

ANALYSIS OF CONCESSIVE EXPRESSIONS IN ORAL OPINION STATEMENTS  
 BY NATIVE SPEAKERS AND ENGLISH-SPEAKING LEARNERS OF JAPANESE  
 日本語母語話者と英語を母語とする日本語学習者の意見陳述中の譲歩表現の分析

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Concession can be described as an act of yielding and can be linguistically expressed in many ways. This research aims to analyze the concessions found in Japanese oral opinion statements by native speakers (NS) and L2 learners of Japanese (NNS). In this study, concession is defined as 1) the speaker's acknowledgment of and/or agreement with an opposing opinion or 2) the speaker's showing of a limitation or problem regarding their own opinion. In writing, concession is considered an important technique to strengthen the writer's opinion (Ishiguro 2004), but little is known about concession in oral speech.

## 2. PREVIOUS STUDIES

Research on concession has mainly examined concessive clauses such as “~*noni* (although)” or “~*temo* (even though)” in Japanese (Kudo & Ijuin 2013a), and a few studies have been conducted to investigate concession in discourse. Ishiguro (2004) explains that concession is an effective form of persuasion in explanatory writing, as it can allow the writer to acknowledge readers with opposing opinions and enhance the credibility of the writer's opinion. Ishiguro adds that the writer needs to justify his/her opinion after pointing out a problem with it or admitting the merits of an opposing opinion.

Ijuin & Kudo (2014) define concession as “the parts in which a writer provides information advantageous to or shows understanding towards the opposing opinion, or provides information disadvantageous to or points out the problems and limits of his/her own opinion,” and found that concessive structures are commonly used in opinion essays written by the NS of Japanese. Kudo & Ijuin (2013a) found similar tendencies in advanced learners of Japanese. However, qualitative analysis of the essay data indicated that L2 learners' concessive expressions tend to be abrupt, illogical, and too long to be effective (Kudo & Ijuin, 2013b). For speaking, no study has examined concession in oral discourse in Japanese.

## 3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to determine similarities and differences between NS and NNS with respect to discourse patterns for concessive structures in opinion statements. In this study, following Ijuin & Kudo (2014), concession is divided into two types and is defined as 1) the speaker's acknowledgment of and/or agreement with an opposing opinion or 2) the speaker's showing of a limitation or problem regarding their own opinion.

On the basis of the results, effective way of concession in Japanese oral opinion statements will be considered.

#### 4. DATA

The participants included 33 native speakers of Japanese and 40 English-speaking intermediate and advanced learners of Japanese. All the NS were graduate students studying at a graduate school in Japan. Of the 40 English-speaking intermediate and advanced learners of Japanese, 22 were studying at a summer program in the US, and 18 were studying at a University in Japan. Among the 40 NNS learners, six were attending advanced-level Japanese language classes, whereas 34 were attending intermediate-level Japanese language classes.

For data collection, participants were asked to read a question such as “Does technology make our lives simpler or more complex? Use details and examples to support your explanation” and freely provide their responses orally. A total of nine topics were prepared for data collection, and three topics were randomly chosen for each participant. The speech data was audio-recorded and transcribed.

A total of 99 NS opinion-statement data and 120 NNS opinion-statement data were collected. To avoid an imbalance of the number of statements between NS and NNS, some data were randomly eliminated for analysis. As a result, 87 NS and 87 NNS opinion-statement data were prepared for analysis. Table 1 shows the list of nine topics and the number of statements used for the analysis.

Table 1. The number of opinion statements for each topic

		NS	NNS
1	Does technology make our lives simpler or more complex?	10	10
2	Do you agree or disagree that young students should bring a cellphone to school?	10	10
3	Do you agree or disagree that people should always tell the truth?	11	11
4	Do you agree or disagree that a celebrity should set a good example for young people?	11	11
5	When communicating with your friends and families, you can use different methods: letters, e-mails, and/or telephone calls. Which method do you think is better and why?	9	9
6	Do you agree or disagree that a higher education means a successful life?	10	10
7	Do you agree or disagree that luck has nothing to do with success?	10	10
8	Do you prefer to learn on your own or learn with a teacher?	9	9
9	Which is more important in one's life, doing your best or taking time to relax?	7	7
Total		87	87

#### 5. ANALYSIS

In this research, concession is divided into two types on the basis of the definition of concession.

Type 1 concession: Acknowledging and/or supporting an opposing opinion

With this concession pattern, the speaker acknowledges and/or supports an opposing opinion. By this act of concession, the speaker can show that s/he has considered the opposing opinion but still believes that their opinion is the better option.

