Evaluative Ratings of Selected Japanese Emic Trait Descriptors

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Positivity of person-descriptions is one way, and a rather intuitive way at that, to assess self-esteem and other components of self-concept, and of impressions of people in general (self, individual others, and groups [self-inclusive and self-exclusive]). A typical device for gathering such person-descriptions is a checklist consisting of adjectives, and occasionally nouns or phrases, denoting personal characteristics, generally psychological traits, but also behavioral tendencies (the difference between a behavioral tendency and the behavioral manifestation of a psychological trait is not always clear, and by the same token, is not always significant if the research objective is to assess affective directionality toward an evaluation object.)

The use of such checklists dates back to Katz and Braly (1933), if not earlier. In studies of stereotypes, the valence of the trait adjectives was assumed. There are two problems with this. The first is that the valence of a given adjective for the raters may differ from what the investigators assume that it is. The second is that valences differ in magnitude. Traits are not merely good or bad, but may be good or better, bad or worse. Evaluative content is precisely why the ascription of traits matters and therefore the magnitude of a valence is important. Anderson (1968) attempted to rectify this by establishing evaluative base rates for a list of 555 adjectives, using the aggregated intuitions of a sample of 100 college students as his primary data source. Numerous subsequent studies have made use of Anderson's list (including, to name just a few, Alicke, 1985; Campbell, 1990; Crisp & Nicel, 2004; Heine & Renshaw, 2002; Hornsey, 2003; Robin, Tracy, Trzesniewski, Potter & Gosling, 2001; Tafarodi & Milne, 2002; Tafarodi, Marshall, & Milne, 2003; Tropp, & Wright, 2001; Yamaoka, 1994). Apart from the fact that the ratings have become somewhat dated there is a problem－the 555 trait words were essentially selected at random from a dictionary. There is no reason to believe that they correspond to the trait words that people actually use to describe either themselves or others. It would behoove the consumer of the Anderson list to conduct pre-tests to establish that the trait words are relevant and meaningful for the samples involved. In practice, this is seldom done. A second problem is potentially more serious. When trait words drawn from the Anderson list are used in cross-cultural research, the standard practice is to select English words for the typically North American sample, and then translate them into the language of the comparative group. This procedure is fraught with difficulties. There is, as with the first group, no independent reason to believe that the words are

relevant and meaningful to the second group. Indeed, there is no way to ascertain whether the words even mean the same in the two languages. Back translation to check for equivalence, even when it is done, which is seldom, is of limited value. Translators will generally provide the closest available word in the target language (Heine & Lehman, 1997). But what is "close" and what is "available" depends both on the extent of the target language's lexical inventory and on the skill of the translator. Moreover, the closest available word may differ in important ways, including subtle and easy-to-miss connotations. The meaning may in fact be highly available, but expressible only phrasally. The valence of the word itself may be quite different and even reversed (which raises the question of whether the words are equivalent in the first place, or whether the traits or behaviors named by the word are what are differentially valued). Thus, there are two distinct but related problems. One concerns the

translatability of words, the other concerns the "emicity" of the words, their relevance and meaningfulness to the people using the word, relative to the people being assessed with respect to the word. The first might be solved by selecting only words that in fact are adequately translatable. This however may exacerbate the second problem, in that the adequately translatable words may not have high "emicity" for one or both (or all) of the groups involved. Or the researchers may simply opt for convenience, as for example Heine & Renshaw (2002), appear to have done, having selected 30 traits from the Anderson list: "those we felt would be comparably meaningful to both Japanese and Americans and were straightforward to translate into Japanese". One solution is to not use trait words but rather simply pure expressions of evaluation or affect (e.g., good, bad, I like, I don't like). Unfortunately, this would make it difficult to investigate the internal structure of cross-cultural self-concepts and stereotypes, at least by means of adjective checklist and related instruments. Although this is not generally recognized by cross-cultural researchers, it is not necessary to use equivalent concepts or terms to investigate either inter-group or intra-group perceptions.

Nevertheless, adjective trait word lists can be useful research tools, if not to compare cultures, at least to explore related questions in different cultures without making direct comparisons. In other words, to investigate the Japanese self-concept or Japanese stereotypes of various in-groups and out-groups, we need a set of indigenous trait words. The following list was prepared with this objective in mind.

