

A Comparative Study of Motion Verbs ‘COME’ and ‘GO’ in Japanese and Sinhala

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Introduction

This paper focuses on the differences between the usage of motion verbs COME and GO in the Sinhala and Japanese languages. When examining the two languages it is clear that the Japanese speakers usually take the speaker’s viewpoint whereas Sinhala speakers take the hearer’s viewpoint. In Japanese language, if the motion is directed away from the speaker, the verb GO (*ikimasu*) is used. But in Sinhala language, even the motion is directed away from the speaker, the verb COME (*enawa*) is used to take the hearer’s viewpoint. For example, when we say I’m coming to your place in Sinhala, it is ‘*mama oyage gedara enawa*’ (I’m **coming** to your place) whereas in Japanese it is said that ‘*watashi ha anatha no uchi he ikimasu*’ (I’m **going** to your place). As ‘your place’ is a direction away from the speaker, Japanese speakers use GO (*ikimasu*), taking the speaker’s view point. But in Sinhala and English languages, the speaker uses COME (*enawa*), as ‘your place’ is the direction where the hearer is. In order to take the hearer’s view point, Sinhala and English speakers use COME (*enawa*). Here we find that the usage of the verbs COME and GO in the Sinhala language, is similar to the usage of COME and GO in the English language. It can be summarized that both Sinhala and English language are hearer – centered languages, whereas the Japanese language is a speaker – centered language.

Key Words – ‘Come’, ‘Go’, Hearer, Japanese, Sinhala, Speaker, Verbs

Research Problem

As the corresponding author is working with a volunteer Japanese Lecturer sent by JICA; a native Japanese speaker who has learnt Sinhala before coming to Sri Lanka, the author has encountered the issue simultaneously with the Sri Lankan Japanese language learners and the Sinhala learned Japanese language Lecturer. When speaking in the target language, Sri Lankan Japanese language learners are using the verb COME (*kimasu*), completely similar to the usage of Sinhala language. They directly translate the sentence ‘*mama oyage gedara enawa*’ to Japanese language as, ‘*watashi ha ouchi he **kimasu***’. (I’m **coming** to your place). But in Japanese, it should be ‘*watashi ha ouchi he **ikimasu***’ (I’m **going** to your place). Simultaneously, when the JICA Lecturer speaks Sinhala, she tends to say ‘*mama oyage gedara **yanawa***’ (I’m **going** to your place). She uses ‘*yanawa*’ instead of ‘*enawa*’ as she has translated the Japanese sentence ‘*watashi ha ouchi he **ikimasu***’ (I’m **going** to your place) directly in to the Sinhala language.

In this paper the authors’ intention is to find out whether the language learners of both Sinhala and Japanese are aware of this aspect, and, if they are aware, to what extent their mother tongue influences the misuse of the verbs COME and GO.

Literature Review

Idehara (2009), Takano (2011), respectively have done comparative studies on motion verbs COME and GO in the Japanese language and the English language. They have stated that the Japanese Language is a speaker - centered language whereas the English language is a hearer – centered language. Koga (2012) has done a comparative study on the usage of motion verbs COME and GO in the Japanese and Chinese languages. He has pointed out that the usage of COME and GO in the Japanese and Chinese are similar. Studying these papers made the authors to assume that both English and Sinhala are similar in this aspect, as the Sinhala language is also a hearer – centered language. Therefore it made the authors to carry out a research, comparing the Sinhala and the Japanese, as the authors could not find any literature done on the related theme comparing the Sinhala language and the Japanese language.

Methodology

This research is based solely on primary data, as the authors could not find any comparative study done by comparing the Japanese and the Sinhala language related to this title.

Data is collected through questionnaires. Informants were selected from both groups. (Sinhala learning Japanese speakers and Japanese learning Sinhala speakers) .Ten informants from each group were selected and the same sentences were given to both groups to translate in to the target language.

Data Analysis

Japanese learning Sinhala speakers were completely unable to give the correct answer, as they are not even aware of the fact that the usage of motion verbs are different in the Japanese and Sinhala languages. They have directly translated the verbs COME (*kimasu*) to 'enawa' and GO (*ikimasu*) to 'yanawa' and vice versa.

Sinhala learning Japanese speakers were also unable to give the correct answers, as they were not taught about this fact when they were learning the Sinhala language in Japan. They have done the same mistake as the Japanese learning Sinhala speakers. But the percentage of the correct answers was high when compared with the Japanese learning Sinhala speakers.

Results and Discussion

When analyzing the results the authors realized that both groups are unaware of this fact that the motion verbs COME and GO are used differently in the Japanese language and the Sinhala language. Even the authors did not notice this fact when they were learning the target language. Since the authors have got the chance to work together, they have realized that there are numerous differences in the usage of language than we are not even noticed.

But some Sinhala learning Japanese speakers were aware of this aspect to some extent, as they had gone through a home stay program conducted by JICA for three weeks. During this home stay, some of the JICA volunteers have noticed the differences in the usage of COME and GO between Sinhala and Japanese. Therefore the Sinhala learning Japanese speakers were successful to some extent.

But, the problem with Sri Lankan Japanese learners is that they have very less chances to interact with native Japanese people, and, even they have noticed a difference, they tend to neglect it because the native Japanese speaker has anyhow understood the meaning and the communication is completed.

Conclusion

Through this study, the authors came to realize that both Sinhala learning Japanese speakers and the Japanese learning Sinhala speakers were not taught the fact that the usage of the verbs COME and GO in the Sinhala and Japanese languages are different. The authors believe that it should be inculcated at the beginner level of language learning. At this point, the teachers who teach Japanese as a foreign language and Sinhala as a foreign language, have a greater responsibility in educating their students that there are many situations in which the direct translations may be a barrier to the proper communication.