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## The Difference of Japanese *Uso* and English *Lie* from the Perspective of Speech Acts \*

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キーワード： semantics, Natural Semantic Metalanguage, speech acts

本論文は、発話行為の観点から日本語の「嘘」と英語の *lie* という語の意味に着目することで、その違いを明らかにした。その意味の違いをもとに、先行研究で指摘される「*Lying* は避けるべきである」という価値観の普遍性を批判的に検討した。

意図的に述べた真ではない発話は、一般的に日本語で「嘘」と呼ばれ、英語では *lie* に相当する。しかし、特定の文脈において、*lie* は「嘘」の訳語としては用いられず、両者の意味は完全には一致しない。従来の先行研究からは、*lie* と「嘘」における各プロトタイプ要素の重要度の違いなどの示唆が得られるが、なぜ特定の文脈で *lie* が「嘘」の訳語として機能しないか説明できない。

本研究は、(i) 相手の先行発話、(ii) 自分自身の先行発話、という2種類の発話を *lie* もしくは「嘘」とラベル付けする表現を観察し、これらの文脈で *lie* や「嘘」という語を使用した際に生じる意味である、それぞれの発話行為を考察した。また、分析枠組みとして Natural Semantic Metalanguage (Wierzbicka 1972) を援用することで、*lie* や「嘘」などの抽象的な語の意味の定義、および通言語的な語の意味の比較を可能にした。

コーパスの実例に基づく分析によると、*lie* は上記 (i) の文脈で ‘you did something bad’ (ii) の文脈で ‘I did something bad’ という発話行為として用いられ、‘someone did something bad’ という語のスキーマの意味を持つ。他方、「嘘」の場合は、このような否定的評価なしに (i) の文脈で ‘what you said is not true’ (ii) の文脈で ‘what I said is not true’ という発話行為として用いることができるため、語のスキーマ的意味としては *lie* の持つ否定的評価を含まない。このような *lie* と「嘘」の語の意味の違いから、*lie* をいう行為が常に ‘something bad’ と見なされる一方、日本語の「嘘」をつく行為は必ずしも「避けるべき」行為とは見なされていないという示唆が得られる。

最後に、自民族中心主義というキーワードを通して、言語・文化の多様性を重視する研究者でさえも ‘*Lying*’ の価値観の普遍性を唱えることとなった動機を探った。異なる言語の母語話者の視点を考慮せずに、自身の母語に埋め込まれた価値観を疑うことなく

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所与のものとして扱うことによって、意図せずとも自民族中心主義に陥る危険性があることを指摘した。

## 1 Introduction

Intentional untruthful statements are normally called *uso* in Japanese, which is considered as the equivalent of English *lie*. As these two words are used in similar contexts, Japanese *uso* is usually translated as English *lie* and vice versa. In (1) quoted from Kenkyusha's New English-Japanese Dictionary, the utterance to label someone else's preceding utterance as *lie* is translated as the one with the word *uso*.

- (1) That's a *lie*, you scoundrel!

Sore-wa *uso*-da, geretsuna-yatsu-me.

that-TOP lie-MOD degrading-guy-MOD

(Kenkyusha's New English-Japanese Dictionary) (Italics mine) <sup>1</sup>

In (1), the words *scoundrel* and its Japanese supposed-equivalent *geretsuna-yatsu* imply that the speaker criticizes the addressee by calling their preceding utterance *lie* or *uso*. Unlike *lie*, however, the word *uso* can also be used without criticizing an addressee.

- (2) "Bucho, rikon-shita rashii-yo." "Ee, *uso*-desho?"

boss divorce.PST appear-YO Oh lie-MOD.POL

"The boss has got divorced, apparently."

- "You're *joking* [You're *kidding*, You're *not serious*, I *don't believe it*]!"

(Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary)

In (2), the second speaker labels the preceding utterance as *uso* without any intention of criticizing the first speaker. The word *uso* rather expresses their suspicion about the unexpected information conveyed by the preceding utterance. This is why the English translation supplied in Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary does not include the word *lie*.

