

Feature Article

The Use of “*iya*” in Japanese Conversation

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Introduction

About 10 years ago, the book ‘*No to ieru Nihon*’ (A Japan which can now say No) became famous, not only because of its famous author, but also because of the title. It is well-known that Japanese people don’t say “Yes” or “No” clearly, especially “No”. According to Okutsu (1989), the positive response, *Hai* (Yes), is used 90 percent of the time. Whereas, the negative response, *Iie* (or *Ie, Iya, Uun*) (No), appears in only 10 percent of the data. Therefore we seldom see any research relating to negative responses. This research discusses the function of the negative response marker *iya*.

Iya in the dictionary

The definitions of *iya* in three Japanese dictionaries do not show the function of *iya* clearly. (*Daijirin* 1995, *Shinmeikaikokugojiten* 1998, *Kihongoyooreijiten* 1994).

(1) ‘A negative response marker but less polite than *iie*.’

Eg: “Kore kimi no?” “*Iya*, Bokuno ja nai.” (*Kihongo*)
This you GEN No I GEN is-not
Is this yours? No, it’s not mine.

(2) ‘A word which denies the word the speaker said first.’

Eg: “5 nin *iya* 6 nin datta.” (*Shinmeikai*)
five- people no six-people COP PAST
There were not five but six people.

(3) ‘A word which indicates the speaker’s unwillingness to commit to a positive or negative judgment.’

Eg: “*Iya* nandemo nandesu ga ne.” (*Shimeikai*)
No nothing not COP HON but FP
Nothing serious.

(4) ‘*Iyaiya* is a word which stresses the meaning of the word *iya*.’

Eg: “*Iyaiya*, son’na hazu wa nai.” (*Daijirin*)
No that can not
No, that can’t be right.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze spoken data and to attempt to find the function of *iya* in detail.

The usage of *iya*

This section analyzes the data in Yamane (2002). It includes five lectures (6 hours 50 minutes), seven interviews such as *Tetsuko no heya*, *Shuukan* book review, *Waratte itomo* (1 hour 45 minutes) and six telephone conversations (30 minutes). I collected 40 examples of *iya* (lecturers 10, interview 16, telephone 24), *iya* (2, 3, 0), *iyaiya* (3, 6, 5), *iyaiyaa* (1, 0, 1), *iyaiyaiya* (0, 1, 0).

Iya in denying a previous word

This type of *iya* is used for correcting a speaker’s mistaken utterance as in the example of (2), above. This *iya* does not have the role of pointing out another speaker’s mistake. Therefore, it is not related to *face*, so the correction can occur immediately after *iya*. However, we have not found this kind of usage of

iya in these data. In these data, we can see some words or fillers between *iya* and the correction. According to Yamane (2002), fillers such as *a*, and *ano* are often used for repair. As the meaning of fillers is more vague than *iya*, *iya* may not be used as often as these fillers.

- (1) Kirisuto wa don'na ee hito de atta ka,
Christ TOP what kind of um person was Q
iya kocchi wa kami de atta to yuu.
no this TOP god was say
What kind of , um person was Christ? Not a person but God, they say.
- (2) “Ee Hagiwara san, *iya* ano sakusha de irasshaimasu.”
Um Ms. no um author is HON
Um not Ms. Hagiwara but um the author
- (3) Hanabi ga agariyotta wa. Fun watashi *iya* kaminari kana to
Fireworks display uh I no thunder Q
omotte mitara hanabi nanja.
think look up fireworks were
There were fireworks. Uh I looked up at the sky because I thought it was not fireworks but thunder

.Iya of denying a previous utterance

There are two types of this *iya*. One usage is for the speaker to deny his/her own utterance. In this case, there is no turn-taking. The other usage is for the listener to deny the speaker's utterance. In this case, it is related to turn-taking.

First, let us consider the case of the speaker denying a previous utterance. There are two characteristic usages: one is used at the beginning of the quotation, as in line (4). The other is used at the beginning of a negative utterance after using a back-channel (5).

- (4) Antamo hadaka ni natte haitte kurerunkatte
You naked DAT become take a bath give-me Q
yuukara, iya watashi hairanyoo yuute.
say No I don't take a bath say
He asked me to take my clothes off and take a bath. No, I told him, I won't take a bath.
- (5) C: Futsuu wa sa, aru yo daroo, aru ka datte.
Usually TOP there is COP there is Q COP
Usually people say they have it , but they say do you have it
 A: Haa, *iya* soo miemasu yo.
Um no so seem HON FP
Um it seems that you have it.

The *iya* of (4) is easy to use because the speaker does not need to think about the listener's feelings as he/she corrects his/her own utterance. On the contrary, in line (5) the speaker has to be careful about using *iya*, because he/she is contradicting the previous speaker's utterance. Speaker A has to consider speaker C's feelings. Therefore, speaker A uses a back-channel first, accepting the previous utterance and uses *iya* afterwords. This kind of utterance order is important.

