

## ***Irassyaimase* as an Unreplyable Utterance in Japanese: Analysis of Ostensible Hospitality**

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**Abstract:** *Irassyaimase* is a greeting often heard in Japan upon entering shops or stores. In general, a greeting is to be responded to with an equivalent expression. However, a response to *irassyaimase* is not expected. Such a greeting expression is thus called an “unreplyable utterance.” The aim of this study is threefold: (1) to observe how the expression *irassyaimase* is used in banks, shops, and stores in Japan; (2) to point out that it is not always intended for substantial communication, that is, it is used as an unrepliable utterance; and (3) to reveal that such expressions are generally used to create an atmosphere of caring for customers, despite being a one-way communication compared to corresponding situations in Western countries such as Germany. The results of this study help to clarify why routine phrases conveying what is generally regarded as obvious are often used in various situations in Japan with respect to ostensible hospitality.

**Keywords:** *Irassyaimase*, Japanese pragmatics, ostensible hospitality, unrepliable utterance

### **1. Introduction**

When entering a convenience store in Japan, I always hear the phrase *irassyaimase*<sup>1</sup> uttered loudly in a bright voice from inside the store. If there are several assistants working in the store, they say the expression sometimes one after another and at other times in chorus. This expression is a kind of a greeting interjection, similar to *welcome*, uttered toward customers entering shops and stores out of politeness, that is, consideration for others due to smooth communication (Ide, 1988). However, a verbal reply is not expected in this case, although a greeting should be generally responded to with its equivalent, usually the same expression, such as *Good afternoon* to *Good afternoon*, which is often observed as an adjacency pair in phatic communication (Malinowski, 1923; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). This case in stores is not applicable to the general greeting exchange ritual because there is no appropriate verbal expression for replying to *irassyaimase* uttered by store assistants. In this sense, the expression can be labelled as “unreplyable.” Therefore, it is called an “unreplyable utterance” in this study. Japan is said to be a country of *omotenasi*,<sup>2</sup> the Japanese way of hospitality, and the unrepliable greeting *irassyaimase* can be regarded as a realization of *omotenasi* because it is a formulaic phrase uttered to welcome customers.

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<sup>1</sup>The romanization of Japanese has two systems: *Hepburn* romanization and *Kunrei-shiki* romanization. The latter system is appropriate for the purpose of analysis of Japanese expressions. Therefore, Japanese expressions in this study are written in the *Kunrei-shiki* romanization system.

<sup>2</sup>The word *omotenasi* was used with special gesture by a Japanese journalist in a presentation to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in Buenos Aires on September 7th, 2013, to invite the IOC to hold the Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hggygKWwhg>; <https://toyokeizai.net/articles/-/19147>). Since then, the word has often been mentioned in media in Japan and was recognized as one of the trendy words in 2013.

However, hearing the expression *irassyaimase* sometimes causes discomfort. Such an uncomfortable feeling caused by the expression has been explored across different Internet media, blogs, and Twitter, where various critical opinions on *irassyaimase* are offered and discussed. In most cases, it is speculated that the cause of such a negative feeling lies in the use of the expression itself. However, the speculations seem to be subjective and unclear because most of them have not been discussed from a linguistic point of view. Accordingly, in this study, the problem of the use of the expression *irassyaimase* will be analyzed linguistically from the point of view of intercultural communication. The questions for starting the study are as follows: (1) Why is the expression uttered by most of the crew when entering a shop? (2) Why is the expression uttered even when not seeing customers? (3) Why is the expression uttered repeatedly as the customers pass a shop assistant? To answer these questions, it would be necessary to consider the viewpoints such as “routine formulas,” “repetition,” and “mentioning of the obvious” as key concepts for the analysis, which could be useful to clarify what *omotenasi* represents for Japanese. By analyzing the use of the greeting expression *irassyaimase*, the study reveals that *omotenasi* is a kind of ostensible hospitality reflected in public communication in Japan.

## 2. Problem Description

### 2.1. Greetings for Initiating and Ending a Communication

Greeting expressions and their use for initiating and ending a contact in shops and stores varies across different cultures. In general, replying to greetings is obligatory in Germany, whereas it is not always necessary in Japan.

