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## Chapter 9

# *Omoiyari* – the key word of harmonious Japanese communication

*Maria Spiechowicz*

### **Abstract**

*Omoiyari* is known as one of the most ideal ways of behaviour in Japanese society. The word has been translated in Japanese-English dictionaries as nouns: “consideration,” “sympathy,” “empathy,” “compassion,” and as adjectives: “thoughtful” and “sensitive.” Additionally, Rohlen (1974) suggested combinations of English words such as “concerned sensitivity,” “empathetic sensing,” “concerned empathy” and “concerned emphatic kindness.” However, as Travis (1992) showed in her work, none of these words correspond to the full meaning of *omoiyari*, which is described in Japanese primary schools’ curricula as “*Omoiyari tte nan darou. Doushitara ii no*” (“What is an *omoiyari*. What is the best thing to do?”) and by Lebra (1976) as a way of harmonious Japanese communication and coexistence with others. *Omoiyari*, similarly to other types of behaviour, needs to be taught to children by their families and schools.

The paper aims to approach the meaning of *omoiyari* as a concept which Japanese linguists, like Lebra and Japanese teaching curricula and books like “*Katei kyouiku techou*” (“Home education notebook”), try to present to Japanese children and non-Japanese speakers. Furthermore, the paper aims to address the question whether *omoiyari* is a unique concept of communication typical only for the Japanese language or if it could be found in Polish as well. In order to illustrate that, the situations in which Japanese people perform *omoiyari* are presented and the typical reactions of Polish people in the same situations are described.

## **1. Introduction**

Politeness is an element of every culture, every society. Nevertheless, in many languages, it is expressed in different ways. The term “politeness” in English-Japanese dictionaries has its equivalents: *teinei* and *reigi tadashii*. As Cutrone

(2011) argued, modern definitions of politeness in English fall into four categories:

1. as behaviour avoiding conflict and promoting smooth communication;
2. as socially appropriate behaviour;
3. as consideration for the feelings of others;
4. as hearer's evaluation of speaker's behaviour as polite. (Cutrone, 2011, p. 55)

The same components of politeness were mentioned in Japanese dictionaries. However, in Japanese the term is also associated with honorific language and etiquette. "Smooth communication" and "consideration for the feelings of others," which was mentioned in Cutrone's work, as a category of politeness, has connection with *omoiyari*, Japanese behaviour which will be described in the second part of this chapter.

Politeness is also identified with *negative face* or *positive face*. Brown and Levinson (1987) claimed the notion of face to be universal and suggested the following concept of face:

- Negative Face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, right to nondistractedness – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61) [...] the want of every competent adult member that his action be unimpeded by others (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62).
- Positive Face: the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61) [...] the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62). (Fraser, 2005, p. 74)

However, such a definition of face seems to present the Western point of view, and Matsumoto (1988) argued that what Brown and Levinson (1987) defined as universal, does not apply to the Japanese concept of face.

What is of paramount concern to a Japanese is not his/her own territory, but the position in relation to the others in the group and his/her acceptance by those others. Loss of face is associated with the perception by others that one has not comprehended and acknowledged the structure and hierarchy of the group. The Japanese concepts of face, thus, are qualitatively different from those defined as universals by Brown and Levinson. The difference transcends the variability of cultural elaboration acknowledged in Brown and Levinson's theory (e.g. what kinds of acts threaten face, what sorts of persons have special rights to face-protection, etc.) and call into question the

universality of a core concept; the notion of face as consisting of the desire for approval of wants and the desire for the preservation of one's territory. (Matsumoto, 1988, p. 405)

Brown and Levinson (1987) assumed that the individual is the basic unit of the society, whereas in Japanese society individualism is not as vital as the belonging to a group or society. Therefore, the concept of face seems to be different from the one in Western societies. Matsumoto (1988, p. 405) pointed out that the concept of face depends on culture.

Bargiela-Chiappini (2002) distinguished strategic face and normative politeness, which could be referred to Japanese culture. Her research shows the difference between Western societies, described by Brown and Levinson (1987), and Eastern societies, which supports Matsumoto's opinion about connotation between culture and concept of face:

Strategic face is therefore concerned with duties to self and others as individuals, while normative politeness is concerned with duties to self and others as members of a social group. (Matsumoto, 2002, p. 1466).

