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Directness and Indirectness in Japanese Interaction – Aiming at a more realistic view

A stereo-typical view of Japanese interaction is that it is ideologically vague and obscure (Pizziconi 2009) and even powerless (Wetzel 1988), and so it is depicted as an indirect culture (van Dijk 1997; Grainger & Mills 2016). Indirectness in Japanese is also associated with its cultural values and ethos such as emphasis on *omoiyari* ('consideration') (Clancy 1986), reflection of *wa* ('harmony') in Japanese society (Ciubancan 2015), and symbolic representation of collectivism (Mičková 2003). On the other hand, directness in Japanese, although it is believed to occur much less frequently than indirectness, is a sign of intimacy between family members (Matsumoto & Okamoto 2003), and (in-)directness distinguishes *uchi* ('inside') from *soto* ('outside') (Makino 1996).

However, reality is contrary to those theoretical assumptions. Directness is witnessed as frequently as indirectness in Japanese interactions. Children approach indirectly to their parents when they need a parental permission from them (Haugh & Obana 2011). Requests from juniors can be direct toward their seniors at work when juniors are entitled to request (Obana 2021). The same participants can switch between direct and indirect speech acts as the discourse develops into different phrases (Obana & Haugh 2023). Indirectness is not necessarily polite but can carry irony, retaliation and cunningness. On the other hand, directness is considered professional in certain situations.

In this lecture, I provide examples from data for analysis and discuss what distinguishes directness from indirectness and what effects (in-)directness brings about. By using the terms, *tachiba* ('standing-place' – role, duty, profession) and 'discourse alignment', I attempt to find the borderline between directness and indirectness and to probe into pragmatic effects of (in-)directness in Japanese. I also examine how non-performative verbs/adjectives allow directness in interaction.

