

The Usage of Honne and Tatemaie in Japanese and American Relationships among University Students

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Abstract

Can you believe there is a difference between lying and not telling the truth? Honne is saying what you think directly, on the other hand Tatemaie, depending on the situation is not saying what you think. Therefore Tatemaie is often seen as a lie. In Japan, Tatemaie and Honne are used swiftly in certain situations. The usage of Honne and Tatemaie is used in America as well. However there is no direct translation in the English Language. This research examines what are the Japanese and American perspectives of Honne and Tatemaie and what are the differences between the two. Furthermore, how does Honne and Tatemaie affect the relationships of Japanese and American University Students? To show these points I conducted a survey. 30 American and Japanese University Students responded to this survey. In short, the results of the survey showed that the usage of Honne and Tatemaie by Americans and Japanese University Students were similar depending on the situation. I also found that Japanese people are timid and often have difficulty knowing when to use Honne.

Introduction

There are many cultures in this world. Besides culture, I wonder just how different everyone's way of thinking is. In this study, within culture, Japanese and American people's mindsets in relation to Honne and Tatemaie will be explored. Various aspects in relation to Honne and Tatemaie will also be explored. Furthermore it can be said from the results that the young generation of Japanese people are beginning to adopt the mindset of Americans.

1. Significance of Study

Before studying abroad in Japan I was fascinated by the concept of Honne and Tatemaie. During my time abroad I encountered many different groups of friendships and in various situations those people used Honne and Tatemaie. Americans among their relationships with others also use this way of thinking. I want to know more about these concepts and their effects

in relationships by gathering the perceptions of Japanese and American University Students through surveys.

2. Research Questions:

- 1) What are the Japanese and American perspectives of Honne and Tatemaie?
- 2) How does Honne and Tatemaie affect the relationships of Japanese and American University Students?

3. Research Background

3.1. High Context, Low Communication vs Low Context High Communication

High Context-Low Communication

Japanese culture revolves around high context and low communication system. This system caters to the in-group or group orientated people (uchi) within the society. Few words can express a more complex message. The system causes miscommunication gaps between people who use different systems (Donahue, 1998).

Tatemaie vs Honne

In the Japanese society Tatemaie implies a high context expressed with low communication. High context is often understood more with in-group or groups (uchi) but is often misconstrued when expressed to people outside of the group (soto). Honne is the truth that is only expressed within a group or to those who are considered trustworthy (uchi) (Fujimoto, 2011).

Low Context-High Communication

American culture is based on a low context high communication system. Therefore more words are required to explain the context of the situation. It is more common in America for people to rely more on words than context. This system is used inside and outside of groups (uchi) (Donahue, 1998).

Tatemaie vs Honne

In the American society *Tatemae* although under high context can be misunderstood or it is more commonly known among Americans to be “lying/ white lying” and or “Fake [not being real or honest]”. *Honne* is more accepted. (Fujimoto, 2011)

3.2 Perceptions of *Honne*

In Japan, *Honne* is only used with or spoken to people who are considered as trustworthy (Trinidad, 2014) within a group (Doi, 1987). In America, *Honne* can be said to anyone inside and outside of one’s group (Schumpeter, 2013).

3.3 Perceptions of *Tatemae*

In Japan, *Tatemae* is used to maintain good relations within and outside of the group, avoid confrontation; uncomfortable situations. It also a tool used to create Harmony within the Society by showing a modest/humble self to society (Doi, 1987).

In America, *Tatemae* is used to maintain relationships outside of the group and avoid confrontation; uncomfortable situations. However it is also considered as deceitful behavior because the usage causes a loss of credibility (Schumpeter, 2013).

In both countries the usage of *Tatemae* is necessary to balance out the roles in relationships within society (Trinidad 2014).

3.4. *Soto* vs *Uchi*: Group Behavior in Japan in relation to *Honne* and *Tatemae*

The concept of “we versus them” – known as *soto* versus *uchi* in America (Caudill, 1970). “*Uchi*” is defined as one’s inner group, for example: close friends. “*Soto*” is defined as outside one’s group (example: classmates). While “*Yoso*” is defined as outside of “*soto*” (example: acquaintances) (Takiguchi & Yoshikawa, 2014). It’s difficult in Japanese society to reveal personal opinions and feelings to “outsiders” or those not a part of the group. In order to live life well one must create relationships within society harmoniously while maintaining the balance of *Honne* and *Tatemae* (Miyake, 1993).

3.5 American Cliques in relation to *Honne* and *Tatemae*

A Clique is described as a group of people who have similar interests but aren’t necessarily friendly to others outside their group. What you say or do can affect the group

negatively. In cliques Honne and Tatemaie and used inside and outside of the clique (Adler & Adler, 1995).

3.6. How to create a Relationship in America vs Japan

A friend is someone who is connected to another through feelings of affection. Kindness is defined as the act of a good deed or being of a benevolent nature. Americans use friendliness to create relationships with others. However, Americans mistake friendliness and Tatemaie for kindness. Japanese people use kindness to create relationships with others. In order to gain friendship with a Japanese person one must be kinder than friendly (Goss, 2000).