The aim of this paper is to examine the difference between the words *lie* and *uso* from

<sup>1</sup> Hereafter, all the italics and underlines were done by the author.

the perspective of speech acts. The present study focuses on two types of expressions: (i) one to label the addressee's preceding utterance, and (ii) one to label the speaker's own previous utterance. This paper claims that the difference of speech acts between *lie* and *uso* stems from the different perceptions of the reprehensibility of the behaviors of telling a *lie* and *uso*, which can disprove the universality of the reprehensibility of 'lying' assumed by Anglo scholars.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents a literature review on *lie* and *uso* in terms of cultural anthropological and linguistic viewpoints, introducing the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach (Wierzbicka 1972). Section 3 discusses the syntactic and pragmatic differences of the words *lie* and *uso* based on the examples from corpora. Section 4 revisits the question of the universality of the reprehensibility of 'lying' based on the definitions of *lie* and *uso*. Finally, Section 5 succinctly summarizes the main arguments.

## 2 Literature Review

This section provides a comprehensive overview of previous analyses on *lie* and *uso*. Section 2.1 takes a brief look at cultural anthropological analyses on the universality of reprehensibility of 'lying.' Section 2.2 reviews linguistic analyses on the meaning of the English word *lie* and its nearest Japanese equivalent *uso* based on prototype theory. Section 2.3 introduces the concept of speech acts and how it can explain the difference between *lie* and *uso*. Lastly, Section 2.4 outlines the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach employed in order to define the meaning of abstract concepts such as *lie* and *uso*.

### 2.1 The Universality of the Reprehensibility of 'Lying'

This section observes Everett (2012), which supports the universality of the reprehensibility of 'lying,' followed by its criticism by Wierzbicka (2014).

Firstly, Everett (2012), who places great importance on language diversity, claims that 'Avoid lying' is one of the concepts of values common to all cultures.

- (3) All cultures have values similar to 'It is good to treat others as you would have them treat you,' or '*Avoid lying*' (Everett 2012: 300)

Although (3) is written in a context that emphasizes the cultural differences about what is regarded as good or bad, Everett states that 'lying' is regarded as a bad practice in all cultures.

Wierzbicka (2014) points out the possibility that the statement of Everett (2012: 300) in (3) is an overgeneralization based on the Anglo culture he belongs to.

- (4) [I]t appears that Everett is eager to attribute to all cultures those values that he himself cherishes, partly because he takes them for granted and perhaps partly because to admit that they may not be found outside his own cultural sphere could smack of cultural superiority. (Wierzbicka 2014: 61)

There are a variety of languages that do not have words corresponding to the word *lie*. According to Goddard (1996), in Pitjantjatjara, one of the Australian languages, the word which has closest meaning to *lie* is the adverb *ngunti*. This word is glossed as "1. (with verbs of saying and thinking) false, wrong, untrue, 2. pretend (to do), fake (doing)." Even the closest word in Pitjantjatjara has a considerably different meaning. Wierzbicka (2014: 61) maintains that "[t]o find out what speakers of other languages value we must listen attentively to their own words and to decipher the meanings inscribed in them." Thus, the present study attempts to decipher the meaning of *uso*, which is considered as the Japanese equivalent of English *lie* to reexamine the universal value of 'lying.'

## 2.2 Literature Based on Prototype Theory

In order to discuss the universality of the reprehensibility of 'lying,' it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the words *lie* and *uso* in the first place. This section outlines the two previous analyses, both of which are based on prototype theory: Coleman and Kay (1981) on the meaning of the English word *lie* and Yoshimura (1995) on the meaning of the Japanese word *uso*.

Coleman and Kay (1981: 27) claim that meaning of words cannot be defined by the necessary and sufficient condition of individual semantic elements. Whether semantic elements can be matched with the meaning of words is not a matter of "yes or no" but a matter of "more or less." Different semantic elements belong to one category to a different extent. On the basis of these assumptions, Coleman and Kay hypothesized the following three elements as prototype elements of the meaning of the word *lie*, which contribute to

the semantic structure of the category *lie* the most.

- (5) The speaker (S) asserts some proposition (P) to an addressee (A) :
- a. P is false.
  - b. S believes P to be false.
  - c. In uttering P, S intends to deceive A. (Coleman and Kay 1981: 28)

Composing eight different stories in which each element (a, b, c) is either plus or minus, they conducted a questionnaire survey on which utterance in different stories can be called a *lie* with 67 American subjects. Likewise, Yoshimura (1995) roughly translated the questionnaire designed by Coleman and Kay (1981) into Japanese and conducted a questionnaire survey with 59 Japanese subjects.

Table 1 below summarizes the results of questionnaire surveys by Coleman and Kay (1981) and Yoshimura (1995). It should be noted that the former is the absolute comparison among elements while the latter is the relative comparison among orders of elements.