Type 2 concession: Stating a limitation or problem with the speaker's opinion

With this concession pattern, the speaker mentions a limitation or problem with the speaker's own opinion. By this act of concession, the speaker can show that s/he has considered possible counterarguments that others may present but still believes that their opinion is the best option.

For both types of concession, discourse structure was analyzed to examine whether there was any tendency in NS's and NNS's opinion statements. To analyze the data, the following elements were coded, other than concession (C).

Opinion (O): The speaker is clearly stating their opinion or standpoint on the given topic.

Counterargument of an opposing opinion (CA): The speaker is presenting a counterargument against an opposing opinion that s/he has already mentioned as a concession.

Reasoning (R): The speaker is explaining or giving reasons for supporting their opinion.

Example 1 below shows a Type 1 concession. In this example, the speaker thinks that studying with a teacher is better than studying alone but shows a concession by admitting that one can study alone with textbooks. But s/he then points out a problem with studying alone and presents a counterargument, saying "*I often end my study feeling as though I've understood the material without actually understanding it,*" and "*When it's just me reading a book, I might come across something I don't understand and just stop studying.*" In between the two counterarguments, the speaker gives reasoning for supporting her/his opinions, before summarizing their opinion at the end. The adverb "*mochiron* (of course)" is one of the discourse markers for concessive structures in writing (Ishiguro 2004).

#### Example 1: NS16-topic8

私は勉強する時は、分からないことを勉強する時は、先生と一緒にやるほうが良いと思います(O)。自分一人で教科書を見てやることももちろんできることはできるんですが(C)、分かったつもりになって終わってしまうようなことも多く(CA)、実際に自分で勉強したことを先生に教えてもらったら、あ、これ、こういう意味だったんだっていうふうに、分かった、改めて分かるようなこともありますし(R)、本だけ読んでいても、これどういう意味だろうって思って分からなくなって途中で止めてしまったりとかもあるので(CA)、分からないことは先生に教えてもらってやる方が効率的ではないかなあとと思います(O)。

When I study, I think it's better to study with a teacher if it's on a topic I don't know (O). Of course (*mochiron*), I could always just read a textbook and study alone (C), but I often end my study feeling as though I've understood the material without actually understanding it (CA). When I then have a teacher actually teach me the things I've studied, I think, "Oh, so that actually meant this, I get it," and I can reaffirm my understanding. (R) When it's just me reading a book, I might come across something I don't understand and just stop studying (CA), but with a teacher I can always ask them to clarify so I think it's more efficient (O).

Example 2 below shows a Type 2 concession. The speaker thinks that young students may bring cellphones to their schools, and that is his/her opinion. But right before restating his/her opinion at the end, the speaker mentions that cellphones may need to be kept away during class. The conjunction word “*tada* (but)” indicates that there is an exception or condition associated with his/her opinion.

Example 2: NS 01-topic2

その携帯やスマホを学校に持って来るのはいいと思っています(O)。特に子どもと親の連絡ができる通学路であつたら、連絡できる手段って、公衆電話とかが減っているの、連絡できる手段が携帯やスマホになると思います。なので必要なのかなと思います(R)。ただ、授業で、必要でないということもあるので、学校では預かたりとか、したりするのがいいのかなと思う(C)ので、学校に持って来ること自体には賛成です(O)。

I think it's fine to bring cellphones and smartphones to school (O). Especially in places where children and parents can communicate like on their way to or from school, communication methods like public phones are becoming scarcer so I think cellphones and smartphones become the main mode of communicating. Therefore, I think they're a necessity (R). But (*tada*) there are also times when they're not necessary, so I think one possible solution is for schools to hold on to the phones while students are in class (C). But regarding just bringing them to school, I approve of it (O).

For analysis, the data were examined to see if each statement contained Type 1 or Type 2 concessions. Then, all the opinion statements with concessions were closely examined by coding elements of discourse, such as opinion, counterargument, and reasoning. The results were compared between NS and NNS to find similarities and differences with respect to the discourse pattern for concessive structures in opinion statements.

## 6. RESULTS

Table 2 below shows the number of opinion statements that include either Type 1 or Type 2 concessions.

Table 2: Concessions found in opinion statement (by topic)

Topic (# of opinion statement)		1 (10)	2 (10)	3 (11)	4 (11)	5 (9)	6 (10)	7 (10)	8 (9)	9 (7)	Total (87)
NS	Type1	2	2	2	1	4	6	1	4	1	23
	Type2	0	4	2	2	0	1	1	1	1	12
NNS	Type1	3	0	4	1	3	5	5	3	2	26
	Type2	1	5	4	6	0	5	1	0	0	22

The results show that the number of opinion statements that include either Type 1 or Type 2 concessions was higher for NNS. But concessions should be followed by appropriate follow-up statements to justify the speaker's opinion (Ishiguro 2004), and so the discourse structure that follows concessions was further analyzed to determine tendencies.