Such an interaction can be observed, for example, in conversations between a teller and a customer at a bank. In Germany, it is usual for the customer to initiate, control, and end a conversation because he or she needs something there. Therefore, a conversation is initiated by the customer who utters the greeting expression, as in the following example (cf. Marui, Nishijima & Reinelt, 1990):

Customer: *Guten Tag!*  
 (“Good afternoon!”)  
 Teller: *Guten Tag!*

Then, the customer can state his or her business.

After the business has been completed, the customer will acknowledge the end of business:

Customer: *Das war’s. Danke, auf Wiedersehen.*  
 (“That’s all. Thank you, good-bye.”)  
 Teller: *Auf Wiedersehen.*

Using the expression *Das war’s*, the customer states the end of his or her business. Then, the customer declares the ending of the conversation. Exchanges of such interactional greeting rituals at the beginning and end of the conversation are obligatory in Germany each time to establish and dissolve a relationship between conversation participants for cooperation in the business.

In contrast, in a corresponding situation in Japan, a bank teller usually initiates contact and greets the customer with the expression *irassyaimase*. As a response to the utterance, the customer can then begin to state his or her business without using any greeting expressions.

Teller: *Irassyaimase*.

Customer: *Ginko koza-o kaisetsu.s-i-tai-no desu-ga*  
 Bank account-ACC open-CONJwant-GEN POL-PART  
 (“I’d like to open a bank account.”)

When the teller thinks that the business is about to be done, he or she is going to ask whether the customer needs anything else:

Teller: *Hoka-ni go-yōken-wa gozai-mas-e-n-ka?*  
 extra-DAT HON-business-TOP RESP-POL-CONJ-NEG-INTR  
 (“Is there anything else?”)

Customer: *Iie*.  
 (“No.”)

Teller: *Arigatōgozai-mas-i-ta*.  
 thank.exist.RESP-POL-CONJ-PAST.  
 (“Thank you very much.”)

The bank teller asks the customer: *hokani goyōken wa gozaimasenka?* (“Would you like anything else?”) The customer replies: *iie* (“No.”). The bank clerk says: *arigatō gozaimasita* (“Thank you very much.”), which is interestingly different from the conversation in German, because the bank teller thanks the customer, not vice versa. Then, the customer can leave without saying anything to the teller. In this way, the conversation in Japan is basically controlled by the clerk, in contrast to the German conversation above. In Japan, in general, it is not obligatory to form a relationship between a customer and a clerk by exchanging interactional greetings at shops before starting a business, because the relationship is assumed to be given, that is, already guaranteed by the situational and institutional setting (cf. Marui et al., 1990).

The expression *irassyaimase* in Japanese is generally considered to imply both a welcome and gratitude for coming, although it is formally a polite imperative expression, and it literally means, “Please come in.” During the face-to-face conversation in the bank setting described above, however, the function of the expression *irassyaimase* can be interpreted more concretely as a polite request for the customer to state his or her business (i.e., *What can I do for you?* Or, *Was kann ich für Sie tun?* in German). Therefore, the customer can state his or her business directly, as discussed in the example above. It shows that the clerk is expressing the attitude of welcome and trying to conduct the business smoothly, that is, without hesitation.

Interestingly, however, I sometimes feel discomfort upon hearing the expression *irassyaimase* in banks and other shops. This is probably because the same expression is often used in a different manner, especially as a greeting without expecting any response. For example, when I browse through a supermarket, salespersons will say *irassyaimase* to me without even looking at me whenever they pass me, although I am already in the store. Such an utterance seems to be used almost automatically, and a reply is not expected. Recently, however, the unreplyable expression is sometimes

accompanied by another greeting expression such as *kon'nitiwa* (“Good afternoon.”) when entering a store at daytime. The relatively new usage of *irassyaimase kon'nitiwa* can also cause discomfort.<sup>3</sup>

The above examples of the use of *irassyaimase* show that the expression has various functions, such as (1) a polite invitation to come in; (2) an interjection expressing welcome; (3) a prompter for a customer to state the business; and (4) a signal that one is aware of customer’s presence and is always ready to serve him or her.

