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Expressive Symbolism: A comparative study of Japanese and Tamil usage

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Abstract

Nature taught us to communicate even before languages were invented. The expressions varied in meaning and context, helping members of the community share information and act accordingly. This basically consisted of sounds and physical movements. The invention of language gave it a written form and communication evolved to a much more sophisticated level. This reduced human effort and time to a great extent. However, animals and birds still retain their natural instincts - which has become an interesting topic of research. Elements of such expression exist even to this day as an integral part of language. Written or printed symbols play an especially important role in today's style of communication. This paper studies some very interesting aspects of expressions in Japanese with references to Tamil.

Keywords: Sounds, Interjections, E-moji, Kao-moji, Kakigoe, KuchiShoga, Aizuchi, Onomatopoeia, Irattaikkilavi.

1. Introduction

Nature taught us to communicate even before languages were invented. The expressions varied in meaning and context, helping members of the community share information and act accordingly. This basically consisted of sounds and physical movements. The invention of language gave it a written form and communication evolved to a much more sophisticated level. This reduced human effort and time to a great extent. However, animals and birds still retain their natural instincts - which have become an interesting topic of research. Elements of such expression exist even to this day as an integral part of language. Written or printed symbols play an especially important role in today's style of communication. This paper studies some very interesting aspects of expressions in Japanese with references to Tamil.

2. Interjections

We often express surprise, fear, shock, excitement in our daily conversation and most of these involve sounds rather than words, In Japanese, there are some very common interjections:

hai, ee, m – yes
m-m, iie – no
e? - surprise
a! - Oh! Eureka!



Non-verbal expressions Interjections



Tsunagi Kotoba Pause fillers

Onomatopoeia

These are double words which lose their meaning when split. Japanese is rich in onomatopoeia catering to a variety of situations and descriptions.

Basically, they are classified under 5 categories:

- ⑩ “Giseigo” - Animal and human sounds, etc.
- ⑩ “Giongo” - Sounds made by inanimate objects and nature.
- ⑩ “Gitaigo” - Conditions and states.
- ⑩ “Giyogo” Movements and motions.

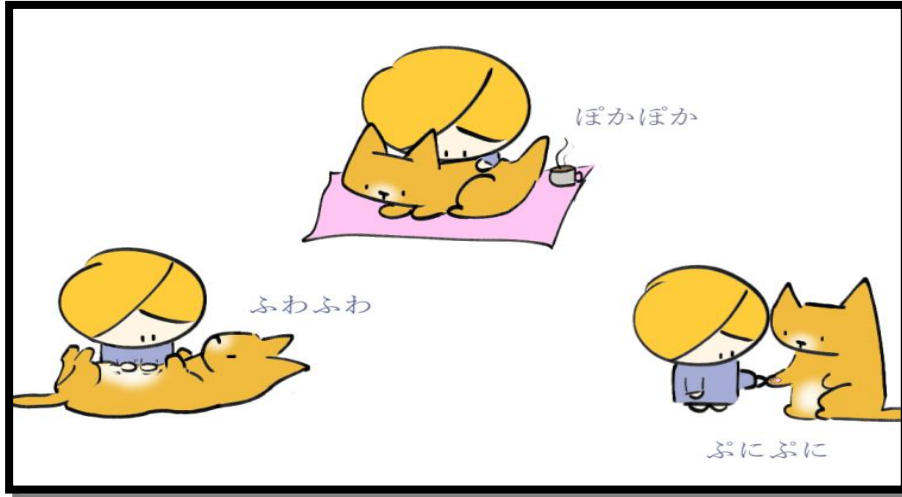
⑩ “Gijougo” Feelings.

“Giseigo” represent real sounds made by humans and animals – like “pechakucha”(frivolous chat), “kusu-kusu” (quiet laughter), (“moo-moo” (cow), “wang-wang” (dog), “choo-choo” (mice), “boo-boo” (pig), etc.

“Giongo” are also real sounds - seen in manga and anime. They represent the sound of thunder (“goro-goro”), bubbling water (“kobo-kobo”), etc. They differ from “Giseigo” in the sense that they are not sounds produced by humans or animals.

“Gitaigo”, “Giyougo” and “Gijougo” are mimetic words, or ideophones. “Gitaigo” describe or represent abstract ideas that are not based on sounds – “mushi-mushi” (humid), “deko-boko” (uneven ground or surface), etc. Giyougo describe movements from place to place - “uro-uro” (aimless wandering), “noro-noro” (slow and sluggish), etc. Gijougo describe feelings - “waku-waku” (excitement), “ata-futa” (hurried running), etc. Tamil has similar expressions – for example, “padapada” shows a state of nervousness, which in Japanese is “doki-doki”.

Aizuchi



Onomatopoeia



In Japanese, these represent interjections that indicate the attention paid by the listener to the speaker during a conversation or narration. They show that the active involvement of the listener in the topic under discussion.

Common “aizuchi” include:

- ⑩ *hai, ee, orun* - yes
- ⑩ *sō desu ne* - I see

- ⑩ *sō desu ka* - is that so? really?
- ⑩ *Hontō, hontō ni , maji, honma* - really
- ⑩ *naruhodo* - I see, that's right

One interesting comparison with Indian expression relates to body language. Japanese non their heads for “Yes” and shake their heads for “No” - but what confuses them most is the Indian way of moving the head from left to right in a circular fashion. It takes an explanation to convey that we mean “okay!”