Types of Relationships

Japanese	English Meaning
Tomo (友)	friend
Yuujo (友情)	personal
Yuukoo (友好)	business
shitashii tomodachi (親しい友達)	intimate friend
shitashii kankee (親しい関係)	close relations
Chijin (知人)	acquaintance
Shitashimi (親しみ)	Familiar
Shitashimiyasusa (親しみ易さ)	Friendly

(Goss, 2000)

3.7 Honne and Tatemaie Responses

Problematic relationships have two responses depending on whether or not the behavior is inhibited by a close friend (uchi) or an acquaintance (soto). Honne is a direct response while Tatemaie is an indirect response. An indirect response is used so that their parties are embarrassed or hurt during the situation (Goss, 2000).

3.8 Forms of Tatemaie: Flattery

Oseji is known as empty compliments. The Japanese verb *koburu* is another form of flattery defined as fawning over someone or something. *Hetsurau* is a negative form of flattery which tells someone what they want to hear. To “*homeru*” means to praise or admire someone or something. *Temaie miso* is self flattery or to boast and or brag about oneself. Lastly, *sanji* is defined simply as a compliment (Barlund, 1985).

Common Phrases in relation to Flattery

Praising or flattery is an example of satisfying the face of who you are talking to (Ohno 2005).

- › うわべだけのお世辞だ (“*Uwabe dake no oseji da,*” “That’s a left-handed compliment”
- › 胡麻スリ (*gomasuri*, literally “grinding sesame” similar to “kissing up”
- › ほめ殺される (*homegorosareru*, to be damned with faint praise)
- › 尊大に構える (*sondai ni kamaeru*, act self-importantly)
- › 能ある鷹は爪を隠す (“*Nō aru taka wa tsume wo kakusu*, The skilled hawk does not bare its talons)

(Barlund, 1985)

3.9 Forms of Tatemaie: Brief Responses

Aizuchi can hide *Honne* or true feelings; often implied to infer agreement with what is being said in a conversation. Brief Responses can be recognized as “yeah”, “I understand what you are saying” in English. *なるほど* (*naruhodo*) means Indeed. In other words saying this during a conversation means it appears as if you’re listening or following the flow of the conversation. *そうですか* (*soudeska*) means Really? By saying this during a conversation shows that you have interest without expressing your *honne* (Morita, 2005).

4. The Study

4.1 Research Method

In this study, a total of 60 University students were surveyed. 30 Japanese and 30 American University students, 15 male and 15 female, were surveyed in an online survey.

5. Results

5.1

Research question 1: What are the Japanese and American perspectives of Honne and Tatemae?

“I belong to a group that is unfriendly to others”

In relation to this question 0% of Japanese University Students did not strongly disagree to this statement. Due to the fact that Japanese people are more group orientated the results of this question were very interesting. My hypothesis was wrong, I wonder if the Japanese students truly answered with their “Honne”.

“Before making decisions, I consider how it will affect my group”

About 50% of both Japanese and American University students agreed and strongly agreed to this statement. Japanese people are group orientated and are expected to cherish their group more. I wonder if the Japanese responded to this statement with their “Honne”.

In conversations about various difficult topics (for example: politics), American university students tend to respond directly with their Honne.

About half of the Japanese unlike the American students responded directly with their Honne.

5.2 Summary of Research Question 1 Results

The statements “I belong to a group that isn’t friendly to others” and “when making decisions, I consider how it will affect my group” in relation to how the Japanese students are group orientated, the way they answered was the opposite of my hypothesis. I wonder why the Japanese students answered this way. Unlike Americans, Japanese directly responded with Honne about difficult topics.

Research question 2: How does Honne and Tatemaie affect the relationships of Japanese and American University Students?

In the case of friendships, Americans showed that the usages of Honne and Tatemaie in relationships are necessary.

In the case of Japanese students, in order to maintain human relationships, Honne and Tatemaie are necessary but tiring to use. I had my surveyors respond to some short situations. Americans respond directly with Honne to close friends to lazy and gossipy friends.

Furthermore, Japanese students also responded with Honne to gossipy close friends.

5.3 Research Question 2 Summary of Results

Americans and Japanese students feel that the usage of Honne and Tatemaie in order to maintain relationships is important. However, Japanese people are more aware of how they use Honne and Tatemaie. Japanese and Americans respond to lazy friends with their Honne.

5.4 Research Findings

In order to maintain relationships with others, the usage of Honne and Tatemaie by Japanese and Americans is very important. From this survey I found that both Japanese and Americans are concerned for other feelings. Using Honne is important in creating a strong friendship.

6. Conclusion

Japanese University Students are more aware of the usage of Honne and Tatemaie while American University Students aren't aware of their use of this system because in America there isn't a word or strict custom in the American culture. The main factor in using Honne and Tatemaie or Direct and Indirect responses in certain situations is to maintain a harmonious atmosphere within society and various relationships.

7. Discussion

I expected the responses of the Japanese students to be different from the American students, but my hypothesis was wrong, no difference was shown in the results.

Future Study

There is a distinct difference of the way Americans and Japanese people use Honne and Tatemaie. For the future study of this research I want to examine the usage of Honne and Tatemaie through anonymous interviews.

Limitation of Study

Due to the fact that I knew most of my surveyors, the study wasn't generalized enough.

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