Procedure

Data were collected over a two-year period, between 2002 and 2004. Participants were students at a university in the Tokyo area with an average age of approximately 19, and slightly more males than females for most sub-samples. Independent samples *t* tests were conducted to determine whether the males and females rated trait words differently. Because the purpose of the *t* tests was to rule out the possibility of systematic differences, rather than to detect differences, the large number of tests conducted does not pose an unacceptable Type I error risk. In any case, no systematic pattern of differences was observed and therefore all means in Table 1 are combined ratings of the male and female students. All materials were presented in Japanese. The initial set of words (predominantly adjectives, or the Japanese equivalent of adjectives, some nouns, and a few multi-word phrases) were gathered by asking a sub-sample of students to describe various types of people, including themselves, other Japanese people, and several groups of non-Japanese (Americans, Chinese, Koreans, Turks, Arabs, etc) by listing three words or short expressions that applied to them. (This is described in more detail in Brown & Ferrara, 2004) Cursory inspection of the resulting lists indicated that both positive and negatively valenced words were well represented. The words were then incorporated into a simple rating instrument using a Likert type 7-point scale ranging from 1 (=とても悪い [*very bad*]) to 7 (=とても良い [*very good*]), with 4 explicitly labeled "良くも悪くもない [*either good nor bad*]). The questionnaire was then routinely given to groups of students as part of their beginning of term introduction, during which they filled out a battery of questionnaires relating to learning objectives, learning preferences, learning strategies, and various other matters of potential relevance to the course. Several additional words were incorporated in revisions of the questionnaire to explore secondary research avenues. Thus, total sample size varies according to the word being rated, and ranges from 92 to 521. Results are presented in Table 1, along with approximate English translations.

Valences

Research involving the use of trait checklists is generally concerned with the positivity of impressions and therefore the valence of the traits is important. Ingroup versus outgroup bias, for example, can be assessed by calculating the extent to which ingroup members ascribe higher levels of more positive traits to the ingroup relative to an outgroup. Traits that are evaluatively neutral, no matter how characteristic of a group they are believed to be, cannot contribute to bias (or to any variety of self-esteem for that matter (Brown, 2005; Brown, 2004a), to cite another example). For all 70 trait words, single-sample t tests were conducted against the scale midpoint. A conservative alpha of $p < .001$ was used. Despite the large number of tests conducted, the danger of Type 1 error is not particularly ominous in view of the obvious rank ordering obtained. Beginning with the obvious case of *tenkeitekina* (M = 4.00, SD = 0.90) a total of ten trait words did not differ from the scale midpoint. That is, the probability of obtaining their mean ratings by chance alone, given the sample size and dispersion, was not $p < .001$. All other trait word means did differ from the scale midpoint at $p < .001$. Judged by this criterion, as can be seen in Table 1, 28 traits were evaluatively positive, 32 were evaluatively negative, and 10 were more or less neutral (although there was relatively high degrees of disconsensus within the sample regarding some of them, and their neutral evaluativeness reflected this disconsensus).

Table 1.

	M	SD	N
心が広い　Kokorogahiroi Open Hearted	6.28	0.77	449
根性がある　Konjougaaru Fighting Spirit	6.24	0.80	357
誠実な　Seijitsu Sincere	6.13	0.93	521
親しみやすい　Shitashimiyasui Friendly	6.11	0.89	357
臨機応変な　Rinkigahenna Resourceful	6.10	0.92	357
活発　Kappatsu Active	6.06	0.94	92
正直な　Shojikina Honest	6.01	0.98	448
明るい　Akarui Bright	6.00	1.34	92
優しい　Yasashii Kind	5.96	1.35	500
穏やか　Odayaka Calm	5.83	1.15	92
賢い　Kashikoi Intelligent	5.82	1.00	449
社交的　Shakoteki Sociable	5.76	0.97	449
勤勉　Kinben Hardworking	5.75	1.03	449
丁寧な　Teineina Polite	5.72	0.92	449
積極的　Sekyokuteki Active	5.71	1.02	449
用心深い　Youjinbukai Cautious	5.49	1.17	357
実務的な　Jitsumutekina Practical	5.25	1.02	356
真面目な　Majimena Serious	5.21	1.07	449
前向き　Maemuki Positive	5.16	1.57	144
合理的　Goriteki Logical	5.08	1.08	449
自由　Jiyuu Liberal	5.05	1.44	501