Second, let us consider the case of *iya* for turn-taking.

- (6) X: Moo yuu koto kiite kurete, haihaitte
Say thing listen give-you yes yes
Your husband is so obedient that he says Yes, yes
V: *le*, yuu koto kiite kurenai desu
No say thing listen not give me COP HON
No, I don't think so. He doesn't care what I say.
X: A, honto
Really
Really?
V: Soo desu yo
So COP HON FP
Yes, that's right.
X: haihai yuute
Yes yes say
He says Yes, yes
V: *Iya* soo demo nai desu yo
No so not COP HON FP
No, I don't think so.

In this situation, V is talking on the telephone about her husband with her former boss and uses the negative responses, *le* and *Iya* consecutively. It is usually necessary to show consideration before using a negative response with an older person. However, this example is an exception because this conversation is about V's husband, a person from her in-group. It is therefore acceptable for the speaker to use *le* and *Iya* even in response to an older person.

Iya in denying a response to a question

This is a typical usage of *Iya*. It is usually described in the dictionary as in the second dictionary example above. It is used at the beginning of a yes-no question, tag-question or intonation-question.

- (7) V: Are, yappa kowaretotta
That as-I-thought break-PASSIVE-PAST
It was broken as I thought.
W: *Iya*, kuuraa no haisen o ijikutton yo
No air-conditioner GEN wiring ACC handle FP
No, he handled the wiring of the air-conditioner
- (8) A: Nihonjin
Japanese
Japanese?
C: *Iya* Hawaii no kata ga
No Hawaii GEN person SUBJ
No, the person is Hawaiian
A: Un
Yes
C: Un
Yes
- (9) A: Baiku ni norutte koto wa mazu arienai da ro
Motor bicycle DAT ride thing TOP cannot-be COP

You don't ride a motorcycle, do you?

B: *Iya* boku ne

No I FP

Well, I

- (10) A: Okinainda
not get up COP
You cannot get up, can you?
B: *Iya, dame desu.*
No no is
No, I cannot.

- (11) P: Ikebukuro kaina
isn't it
It's Ikebukuro, isn't it?
Q: *Iyaiya* nanka sooyatte xx(name) chan ni ittandatte
No no something Mr.(Ms.) DAT said
No, no. You told Mr.(Ms.) xx something like that.

In this case, many instances of *iya* do not have negative response expressions (*ootoo fuka hyoogen*) such as *chigau* (wrong) and *son'na koto wa nai* ("Not at all!") as described by Moriyama (1993). In other words, it is preferable to use only *iya*, as this is enough for the speaker to convey the meaning of denying. In addition, the speaker does not use *iya chigau* or *iya son'na koto wa nai* because words/sentences with two negative expressions give the listener a stronger negative feeling than the speaker intends.

However a speaker has to add a negative utterance in addition to *iya* if there is a possibility that there are both affirmative and negative answers such as in (10).

It should be noted that *iyaiya* can be used in a relaxed situation such as in (11). Therefore *iyaiya* is used for softening the nuance of negation rather than emphasizing *iya*.

.*Iya* in order to signal negation

Iya is used for not only yes-no questions, but also at the beginning of the answer of a wh-question.

- (12) J: Soosuruto, ma, dooyuu kaishoohoo o okangae ni
then What kind of how to dissolve ACC think
nattemasu, ima
HON now
Then what kind of stress reduction are you thinking about, now?
K: *Iya* moo *iyaa* desukara moo nigeba ga nai to yuu ka taihen
No no then shelter SUBJ no very
kurushii omoi o shiteru wake nandesu kedo
hard thinking ACC do COP HON
Well, it is very hard for me not to have a place to escape.
- (13) J: Ikkyo ni 48 manbu besuto seraa ni natta wake
At a stroke DAT 48,000 books best seller DAT became
desu yo ne, kore wa moo saisho do, doonandeshoo yosoo wa
COP HON this TOP first how expectation TOP
At a stroke, the book became best seller. 480,000 books were

sold. Was this your expectation?

K: *Iyaiyaiya*, mo, tondemonai desu ne.
No no no surprising COP HON FP
Well, it's surprising.

(14) M: Soide dooyuu koosu ga onozomi ka na, ano, han'nichi
Then what kind of course SUBJ wish HON um half a day
Okayama kankoo wa
Sightseeing TOP
**What kind of places do you want go for sightseeing for half a day`
in Okayama?**

N: *Iya* nandemo ii yo
No anything good
Um any plan is O.K.