Table 1. Comparison of the Order of Elements Contributing to  
the Meaning of the English Word *Lie* and the Japanese Word *Uso*

Order	<i>LIE</i>	<i>USO</i>
1	b. S believes P to be false.	<b>a'. P is false.</b>
2	c. In uttering P, S intends to deceive A.	b'. S believes P to be false.
3	<b>a. P is false.</b>	c'. In uttering P, S intends to deceive A.

While element (a) contributes to the meaning of *lie* the least, it contributes to the meaning of *uso* the most. Yoshimura illustrated that the degrees of contribution of prototype elements to the meaning for the word *uso* are different from those for *lie*.

To recapitulate this section, the previous analyses show that the prototype elements contribute to the meaning of Japanese *uso* in a different way from that of English *lie*. However, the difference of the prototype elements between *lie* and *uso* cannot account for the reason why *uso* cannot be translated as *lie* in cases like (2), repeated as follows.

- (6) “Bucho, rikon-shita rashii-yo.” “Ee, *uso*-desho?”  
 boss divorce.PST appear-YO Oh lie-MOD.POL  
 “The boss has got divorced, apparently.”  
 - “You’re *joking* [You’re *kidding*, You’re *not serious*, I *don’t believe it!*]” (=2)

According to prototype theory, *uso* in (6) can be analyzed as an atypical example lacking element (c’). However, it also makes a wrong prediction that *uso* in (6) can be translated as an atypical example of *lie* lacking element (c).

The next section shows that the concept of speech acts can explain the reason why *lie* cannot be used as a translation in (6).

### 2.3 Speech Acts

This section introduces the concept of speech acts (Austin 1962) and how it reveals the difference of the meaning of the words *lie* and *uso*. Speech acts are something done by saying something. One type of illocutionary speech act is performed in the utterance called performatives, which include performative verbs such as *name* (e.g., I hereby *name* this ship as X.) or *promise* (e.g., I *promise* to climb Mt. Fuji). By making these utterances, the speaker is giving a *name* or making a *promise*. In these performative sentences, the action that the sentence describes, namely *naming* and *promising*, is performed by the utterance of the sentence itself. Performative sentences are normally in the first person and present tense.

Another type of speech acts is indirect speech act, introduced by Searle (1975). Unlike performative sentences, an illocutionary act is conducted without using performative verbs. For instance, in (7) and (8), although the speaker seems to just ask the hearer whether they are able to pass the salt or open the window, they request the hearer to do so by making an utterance.

- (7) Can you pass me the salt?  
 (8) Will you open the window?

In a similar fashion, the speaker performs the indirect speech act of criticizing the addressee by means of calling the preceding utterances *lie* or *uso* in (9).

(9) That's a *lie*, you scoundrel!

Sore-wa *uso*-da, geretsuna-yatsu-me  
that-TOP lie-MOD degrading-guy-MOD (=1)

In what follows, the present study claims that the utterances containing the words *lie* and *uso* perform different indirect speech acts. The next section introduces the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach, which incorporates indirect speech acts into the meaning of the words *lie* and *uso*.

#### 2. 4 Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM)

This section outlines the basics of Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM), a semantic framework originated by Wierzbicka (1972). NSM is a metalanguage consisting of approximately 65 of the simplest concepts and its own grammar. The basic idea of the NSM approach is that complex meanings should be described in terms of simpler ones and all the concepts are comprised of combinations of the limited number of the most basic concepts.

NSM employs 'reductive paraphrase' in which meaning is defined in terms of simpler words. The definitions comprised of reductive paraphrase are called 'explication.' Wierzbicka (1972) proposed a list of the most basic self-evident concepts, naming them 'semantic primes.' The items listed in Table 2 below are the latest version of semantic primes as of 2019.

Table 2. Semantic Primes (English exponents), grouped into related categories  
(Goddard and Wierzbicka 2014)

Substantives:	I-ME, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING~THING, PEOPLE, BODY
Relational substantives:	KIND, PARTS
Determiners:	THIS, THE SAME, OTHER-ELSE
Quantifiers:	ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH-MANY, LITTLE-FEW
Evaluators:	GOOD, BAD
Descriptors:	BIG, SMALL
Mental predicates:	KNOW, THINK, WANT, DON'T WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR
Speech:	SAY, WORDS, TRUE
Actions, events, movement, contact:	DO, HAPPEN, MOVE, TOUCH
Location, existence, specification:	BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE) 'S, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING)



Life and death:	LIVE, DIE
Time:	WHEN-TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT
Space:	WHERE-PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE
Logical concepts:	NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF
Intensifier, augmentor:	VERY, MORE
Similarity:	LIKE-WAY-AS

Wierzbicka (1996) and Saito (2016) analyze the meaning of English *lie* and Japanese *usō* based on NSM respectively. Firstly, arguing against the prototype theory, Wierzbicka claims that the meaning of the word *lie* can be defined as follows.

