

Japanese Adverbs *Zenzen* and *Mattaku*:

Pragmatic and sociolinguistic analysis

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Abstract—*Zenzen* and *Mattaku* are Japanese adverbs that are synonyms and used as complete negation expressions meaning “not at all”. However, recently many younger people also use these adverbs to express positive response. This change is important to be studied further to prevent misuse in communication, especially by Japanese language learners. The study aims to examine pragmatic function of *zenzen* and *mattaku*, and to analyse their use based on the users’ social background. The data in this study collected from Corpus Spontaneous Japanese which includes 580 participants with 661 hours of voice records. Collected data then categorized based on their pragmatic functions and social background of the users. The results showed that *zenzen* and *mattaku* have the same positive function with similar semantic meanings which are “at all”, “really”, and “completely”. Moreover, the pragmatic functions of these adverbs are similarly expressing affirmation, denial and ignorance. However, the use of *zenzen* tends to be based on assumptions, whereas *mattaku* based on facts. From sociolinguistic perspective, the use of *zenzen* and *mattaku* influenced both by gender and age of the users.

Keywords—*Zenzen*, *Mattaku*, Japanese Adverbs, Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics, Corpus

I. INTRODUCTION

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 [1].

This study discussed *zenzen* and *mattaku* which have the 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 [2]. Eventhough that these adverbs have negative meaning, lately many young people use it to express positive response which means there is a language change happening.

Language change is a new linguistic form used by some sub-group within a speech community and adopted by other members as the norm [3]. In communication, this language change can cause problems especially for Japanese language learners. As Japanese language learners learnt that *zenzen* and *mattaku* as negative expressions, they may face difficulty when

they found that *zenzen* and *mattaku* also used as positive expression in recent Japanese communication. This happens not only because the limitations of their Japanese knowledge, but also because its use has changed. Generally, changes in written language also occurs but not as significantly as in spoken language.

In terms of sociolinguistics, these changes can be called as language variation at pragmatic and syntax level. The topic of language variation said needs to be explored in classrooms with the same intensity and focus as racial, cultural and gender problems [4]. Thus, to understand deeper about the use of *zenzen* and *mattaku* and how their function changed, these adverbs need to be investigated based on their pragmatic functions, and through sociolinguistic point of view by examining their user’s age and gender differences. *Zenzen* and *Mattaku* is important to be analysed based on these point of views to prevent misuse of these adverbs which can lead to misunderstanding in communication.

II. ABOUT *ZENZEN* AND *MATTAKU*

Several Japanese adverbs have negative meanings. For example, there are Japanese nouns, such as *nanimo* (anything), *daremo* (anyone), *dokomo* (anywhere) and *mo* (for sentence in the negative sense). Another example is such as *shika~nai* (only), *kesshite~nai* (never), and *kanarazushimo~nai* (not necessarily). In English, the word with negative meaning are such as “anything”, “anyone”, “anymore” [5]. The opposite of these expressions is a positive adverb such as *kanarazu* (always; must).

Zenzen and *mattaku* are included 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 the context means of paramount importance when defining positive or negative types of evaluation [6].

Zenzen is one of the negative polarity items (*hiteikyokuseikoumoku*), also known in Japanese grammar as *chinjutsufukushi* or statement adverb [5]. In addition, the word after *zenzen*, always followed by Japanese negative form such as *~nai*.

Based on the language history, in the late Meiji period up until the early Showa period, the usage of *zenzen* included both negative and affirmative functions [7]. In early Showa, the use of *zenzen* in conjunction with an affirmative word deemed incorrect for unknown reasons and this usage dropped [8].

However, 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 the recent years, contains more modern expressions, same as affirmative usage that used more than 100 years ago [9].

On the other hand, *mattaku* divided into two types, namely *mattaku* with *~nai* (Japanese negative form) ending and *mattaku* that emphasizes the degree. The meaning of *Mattaku* seen from the words that followed. “*Mattaku* + negative functions” means it emphasizes the overall negative meaning. *Mattaku* has almost the same meaning as *totemo* (very), which used to emphasize the degree and show feelings about emphasis on facts or assessments. *Mattaku* shows similar meaning 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 [10].

III. RESEARCH METHOD

The data source in this study is sentences derived from *Corpus Spontaneous Japanese* (CSJ). CSJ is a voice corpus made by National Institute for Japanese Language, Information and Telecommunication Research of Tokyo Institute of Technology. CSJ includes 580 participants with 661 hours of voice records including the script. CSJ is pertinent to be used as data resource for linguistic, phonetic, Japanese language, and Japanese education researches [5]. Some Japanese researchers are using this corpus because the data is actual and the renewal version for the program is also available.

