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The use of Japanese “*iyi*” and Uzbek “*yaxshi*” in Beginner-Level Grammar Patterns

Kuniyuki Noto¹

Abstract

This study investigates the usage of the Japanese adjective *iyi* (“good”) and its Uzbek equivalent *yaxshi* in beginner level sentence patterns. While *iyi* functions broadly in Japanese to express permission, advice, preference, and convenience, *yaxshi* does not appear in expressions of permission. Additionally, the adverbial form *yoku* in Japanese indicates both degree and frequency, but *yaxshi* corresponds only to the degree meaning. The research examines sentence patterns from the *Irodori* textbook, verifies natural usage through consultation with native Uzbek speakers and highlights potential sources of learner misinterpretation, such as the Japanese phrase *iyi desu*. The findings provide practical information for Japanese learners of Uzbek and vice versa, clarifying which functional meanings can be directly expressed and which require alternative expressions. This study contributes to contrastive linguistics by providing detailed cross-linguistic insight into basic vocabulary usage, informing efficient and practical teaching strategies, and addressing an under-researched area in Japanese–Uzbek language studies.

Key words: *iyi, yaxshi, textbook, beginner-level, functional expressions, Uzbek language learning, Japanese language learning, grammar patterns.*

Introduction

Uzbek, one of the Turkic languages, is often said to bear similarities to Japanese. Unfortunately, no phonological rules linking the two languages have been identified, and thus it cannot be demonstrated that they belong to the same language family. Even in the case of basic vocabulary such as kinship terms (e.g., *ota, ona, aka,*

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opa), body-part terms (e.g., *qo'l*, *oyoq*, *yuz*, *ko'z*), and numerals (*bir*, *ikki*, *uch*), no clear correspondences with Japanese can be found. This makes it difficult to regard the two as belonging to the same group.

Even if they do not share a genetic relationship, the similarity of their syntactic structures undoubtedly constitutes an advantage in language learning. For instance, when studying Japanese particles, it is easy to imagine that speakers of Turkic languages would accept them more smoothly than learners whose native languages lack particles altogether. Functional expressions such as *Verb-te ageru*, *V-te miru*, and *V-te oku* are also formed in Uzbek according to similar conceptual patterns, which is advantageous for learning.

souji shite ageru. *tozalab beraman (ageru = bermoq)*

itte miru. *borib ko'raman (miru = ko'rmoq)*

Juice o katte oku. *Sharbat olib qo'yaman. (oku = qo'ymoq)*

The comparison between Japanese *V-te oku* and Uzbek *V-ib qo'y-* has been analyzed in detail by Hidaka [Hidaka 2013]. Other contrastive studies of Uzbek and Japanese include research on the formation of nicknames [Halnazarov, 2015], as well as studies addressing the difficulty of translating idiomatic expressions from a cultural perspective, focusing on Turkish and Japanese [Khamidov & Abdurakhimova, 2021]. From the perspective of Uzbek speakers learning Japanese, several studies have also compared expressions of condition and hypotheticality. For example, Temirova compared the usage and definitions of verb forms expressing commands and conditions [Temirova, 2023]. Since Japanese employs multiple forms for these meanings while Uzbek lacks direct equivalents, learners often struggle with the choice among them. The prevalence of such studies is due to the fact that there are far more opportunities for Uzbek speakers to learn Japanese than vice versa. Globally, the number of learners of these two languages remains limited; accordingly, contrastive studies between Japanese and Uzbek are still at an early stage. Research on Japanese speakers learning Uzbek is particularly scarce. As contrastive research progresses, new approaches to language learning are expected to emerge—approaches that differ from those developed primarily for speakers of English and Chinese, who have thus far been the main focus of Japanese language education.

Research Purpose and Motivation

If the similarities between the languages can be effectively

utilized, explanations of grammar and comprehension can be made more efficient. At the same time, the structural resemblance can become a pitfall if one assumes that expressions can be substituted directly. It is naturally the case that Uzbek sometimes has several alternative ways to express something that Japanese lacks. The Japanese adjective *iyi* (“good”) is precisely such an example. While Japanese allows versatile usage of this basic word, Uzbek employs different lexical items depending on the meaning. Thus, Uzbek learners of Japanese must acquire this differentiation. In this paper, I examine the Japanese adjective *iyi* and the Uzbek *yaxshi*, focusing on how they differ in use. Specifically, I analyze how *iyi* as it appears in beginner-level Japanese textbooks is translated into Uzbek, and compare the usage and semantic range of *iyi* and *yaxshi*. The aim is to provide useful insights both for Uzbek speakers learning Japanese and for Japanese speakers learning Uzbek.