(10) **To lie (i.e. *You are lying*)**

- (a) you are doing this:
- (b) you are saying to me about something: “it is like this”
- (c) you know that this is not true, you don’t want me to know it
- (d) *you know that it is bad if someone does this*

(Wierzbicka, personal communication, August 7, 2019)<sup>2</sup>

The italicized component in (10) suggests that the explication includes the social evaluation that “you know it is bad if someone does this.” This semantic component can be considered to express an indirect speech act of criticizing the addressee.

Secondly, Saito (2016) analyzes the meaning of Japanese *usō* based on the comparison of literary works with their translations. Saito argues that *usō* has a wider variety of meanings compared to *lie*, classifying them into nine categories as follows (my translation).

(11) One accompanying explicit utterances

- (i) Ill intent (ii) Good intent (iii) Compliment (iv) Joke
- (v) Saying what they do not think from a sense of duty (vi) Slip of the tongue

<sup>2</sup> The previous versions of the explication for *lie* are listed in Wierzbicka (1996, 2006). Wierzbicka kindly offered the author its latest version based on the new findings.

- (12) One without explicit utterances
- (i) Unbelievable thing
  - (ii) What people should not do
  - (iii) Telling a lie to oneself

Saito (2016), however, has two major problems. Firstly, it subdivides the meaning of the word *uso* more than necessary without clearly mentioning the classification criteria. Wierzbicka (1996: 242-244) warns that the polysemy should not be considered until it turns out that one explication cannot cover the whole meaning in NSM approach.

Furthermore, Saito (2016) uses several unacceptable syntactic frames in NSM such as *feel bad*. As pointed earlier, NSM limits how to combine semantic primes. These limitations are necessary to be free from ways of thinking dependent on particular languages and cultures, occasionally sacrificing the naturalness of English. In natural English, the verb *feel* is often followed by adjectives such as *good*. However, as this combination is not permitted in some languages, a noun needs to be inserted between them, e.g. *feel something good*.

The next section argues that the word *lie* differs from *uso* particularly in their speech acts. In keeping with the spirit of NSM, the present study does not make use of labelling of illocutionary forces such as ‘criticism’ or ‘apology,’ which is not cross-translatable. Instead, this paper attempts to decompose these illocutionary forces into universal semantic primes, incorporating them into the explications for *lie* and *uso*.

### 3 The Differences between the English Word *Lie* and Japanese Word *Uso*

This section examines the syntactic and pragmatic difference between the English word *lie* and Japanese word *uso*. Section 3.1 shows that the words *lie* and *uso* belong to different word classes. Section 3.2 demonstrates the difference of speech acts between *lie* and *uso*. Section 3.3 offers their explications to capture the difference between them.

#### 3.1 The Syntactic Difference between *Lie* and *Uso*

The Japanese word *uso* differs from the English word *lie* in its syntax. First of all, the word *lie* can be used as either verb or noun. In (13), the verb *lie* agrees in person and number with the subject, and is being inflected to encode tense or aspect.

- (13) a. She often *lies*.  
 b. You're *lying*.

The word *lie* can be used as a noun as well. In (14), the noun *lie* occurs with an article or takes a plural marker.

- (14) a. He told *a lie*.  
 b. The whole thing is a pack of *lies*.

On the other hand, the Japanese word *uso* can be used as either a noun or interjection. The noun *uso* can occur with the verb which amounts to the English word *say* (15) or copula verbs (16).

- (15) a. Kare-wa *uso*-wo tsuku.  
       3SG-TOP lie-ACC tell  
       “He tells lies.”  
 b. Kanojo-wa *uso*-wo i-tta.  
       3SG-TOP lie-ACC say.PST  
       “She told a lie.”
- (16) a. Sore-wa *uso*-da.  
       That-TOP lie-COP  
       “That is a lie.”  
 b. Ano-hanashi-wa *uso*-desu.  
       That-story-TOP lie-COP.POL  
       “That story is a lie.”

