy*.

One more set of omissions from the list from the list are the antonym pairs fast/slow and early/late. These words also do not have any readily accessible

upgrade versions. In addition, these words present a problem for Japanese learners of English. In Japanese there exists a word *hayai*. In writing this word is represented by two different kanji ideograms; 早 and 速. Even though the pronunciations of the two Kanji are identical they have different meanings. The kanji 早 is generally translated as *early*, while the kanji 速 is generally translated as *fast*. The antonyms for these English words are *late* and *slow* respectively, and English speakers readily perceive a difference between the two, with *late* referring to an action happening after it was planned or expected and *slow* referring to some notion of speed and the speed is lower than expected or usual. In dictionaries the Japanese word *osoi* is translated as both *slow* and *late*, and Japanese learners, in my experience, often have trouble choosing the correct word. It must be noted that there are other words in Japanese such as *chikoku* and *okureru* which both refer to lateness rather than low speed, but the confusion between late and slow does persist with some Japanese learners of English.

A final point that may prompt explanation to students is item 10 on the list, *beautiful* and its upgrade *gorgeous*. The base adjective is cognitively accessible to learners and it has various Japanese translations such as *utsukushii*, and *kireina*. The upgrade adjective *gorgeous* needs to be differentiated from the word that has been loaned into Japanese from English; *Gojyasu*. The original English meaning can be applied to pleasing visual stimuli such as a gorgeous view/jewel/painting/person and so on. The Japanese loan word is often used where English speakers would use the word *luxurious or opulent*. A Japanese speaker might describe a hotel as being *Gojyasu* and indeed the hotel may present a pleasing visual image to the person, but they are likely using the word to describe the high-quality, luxurious, extravagant and expensive decor, fittings and so on. Loan words may not make it across the language boundary intact and attention needs to be drawn to cases of false cognates such as *gojyasu*.

## Discussion

The ways in which any particular language encodes four-dimensional reality is individual to that language; it reflects a unique and situated way of dealing with the world, the things in the world, the relations between things in the world and so on. Whilst these differences may be informative for linguists, anthropologists, philosophers and others engaged with questions of linguistic relativity, universal grammar, ontology, epistemics and so on, they are also of interest to language learners and their teachers. One does not have to travel to the deep Amazon or the Australian outback to discover languages that differ in various subtle (and not so subtle ways) in the way(s) they deal with the world. Even comparisons of languages spoken by millions of people in highly technologically advanced societies that have high levels of contact with each other can have unexpected and surprising nuances of encoding, categorization and description. This paper has taken two such languages, English and Japanese, and focused on one part of the vocabulary, adjectives, examining ways in which the two languages differ. Even a smallish list of apparently mundane adjectives reveals, upon examination, to provide multiple instances where a one-to-one, neat fit across the linguistic boundary is not sustainable. For both language teachers and their students, this is a complex area. Beginners and lower level learners are unlikely to benefit from detailed explications such as those using Natural Semantic Meta-language methodology (See Wierzbicka, 1996). On the other hand, any serious attempt to engage with learning another language must at some point deal with such non-correspondences that exist between the L1 and the L2 in order for learners to move towards subtler and more nuanced use of the target language rather than relying on the patience, sympathy and understanding of the recipient to work out what precisely is meant when a word is used.

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## Upgrade Adjectives

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Cold | Freezing |
| 2. | Hot | Boiling |
| 3. | Good | Great, Fantastic, Wonderful, etc. |
| 4. | Bad | Terrible, Dreadful, Dire, Rubbish. |
| 5. | Interesting | Fascinating |
| 6. | Surprising | Astonishing |
| 7. | Nice | Delicious |
| 8. | (_____) | Disgusting, Gross, Horrible |
| 9. | Funny | Hilarious |
| 10. | Beautiful | Gorgeous |
| 11. | Ugly | Hideous |
| 12. | Scary | Terrifying |
| 13. | Far | Miles |
| 14. | Big | Huge, Massive, Gigantic |
| 15. | Small | Tiny. Microscopic |
| 16. | Boring | Tedious |
| 17. | Loud | Deafening |
| 18. | Tired | Exhausted |
| 19. | Sad | Heartbroken |
| 20. | Happy | Overjoyed, Delighted |
| 21. | Embarrassed | Mortified |
| 22. | Dirty | Filthy |
| 23. | Crowded | Packed |
| 24. | A long time | Ages |
| 25. | Bright | Blinding |
| 26. | Wet | Soaked, Drenched |
| 27. | Hungry | Starving |
| 28. | Angry | Furious |
| 29. | Quiet | Silent |
| 30. | Difficult | Impossible |