The first step in data collection in this research was selecting sentences from CSJ corpus containing *zenzen* and *mattaku* adverbs. Collected data then classified into 3 types of functions namely negative function, negative connotations, and positive functions [5]. Negative function includes sentences that contain *zenzen* and *mattaku* adverbs followed by *~nai* (Japanese negative form). Negative connotation functions are marked by affirmative words like *chigau* (different), *dame* (useless), *betsu* (other or different), and others. And positive function as a new function includes positive response functions such as *ii* (good), *daijoubu* (good), *heiki* (no problem), etc. The meaning of sentences contains *zenzen* and *mattaku* then analyzed using heuristic analysis method by Leech to analyse their meaning and adverbial pragmatic functions used in the sentences [11]. Lastly, social background of *zenzen* and *mattaku* adverb users are analyzed based on their gender and age, to find out the social factors influencing these adverbs function’s change from sociolinguistics point of view.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Overall Use Of Zenzen and Mattaku in Corpus Spontaneous Japanese

The data of *zenzen* and *mattaku* adverb collected from CSJ then classified based on their type of functions and their frequencies as shown in Table 1.

TABLE I. THE USE OF ZENZEN AND MATTAKU IN CORPUS SPONTANEOUS JAPANESE (CSJ)

Zenzen		Mattaku	
Functions	Frequency (%)	Functions	Frequency (%)
Negative	1141 (70%)	Negative	796 (56%)
Negative Connotations	273 (17%)	Negative Connotations	223 (15%)
Positive	219 (13%)	Positive	416 (29%)
Total	1633	Total	1435

Table 1 shows that the overall frequency of *zenzen* appeared in CSJ was higher than *mattaku*. *Zenzen* used in 1,633 sentences in total, while *mattaku* found in 1,435 sentences. Moreover, the difference also seen from the type of functions and their frequencies. *Zenzen* consists of 1,141 sentences with negative function, 273 negative connotation, and 219 sentences with positive function. Meanwhile, sentences that includes *mattaku* consists of 796 sentences with negative function, 223 sentences with negative connotation, and 416 sentences with positive function. From this data, it can be concluded that *zenzen* and *mattaku* similarly used mainly to show negative function. However, *zenzen* is used as negative connotations secondly, and lastly as positive function in sentences, while *mattaku* used more as positive function than as negative connotations in sentences.

B. The Pragmatic Functions of Zenzen and Mattaku

As mentioned above, *zenzen* and *mattaku* are adverbs that are also synonym which have similar meanings and functions. To understand further about the difference between *zenzen* and *mattaku*, in this sub-section *zenzen* and *mattaku* will be analyzed based on their pragmatic functions. The data collected about *zenzen* and *mattaku*, then categorized into 10 pragmatic functions, based on pragmatic functions proposed by Park. Pragmatic functions of *zenzen* and *mattaku* found in this study is as shown in Table 2.

TABLE II. PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF ZENZEN AND MATTAKU

Pragmatic Functions	Zenzen	Mattaku
Declare Statements / Assumptions	O	X
Declare Affirmation	O	O
Declare Denial	O	O
Declare Negative Estimates	O	X
Stating Presupposition	O	X
Express Disappointment	X	O
Declare Assessment	X	O
Expressing Indifference	O	O
Declare Information Based on Facts	X	O
Expressing hatred	X	O

As seen in Table 2, *zenzen* and *mattaku* can be categorized into 10 (ten) pragmatic functions including declaring statements, affirmation, denial, negative estimations, assessment, and information based on facts; stating presupposition; also expressing disappointment, indifference, and hatred. From Table 2, it is known that *zenzen* and *mattaku* have some similar pragmatic functions including expressing affirmation, denial, and indifference. The pragmatic function that only exists in the word *zenzen* is a function that states assumptions, estimations and presuppositions, which have a tendency to be conceived falsehoods or cannot be determined whether it is based on fact or not [12]. On the other hand, *mattaku* expresses four pragmatic functions that cannot be expressed by *zenzen*, namely expressing disappointment, declaring assessment, declaring information based on facts, and expressing hatred.

Other than pragmatic function differences mentioned above, from the data collected, these adverbs have another difference. *Zenzen* has a tendency to be used in expressing speaker's assumptions, whereas *mattaku* used to express more concrete subjects based on facts or proven experiences as seen in *examples (1) and (2)*.

Example (1):

それで僕は苦勞とかってあんま思ったことないんですけど。そんなにお金もないような貧乏な生活をしてでも全然不幸だと思ったことがないの

Sore de yappari boku wa kurō to katte anma omotta koto nain sukedo. Son'nani okane mo nai yōna binbōna seikatsu o shite demo zenzen fukōda to omotta koto ga nainode.