Takegoe



Takegoe

These are usually words of encouragement for the musicians, singers, or dancers performing with the music. We commonly hear "sore!", meaning "That's it" or "dontokoi" meaning "come up with your best shot!", etc. Other such words are "yoisho!", "yoiyoiyoi!", and "choicho!"

“Takegoe” are also used when the stage name of the performer is shouted at key points in a dance. "ahdokkoisho, dokkoisho!" is heard at the end of each verse of a popular folk song. Some shouts are area-specific. For example, in the HanagasaOdori (Flower Hat Dance) of Yamagata, we can hear "ha yasshomakasho!" - which is used nowhere else. "Ha iyasasa!" and "A hirihiri" are shouts specific to Okinawan folk music.

As a comparison, we have expressions like “Shabash”, “Balle, Balle”, “BeshBesh”, “Wah-wah”, “Aha”, “Oho”, “Athu”, etc. during seasonal music and dance performances of India.

Nakigoe

Nakigoe is a cry of an animal, corresponding to many words such as baa, chirp, bark, etc.



Nakigoe

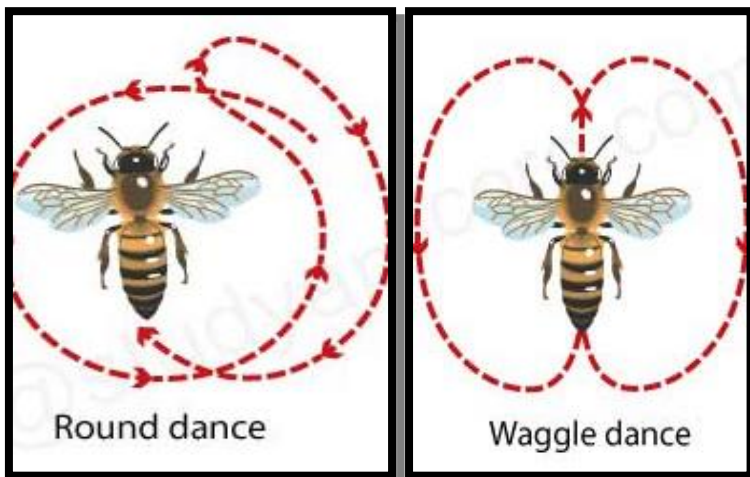
During “Matsuri” festivals, Japanese carry decorated **palanquins and chariots** called “Yatai” – which is a common feature of temple festivals in India as well. This involves a great deal of energy, effort and enthusiasm to keep going. We can hear shouts like “Wasshoi”, “Oisho!”, “Korasa” and “Hoisa” which serve the purpose. A good comparison here would be the Snake boat festival of Kerala, where boatmen keep chanting continuously to cheer themselves. Fishermen of Tamilnadu use shouts like “Hoyya, hoyarahoyya hoy hoyya” and “Eleloailasa” while rowing. As a typical example, while lifting a heavy object, they use “Yosshoi”.

KuchiShoga



Kuchi-Shōga

Also known as “Kuchi Showa” or “Kuchoshoka”, this is observed in traditional music and dance – especially during notation of beats for “Taiko” and “Tsumuzumi” drum sessions. Training sessions have a variety of sounds for long and short beats, the start of a piece, etc. Some typical examples are “Tsu”, “Tsuku”, “Ka”, “Kara”, “Do”, “Don” and “Doko-doko”. In Indian dance and drum performances, we hear typical sounds like “thakita-thakathimi”, “thom-thom-tarikita”, etc.



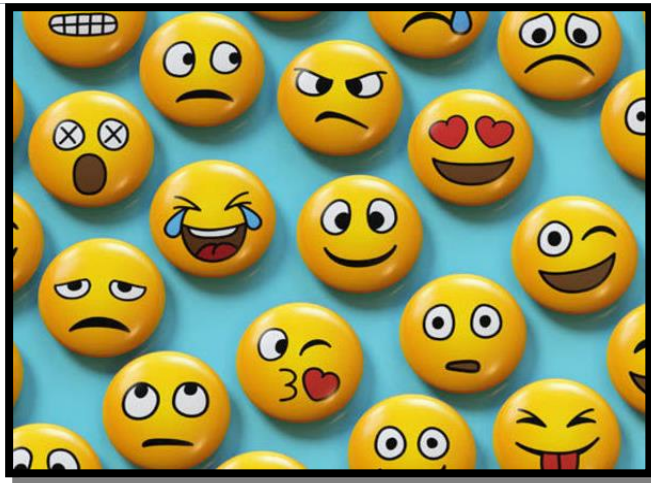
Kaomoji



Kao-moji

These are similar to Emoji in use, but employ letters and symbols to convey the expression instead of actual facial representations. These can be understood without tilting one's head to the left.

Emoji



These are ideograms or Smileys commonly used in messages and web pages. They include facial expressions, weather, animals and common objects.

Conclusion

The variety and similarity of expressive symbolism in Japanese and Indian languages is a topic of great interest and this paper seeks to pave the way for further research into their use in a wide range of situations – from common everyday conversations to sophisticated art forms.

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Japanese and Indian artist friends and professional performers.