This view is corroborated by Takekuro (2005, p. 87), who claims that:

Studies under the former paradigm claim that linguistic politeness in Japanese is non-strategic and intentionless, because the main principle regulating linguistic politeness in Japanese is conformity to social norms.

Having taken Matsumoto's, Bargiela-Chiappini's and Takekuro's perspectives into consideration, I argue that *omoiyari* is a concept related to non-strategic normative politeness. Taking into account the fact that the Western category of politeness has connection with Japanese *omoiyari*, I would like to address the question if *omoiyari* is a unique concept of communication typical only for the Japanese language or whether it is something that could also be found in the Polish language and behaviour of Polish people. To understand the concept of *omoiyari*, it is important to define it both in the way as Japanese people and Western researchers do. In the next part of the paper, I will describe the Western and Eastern points of view on *omoiyari* to show the more wide perspective of this concept. Afterwards, I will present a survey which was created in order to verify the hypothesis about the uniqueness of *omoiyari*. The survey and its results will be presented in the last part of the article.

## 2. Definition

For Japanese people *omoiyari* is one of the most important key-words in Japanese society. Some researchers like Rohlen (1974), Wierzbicka (2007) or Travis (1992) attempted to translate this concept into other languages, especially English, but there does not seem to be one widely accepted equivalent.

*Omoi* (思い) in *omoiyari* means “a thought; mind; heart; feelings; an emotion; sentiment,” while *yari* (やり) is the nominal form of the verb *yaru* (やる), which means “sending something to others.” Consequently, *omoiyari* literally means “sending one’s heart to others.” However, this literal meaning is more a word by word translation than interpretation of the concept of *omoiyari*.

Lebra (1976) described *omoiyari* as a way of harmonious Japanese communication and coexistence with others. A similar explication is presented in Japanese schools’ curriculum “*Omoiyari tte nan darou. Doushitara ii no*” (“What is an *omoiyari*. What is the best thing to do?”), which is directed at children from the fourth grade of primary school. According to it, *omoiyari* is not only the way of being polite and acting kindly towards others, but also being a person who understands the feelings and situation of others. It is a basis for establishing good human relations. In this concept, there is not only “a helper,” who is a person who helps someone in need, but also “a target” of this action, namely a person whom we help. If a person who helps wants to act according to the concept of *omoiyari*, it is essential for him or her to learn how to assess the needs or feelings of the person in need.

Among other definitions of *omoiyari* there is also a notable one by Lebra (1976), for whom *omoiyari* is silent communication:

Inward communication of unity and solidarity stems from the notion that in perfect intimacy, Ego does not have to express himself verbally or in conspicuous action because what is going on inside of him should be immediately detected by Alter. The Japanese glorify silent communication, *isshin denshin* (“heart-to-heart communication”), and mutual “vibrations,” implying the possibility of semitelepathic communication. Words are paltry against the significance of reading subtle signs and signals and the intuitive grasp of each other’s feelings. The ultimate form of such communication is *ittaikan* (“feeling of oneness”), a sense of fusion between Ego and Alter. (1976, p. 115)

This seems to correspond closely to the way the notion is presented in Japanese schools’ curriculum. *Ittaikan*, that is “feeling of oneness” is not only harmonious or silent communication, as Lebra (1976, p. 115) describes, but also a relation between “a helper” and “a target” of our actions, as is shown in the curriculum “*Omoiyari tte nan darou. Doushitara ii no.*”

For *omoiyari* to be successful in social relation, some conditions should be fulfilled, which will be described in the latter part of this paper.

## 2.1. Factors affecting the perception of *omoiyari* action

The “*omoiyari* behaviour” done in everyday life could be not only shown by any action of helping another person, but also as compassion. For instance, if we see a crying person, we sympathize with him or her but we do not show this verbally. Does it mean that we do not express *omoiyari*? In Japanese culture such a situation is quite common and it still shows solidarity with the sufferer (Sakai, 2006).

As Sakai (2006, p. 145) argues, there are three factors which influence the perception of *omoiyari*.