## 2.2. Research Questions

Based on the description of the various functions of the expression *irassyaimase* above, the following six research questions can be posed:

- (1) How did the original imperative expression *irassyaimase* become an alternative greeting to welcome?
- (2) In what situations is the expression *irassyaimase* used as an unreplyable utterance?
- (3) For what purposes is the expression *irassyaimase* used as an unreplyable utterance?
- (4) Why is the expression *irassyaimase* sometimes accompanied by other greeting expressions such as *kon'nitiwa*, *konbanwa*, or *ohayōgozaimasu*?
- (5) Why do I sometimes feel discomfort when greeted with *irassyaimase* in banks or shops, although its use is conventional, that is, it means *welcome*?
- (6) Are there any other unreplyable utterances or expressions similar to *irassyaimase* with respect to its functions?

## 3. Methods

To answer Research Question 1, the expression *irassyaimase* will be analyzed grammatically on the basis of *Kojien* (Shinmura, 2008), a reliable Japanese language dictionary. To answer Research Questions 2–4, situations where the expression *irassyaimase* is often uttered will be analyzed heuristically from an interactional point of view. Concerning Research Question 5, based on the results of analysis of Research Questions 1–4, it will be speculated why I sometimes feel wrongness or discomfort upon hearing the expression *irassyaimase* from the crew in stores. To answer Research Question 6, conversations and announcements where the obvious is mentioned are observed, and their expressions are analyzed from an interactional point of view in relation to ostensible hospitality.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1. Research Question 1: Grammatical Analysis of *Irassyaimase*

As mentioned above, the expression *irassyaimase* is usually used as a greeting to express welcome or gratitude for coming. However, it is formally and literally a polite imperative, which means “Please come in.” In this section, the expression *irassyaimase*

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<sup>3</sup> Oddness of such a compound expression has been pointed out in some blogs, such as <https://bite-tengoku.com/2018/05/13/opinion-5/>. Kokami (2006) argued that such expressions creep customers out.

will be analyzed grammatically based on the lexical explanation of the dictionary *Kojien* to try to explain how it got a different use as a greeting expressing welcome. Incidentally, the expression has a variant form: *irassyaimasi*. Both expressions are semantically and pragmatically same. The difference between them is only formal in their conjugated forms of the polite auxiliary verb *masu*, which has two imperative forms: *mase* and *masi*. Generally, *irassyaimase* is used more often than *irassyaimasi*. Therefore, this study limits the discussion to the expression *irassyaimase*.

The expression *irassyaimase* is a euphonicly changed variant form of *irassyaimase* expression. The phoneme /r/ in the middle of *irassyaimase* can be dropped so that it is easier to pronounce. The former is used more frequently. Thus, in the following, the expression *irassyaimase* will be analyzed exclusively.

*Irassyaimase* is a composition of the honorific verb *irassyar-u* and the polite auxiliary verb *mas-u*, and it can be analyzed as follows:

*Irassyar-i-mas-e.*  
come.RESP-CONJ-AUX.POL-IMP  
("Please come.")

The linguistic form *irassyar-i* is derived from the honorific verb *irassyar-u*, which was originally abbreviated from the honorific verb *iraserar-u*. The original expression *iraserar-u* is composed of the verbs *iru* for *iku* ("go"), *kuru* ("come"), and *iru* ("be"), and so on, and the respect auxiliary verbs *su* and *raru*, and therefore means "go," "come," and "be" as behaviors of the interlocutor in higher position. The expression *mase* is an imperative form derived from the polite auxiliary verb *mas-u*. The glossing above shows that the expression *irassyar-imase* is formally an imperative, and the meaning is originally a polite request for others to come in, such as "Please come in." The sentence was traditionally uttered routinely to invite customers passing near a shop to come into the shop.

There are other expressions similar to *irassyaimase*: *yoku/yō irassyaimasita*, and *yōkoso irassyaimasita*. *Yō* is a euphonicly changed variant of the adverb *yoku* (well), which is used in this context as evaluation of overcoming difficulties. *Yōkoso* is a euphonicly changed variant of *yokukoso*, which is a compound of the adverb *yoku* and the particle for emphasis *koso*. Nowadays, the part *yōkoso* is often used independently as a conventional greeting form for welcome,<sup>4</sup> as discussed in more detail further in text. The same conventionalization can be observed in the expression *dōmo arigatōgozaimasita* ("Thank you very much."), for example. The emphasis *dōmo* ("very much") has come to be used independently as the expression for "Thank you."