## 6-1. RESULTS FOR TYPE 1 CONCESSIONS

Table 3 shows the discourse structure of opinion statements that included Type 1 concessions. In theory, with Type 1 concessions, the speaker acknowledges and/or supports an opposing opinion, and, by giving a counterargument for opposing opinions, the speaker can convince the listener that his/her opinion is a better option. Therefore, concessions should be followed by an appropriate counterargument, and the speaker's opinion should be stated after that to clarify the speaker's standpoint on the given topic. In the table, "C→CA" indicates a counterargument presented after the concession, and + or - before "O" indicates the existence of a clear opinion statement by the speaker at the end of the statement.

Table 3: Discourse structure of opinion statements with Type 1 concessions

	C→CA		C→∅		Total
	+O	-O	+O	-O	
NS	12 (52.2%)	4 (17.4%)	7 (30.4%)	0 (0%)	23 (100%)
NNS	7 (26.9%)	2 (7.7%)	10 (38.5%)	7 (26.9%)	26 (100%)

The results revealed a clear tendency for the making of counterarguments following concessions. In the NS data, 69.6% of the Type 1 concessions were followed by counterarguments (C→CA), whereas 34.6% of the Type 1 concessions were followed by counterarguments in the NNS data. Contrary to the expectation, cases were found where no counterarguments were produced, even in NS data as per Example 3.

### Example 3: NS 23-topic8

(...) で、確かに先生と一緒にやるとすぐ教えてくれるので、すごいはかどるのかもしれないんですけど(C)、 やっぱこう、自分一人でこう…やって、壁に当たって、で、こ う考えるっていう、そういうこう、その、壁にぶち当たって、まずその、壁にぶち当た って考えるっていうところで、何かすごい自分のインパクトに残りますし、こう、そう ですね、たとえこう分からなかったとしても、その考え抜くことによって、思考能力と かそういうところが、あれですね、鍛えられると思うので、そうですね、先生とやるよ りも自分で一人でやる方が、自分の為にはなると思うので(R)、 なので、一人でする方 が良いという意見です(O)。

(...) So it's true that (*tashikani*) when you learn with a teacher, they'll teach you right away and you can make a lot of progress (C). But at the same time, when you study alone, you'll come up against a problem, a wall, and you'll have to think of some way to overcome that wall. And I think that thinking to overcome the problem can have a big impact on you, and that, how do I say it, even if you didn't understand at first, by thinking through to the solution, you get to train your critical thinking abilities, therefore, it's good for you if you study alone (R), so I think it's better to study alone (O).

In this case, the speaker believes that it is better to study alone, but admits that studying with a teacher is also good, because the teacher can give feedback and one can make good progress. The adverb "*tashikani* (surely)" is another commonly used discourse marker for concession (Ishiguro 2004) and is used to indicate admitting an

opposing opinion. After the conjunctive clause “*desukedo* (but),” the speaker gives a reason s/he believes it is better to study alone, instead of directly pointing out a limitation or problem when studying with a teacher. As in this example, all the Type 1 concessions without counterarguments produced by NS were followed by reasoning.

Another finding is that the speaker’s opinion was found (+O) at the end of the statement for 82.6% of the NS data. In the NS data, when a statement is not finished with an opinion, it always ends with reasoning, not with concession or counterargument. NNS’s tendencies were slightly different. Their opinion statements with Type 1 concessions were less likely to end with the speaker’s opinion, and when they were not finished with the speaker’s opinion, sometimes concessions or counterarguments appeared at the end of the statement. Example 4 shows an example of a Type 1 concession produced by NNS:

Example 4: NNS39-topic5

友達や家族とのコミュニケーションするためには、やっぱり、ちゃんと、面と向かって、交流するのが一番いいだと思いますが、でもそれ以外には、たぶん電話が、電話がやっぱり一番いいだと思います(O)。何が、すごい危険な、なんか地震のみ、地震、地震があったら、すぐに、あの、電話で連絡できるから、手紙やメールは、ちょっと、遅くて、そういうなんか、不安を与えるかな。やっぱり早いほうがいいかもしれません(R)。でも、ほんとに、大事なことだったら、なんか、昔のそういう、XXXX というのもあるから、たまに手紙やメールを使ってもいいと思います。(C)

I think when communicating with friends or family, face to face is the best way of doing it, but other than that, probably phone calls are the best (O). If something really dangerous happens, like an earthquake, you can call someone to contact them immediately, but letters and emails can be a bit slower and cause anxiety. I think faster communication may just be better (R). But if it’s something really important, like, in the past, [indecipherable in recording] so I think sometimes, it can be good to use letters and emails too (C).