1. Social: discipline; a parent’s attitude; parents-child relation
2. Situational: helping others in need; ability to control the situation; poverty
3. Individual: empathy; morals; social abilities.<sup>1</sup>

It has been argued that a part of the “*omoiyari* behaviour” is empathy and morals (Hara, 2006: 25; Eisenberg, 1986). As argued above, if someone recognizes another person’s needs and does or feels nothing that means this person does not do an “*omoiyari* action,” but when he sympathizes with the other who suffers, it means he does. It can be assumed that empathy, recognition of the problem in conjunction with other factors create the “*omoiyari* behaviour; action,” known in the Japanese language as “*omoiyari kōdō*.”

Eisenberg (1979) studied the influence of the ethic behaviour on other people in society. Altruism, in Western and Eastern cultures, is accompanied by self-sacrifice, which creates a conflict between the importance of support for others and personal needs, which, in turn, could be compared to positive and negative face. A conflict between being accepted by society, because we do something for others – positive face, and a personal freedom of action – negative face.

Eisenberg (1979) examined whether such a dilemma exists in a sample of stories made by Japanese primary and high school students in which they do the pro-social behaviour. He presented the results in six steps of development of “*omoiyari* behaviour”:

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Japanese sources are provided in my translation.

1. First step is the problem if behaving according to *omoiyari* is more useful for us than ethical behaviour.
2. Second step is that, even if our needs are not compatible with partner's needs, we can see the exemplification of interests in partner's demands.
3. Third step is the reason if people around us do or do not recognize and receive the pro-social behaviour. Also if there is a stereotypical image of good and bad people, good and bad behaviour.
4. Fourth step is a valuation problem between effect of our action and the way of thinking about the response to partner's empathy and his standpoint.
5. Fifth step is an opinion about the self-esteem.
6. The base of the sixth step is internalization of prices and norms, responsibility, protection of duty contracted to society and individuals, desire of social requirement, all personal privileges and dignity. (Eisenberg, 1979, in: Sakai, 2006, p. 145)

As previously stated, *omoiyari* can also be referred to as “altruism” and “pro-social behaviour.” However, these terms are only a part of the overall concept. Hiraki (2000) presented that *omoiyari* (思いやり) can also be written as 思い遣り. *Yaru* (遣る) written in these characters refers to the word *tsukau* (使う), which means “to use.” Hiraki (2000) also claims that the concept of *omoiyari* should be defined as: “to make personal thoughts to work” (*mi-zukara no omoi o hatarakaseru koto* – 自らの思いを働かせること), because, according to Hiraki, it contains the meaning “to put someone to work” (*hatarakaseru* – 働かせる). That is why Japanese researchers tend to agree that *omoiyari* should be defined as “psychological movement to think about/ to send one's heart out to others” (*tasha ni omoi o haseru to iu shiriteki na idō* – 他者に思いを馳せるといふ心理的な移動) rather than “behaviour; action” (*kōdō* – 行動) (Sakai, 2006, pp. 146).

Japanese researchers like Lebra (1976), Hiraki (2000) or Sakai (2006, p. 146) describe the meaning on *omoiyari* rather than translate it into English. As Japanese they have acquired an understanding of the concept from their cultural background. Western researchers who attempt to translate the *omoiyari* into another language base on synonymous concepts existing in Western cultures, which will be described in the next part of this paper.

## 2.2. Conceptualization of *omoiyari* from the Western point of view

Hara (2006, p. 25) pointed out that there are three points referring to importance of *omoiyari* in Japanese culture which should be taken into consideration.

First, many psychological studies based on Western concepts have not proposed clear conceptual definitions of *omoiyari*, so there is no consensus on its definition. Second, studies on *omoiyari* in other fields have only argued one aspect of *omoiyari* with its case contexts; we might be able to explore multi-aspects of *omoiyari*, taking various communication contexts and levels into consideration. Third, negative aspects of *omoiyari* have not been referred to adequately in previous studies on *omoiyari*. For example, there are cases when *omoiyari* toward others might not be appreciated or accepted by others.

As argued in the above quotation, it can be seen that the idea of *omoiyari* is presented in terms of pro-social behaviour. In this part of the paper the concept of altruism, sympathy and empathy will also be discussed.