自尊心　Jisonshin Self Respect	5.01	1.22	357
楽天的　Rakutenteki Optimistic	5.00	1.07	449
きまえ　Kimae Generous	4.96	1.34	91
謙遜な　Kensonna Modest	4.73	1.05	376
几帳面　Kichoumen Meticulous	4.71	1.18	92
敏感　Binkan Sensitive	4.47	1.12	144
のんき　Nonki Easy-going	4.41	1.08	92
ずぶとい　Zubutoi Durable	4.36	1.30	92
厳しい　Kibishii Strict	4.07	1.09	92
控えめ　Hikaeme Reserved	4.05	0.98	449
典型的な　Tenkeitekina Typical	4.00	0.90	357
感情的　Kanjoteki Emotional	3.94	1.11	112
おしゃべり　Oshaberi Talkative	3.94	1.37	92
おとなし　Otonashii Quiet	3.90	0.98	92
馬鹿　Baka Foolish	3.74	1.41	92
恥ずかしい　Hazukashii Shy	3.73	1.06	92
遠慮がち　Enryogachi Reserved	3.68	1.00	92
おうざっぱ　Oozappa Rough	3.63	1.01	92
感情を表さない　Kanjou o arawsasanai Apathetic	3.42	1.01	356
自慢する　Jiman suru Boastful	3.41	1.09	358
人見知り　Hitomishiri Shy	3.38	0.92	112
欲張り　Yokubari Greedy	3.37	1.30	356
神経質　Shinkeishitsu Nervous	3.28	0.92	449
臆病な　Okubyouna Timid	3.28	0.97	357
内向的　Naikouteki Introverted	3.26	0.88	439
ずるがしこい　Zurukashikoi Crafty	3.25	1.35	449
せっかち　Sekkachi Frantic	3.21	0.87	92
ネクラ　Nekura Glum	3.18	1.12	354
無口　Mukuchi Taciturn	3.13	0.96	92
消極的　Shokyokuteki Passive	3.10	1.01	521
うるさい　Urusai Noisy	3.09	1.14	92
でしゃばり　Deshabari Pushy	3.07	1.02	367
曖昧　Aimai Vague	3.01	0.88	468
落ち込み　Ochikomi Depressed	3.00	1.09	92
うぬぼれの強い　Unuborenotsuyoi Conceited	2.94	1.07	357
攻撃的　Kogekiteki Aggressive	2.89	1.23	357
傲慢な　Gomanna Arrogant	2.84	1.20	365
悲観的　Hikanteki Pessimistic	2.74	0.94	439
非社交的　Hishakoteki Unsociable	2.73	1.14	92
暗い　Kurai Gloomy	2.73	1.09	92

意思が弱い　Ishigayowaii Weakwilled	2.67	0.91	449
我儘　Wagamama Selfish	2.60	1.07	357
しつこい　Shitsukoi Persistent	2.59	1.05	357
愚か　Oroka Moron	2.51	1.09	112
怠け者　Namakemono Lazy	2.49	1.00	520
自己中心的　Jikochuushinteki Self-centered	2.46	1.21	449
嘘つき　Usotsuki Liar	2.16	1.05	357
自分勝手　Jibunkatte Self-interested	2.11	1.06	92
簿力的　Boryokuteki Violent	1.55	0.82	357

Note: Trait expressions are ranked from most to least positive. With the exceptions of "typical" and "reserved", every expression differs significantly ($p < .0001$) from the scale mid-point

It will be noted that several commonly used words, such as *sunao* and *ganko* are not represented. The reason may be that the data collection instrument did not specify the ages of the targets. *Sunao* (pliable, cooperative) is chiefly used to describe young children, while *ganko* (obstinate, cantankerous) is generally reserved for middle aged and older men. Apparently, the student sample did not regard these as characteristic of people in general. Quite possibly, the people they had in mind were other university students. This is a limitation in the present dataset that could be addressed in future research.

Relevance to Language Attitudes

Attitudes toward languages and speakers of languages are generally measured using evaluative scales. Indeed, it is precisely because of the evaluation that the attitudes matter. Presumably, positive attitudes toward either the target language, native speakers of the target language, or even non-native speakers of the language can affect learning outcomes, and in some cases, survival of the language itself. Studies have been conducted with a range of languages including Arabic, French, and Welsh, various African and Southeast Asian languages, Korean (Brown, 1990, 1991), Japanese (Brown, 1985, 1989; Miller, 1977, 1982, 1986, 1988) and others, and needless to say, English (summarized in Fasold, 1984), as well as dialects or varieties (Alford & Strother, 1990; Kristiansen, 2003; Zhou, 2000), and even individual phonemes (Labov, 1970). What all such studies generally share in common are evaluative judgments of the language or its speakers, hence the need for such ratings as are provided in the present article.

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