In this example, the speaker is answering a question about the best communication method. The speaker thinks the telephone is the best way. But the speaker thinks that letters and e-mails are also good, especially for important matters. This is considered as a concession because the speaker is here showing an agreement toward other options, but no counterargument immediately follows the concession. Furthermore, unlike NS’s concession pattern, the statement ends with a concession.

The speaker could have introduced the benefit of letters and e-mails with an immediate counterargument, such as slower delivery, so that the speaker can clearly show that s/he does not support the idea that sending letters and e-mails are better than using a telephone. Furthermore, the use of the discourse maker “*mochiron* (off course)” or “*tashikani* (surely)” could have shown that the coming sentence contains a concession. In addition, summarizing the speaker’s opinion at the end could have made the speaker’s standpoint clearer.

The data in this study reveals that discourse patterns exist for NS’s Type 1 concessions. In the NS data, concessions are followed by counterarguments and/or reasoning, and they are then followed by the speaker’s opinion at the end. When the

statement does not end with the speaker's opinion, the pattern is different. In that case, concessions are followed by both counterarguments and reasoning at the end. All the NS's Type 1 concessions are explained by these two patterns. This is not the case for NNS's Type 1 concessions, however, as learners' concessions were sometimes followed by speakers' opinions without counterarguments or reasoning, or the statements ended with concessions or counterarguments.

## 6-2. RESULTS FOR TYPE 2 CONCESSIONS

Table 4 below shows the discourse structure of Type 2 concessions. Type 2 concessions are realized by showing limitations or problems with the speaker's own opinion. Therefore, to effectively concede, the speaker should convince the listener that their opinion is a better option, despite limitations or problems. To see if this is the case, discourse patterns were analyzed by examining the existence of reasoning (R) and the speaker's opinion (O), following the concession (C). It should be noted that, for Type 2 concessions, counterarguments were not coded because there were no opposing opinions. Any parts that defend the speaker's opinions were coded as reasoning.

Table 4: Discourse structure of opinion statements with Type 2 concessions

	C→+R +O	C→-R +O	C→+R -O	C→-R -O	Total
NS	7 (58.3%)	4 (33.3%)	0 (0%)	1 (8.3%)	12 (100%)
NNS	6 (27.3%)	4 (18.2%)	4 (18.2%)	8 (36.4%)	22 (100%)

The results show that reasoning tends to appear (+R) after Type 2 concessions in NS discourse, but this is not always the case. There were five cases of Type 2 concessions that were not followed by reasoning. No clear difference was found between NS and NNS data in terms of the existence of reasoning after concessions.

However, regarding the existence of the speaker's opinion (+O) at the end of the statement, there was a clear difference between NS and NNS data. For NS, speakers' opinions appeared at the end of most of the opinion statements with Type 2 concessions. On the contrary, for NNS, approximately half of the opinion statements did not end with the speaker's opinion. Out of 12 statements that did not end with the speaker's opinion, eight ended with concessions. Example 5 provides an example of this.

### Example 5: NNS25-topic6

まあね、過去、約 1950 年の時代に、大学に行かなくても、いい仕事、あるいは、いい仕事できたかもしれないけど、最近ほんとに、一般的に、僕のところは、大学に行かなければいけないっていう気持ち、ものすごく増えて、増えてきたので、現在、ほんとに、成功のために大学に行かなきゃならないと思います(O)けど、そうじゅいっても[そうは言っても]大学にいても[入っても]せい、必ず成功できるわけではないと思います(C)。大変ですけど、うん。

Well, yeah. In the 1950s, you might have been able to get a good job without going to college. But recently, the feeling that you must go to college has been really growing and becoming mainstream in those around me. That feeling's growing, and right now, I really

think that in order to succeed you have to go to college (O), but there's no guarantee you'll succeed even if you go to college (C). It's tough, yeah.