### Altruism

The foundation of *omoiyari* can be described as altruism, which is self-sacrificial and oriented towards others. According to Cohen (1978), “altruism refers to an act or desire to offer something gratuitously to others when needed.” “Cohen indicates that there are three components of altruism: (a) giving, or the desire to do so; (b) empathy; and (c) the absence of any motives of reward from exhibiting the altruistic behaviour” (Hara, 2006, p. 25).

### Empathy and sympathy

Sympathy refers to a concern for the other person, while empathy is the capacity to recognize emotions that are being experienced by the other person. Bruneau (1995) described empathy expressed by *omoiyari* as “‘feeling into’ another’s feelings with one’s own, vicariously, and attempting to achieve some I-thought congruence” (Bruneau, 1995, p. 87; Hara, 2006, p. 26).

All the aspects mentioned above, that is altruism, empathy and sympathy are reflected in pro-social behaviour and their combination helps to conceptualize the idea of *omoiyari*. However, none of them can individually correspond to the exact meaning of *omoiyari*.

According to Hara (Hara, 2006, p. 26), there are two reasons why it may be problematic to translate *omoiyari* into English, and even words such as “compassion, consideration, thoughtfulness, mercy, and benevolence” cover only one aspect of the concept.



First, there are different views of *omoiyari* across cultures. For example, Yamagishi (1995) argues that for Westerners, *omoiyari* is not “thoughtfulness” to others, which is occasionally perceived to be unnecessarily imposed by others depriving one’s own right to choose his/her own behavior. Easterners, on the other hand, believe that thoughtfulness-based *omoiyari* is essential to living a group-oriented life. Secondly, as Travis (1998) points out, English words such as “considerate” and “thoughtful,” which are related to *omoiyari*, do not involve the same kind of “intuitive” understanding. This intuitive way of communication is also cultivated as intuitive listening and empathic understanding in Japanese ways of communication (Barnland 1975: 27). As for a neutral and comprehensible translation term, Yamagishi (1995) points out that “sensitivity” can represent the feelings of *omoiyari* that are common to Westerners and Easterners and which do not have the connotation of imposing one’s thought on others. (Hara, 2006, p. 27)

Terms as altruism, sympathy and empathy have only positive connotations, and are desired in pro-social behaviour. Although, *omoiyari* also refers to these positive aspects, it is not always desired by others, and this concept may also contain negative connotations as opposed to Western concepts.

### 2.3. Negative aspects of *omoiyari*

As previously mentioned, “*omoiyari* behaviour” is an act, which is done toward others without expecting any reward. If a reward is expected, it is not *omoiyari* anymore but business-like transaction. Even if, “*omoiyari* behaviour” is done with a good will, it does not always function as we would like it to. Hara (2006, p. 27) argues that the receiver of *omoiyari* could experience a psychological burden or an annoyance, and he divides the negative aspect of *omoiyari* into two parts:

1. *Osekkai* (“meddlesome”) – for example, when the elderly want to meddle in young people’s life.
2. *Sakaurami* (“to think ill of a person who meant to be kind”/unjustified resentment through misunderstanding) – this is when the *omoiyari* is no longer considered by receiver as a positive behaviour (Hara, 2006, p. 29).

These terms concern negative aspects of *omoiyari*. However, in the Japanese language there are many examples of idioms or expressions which contain only positive aspect of this concept. Examples of those expressions and their function in Japanese communication will be presented in the next part of this paper.

### 3. *Omoiyari* expressed by Japanese idioms and expressions/ phrases

The Japanese have a tendency to avoid conflict rather than to resolve it. They use *tatemaie* (“face; public attitude”) and *honne* (“true intention”) in order not to hurt the feelings of other people. Such a linguistic feature can be described as ‘the language of *omoiyari*’ and it is listener-oriented” (Hara, 2006, p. 29). This type of communication style is represented in Japanese proverbs such as “*teki no shio o akuru* (to show humanity even to one’s enemy) or *bushi no nasake* (samurai-like mercy)” (Hara, 2006, p. 29).

Other examples of proverbs and four-character idioms which contain *omoiyari* are presented in the next section.

#### 3.1. Idioms

1. 我が身を抓つて人の痛みを知れ (*wa ga mi o tsunette hito no itasa o shire*)

English meaning: Judge other people’s feelings by your own.