In (15), the noun *uso* is used as an object of the verb *tsuku* (roughly, ‘tell’) and *iu* (‘say’). In (16), *uso* occurs with the copula verb *da* or its polite form *desu*. The word *uso* can be also used as an interjection as in the following examples.

- (17) a. *Ussso!*  
       *lie*  
       “I cannot believe it!”
- b. *Uso-daro!*  
       *lie-MOD*  
       “It cannot be true!”

Ameka (1992: 111) claims that interjections express mental attitude or state as a monologue. The word *uso* in (17) can be classified as an interjection as it expresses a mental attitude as a monologue. Thus, the words *lie* and *uso* show different syntactic behavior.

### 3. 2 The Pragmatic Difference between *Lie* and *Uso*

This section shows the difference of the speech acts between *lie* and *uso* with a special focus on two types of expressions: (i) one to label the addressee’s preceding utterance and (ii) one to label the speaker’s own previous statement.

#### 3. 2. 1 The Speech Acts of *Lie*

On the basis of the examples from the British National Corpus (BNC), this section demonstrates that the utterances containing the word *lie* have a schematic meaning ‘someone did something bad.’ It conveys ‘you did something bad’ against (i) the addressee’s preceding utterance and ‘I did something bad’ when used to label (ii) one’s own utterance.

##### (i) Labeling the Addressee’s Previous Utterance

When the word *lie* is used as a response to the addressee’s previous utterance, the speaker criticizes the addressee by conveying the message ‘you did something bad.’ In (18) and (19), the speaker seems to be sure that the addressee’s previous utterance is not true, blaming them for what they said.

- (18) ‘A woman’s hair! Whose is it?’ Troy closed the watch immediately and replied carelessly, ‘Why, yours of course. I’d quite forgotten I had it.’ ‘*You’re lying*, Frank. It’s yellow hair. Mine is darker.’ (BNC)

- (19) 'What sacrifices you're prepared to make!' 'It wouldn't be a sacrifice,' he cried fiercely. '*Don't lie to me* any more!' she raged, despair lending her anger a malicious knife. (BNC)

In (18), the girlfriend blames the addressee by calling the boyfriend's untruthful statement *lie*. In (19), the words *raged* and *despair* imply that she harshly criticizes the addressee with strong emotion.

The observation that the word *lie* criticizes an addressee is consistent with the following Coleman and Kay's (1981) statement that the main reason to label something as a *lie* is to 'blame' or 'criticize' someone who made an untruthful statement.

- (20) A frequent reason for reporting something as a lie is that we want to blame or criticize the person who said it; i.e., there is a strong association between a sentence of the form *X lied* and an ACT of the (presumed) form 'I hereby blame/criticize/etc. X.' (Coleman and Kay 1981: 37)

According to (20), to label the preceding utterance as a *lie* can be considered as indirect speech acts to convey 'you did something bad' to the addressee. The next section argues that *lie* performs different but related speech acts when used to label one's own previous utterance.

#### (ii) Labeling One's Own Previous Utterance

When *lie* is used to label one's own utterance, the speaker admits that 'I did something bad.' In (21) and (22), the speaker realizes that they have to admit making an untruthful statement to the addressee although initially they might have succeeded in deception.

- (21) 'Tell me truthfully, now. How old are you?' Thomas Sachs asked. Katherine lowered her eyes. 'Thirteen. I'm sorry I lied to you yesterday.' (BNC)
- (22) 'Okay, *I'm lying*, I admit. 'There are lots of English painters I really do like.' (BNC)

The phrases *I'm sorry* or *I admit* imply that the speaker is making an apology to the addressee because 'they did something bad.' Table 3 summarizes the speech acts of *lie*

used in the contexts (i) and (ii).

Table 3. The Speech Acts of the Word *Lie*

	(i) Addressee's Utterance	(ii) One's Own Utterance
Speech Acts	'you did something bad'	'I did something bad'

Thus, the use of word *lie* conveys 'someone did something bad' as a schematic meaning.

### 3. 2. 2 The Speech Acts of *Uso*

This section shows that, unlike *lie*, the word *uso* can be used without the negative evaluation 'someone did something bad.' It can merely express disbelief that 'what you said is not true' when used to label (i) the addressee's utterance and 'what I said is not true' when used to label (ii) one's own utterance. The examples are taken from the Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese (BCCWJ).