The expression *yōkosoirassyaimasita* can be analyzed grammatically as follows:

*Yō-kosoirassyar-i-masi-ta*  
(Good emphasis) come.RESP-CONJ-AUX.POL-CONJ-AUX.PAST  
("It's good (you) have come.")

The difference between the main parts of the expressions *irassyaimase* and *irassyaimasita* is in their ending forms: *mas-e* and *mas-i-ta*. The ending *ta* is a past

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<sup>4</sup>On the Windows start screen in Japanese, *yokoso* appears, whereas in English, the word *welcome* is displayed.

tense auxiliary verb. Therefore, *mas-e* and *mas-i-ta* are imperative and past tense forms of *mas-u*, respectively. The primary meaning of the expression *yōkoso irassyaimasita* is a confirmation of the (difficult) arrival of the interlocutor, which entails a feeling of gladness of the speaker expressed to the interlocutor. Therefore, the whole expression has come to be used as welcome. The emphasis part *yōkoso* has been gradually used solely as the expression for welcome. Nowadays, however, it has come to be used as the conventional expression for welcome, as mentioned above. The compound form of *yōkoso irassyaimasita* is regarded as a more formal expression.

The two expressions with different meanings have the part *irassyai-i* in common. The common part *irassyai-i* is a conjunctive form of the respect verb *irassyaru-u* in connection to the polite auxiliary verb *masu*, whereas the *irassyai-i* can also be used solely as an imperative form of *irassyaru*. The situations in which the two expressions *irassyaimase* and (*yokoso*) *irassyaimasita* were used were almost common. In such situations, the common linguistic item *irassyai* has gradually acquired the meaning of welcome, in addition to a request to come in. As a result, the expression *irassyai* has received two usages: as a greeting interjection for *welcome* and as an imperative for *come in*. In fact, the two usages of the expression can be illustrated by the following example:

*Irassyai. Kotira-ni irassyai-i.*  
welcome. here-to come.RESP-IMP

The expression *irassyai* in the first sentence is an interjection for welcome, whereas in the second sentence, it is an imperative form. *Irassyai* with two different meanings can be used differently in the same situation. This utterance can also be paraphrased more politely with the polite auxiliary verb *masu*:

*Irassyaimase. dozokotira-ni irassyai-i-mas-e.*  
welcome. please here-to come.RESP-CONJ-AUX.POL.AUX-IMP

The abbreviated expression *irassyai* can be used alone, but in such a case, it is sometimes regarded as not polite enough, although it is formally an honorific verb. Based on this feeling, it can be supposed that the *irassyaimase* with the polite auxiliary verb *mase* has come to be used as a polite form of *irassyai* for welcome.<sup>5</sup>

## 4.2. Research Question 2: In What Situations Are Unreplyable Utterances Spoken?

### 4.2.1. The Use of *Irassyaimase* and *Arigatō Gozaimasita* When Entering and Leaving a Bank

#### 4.2.1.1. Unreplyable *Irassyaimase* and *Arigatō Gozaimasita*

Unreplyable utterances such as *irassyaimase* can be heard in a bank, for example. Upon entering a bank, you are greeted with *irassyaimase* from most of the clerks working

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<sup>5</sup>This discussion is supported by the explanations from the Japanese dictionaries, such as *Obunsha Kokugo Jiten* (Obunsha Japanese language dictionary) (10th edition, Tokyo: Obunsha, 2009, p. 105). For a similar discussion, see Iseki (2019).

inside the bank in chorus. It may be hard to respond to it because many people are greeting you at the same time, while usually working without seeing you. In this case, a reply is not expected. Therefore, the expression can be regarded as unreplyable. The expression *irassyaimase* can be interpreted as a message acknowledging that you have been welcomed, and it creates a welcoming atmosphere. For this purpose, it is obligatory for crews to utter *irassyaimase* in a bright voice when customers enter the store.

When leaving the bank, you will hear *arigatō gozaimasita* (“Thank you very much.”) from all the clerks behind you in chorus. It is also hard to respond to this expression because many people are greeting you from behind at a time. In this case, a reply is also not expected. Therefore, the expression can be regarded as unreplyable or unexpected to reply. The expression *arigatō gozaimasita* can be interpreted as a confirmation that you have been thanked by the bank, and it projects an atmosphere of gratitude to customers and expectations to visit again. In this way, it is also obligatory for the bank clerks to utter *arigatō gozaimasita* in a bright voice to customers right before they leave the bank.