2. 情けが仇 (*nasake ga ada*)

English meaning: Pardon makes offenders.

3. 判官贔屓 (*hōganbiiki*)

English meaning: Sympathy for the weak (a tragic hero).

4. 老婆心 (*rōbashin*)

English meaning: Old-woman’s solicitude.

5. 同病相憐れむ (*dōbyōaiawaremu*)

English meaning:

- a. Misery makes strange bedfellows.
- b. Misery loves company.

6. 武士は相身互い (*bushi wa aimitagai*)

English meaning:

- a. Samurai should help each other in times of trouble.
- b. Mutual help is a part of the Samurai’s code of ethics.

7. 鳴く蝉よりも鳴かぬ螢が身を焦がす (*naku semi yorimo nakanu hotaru ga mi o kogasu*)

English meaning: Light cares speak, great ones are dumb.

8. 巧言令色鮮し仁 (*kōgenreishoku sukunashijin*)

English meaning:

- a. He who gives fair words feeds you with an empty spoon.
- b. Full of courtesy, full of craft.
- c. Where there is over mickle courtesy, there is little kindness.

9. 情けは人の為ならず (*nasake wa hito no tamenarazu*)

English meaning:

- a. One good turn deserves another.
- b. A kindness is never lost.

### 3.2. Institutionalized expressions of *omoiyari*

The Japanese language is known for its variety of polite expressions and some of them are said to contain *omoiyari*. Shimizu and Levine (2001) provide some examples of those expressions, presented below:

1. *Irasshai mase* (いらっしやいませ) – “come in and let us serve you/welcome (in shop, restaurants, etc.)”
2. *Hakusen no ushiro made sagatte kudasai* (白線の後ろまで下がって下さい) – “Please stand behind the white line.”
3. *Owasure mono nai you ni go chuui kudasai* (お忘れ物ないようにご注意ください) – “Please make sure you take all your belongings with you.”

In the last part of this paper, I will analyse the views of a group of young Polish people about the above expressions, as well as their views on whether they show something more than information. Moreover, I will attempt to answer the question whether some of the Polish expressions used in notices in public places have only informative function or contain *omoiyari*.

## 4. Survey

According to Matsui (1998), the altruistic way of thinking depends on the influence of culture. Results from his research show that college students tend to be more capable of altruistic behaviour than the high school students. This means that the pro-social behaviour based on morals is the only one part of the *omoiyari*.

On the other hand, Inaba (2010) suggested that *omoiyari* behaviour has its source in Buddhist compassion heart of bothisattva, while in Western culture it could have its foundation in Christian education, especially in the parable of Good Samaritan.

Bearing the above points in mind, I addressed the question if *omoiyari* is a unique concept of communication typical only for the Japanese language or whether it is something that could also be found in Polish language and behaviour of Polish people. The questionnaire, which is presented in appendix to this article, contains descriptions of situations including *omoiyari* behaviour.

Some examples of the situations and expressions provided in the questionnaire are the examples of *omoiyari* behaviour presented in *Japanese cultural psychology and empathic understanding* (Hidetada, 2002) and *The Japanese patterns of behavior* (Lebra, 1976).

All *omoiyari* answers marked in part of the results analysis are based on examples given in the Lebra's and Hidetada's works. Other expressions and situations provided are the ones which are present in Polish language.

The next part of this article presents only the results. The whole survey is attached as an appendix to this article.

### 4.1. Analysis of the results

The answers containing *omoiyari* behaviour are marked by the word *omoiyari* written next to them in parentheses. Answers with the highest percentage are written in bold. Numbers I and II refer to first and second part of the survey. Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 are the numbers of the provided situations and expressions.

In one of the answers the term *ozendate* was used, which literally and metaphorically means "seating a table with full dinner" (Lebra, 2004, p. 115), and in this case it also means "to do all effort to succeed in business."

There were 50 Polish people who took part in the survey: 29 women (59.2%) and 20 men (40.8%) aged 16–19 (6.1%), 20–25 (61.2%) and 26–30 (32.7%). The survey was created as an online questionnaire and anyone could take it any-

mously. The information about the survey was spread via social media like Facebook and Goldenline. There were six age groups: (1) under 16-years-old; (2) 16–19, (3) 20–25; (4) 26–30; (5) 31–40, and (6) over 40-years-old. However, people only from three groups took part in this survey. There was no answer from the remaining groups. The survey was active online for three weeks.