#### (i) Labeling the Addressee's Previous Utterance

When the word *uso* is used as a reply to addressee's preceding utterance, the utterance can convey 'you did something bad.' In (23), the speaker conveys the message 'you did something bad,' assuming that the addressee's previous utterance is not true.

- (23) “Naka-e irete-morae-masenka-ne. Shirabe-ga sumeba,  
inside-to enter-let-POL-NE examination-NOM complete-once  
hikiage-masu.” “*Uso-da!*” -to hitori-ga i-tta.  
leave-POL lie-COP -QUOT one person-NOM say-PST  
“Koko-kara minna-wo oidashi-te, heisasuru-tsumori-da”  
here-from everyone-ACC kick out-and shut-will-COP  
“Could you let us in? Once we completed examination, we are going to leave.”  
“*That's a lie!*” said, one of them. “They are going to kick us out from here and  
shut the door.” (BCCWJ)

Unlike the word *lie*, however, the evaluation 'you did something bad' can be absent in some contexts. As seen earlier in (2), the speaker who cannot believe the proposition of the preceding utterance in (24) does not have any intention of criticizing the addressee.

- (24) “Bucho, rikon-shita rashii-yo.” “Ee, *uso*-desho?”  
 boss divorce.do.PST appear-YO Oh lie-MOD.POL  
 “The boss has got divorced, apparently.” –  
 “You’re *joking* [You’re *kidding*, You’re *not serious*, I don’t believe it]!” (=2)

In (24), the speaker expresses disbelief ‘what you said is not true’ because the information that their boss got divorced is surprising for them. Furthermore, the word *uso* can be used in the context where there is no target of criticism as in (25).

- (25) Tokei-wo mi-ta. U, *uso*! Mou 7-ji-han janai.  
 clock-ACC look-PST lie already 7 o’clock-half COP  
 “I looked at the clock. Oh, my Gosh! (#That’s a lie!) It’s already half past seven.”  
 (BCCWJ)

In the monologue (25), the word *uso* is used as a reaction to a preceding event rather than labeling the preceding utterance. The speaker has difficulty believing the information they gained from watching the clock. The word *lie* cannot be used in a monologue as it requires the addressee to criticize.

#### (ii) Labeling One’s Own Previous Utterance

In a similar way with (i), the word *uso* implies ‘I did something bad’ in some contexts. However, it can merely convey ‘what I said is not true’ without this negative evaluation.

- (26) Sono...*gomennasai*, atashi-wa *uso*-wo tsukimashi-ta.  
 Well...I am sorry 1SG-TOP lie-OBJ tell-PST  
 “Well, I am sorry. {I told you a lie. /What I said is not true. }” (BCCWJ)
- (27) “Sensei-ga suki-nanda-yo. Nanchatte, *uso*-da-yo.”  
 Teacher-NOM like-COP-YO like-said lie-COP-YO  
 “I like my teacher. Just joking! {#I told you a lie. /It is not true.}” (BCCWJ)

There are two different ways of interpreting the sentence (26). The speaker either made untruthful statement intentionally or noticed what they said turned out to be not true afterward. The phrase *gomennasai* roughly translated as *I’m sorry* indicates that the

speaker admits that ‘I did something bad’ and apologizes to the addressee without regard to whether they told untruthful statement intentionally or not.

Conversely, in (27), it is highly likely that the speaker just informs that ‘what I said is not true.’ In this case, the phrase *nanchatte* (‘just joking’) implies that the utterance is rather comical and intended to be told as jokes. As the speaker does not really intend to deceive the addressee, immediately they make clear ‘what I said is not true’ by calling their own utterance *uso*. The speech acts of *uso* in (i) and (ii) can be stated in NSM as follows.

Table 4. The Speech Acts of the Word *Uso*

	(i) Addressee’s Utterance	(ii) One’s Own Utterance
<b>Speech Acts</b>	‘what you said is not true’ (‘you did something bad’)	‘what I said is not true’ (‘I did something bad’)

As described in Section 3.2.1, labeling previous utterance as *lie* conveys either (i) ‘you did something bad’ or (ii) ‘I did something bad.’ Table 5 represents the difference of speech acts between *lie* and *uso*.

Table 5. The Difference of the Speech Acts between the Words *Lie* and *Uso*

<b>Speech Acts</b>	(i) Addressee’s Utterance	(ii) One’s Own Utterance
<i>Lie</i>	‘you did something bad’	‘I did something bad’
<i>Uso</i>	‘what you said is not true’ (‘you did something bad’)	‘what I said is not true’ (‘I did something bad’)

As a schematic meaning, the English word *lie* conveys ‘someone did something bad’ whereas the Japanese word *uso* merely conveys ‘what someone said is not true.’