That's why I have never thought of hardships. Because I have **never** thought that it is unfortunate even if I live a poor life and do not have much money.
(Male, 35-39 years old)

Example (2):

他のお友達のうちでは結構繁殖が盛んに行なわれてたんですけども。お見合いは全く失敗であの子供が増えるようなことはありませんでした。

Hoka no o tomodachi no uchide wa kekkō hanshoku ga sakan ni okonawareteta ndesukedomo. Omiai wa mattaku shippai de, ano kodomo ga fueru yōna koto wa arimasendeshita.

Among the other friends, raising children was carried out extensively well though. (My) Matchmaking was **absolutely** a failure so there was no such thing like rising a child.
(Female, 25-29 years old)

Example (1) shows a relative thing based on the assumption of the speaker. The sentence has a happy pragmatic meaning with expression of negative function. However, the happy feeling expressed by the speaker seems relative. Even though speaker says he is happy being poor, this condition is only based on speaker's feeling, and there is a possibility that poverty is an unhappy thing for others. On the other hand, *mattaku* used to express some facts based on conditions that occurred in reality. As in the *example (2)*, the speaker feels

disappointed over her marriage and stated that her unluckiness is including not having children, and she gave a fact to support her feeling by comparing her marriage to other people's marriages. Therefore, her statement was not just an assumption or an estimation but more as a fact.

Because of its concrete nature, *mattaku* has a tendency to have a pragmatic meaning and function that is almost the same as its semantic meaning and function. In contrast to *zenzen* which tends to have pragmatic meanings and functions which tend to differ from its semantic meaning and function, as showed in *examples (3) and (4)*.

Example (3):

個人的にはあんまり好きじゃないですけど全然いいですよ。

Kojin-teki ni wa anmari suki janaidesukedo, zenzen īdesu yo.

Personally I do not like it much, but it's **all** good.

(Female, 30-34 years old)

Example (4):

それから二十デシベルから四十デシベル境界群という風にあのこの二群にそれぞれ分けて結果ですけども、実験のやり方は若年者の場合と全く同じ刺激を使っております。

Sorekara ni jū-deshiberu kara shi jū-deshiberu kyōkai-gun to iu kaze ni ano kono ni-gun ni sorezore wakete kekkadesukedomo. Jikken no yarikata wa jakunenmono no baai to mattaku onaji shigeki o tsukatte orimasu.

Then we divided each of these two groups into twenty decibels to forty decibels border group, but the result is that the experiment method is **exactly** the same as in young people.
(Male, 55-59 years old)

Zenzen in *example (3)* has a semantic meaning as "I am ok with that" (全然いいですよ/*zenzen ii desuyo*) which means that the speaker has no problem about the matter happened. However, based on its pragmatic context, the sentence implied that the speaker is actually not ok or has a problem with what happened. It is also can be understood from the previous sentence where she said "I personally don't like it", which means she is actually doesn't like it. Meanwhile, *mattaku* has almost the same semantic and pragmatic meaning as seen in *example (4)* where the speaker just wants to convey information that the research method, he uses is no different from the research of young people.

From above examples, it can be concluded that *zenzen* has characteristics which showed relative meanings, based on assumptions, expresses positive feelings, and tend to have different semantic and pragmatic meanings. Whereas *mattaku* has concrete characteristics, based on facts, expresses negative expressions, and tends to have almost the same semantic and pragmatic meanings and functions.

C. *Zenzen and Mattaku from Sociolinguistic Perspective*

Research on *zenzen* and *mattaku* has a deep connection to the social background of the users. As stated, that language

variety show how the use of a language occurs and change in certain circles [4].

To find out about *zenzen* and *mattaku*'s recent usage from sociolinguistic perspective, the gender of their users is analyzed as seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

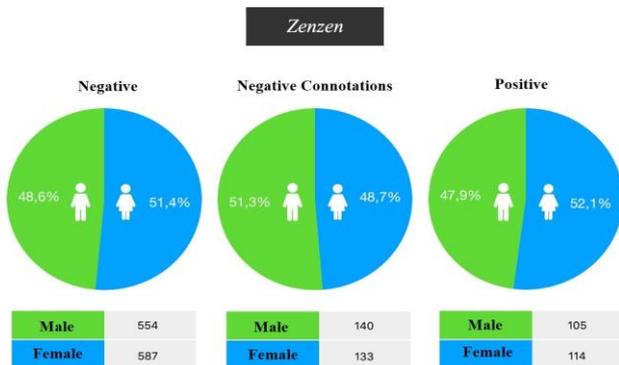


Fig. 1. The use of *Zenzen* based on the user's gender.