According to the question *Doo*, it is enough for the speakers to respond with: a good way to relax, in (12); his prediction, in (13); and his wish, in (14). It is not necessary for the speaker to say Yes or No. However if the speaker uses *Iya*, he/she shows his/her attitude immediately. It is one of the signals of negation.

In addition, *Iya* at the beginning of quotation is also a signal of negation.

(15) L: Dakara denwa ippon de moo kocchi kara ginkoo
Therefore telephone one time even this place from bank
kara tondeiku noni ne, dooshitandesu ka ttettara
from go like flying what's happen say
iya watashi wa okane o kari ni kiteru to
no I TOP money ACC borrow come
**If you give us a call, a bank clerk will visit you. Therefore he asked him why he
didn't give us a call and come to our bank. Then he told him that I came to this
bank to borrow money.**

The question from the bank includes the connotation that the person does not need to wait. As the speaker knows that situation, he/she uses *Iya* to indicate the following meaning: He/She may not need to wait, *but* he/she has to wait like other people because he/she comes here to borrow money.

.Iya for consideration to others

To respond to the utterance of thankfulness and apology, *Iya* is often used. Negative responses such as *Arigatoo gozaimasu! Ie, dooitashimashite* or *Sumimasen! Iyaiya* are often used for being modest and waiving the thankfulness or apology of the other person (Yamane 1993). We can also see such a usage of *Iya* in these data. Especially *Iyaiya* is often used.

(16) V: Suimasen nanka oisogashii jikan o torasete shimatte
Sorry busy time ACC take CAUSE
**Sorry to bother you. You are busy, but you have to spend time
on me.**

X: *Iyaiya* moo ima haittoru wake
No no now start
No. Not at all. The recording has already started?

Iya is also used for modesty towards the appraisal of the other person.

- (17) G: Toojoo san, seppuku seneba naranedomo kiritaku mo ari
Mr. perform hara-kiri must but want hara-kiri
 kiritaku mo nashitte yuu no datta wa ne.
want hara-kiri no was FP
It's one that goes, "Mr. Toojoo must perform hara-kiri, but he may want to or may not"
- I: suggoi surudori
Very sharp
You are very sharp.
- G: Iyaiya soshitara Kawakami Santaroo sensei kara desu ne,
No then master from is
 taihen homete itadaite
very praise HON
No, I don't think so. Then my master Santaroo Kawakami praised it.

G, who is praised about a *senryuu* (humorous poem) by I, uses *Iyaiya* to show modesty. The following (18) also shows modesty.

- (18) X: Takken toorun kana, yuushuu jaken toorun jaroo na
Pass Q smart pass COP FP
Will he pass Takken, I wonder? Probably he will pass the test because he is smart.
- V: Iya son'nakoto nai to omoimasu.
No that kind of thing no think HON
Well, I don't think so.

V's former boss X tells V that V's husband has an ability to pass the special test (takken). After that V uses *iya* even if she thinks her husband will pass the test. It is natural for Japanese to use *iya* to show modesty.

Iya in ambiguity

Iya appears when the speaker does not want to answer Yes/No clearly at the beginning of a turn..

- (19) V: Terebi mo kootan
TV bought
You bought a TV, didn't you?
- W: Iya terebi wa, ano, akko ya, xx(the name of the electric shop) ga
No TV TOP well that SUBJ
 motte koyoo to shita kedo mate yuutanja
bring but wait said
Well, that electric shop tried to bring TV, but I said "Wait."
- V: A, kooton wa kooton, moo
Bought TOP bought already
You already bought a TV, didn't you?
- W: Iya, watashi wa son'na ni omoute nakatta kedo
No I TOP so much think did not but
 ma, xx no shitenchoo ga moo uchi oshikakete
GEN manager SUBJ my house come without an appointment
 motte kiyon
bring come

**No, I didn't think so, but the manager of that branch brought
a TV without an appointment**

The speaker W already bought a TV. Therefore W can use the affirmative response "Yes" instead of *iya*. However W uses *iya* to reflect the fact that W bought not only a TV but also a curtain and furniture. W feels he has wasted money and he feels embarrassed.

That kind of *iya* can also be seen in (20):

(20): N: Getsuyoobi ga ne, chotto mata betsu na kenkyuukai ga atte
Monday SUB a little again another meeting SUBJ is
sono junbi shinakucha ikenaindesu yo.
That preparation must do COP HON
**On Monday we have another meeting, therefore I have to
prepare for it.**

M: Ma, son'na mon hayaku shitoite dandori ga warui naa, nani o
quick do procedure SUBJ bad what ACC
shitendesu ka. A, soo desu ka, iyaiyaa nee.
do COP HON so COP HON no no
**Why don't you prepare a little bit earlier? Your plan doesn't
work well. I see. Um, I know what you mean.**

The speaker M is disappointed to hear that N has to come back to his hometown from Okayama immediately because of his work. However it is inappropriate for M to criticize N or complain about N tediously or express disappointment to N. M expresses that kind of feeling by using *Iya*.