### 3. 3 The Explication for *Uso*

This section attempts to explicate the meaning of the word *uso* and compare its explication with that for *lie* in Wierzbicka (2019) in order to capture the subtle but significant differences between them.

As pointed out in Section 3.2, the word *lie* conveys ‘someone did something bad.’ ‘You did something bad’ means to say that the addressee is the person who ‘did something bad’ and ‘I did something bad’ means that the speaker themselves admit that they are the ones



who 'did something bad.' Therefore, the speech acts of *lie* indicate that 'lying' is regarded as 'something bad.' This is consistent with Wierzbicka (2019) in which the negative evaluation '*you know that it is bad if someone does this*' is lexically encoded in the word *lie*. (see the explication (10) in Section 2.4)

In contrast, the word *uso* merely conveys 'what someone said is not true.' The explication for *uso*, which does not have the semantic component related with 'someone did something bad,' can be put forward as follows.

(28) *Uso (i.e. That's uso (Sore-wa uso-da) )*

- (a) someone said something about something
- (b) it is not true

Unlike the explication for *lie*, the semantic structure for *uso* involves neither any evaluation nor the intention to hide the truth. This analysis tallies with Yoshimura (1996) that the intention of deceiving the addressee is the least important prototype element of *uso*. For this reason, the word *uso* can be used to describe a range of things as pointed out in Saito (2016). As it does not matter whether the preceding utterance is regarded as good or bad, *uso* can be used as a response to even good news for the speaker.

- (29) “Kono-mae okan-ni narota roosutobiihu tsukut-te mita” “*Usoo...ureshii*”  
 last time mother-from learn.PST roast beef make-have.PST lie happy  
 “I have cooked roast beef, which my mother told me how to cook the other day.”  
 “*Are you kidding me? I'm happy*” (BCCWJ)

The word *ureshii* (*happy*) following *usoo* indicates that the preceding utterance is good news for the speaker. The evaluation 'someone did something bad' is totally absent in (29).

The simplicity of the explication for *uso* is closely related to the interjection *uso*.<sup>3</sup> On the basis of the communicative functions, Ameka (1992: 113) classifies interjections into three: (i) *expressive*, with emphasis on the mental state of the speaker, (ii) *conative*, with focus on the speaker's wishes, and (iii) *phatic*, which is related with the establishment of contact. Expressive interjections can be subdivided into emotive such as *Yuk!*, which

<sup>3</sup> As the interjection *uso* is mainly used by young people, presumably it is derived from the noun *uso*.

expresses the emotion or sense, and cognitive such as *Aha!*, which has something to do with the speaker's knowledge or thought.

The interjection *uso* can be categorized as a cognitive interjection on the grounds that it is related with the speaker's knowledge or thought about an unexpected event. Cognitive interjections contain a semantic component 'I think like this now' or 'now I know something' in their NSM explications (Goddard 2011: 167). As the interjection *uso* is used when the speaker finds out something from preceding utterances or events, 'I now know something' can be employed as its semantic component. The explication for the interjection *uso* can be proposed as follows.

(30) *Uso* (i.e. *Ussō*)

- (a) something happened a short time before
- (b) because of this, I now know something
- (c) it is not true

The interjection *uso* often occur with question mark (e.g., *Ussō?/Usodaro?*), expressing the speaker's surprise or disbelief. The semantic components shared between the noun *uso* and interjection *usso* suggest a link between these two usages. Thus, the word *uso* can describe a wider range of things than the word *lie*.

#### 4 Revisiting the Question of the Universality of the Reprehensibility of 'Lying'

Section 3 has demonstrated that the meaning of the word *uso* differs from its nearest English equivalent *lie*. The present study proposes that the difference of speech acts between *uso* and *lie* derives from the different perceptions of the reprehensibility of the behaviors of telling *uso* and a *lie*. In this context, this section revisits the question of the universality of the reprehensibility of 'lying' assumed by Anglo scholars in terms of the keyword *ethnocentrism*.