It is worth noting that in Turkish, the word *iyi* – coincidentally very similar in pronunciation to Japanese *iyi* – provided the initial motivation to compare their behavior. However, within the Turkic languages, only Turkish uses *iyi*, while most others use the *yaxshi*-type form. Therefore, this paper compares *iyi* with Uzbek *yaxshi*, not with Turkish *iyi*. Interestingly, the Japanese *iyi* has the more formal variant *yoi*, and in earlier stages was *yoshi* or *yoroshi*. The similarity between *yaxshi* and Japanese *yoshi*, *yoroshi* – though coincidental – is highly intriguing. It should be noted that in this paper, the term *iyi* is deliberately used, considering readability for the intended Uzbek-speaking readership and its incidental affinity with Turkish. It refers to the same item as *ii*, which is a direct Romanization of the Japanese expression.

yoshi > yoi > ii

“Yoroshi” is used when the expression is less strong than “yoshi”. The -shi form still remains today in formal situations and in fixed expressions. Over time, the consonant -shi dropped, becoming -i, and eventually evolving into “ee” in western Japan and “ii” in eastern Japan.

Method

The Japanese *iyi* and Uzbek *yaxshi* in Elementary Sentence Patterns

When students first learn *i*-adjectives at the elementary stage, *iyi* (*yoi*) appears as a basic adjective. Thereafter, *iyi* is used in a wide variety of sentence patterns. In this study, I extracted sentence

patterns containing *iyi* from *Irodori*, a textbook that provides Uzbek translations. *Irodori* is an A1–A2 level textbook consisting of three volumes: Starter, Elementary 1, and Elementary 2 [JF, 2020]. In addition to the initial introduction of *iyi* as an adjective, a total of 14 sentence patterns in which *iyi* functions in various ways were identified. These patterns are not unique to *Irodori*; they are also widely taught at the elementary stage in general.

The 14 patterns were broadly classified into four functional categories: convenience, preference, permission, and advice. For each of these patterns, I examined what kind of expressions are used in Uzbek. In cases where *yaxshi* was not used, I further investigated which Uzbek expressions corresponded to the Japanese forms. Since all Japanese example sentences in the textbook represent scenes of everyday conversation rather than written usage, I also considered how such expressions could naturally be said in daily Uzbek conversation. In other words, I asked native Uzbek university students to confirm whether the expressions using *yaxshi* would sound natural.

Next, I also investigated cases where *iyi* is used as an adverb. In Japanese, *iyi* can appear in the form *yoku*, functioning as an adverb. This is also a basic and high-frequency vocabulary item in Japanese. By examining this usage, I sought to clarify the extent to which *yaxshi* corresponds to *iyi*, in addition to its use in functional expressions.

Results and Discussion

1. Japanese *iyi* Used in Requesting Permission.

The first appearance of *iyi* occurs in Lesson 7 of the *Starter* volume, where adjectives are first introduced. At that point, the phrase *iyi desu ne* appears, and it is translated as *yaxshi*. Subsequently, fourteen sentence patterns containing *iyi* are presented as elementary-level grammar items (see Appendix). In the Uzbek translations of these patterns, the expressions *ma’qul*, *mayli*, and *bo’lmoq* were found to occur.

However, it should be noted that the translations in *Irodori* aim to convey the meaning of the Japanese sentences, and therefore relatively formal expressions are often used. For instance, there is a tendency to employ Arabic-derived vocabulary such as *afzal* and *ma’qul*. This is similar to how Sino-Japanese words function in Japanese: they hold the status of more formal or literary vocabulary. Yet, just as in Japanese actual conversation relies heavily on native

vocabulary, Uzbek also makes frequent use of native items in everyday speech. For this reason, I also examined whether *yaxshi* could be used naturally in actual conversational contexts.