*Irassyaimase* and *arigatō gozaimasita* as unreplyable utterances are basically uttered by all the crew members working at a bank in chorus without seeing you. It must be believed that such utterances cried in chorus when customers enter and leave banks create a welcoming atmosphere projecting the feelings of gratitude to customers. However, the problem is that it is hard to convey such attitudes and feelings to customers using utterances. For a more detailed discussion, see below.

#### 4.2.1.2. Replyable *Irassyaimase*

The expression *irassyaimase* sometimes should be responded to, that is, it is replyable. If you are already in a bank and are going to a clerk at a teller, you are possibly greeted directly by the clerk:

Bank clerk: *Irassyaimase.*

In this situation, however, you can respond to the same expression *irassyaimase* with *ohayō gozaimasu* (“Good morning.”), for example, if it is in the morning because the utterance is issued personally, from the clerk to you. However, the response is not obligatory in Japan. Instead, you can state your business immediately without any greeting because the utterance can be regarded as the expression by which the clerk encourages you to state the purpose of your visit. No greeting by customers in a conversation is not a problem in Japan (Marui et al., 1990).

#### 4.2.2. *Irassyaimase* When Browsing Through Stores

Suppose you are in a supermarket with many shopping assistants. When you pass them while looking around and browsing, you will usually hear the expression *irassyaimase* repeatedly from every assistant. The utterance does not seem to be intended to start a conversation with you because the assistants utter the expression automatically without looking at you when you are passing by.

Furthermore, you can hear the same assistant utter *irassyaimase* to you every time you pass him or her. The utterance *irassyaimase* in these situations is not expected to be

responded to because the assistant utters or cries it automatically without seeing customers. Therefore, it is unreplyable. However, you may feel uneasiness because you are greeted, but you are not expected to reply. Why does the shop crew utter the unreplyable expression repeatedly then?

#### 4.3. Research Question 3: For What Purposes Are Unreplyable Utterances Spoken?

The purpose of the expressions above is not to communicate with you, because they are uttered automatically and in chorus by many people, or in many cases, people who utter them are not even seeing you. Then, why are these expressions uttered to customers?

They seem to be uttered to show customers that the bank or the store welcomes them and is always ready to listen to their needs and wants. Greeting words uttered to customers are understood in Japan as polite behavior because of the attention paid to customers, which also implies the willingness to care about customers and make them feel good.

The reason why the expression *irassyaimase* is uttered repeatedly can be explained as follows: Saying *irassyaimase* to customers shows the readiness to care about them if they need help. Therefore, shop assistants often say or cry these expressions to customers repeatedly.

There can be another explanation: crime prevention (Kawamoto, 2011). Saying *irassyaimase* repeatedly to customers is also done to imply that their presence is known, thus preventing possible shoplifting or theft.

#### 4.4. Research Question 4: Why Is the Expression *Kon'nitiwa* Sometimes Added to *Irassyaimase*?

Recently, *irassyaimase* has often been uttered together with another greeting expression, *kon'nitiwa*, which has also been discussed in some blogs and Kokami (2006). According to the author's students who do a part-time job in convenience stores and secondhand bookstores in Japan, they were told to greet customers with such compound expressions. There are arguments both for and against the compound use of *irassyaimase kon'nitiwa*:<sup>6</sup> One of the supporting arguments is that the compound can invite customers to make contact with a shopkeeper and assistants. In contrast, a confronting argument is that the greeting *kon'nitiwa* is uttered without expectation of any response from the interlocutor, although it usually requires a reply. In this sense, the expression *irassyaimase* can be regarded as one of the interesting expressions in Japanese.

*Kon'nitiwa* is usually a greeting expression used in an encounter between acquaintances during daytime. As a greeting, it is expected to be responded to with the same expression, which is different from the unreplyable expression *irassyaimase*. Based on the daily use of *kon'nitiwa*, it can be assumed that the addition of *kon'nitiwa* can change the unreplyable utterance into a replyable one. Just only the utterance of

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<sup>6</sup>Another one of the supporting opinions: “henji-o hikidasu kotoba-o tsukemasho [let's add expressions eliciting a reply]” where it is recommended to add some expressions such as *kon'nitiwa* to *irassyaimase*. It is available at <https://arainaoyuki.com/?p=842>. Another one of the confronting opinions: “baitokeigo-ni monomōsu [object to manual honorifics]” where it is pointed out that the combination is pragmatically wrong in the blog available at <https://www.goodcross.com/words/4049-2016>.



