

Deictic Properties of Origami Technical Terms and Translatability: Cross-Linguistic Differences

Koichi Tateishi
Kobe College

The hardship diagram translators/interpreters often experience between English and Japanese (and also with other European languages) is due to deictic differences between the two languages, which make it difficult to achieve proper translations for some terms.

For the English term, “Fold corner to corner and unfold,” the Japanese use two expressions, “Corner-OBJECT corner-*e* fold,” and “Corner-OBJECT corner-*ni* fold,” where both *e* and *ni* mean *to* in English. When unfolding is the next step, more people tend to use *ni* rather than *e*. The only differences between *ni* and *e* are that *e* implies ‘gone forever’, while *ni* implies ‘staying only tentatively (or temporarily?)’. English does not make this distinction.

There are two possibilities to explain this difference: 1. Japanese stop their viewpoints at where paper have been, and wait and see what happens to paper, while English-speaking people’s viewpoints change while MAKING ACTIONS to paper according to where they do so, and 2. It is just ignorance on the English side about such delicate semantic distinction. I will, of course, take the former view.

The evidence can be found in many origami terms in the two languages, two of which I will mention here. First, reverse folds are ACTIONS on the folded flaps, while the Japanese words *nakawari*, “cracking into the center,” and *kabuse*, “covering,” have another patients of the events, the rest of the sheet being cracked and covered. Second, Japanese still does not have a proper translation of an English term, “open/closed sink,” which shows Japanese are not good at expressing ACTIONS in origami. There are still many others.

The differences alter creators' psychological attitudes. The neural-network paths from origami for Japanese are thicker towards nature than nurture. Thus, Japanese creators tend to be satisfied with creating only crease patterns, not caring for diagrams. Paper becoming something else IS a model for Japanese. (300 Words)
(Bibliographies to be given in the paper)