The results showed that in many cases, the expressions could indeed be rendered with *yaxshi*. While there were also instances in the categories of advice, preference, and convenience where *yaxshi* was judged to be less natural, the overwhelming concentration of examples where *yaxshi* was not used lay in the function of permission. In other words, while Japanese can use *iyi* to across all four functional categories – permission, advice, preference, and convenience – Uzbek does not use *yaxshi* for the function of permission.

Table 1. Uzbek Translations of Example Sentences by Function.

Function	Grammar	Uzbekcha	Yaxshi
permission	N, iyi desu ka?	Bu mumkinmi? / Bundan foydalansam maylimi?	✗
	V temo iyi desuka?	Hojatxonaga borib kelsam maylimi?	✗
	V temitemo iyi desuka?	Bu sviterni kiyib ko'rsam maylimi?	✗
advice	V ruto iyi desu.	Yaxshi uxlay olmasangiz, iliq suvli vannaga kirib miriqib dam olsangiz yaxshi.	✓
	[so'roq so'z] V tara iyi desuka?	Nikkoga bormoqchi edim, nimada borsam bo'ladi?	✗
	V tahouga iyi desu.	Issiq ust kiyimlarni olib borganingiz ma'qul. / yaxshi.	✓
	V naihouga iyi desu.	Iloji bo'lsa, yakshanba kuni bormagan ma'qul. / yaxhi.	✓
	V ba, iyi desuka?	Dafn marosimiga nima olib borganim ma'qul? / yaxshi?	✓
preference	N1 to N2, dotchiga iyi desuka?	Shokoladli tort va chizkeykdan qaysi birini ma'qul ko'rasiz? / qaysi biri siz uchun yaxshi?	✓
	Dorega iyi desuka?	Choyning turlari ko'p. Qaysi birini ma'qul ko'rasiz? Siz uchun qaysi biri yaxshi?	✓
	N no houga iyi desu.	Tuzni afzal ko'raman. Menga tuz yaxshi.	✓
	[so'roq so'z] demo iyi desu.	Farqi yo'q, nima bo'lsa ham bo'laveradi.	✗

convenience	[sana va vaqt]ga iyi desu.	Menga shanba kuni qulay. / yaxshi.	✓
	N demo iyi desu ka?	Soat 6 yarim ham bo'ladimi?	✗

At present, the few existing Uzbek-language textbooks designed for Japanese learners mainly follow a grammatical syllabus, while functional syllabi are not well developed. Consequently, approaches that focus on how to express specific functional meanings in Uzbek remain insufficient. Once learners acquire the word *yaxshi*, it is natural for Japanese speakers to attempt to express all of these functions using *yaxshi*. However, the fact that *yaxshi* does not appear in expressions of **permission** provides valuable information for Japanese learners.

2. Usage as an Adverb: To What Extent Can *yaxshi* Cover It?

In addition to its use as a functional expression, Japanese *iyi* often appears in the adverbial form *yoku*. In this usage, its meaning can be divided into three categories: frequency, degree, and evaluation [Kawabata, 2016; 2020]. In *Irodori*, only the meanings of degree and frequency are introduced. Among these, it appears that *yaxshi* is used in Uzbek only for the sense of degree.

Table 2. Example Sentences with Adverbial Use of *iyi* (*yoku*)

Darslik	Dars	grammatika	Uzbekcha	Yaponcha
Kirish	5	tez-tezligi	Odatda non, tuxum va yogurt tanovul qilaman.	Watashiwa, pan to tamago to yooguruto o <i>yoku</i> tabemasu.
	11		Ko'pincha kitob o'qiyman.	yoku hon o yomimasu.
Elementary 1	9	jiddiyligi	Bu hujjatni yozish uslubini <i>yaxshi</i> bilmayman.	Kono syoruino kakikataga <i>yoku</i> wakarimasen.
	16		<i>Yaxshi</i> uxlay olmasangiz, iliq suvli vannaga kirib miriqib dam olsangiz yaxshi.	<i>Yoku</i> nemurenai tokiwa, nurui oyuni yukkuri hairuto iyi desuyo.

In the elementary-level textbook *Minna no Nihongo*, *yoku* appears in Lesson 9 with the meaning of degree and in Lesson 22 with the meaning of frequency. In actual usage, however, *yoku* is

more frequently employed as an adverb of frequency [Hagiwara, 2004]. It has also been noted that in the absence of context, when interpreted solely on the basis of co-occurrence with verbs, *yoku* tends to be understood in terms of frequency [Hagiwara, 2005]. By contrast, in Uzbek, *yaxshi* does not undergo semantic extension into the domain of frequency.