The speaker claims that “one has to go to college to succeed,” and s/he therefore believes that there is a relationship between education level and success in life. At the end of the statement, the speaker mentions that “there's no guarantee you'll succeed even if you go to college” and admits that his/her opinion is not always correct. This is an acceptable concession strategy because the speaker can show that s/he has already considered possible counterarguments by others. However, by providing concessions at the very end of the statement, the speaker's standpoint may be misunderstood by the listener or confuse the listener with regard to the direction of the speaker's argument. In order for the concession to function effectively, it is necessary to show the speaker's standpoint in a clear manner and that can be realized by stating the speaker's intention, i.e., that s/he still believes her/his opinion despite its limitation. The speaker in this example could have stated why s/he still believes that education still matters for success in life, although some people do not succeed even if they go to college.

## 7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, concessions were divided into two types, and NS and NNS data were analyzed to examine similarities and differences with respect to discourse patterns for concessive structures in opinion statements.

The results revealed that, for Type 1 concessions, approximately 70% of concessions were followed by counterarguments in NS's opinion statements. This was expected, as Type 1 concessions can strategically function to make the speaker's opinion more persuasive when the opposing opinion is rejected. Moreover, in cases where there is no counterargument, NS provided the listener with reasoning to support his/her opinions.

On the contrary, in NNS data, counterarguments were only provided in approximately 35% of the Type 1 concessions. Furthermore, unlike NS opinion statements, some opinion statements ended with concessions, as in Example 4. This could make concessive discourse ineffective, as the listener may feel confused as to the direction of the argument that the speaker is making.

Similarly, Type 2 concessions were analyzed in terms of the discourse structure after concessions. No clear difference was recognized between NS and NNS with regard to the existence of reasoning after concessions. Similar to Type 1 concessions, as shown in Example 5, some opinion statements ended with Type 2 concessions, that is, stating limitations or problems with the speaker's opinions. This type of discourse could be problematic because the speaker may leave the listener with an impression that the speaker's opinion is not strong enough, and this may cause the speaker's opinion to lack persuasiveness.

Regarding the ending of an opinion statement, it should be pointed out that 20 out of 23 NS's opinion statements (82.6%) with Type 1 concessions ended with the speaker's opinion. Likewise, 11 out of 12 NS's opinion statements (91.6%) with Type 2 concessions concluded with the speaker's opinion. Meanwhile, 17 out of 26 NNS's opinion statements (65.1%) with Type 1 concessions ended with the speaker's opinion. Also, 10 out of 22 NS's opinion statements (45.5%) with Type 2 concessions concluded with the speaker's opinion. Summarizing the speaker's opinion at the end would make sense after a concession, as the act of concession could create discourse digression from



the speaker's standpoint. Specifically, with Type 1 concessions, the speaker acknowledges or agrees with an opposing opinion, and this may cause the listener to misunderstand the speaker's intention in raising an opposing opinion in the discourse. Therefore, it would be better to make the speaker's standpoint clear after a concession, and this can be done by clearly stating the speaker's opinion at the end. With Type 2 concessions, the speaker talks about limitations or weaknesses of his/her own opinion, and it is necessary not to end the statement with that limitation or weakness and to make clear that the speaker still believes his/her opinion, despite the aforementioned problem.

To summarize, for both Type 1 and Type 2 concessions, the NS data shows that it is important not to end an opinion statement with a concession. It should preferably be ended with the speaker's opinion. Furthermore, it would be more effective to provide a counterargument to the opposing opinion which is used as a concession; however, the data revealed that counterargument is not necessary in oral opinion statements.

With regard to pedagogical implications, it would be beneficial to incorporate a "concessive structure" into opinion statements as a strategy when practicing oral opinion statements. For writing, several studies have shown positive outcomes for introducing a strategy for incorporating other opinions or expected counterarguments in writing (Yamaguchi & Sannomiya, 2013). For speaking, learners can be provided with examples and explanations of two types of concession, as well as basic patterns that they can utilize in their oral opinion statements. Furthermore, commonly used words for concession, such as *mochiron* (of course), *tashikani* (surely), and *tada* (but) can be introduced as key words to incorporate an opposing opinion or to state the limitation or problem with one's own opinion.

The results of this study can provide insights into finding an effective way to incorporate concessions in oral opinion statements, but the results need to be interpreted carefully, as the different tendency shown in NNS's discourse may be caused by the learner's proficiency level. Most of the learners in this study were intermediate-level learners, and more than half of the data were collected at a summer course in the US. This indicates that many of the learners in this study may have had difficulties in producing discourse-level speech because of their proficiency level. Also, it may be that learners did not have sufficient experience in stating their own opinions in Japanese, especially regarding non-daily topics such as life, education, or luck. For future studies, advanced-level learner data will be necessary to examine tendencies in NNS with different Japanese proficiency levels. In addition, to investigate the possible influence of L1 on concessive structures in L2, NNS data of speakers from different language backgrounds should be examined.

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