*irassyaimase* would be unreplyable, but the compound use could make the utterance replyable because *kon'nitiwa* is a greeting that is expected to be responded to. Theoretically, customers can reply to the compound greeting with *kon'nitiwa*. However, the problem is more complex.

The two expressions *irassyaimase* and *kon'nitiwa* differ in the politeness level: *irassyaimase* is composed of the respective verb *irassyaru* and polite auxiliary verb *masu*. Therefore, it is basically used between people who are psychologically and socially distant, that is, it is uttered by a person of a lower position to a person of a higher position, regardless of whether they are acquainted or not. *Kon'nitiwa* is, however, a greeting that is usually used between acquaintances of equal position. Thus, the politeness gap in the compound expression seems to be odd.

Furthermore, and what is more problematic, the compound use seems to force customers to reply. If addressed by an acquaintance with a greeting expression such as *kon'nitiwa*, you are expected to reply with the same expression. If so, it can be said that you are forced to reply to the expression *irassyaimase kon'nitiwa* because *kon'nitiwa* is usually used to require the interlocutor to reply with the same expression. Therefore, it is odd to use the compound expression in a shop. Of course, the expression *kon'nitiwa irassyaimase* or *kon'nitiwa irassyai* would not be problematic in theory if uttered by a shop assistant to a familiar customer, because the first half of the expression *kon'nitiwa* is usually used when speaking to an acquaintance, and then the second half *irassyaimase* or *irassyai* conveys the attitude of welcome. However, such expressions with a changed word order have not been heard in any shop.

If the expression *irassyaimase kon'nitiwa* is continued to be used, the function of *kon'nitiwa* would be in danger of becoming a dead phrase because a reply is not expected, although it is usual when greeting with *kon'nitiwa*.

#### **4.5. Research Question 5: Why Do I Sometimes Feel Discomfort When Greeted with *Irassyaimase* in Banks or Shops, Although Its Use Is Conventional, That Is, It Means *Welcome*?**

Based on the analysis for Research Questions 1–4, I will try to explain the reason why I feel uncomfortable when I hear the expression *irassyaimase* in shops.

When I stand in front of the door of a bank or a convenience store, for example, and the door opens automatically, I can hear *irassyaimase* uttered by most of the crew working inside the bank or the store in chorus. The greeting at this stage can be understood as a polite request for customers to enter without hesitation because *irassyaimase* is an imperative form due to the polite imperative auxiliary verb-*mase*. Of course, the expression is conventionally used as a greeting interjection for welcome. This utterance does not always make me feel uncomfortable. This is because the form corresponds with its speech act, although it sometimes makes me feel uncomfortable if the expression is uttered, and I am not visible to crews working at a desk or arranging goods on a shelf, due to insincerity.

Then, I approach a bank teller and hear the same expression *irassyaimase* again from a clerk who is sitting behind the counter. Here is the question: Why is the same request for customers to come in used again although I have already entered the bank? My feeling of discomfort possibly comes from the gap between the linguistic form and the use of the sentence. The expression is formally used as a polite request for customers to enter the bank, whereas it is uttered to the customer who is already there, which can be

explained by the other use as a greeting interjection to express welcome. Based on this interpretation, it is understandable that the expression is obviously conventionally used as a hedge for a request to state the business such as *goyōkenwa nande gozaimasyōka?* (“What can I do for you?”), showing a welcoming attitude by using the expression *irassyaimase* as a greeting interjection, and this explains in part why the expression *irassyaimase* causes discomfort.

Furthermore, when I browse through a supermarket, salespersons there say *irassyaimase* without even looking at me whenever they pass me, although I am already in the store. Such expressions are uttered almost automatically to customers. This makes me unhappy because the utterance is unnecessary. Alternatively, if the expression is used to prevent possible shoplifting or theft, it can cause discomfort because it implies I am being watched.

This explains the cause of discomfort.