This difference is likely to affect the interpretation of phrases such as *yoku kawaru*. Without context, this expression is usually interpreted in a negative sense, meaning “to change frequently,” implying instability. However, for Uzbek speakers, who lack the frequency-based usage of *yaxshi*, the phrase may be interpreted in terms of degree, that is, “to change for the better,” carrying a positive meaning. In *Irodori*, *yoku* already appears with the meaning of frequency as early as Lesson 5 of the *Starter* volume. Thus, while there are common expressions such as *yoku shitte iru* corresponding to Uzbek *yaxshi biladi*, teachers should be careful to draw learners’ attention to the fact that in Japanese *yoku* is very often used in the sense of frequency.

3. Misuses to Be Noted.

The potential misinterpretation of *yoku kawaru* is one example, but there are other cases where Uzbek learners of Japanese are likely to commit pragmatic errors. One notable case involves the inappropriate use of *iyi desu*.

Japanese is known as a high-context language, in which much information is left implicit. This cultural characteristic can lead to misuses involving *iyi* [Nishiuchi, 2020].

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| - Ocha, nomimasu ka? | (Choy ichasizmi?) |
| - Iyi desu. | (Yo‘q, Rahmat.) |

In this example, *iyi desu* means “I don’t need (to drink),” essentially equivalent to “No, thank you.” However, if this *iyi desu* is directly translated with *yaxshi*, in Uzbek it conveys agreement or acceptance, yielding the exact opposite meaning.

If a learner responds to an invitation with *hai, iyi desu*, Japanese speakers may be unsure whether the learner intends to decline (“No, thank you”) or to agree (“That’s a good idea”). In my own teaching experience, I often hear students reply with *hai, sensey, iyi desu*, which most likely reflects a transfer from Uzbek *yaxshi* or *bo‘ldi* into Japanese *iyi*.

This is a case where, although *iyi* and *yaxshi* share the same

core meaning, their pragmatic uses and interpretations differ significantly. The reversal of meaning in such contexts is something that should be explicitly taught to learners as a potential source of misunderstanding.

Conclusion

In Japanese, *iyi* is frequently used as part of functional expressions. While its Uzbek equivalent *yaxshi* is used in similar ways, it does not occur in expressions of permission. Identifying which alternative forms are natural in such contexts is an essential learning item for Uzbek learners of Japanese.

Furthermore, the Japanese adverb *yoku* is used not only to indicate degree but also frequency, whereas *yaxshi* cannot be used in this way. Because Japanese and Uzbek share many grammatical similarities, learners may easily assume a one-to-one equivalence (*iyi* = *yaxshi*), substituting only this word when producing sentences. This can lead to misuses. For example, in response to an offer, the phrase *iyi desu* may express either acceptance or polite refusal in Japanese, and this ambiguity poses particular challenges for learners.

From the perspective of Uzbek, functional expressions such as *yaxshi ko'rmog* cannot be adequately expressed by Japanese *iyi*. It is therefore important to provide elementary-level learners with clear information about which functions can be expressed in parallel ways across the two languages, and which require entirely different lexical resources. Such guidance can reduce learners' cognitive load and facilitate more efficient learning. In the future, collecting a larger set of core vocabulary items – distinguishing those that allow direct substitution from those that do not – will contribute to improved learning efficiency.

Due to space limitations, textbooks cannot list every possible expression. As noted earlier, the expressions examined here should be regarded as candidate translations, and in many cases other alternatives are also possible. However, there is a crucial distinction between forms that are merely intelligible through inference and those that are genuinely natural and frequently used by native speakers. Since the spread of CEFR, the focus of language learning has shifted from the acquisition of grammatical knowledge to the development of communicative competence. Taking this trend into account, it remains important to explore ways of reducing the burden on learners of both languages while promoting

efficient and practical learning. Continued contrastive research between Uzbek and Japanese will play a key role in this endeavor, and it is hoped that such studies will continue to develop actively in the future.

Appendix. Fourteen Sentence Patterns Extracted from Irodori.