The difference of the meaning of the words *uso* and *lie* suggests that the behavior of telling *uso* is different from that of telling a *lie*. Along with the expressions to label preceding utterance, the untruthful utterances which are not considered as 'something bad' can be called *uso* in Japanese while it is not normally called *lie* in English. For instance, the utterances permitted on April Fools' Day are called *uso* in Japanese whereas they are not generally called *lie* in English. April Fools' Day in Japan is known as a day

people can tell *uso* as in the following definitions of *April Fools' Day* in the Japanese dictionary.

- (31) Oubei-no shuukan-de, shigatsu-tsuitachi-wa *uso*-wo tsui-temo  
 Western-GEN custom-COP April-1st-TOP lie-ACC tell-if  
 yoi-hi-toshite tanoshimu-koto.  
 fine-day-as enjoy-to  
 “The Western custom to enjoy 1st April as a day you can tell *uso*.”

(Nihon Kokugo Daijiten Concise Edition)

*April Fools' Day* is also defined in terms of *uso* in other Japanese dictionaries such as *Daijirin*.

On the other hand, in English-speaking countries, the word *lie* is not normally used to describe untruthful statements made on April Fools' Day. In the following English dictionaries, *April Fools' Day* is defined in terms of the word *trick* instead of the word *lie*.

- (32) 1 April, in many western countries traditionally an occasion for playing *tricks*.

(Oxford Dictionary of English)

- (33) April 1st, a day when people play *tricks* on each other. (LDOCE)

Likewise, the words such as *joke* or *prank* occur with *April Fools' Day* in corpora. Table 6 represents the search results of *April Fools' NP*, listing the number of the words to describe untruthful statements on April Fools' Day. The word *lie* is not used at all in BNC, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the iWeb corpus.

Table 6. The Types of Nouns Expressing Untruthful Statements Following *April Fools'*

<i>April Fools' NP</i>	BNC	COCA	iWeb
<i>Joke (s)</i>	3 (0)	22 (2)	596 (42)
<i>Prank (s)</i>	0 (0)	5 (0)	102 (24)
<i>Gag (s)</i>	0 (0)	2 (0)	24 (7)
<i>Hoax</i>	0	0	6
<i>Lie</i>	0	0	0

Thus, the behavior of telling *uso* is not the same as telling *lie*. As telling *uso* includes untruthful statements which are not considered as ‘something bad,’ it is implausible to conclude that telling *uso* is regarded as reprehensible as telling a *lie*. Then, why does Everett (2012) state that all cultures have values similar to ‘Avoid lying’?

The problem of the generalization of the universality of the reprehensibility of ‘lying’ can be captured by the keyword *ethnocentrism*. Levisen (2012: 39) states that ethnocentrism is “a major obstacle for linguistic and cultural analysis,” classifying it into two groups: (i) cultural stereotyping, and (ii) conceptual imposition. Everett (2012) ‘s claim can be considered as an example of the conceptual imposition.

- (34) Conceptual imposition refers to the process in which a researcher takes for granted that a linguistic concept of his or her own language, necessarily exists in other languages as well. Projecting a concept from his or her own language, the researcher, so to speak, plants a conceptual package of meaning in another language where the concept is unknown. (Levisen 2012: 40)

Everett takes the English-specific concept *lie* for granted, projecting it to other languages without the identical concept.

As a matter of course, it would not be the case that Everett intends to ignore the difference between the English word *lie* and its supposedly equivalents in other languages. In fact, Goddard (2008: 14) claims that “Ethnocentrism is often unintentional” and “the most widespread and dangerous kind of ethnocentrism is anglocentrism.” The negative evaluation lexically encoded in the word *lie* predisposed Everett to assume that ‘lying’ is ‘something bad’ in all cultures.

Regardless of intentions, we need to be aware that English is not a culture-free analytical tool to describe the world. As with other languages, English is full of culture-specific words, which do not have equivalents in other languages. To label certain kinds of untruthful statements in other languages as *lie* without considering the difference between them is tantamount to imposing one’s own culture on others. Native speakers’ point of view should be incorporated for valid cross-linguistic and cross-cultural analyses.

## 5 Summary

This paper demonstrated that the difference between the English word *lie* and its

nearest Japanese equivalent *uso* lies in their speech acts. Specifically, while the word *lie* is used to convey 'someone did something bad,' the word *uso* is also used without this negative evaluation. This difference of the meaning of words between *lie* and *uso* suggests the difference of the perception that telling *uso* is not always considered as 'something bad' unlike telling a *lie*. Thus, it is implausible to conclude that the reprehensibility of 'lying' is universal. It is necessary to be aware of native speakers' point of view in order to avoid ethnocentrism.

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