#### 4.6. Research Question 6: Are There Any Other Unreplyable Utterances or Expressions Similar to *Irassyaimase* With Respect to Its Functions?

The various functions of the expression *irassyaimase* as an unreplyable utterance are to create an atmosphere of caring about customers by repeating the utterance to welcome them. Such one-way communication of the repetition of routine formulas can be observed in various situations in Japan, such as in public spaces (e.g., on a bus and on a railway station platform) due to the repetition of obvious information to passengers.

Suppose you are on a bus. The driver says *hassyasimasu* (“[the bus] is departing”) every time the bus begins to go, even more, every time the bus moves after it stops at a red light. It is an announcement for passengers to be careful before the bus moves or stops. However, is it necessary to announce it every time? The announcement is repeated every time, although it is obvious to passengers that the bus departs and stops many times. Providing information in such a way to passengers, even about what is obvious, is believed to be creating a caring atmosphere, as a kind of hospitality in public transport.

Suppose then that you are waiting for your train on a platform in a railway station in Japan. You hear the following phrase repeatedly:

*Mamonaku densya-ga mairi-masu*  
soon train-NOM come.RESP-POL.AUX

(“The train is coming soon.”)

*Abunai-desu-kara hakusen-no uchigawa-made*  
dangerous-POL-because white.line-GEN inside-to

*Saga-tte o-machi-kudasai*  
move.back-CONJ HON-wait-please

(“Because it is dangerous, please stay back and wait behind the white line.”)

Such a synthesized message is announced several times until the train arrives at the platform.

The announcements are chanted electronically, which sounds monotonous. After the train arrives, the following announcements can be heard:

*Doa-ga hiraki-masu go-chūi-kudasai*

door-NOM open-POL HON-careful-please  
 (“The doors will open.”) (“Please be careful.”)  
*Doa-ga shimari-masu go-chūi-kudasai*  
 door-NOM close-POL HON-careful-please  
 (“The doors will close.”) (“Please be careful.”)

The utterances announced on the platform convey obvious information because it is apparent that the doors open and close. If so, why are such announcements repeated?

This is possibly because the display of paying attention to and caring about passengers also shows responsibility for the safety of passengers and polite behavior toward them. Therefore, such expressions are uttered repeatedly to display caring attitudes toward customers or passengers.

However, routine phrases are repeated, and as such, they have little cognitive effects on the hearers because they are overheard (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). No one listens to the repeated announcements carefully. Then, why does a bus driver repeat such expressions, or why are the announcements in public transport repeated?

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. The *Omotenasi* Society

The background of using the expression *irassyaimase* in shops and to announce routinized information in public transport is based on an interactional principle: *omotenasi*. In this section, the principle for communicative behavior of *omotenasi* in Japan will be analyzed considering some concepts, such as “routine formulas,” “repetition,” and “mentioning of the obvious.”

Concerning face-to-face communication in Japan, it is generally said that Japanese are reticent. In other words, people do not speak with each other so much, or they do not willingly express their opinions clearly compared to Europeans and North Americans (Naotsuka, 1980). However, fixed linguistic expressions, above all routine phrases, are frequently used on signs or uttered as announcements, which makes linguistic landscapes or soundscapes in Japan flood the public places in Japanese cities, such as sign expressions or announcements in public transport (Honda, Iwata & Kurabayashi, 2017; Kerr, 2014; Nakajima, 2000; Nishijima, 2013). This raises the question, Why are there so many sign expressions in public spaces in Japan? To answer it properly, it is necessary to consider what the expression *omotenasi* represents in Japan because it is regarded as an essential concept for service there.

This expression, which means “Japanese way of hospitality,” is analyzed grammatically as follows:

*o-motenas-i*  
 HON-host-NOML  
 (“hosting [you]”)

In the hospitality industry in Japan, e.g., in restaurants and hotels, *omotenasi* is expected.<sup>7</sup> Such hospitality is shown by making customers and guests feel cherished and valued. Here is an example of a restaurant situation:

*o-matase-itasi-mas-i-ta*  
HON-wait.let-do.RESP-POL.AUX-PAST  
("I let you wait.")