Darslik	Dars	No	grammatika	Uzbekcha	Yaponcha
Kirish	7		sifatlar	yaxshi	Iyi des ne.
	9	1	[sana va vaqt] ga iyi desu.	Menga shanba kuni qulay.	Watashiwa, doyoubiga iyi desu.
	10	2	N, iyi desu ka?	Bundan foydalansam maylimi?	Kore, iyi desuka?
Elementary 1	7	3	N demo iyi desu ka?	Soat 6 yarimda ham bo'ladimi?	6ji han demo iyi desuka?
	11	4	N1 to N2, dotchiga iyi desuka?	Shokoladli tort va chizkeykdan qaysi birini ma'qul ko'rasiz?	Chokoreeto to cheezukeeki, dotchiga iyi desuka?
		5	Dorega iyi desuka?	Choyning turlari ko'p. Qaysi birini ma'qul ko'rasiz?	Ocha, iroiro arimasune. Dorega iyi desuka?
		6	N no houga iyi desu.	Tuzni afzal ko'raman. Menga tuz yaxshi.	Shiono houga iyidesu.
		7	[so'roq so'z] demo iyi desu.	Farqi yo'q, nima bo'lsa ham bo'laveradi.	Nan demo iyi desu.
	14	8	V temo iyi desuka?	Hojatxonaga borib kelsam maylimi?	Toireni itte kitemo iyi desuka?
	16	9	V ruto iyi desu.	Yaxshi uxlay olmasangiz, iliq suvli vannaga kirib miriqib dam olsangiz yaxshi.	Yoku nemurenai tokiwa, nurui oyuni yukkuri hairuto iyi desuyo.

Elementary 2	5	10	[so'roq so'z] V tara iyi desuka?	Nikkoga bormoqchi edim, nimada borsam bo'ladi?	Nikkouni ikundesukedo, nanide ittara iyi desuka?
		11	V tahouga iyi desu.	Issiq ust kiyimlarni olib borganingiz ma'qul.	Atsui uwagio motte itta houga iyi desuyo.
		12	V naihouga iyi desu.	Iloji bo'lsa, yakshanba kuni bormagan ma'qul.	Dekireba, nichiyoubiwa ikanai houga iyi desuyo.
	10	13	V ba, iyi desuka?	Dafn marosimiga nima olib borganim ma'qul?	Osoushikiniwa, naniwo motte ikeba iyi desuka?
	11	14	V temitemo iyi desuka?	Bu sviterni kiyib ko'rsam maylimi?	Kono seetaa, kite mitemo iyi desuka?

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Boshlang'ich darajadagi grammatik qoliplarda yaponcha "iyi" va o'zbekcha "yaxshi"ning qo'llanilishi

Kuniyuki Noto¹

Abstrakt

Ushbu tadqiqotda boshlang'ich darajadagi gap tuzilmalarida yaponcha *iyi* ("yaxshi") va uning o'zbekcha ekvivalenti *yaxshi* so'zlarining ishlatilishi o'rganildi. Yapon tilida *iyi* ruxsat, maslahat, afzallik va qulaylikni ifodalashda keng qo'llanilsa-da, o'zbek tilida *yaxshi* ruxsatni ifodalashda ishlatilmaydi. Shuningdek, yaponchadagi *yoku* so'zi daraja va tezlikni bildirsa, *yaxshi* faqat darajani ifodalaydi. Tadqiqotda *Irodori* darsligidagi gap tuzilmalari tahlil qilindi, tabiiy qo'llanilishiga ko'ra o'zbek tili ona tili bo'lgan talabalarda analiy tekshirildi va *iyi desu* kabi yaponcha ifodalar orqali o'quvchilar xatolari aniqlandi. Natijalar yapon tilini o'rganayotgan o'zbeklar va o'zbek tilini o'rganayotgan yaponlar uchun foydali ma'lumotlar beradi, qaysi funksional ma'nolar to'g'ridan-to'g'ri ifodalanishi mumkinligini va qaysilari boshqa so'zlarni talab qilishini ko'rsatadi. Tadqiqot yapon-o'zbek tilshunosligidagi kam o'rganilgan sohani yoritib, samarali va amaliy o'qitish strategiyalarini ishlab chiqish uchun amaliy hissa qo'shadi.

Kalit so'zlar: *iyi, yaxshi, darslik, boshlang'ich daraja, funksional ifodalar, o'zbek tilini o'rganish, yapon tilini o'rganish, grammatik tuzilmalar.*

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