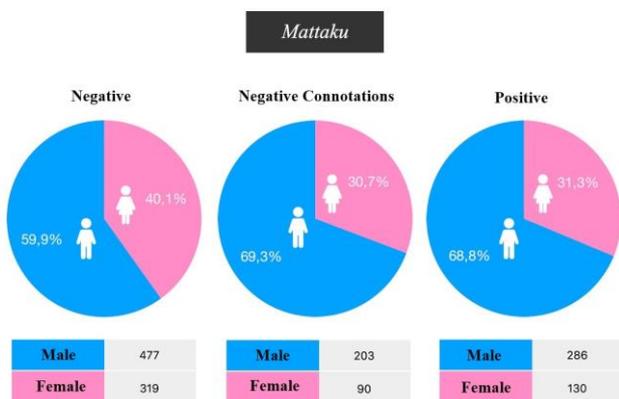


Fig. 2. The use of *Mattaku* based on the user's gender.

From Figure 1 and Figure 2, it is known that gender-based backgrounds tend to be less influential in *zenzen* than in *mattaku*.

Moreover, from Figure 1, it can be seen that the functions of *zenzen* including negative functions, negative connotations, and positive functions, did not show a striking difference while used by both male and female. This showed by the percentage difference in Figure 1 which only consists of 2%-5% difference, minutely as negative function with only 2.8% (M:48.6%; F:51.4%), negative connotation function 2.6% (M:51.3%; F:48.7%), and positive function is 4.2% (M:48.6%; F:51.4%) difference. However, the use of *zenzen* based on these three different functions are somewhat different. Female tend to use *zenzen* more as negative and positive functions than male, while male slightly tend to use *zenzen* to express negative connotation than female.

On the other hand, Figure 2 shows that *mattaku* used more dominantly by male in all three functions than female. The use

of *mattaku* in all functions showed a striking difference between female and male, with male being more dominant using *mattaku* for all three functions. The percentage difference each as negative function reached 19.1% (M:59.9%; F:40.1%), negative connotation function difference is 38.6% (M:69.3%; F:30.7%), and as positive function difference is 37.6% (M:68.8%; F:31.2%).

From these results it can be concluded that female tend to use *zenzen* as it means more relatively than *mattaku* which used to express what speakers means more directly, which is preferred by male.

The usage and function of *zenzen* and *mattaku* are assumed changed among the younger generation. This assumption was proven by the data as seen in Figure 3 and 4, where *zenzen* and *mattaku* are used more widely by younger people (between age 20-44) than older people (above 45).



Fig. 3. The use of *Zenzen* based on the age of the user.

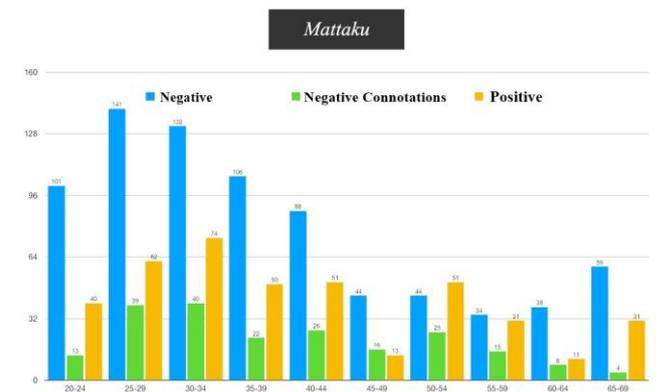


Fig. 4. The use of *Mattaku* based on the age of the user.

Based on the user's age shown in Figure 3 and 4, it is clearly seen that *zenzen* and *mattaku* are widely used in negative functions by all age range. However, the number of users of negative and positive connotation functions are diverse. Age ranges that used *zenzen* to express negative connotation functions more than positive functions are 25-29 years, 35-39 years, 40-44 years, 45-49 years, 50-54 years, 55-

59 years, 60 -64 years, and 65-69 years. While users with age range 20-24 and 30-34 years used more positive functions than negative connotation functions. On the other hand, for the use of *mattaku*, user in age range 45-49 years tend to use *mattaku* to declare negative connotations than positive functions. However, for other age ranges, they are more likely to use the *mattaku* adverb as a positive function.

V. CONCLUSION

From above analysis, it can be concluded that the pragmatic functions found in the data in this study about the use of *zenzen* and *mattaku* both have similarities and differences. *Zenzen* has characteristics that are relative, based on assumptions, expressing expressions of positive feelings and tend to have different semantic and pragmatic meanings. Whereas *mattaku* adverb has concrete characteristics, based on facts, expresses negative expressions, and tends to have almost the same semantic and pragmatic meanings. However, if we view these adverbs usage from sociolinguistic perspective, it can be seen that based on the user's gender, male prefer to use *mattaku* than female, while female slightly use *zenzen* more than male. Lastly, based on the age of the users, the use of *zenzen* as positive function is more widely used by the younger generation. Meanwhile, in the use of *mattaku* positive function, it is seen that almost all users of various ages use this function compared to negative connotation functions.

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