This sentence is often uttered when a waiter serves a meal to a guest. It means that the waiter has let the guest wait for the meal, so the expression entails an apology. It can be uttered even if the meal is brought sooner than expected. This utterance is also regarded as unreplyable and shows consideration for the guest. In this respect, the unreplyable utterances *irassyaimase* and *omataseitasimasita* are both regarded as a kind of *omotenasi* because saying the expressions to customers shows the attitude for paying attention to them to always be ready to help them as discussed above.

## 5.2. Ostensibility

The two types of unreplyable utterances of *irassyaimase* and announcements in public transport were discussed in the previous section. Both types are used to display caring attitudes of staff to customers and passengers, that is, to create an atmosphere reflecting attention and caring about customers or passengers despite one-way communication. Generally, fixed formulaic expressions, that is, routine phrases, are used and repeated. Information or contents expressed by such routine phrases are obvious, or what is obvious/apparent to customers and passengers. The obvious is shown loudly, in other words, ostensibly. Therefore, ostensible repetitions of the obvious as routine phrases are believed to be *omotenasi*, the Japanese ways of hospitality. These points are discussed in more detail below.

### 5.2.1. Routine Formulas

Linguistic expressions used as unreplyable utterances are *irassyaimase* ("welcome"), *arigatogozaimasita* ("thank you very much"), *omataseitasimasita* ("apologies for the wait"), *hassyasimasu* ("[the bus] is departing"), *tomarimasu* ("[the bus] is stopping"), *doagahirakimasu* ("doors close"), and so on. Due to routine formulas, the information conveyed by them is obvious in each situation. Therefore, they can be cried in a bright voice or in chorus automatically. Even if what is spoken in each situation is obvious, it would be uttered repeatedly because speakers believe that stating the obvious to customers or passengers shows the considerations for them or a caring attitude as if the speakers were their guardians.

### 5.2.2. Repetition

As seen above, repeated routine phrases can be regarded as less important. Such expressions are uttered formally and without seeing interlocutors, which makes them

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<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, there is a consulting company teaching *omotenashi* in Japan (<http://www.omotenashi.co.jp/omotenashi-organization/what-omotenashi/>).

detect certain “mindlessness” (Kawamoto, 2011). Even if the expressions are uttered in a brighter voice, they are regarded as formal greetings, that is, the substance is lost because they are repeated automatically or uttered in chorus. However, speakers believe that repeating routine phrases is also to show their consideration for customers or passengers and is good for them.

### 5.2.3. The Obvious

Some studies have pointed out that the obvious is often mentioned at the beginning of a conversation in Japanese (Reinelt, 1983; Sasaki, 1992; Marui, 2006). The following utterances are heard on a train every time it stops at a station:

*Kasa-nado-no o-wasure-mono-no nai-yōni*  
 umbrella-etc-GEN HON-forget-things-GEN not-to  
 (“Do not forget umbrella, and so on.”)

This is also something obvious to passengers because it is responsible for them to manage their belongings. If you hear the routine formula every time when your train stops, you will feel treated as if you were a child because you are repeatedly told what to do. However, in Japan, it is believed that such an announcement favors passengers and is a type of hospitality. Indeed, the announcement leads to a sense of safety. However, repetition is unnecessary because it is obvious to competent adults. Therefore, such expressions are uttered only because of ostensible hospitality to show attention and caring for passengers or customers, although it is generally accepted that such expressions come from kindness (warm-heartedness).

## 6. Concluding Remarks

The results of the study show that the expression *irassyaimase* is sometimes not intended to communicate with customers, but to show hospitality or a caring attitude toward customers by stating the obvious. Furthermore, it was found that there are expressions similar to the unrepliable utterance: announcements in public transport. These expressions also mention what is obvious to competent adults, which is believed to be to express kindness toward passengers. It is regarded as kindness or hospitality in Japan to show ostensible consideration for customers and passengers verbally in various situations.

The data analyzed in this study were limited. To test the validity of the results, it is necessary to collect and analyze other data, which will, however, be done in a future study.

### Abbreviations

ACC: Accusative  
 AUX: Auxiliary verb  
 CONJ: Conjunctive form  
 DAT: Dative  
 HON: Honorifics  
 IMP: Imperative

INTR: Interrogative  
 NEG: Negation  
 NOM: Nominative  
 NOML: Nominalizer  
 PAST: Past tense  
 POL: Polite form  
 RESP: Respect form

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