Iya in commencing an utterance

Iya can be used to commence an utterance. According to Yamane (2002), it is a filler. However, the context of using *Iya* has the tendency to feel like negation.

First, let us see an example which does not feature turns..

(21) Ano, fukuzatsu yamon ano okeshoo nurimachigootara nee ue to
Well complicated well make-up up and
shita machigoo temo taihen ya ro. *Iya* dakedo fukuzatsu yakara
down mistake awful No but complicated
jaken ano nendai ga takoo natta hito wa ano okeshoo suru koto
that age SUBJ rising became person TOP um, make-up
wasuren yoo ni shite hoshiin
forget do want
**Make-up is complicated. It is awful if we don't make up beautifully. But it is very
important for elder persons to make up because it is a good exercise to do that.**

This utterance is about personal grooming and ways to prevent senility. In it, the speaker's train of thought is as follows:

It takes a lot of time to makeup to become beautiful. →It is tiresome and it is awful if we do not makeup beautifully. →But she does not makeup. →However it is not good thinking. →To makeup is a good way to avoid becoming senile. →Therefore it is good to makeup. *Iya* at the beginning of utterance expresses the meaning of "however" above.

Second, let us see *Iya* at the beginning of a turn..

(22) D :Watashi toyuu yoko ni koo, ee, ten ga utte arimasu kedo
I besides dot SUBJ strike is
konoyooni gozaimasu kedomo
like this there-is HON

Beside the letter I, there is a dot. The dot is there like this.

E: Maa hitsuyoo nakattano ka doo ka yoku wakaranain desu kedo

Well, necessity well don't understand COP HON

sokoniwa ma ichioo ano watakushi to yuu kanji no yoko ni

there I Chinese character besides

chon o ano ten o utte chotto chigau watashi ni narimashitatte yuu

dot ACC um dot ACC strike a little different I become

mejirushi ni ichio sasete itadaitan desu kedo ne

mark do CAUSE receive HON COP HON FP

Well, I doubt the necessity of the dot. But beside the Chinese character *watashi* [I], I put a dot because that *watashi* is a slightly different form *watashi* than before.

D: *Iya*, mo, ano, watakushi yomashite itadaite moo sono ma hontoni

No I read CAUSE HON truly

ano iron'na ma haha no basho toka desu ne

various mother place etc COP HON FP

Well, I read this book and I felt various kinds of things such as mother's place.

As Moriyama(1996) explained, *iya* at the beginning of the utterance is used as a marker of discontinuous context. However, the discontinuity seems to contain the feeling of negation. (22) is a dialogue between the author E and the interviewer D. However, the *iya* of D contains the nuance that the speaker is not just reflecting on the placement of a dot but on the story's profoundness.

A comparison of *iya*, *iyaiya*, *ie*, and *iie*

As I explained in the previous section, the basic meaning of *iya* contains negation. However the degree of negation varies from a vague to a strong negation, where the previous utterance is completely denied. *Iyaiya* is often used to soften the utterance rather than strengthen its meaning. *Iyaiya* is also used to express modesty or to save the listener's face.

Then which part of discourse is *iie* and *ie* and how often do we use them? For which functions of *iya* can we substitute *iie*? First, *iie* only appears in three examples in these data. In addition, the modesty *iya* of e.g.18 cannot be exchanged with *lie*. From this research, we can see that the type of utterance in which we can use *iie* is limited, and usually we do not use *iie* even if we can.

Second, we will look at alternate forms of *iie*. *ie* appears in seven examples, *leie* appears in 11 examples and *leieie* appears in three examples. However *ie* can be exchanged with *Iya* of (2), (11), (12), (15), (16), (17), (21) in addition to (4) to (6). Therefore *ie* has more functions than *lie*. Especially, seven examples of *ieie* and two examples of *ieieie* are polite refusals of thankfulness and/or apology. The usage of *iya*, for showing consideration to other people can be changed easily.

From this data, we might conclude that *iya* is the most frequently used because it has a feeling of vagueness and the least feeling of negation among the markers of negation including: *iie*, *ie*, and *iya*. In addition, if the alternate forms *ieie* and *iyaiya* are used, it is often to show consideration to others.

Conclusion

This research concludes that *Iya* has a widespread meaning and is frequently used. The usage of *Iya* is divided into three types:

- (1) Simple negation: to express the negation to the previous word or utterance;
- (2) Negation to show consideration to others: to politely refuse thankfulness, apology or praise;
- (3) Negation as a signal: to assume the negative nuance from a context.

The common feeling of the speaker using the above is to signal to the listener a mollified expression of negation.

I will examine a variety of data and the relationship with gender in further studies.

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