#### I.1.

a. 33.9%; b. 20.3% (*omoiyari*); c. **35.6%**

d. 10.2% – Other behaviour:

- It depends if I agree with the teacher about the weather or not. If I do, I open the window. If don't, I do not do it.
- I ask why he thinks that.
- I wait if someone else opens the window.
- I ask: “May I open the window?”
- I agree and ask if I should or shouldn't open the window.

It could be seen that most of respondents would not behave like people who understand the concept of *omoiyari*. The vast majority of actions chosen by respondents were passive.

#### I.2.

a. **88.2%**; b. 5.9% (*omoiyari* – *ozendate*)

c. 5.9% – Other behaviour:

- I offer something to drink. – almost the same as answer ‘a’.
- I show the tray with drinks and ask what they would prefer. – almost the same as answer ‘a’.

In this example, most of the people choose the most polite behaviour according to the Polish/Western culture. The concept of *ozendate* is foreign to Polish culture, and for Polish people this kind of behaviour could be considered impolite. In other words, Polish people do care for their guests. However, they do it in a different way than Japanese.

#### I.3.

a. 30.8%; b. **67.3%** (*omoiyari*); c. 1.9%; d. 0%.

In this situation, according to respondents, Japanese and Polish, with understanding of *omoiyari*, will act in the same way.

#### I.4.

a. **68.5%** (*omoiyari*); b. 14.8%; c. 9.3%

d. 7.4% – Other behaviour:

- Immediately I'm looking for the solution how to make up for client's losses.
- I'm saying how sorry I am and I am looking for the solution how to make up for client's losses.

- I'm not telling the clients about the problem but I'm doing everything to make up for client's losses.
- If it is not a big problem and loss for the clients, I cover up the mistake. – almost the same as the answer 'b'.

The first, and the most often, marked answer is the one which expresses *omoiyari*. However, as it could be seen in the mass media, it is not common for Polish company's management to apologize for their company's mistake which causes financial damage to their customers. On the other hand, all respondents are young people who might behave in a different way than older managers.

I.5.

a. **52.5%** (*omoiyari*); b. 13.6%; c. 27.1% (*omoiyari* – when we do not want to be impudent)

d. 6.8% – Other behaviour:

- If an elderly person is really old and sick I give up my seat. If not, I don't do anything. Everything depends on circumstances.
- I never sit on a bus.
- I check if there are any other seats available. If not, I make room myself.
- I stand up and give away the seat. – almost the same as answer 'a'.

This example has two answers which indicate understanding of *omoiyari*, and both have the biggest percentage rate.

I.6.

a. 21.2%; b. **71.2%** (*omoiyari*); c. 0%

d. 7.7% – Other behaviour:

- I ask if he/she can meet despite the exam.
- I suggest a different day/time for the date and wait for him/her to let me know whenever he/she wants to meet. It's his/her decision.
- I don't wait and I suggest the date after the exam.

The answer 'b', the most popular one, indicates *omoiyari* behaviour.

II.1

a. **84%**; b. 10%; c. 6%

II.2

a. **58%**; b. 40%; c. 2%

II.3

a. 16%; b. **84%**; c. 0%

II.4

a. 32%; b. **68%**; c. 0%

II.5

a. 28%; b. **70%**; c. 2%

In the second part of the survey it can be seen that respondents chose more frequently the “more empathic” answer. In my opinion it is necessary to conduct more research on factors which influenced those answers, because both notices in point II.2 and II.3 were announced at the same place, which was a train station, and to the same group of recipients of the messages, but respondents had different feelings about those announcements. Announcement II.2 was perceived as “more informative,” whereas announcement II.3 was perceived as “more empathic.”

## 5. Conclusions

The survey shows that Poles display behaviour similar to *omoiyari*, and in some situations, especially in answers: I.3, I.4, I.5, and I.6 they act in the same way as the Japanese, with understanding of *omoiyari* action, would do. Almost none of the Polish native speakers choose the *omoiyari* – answer in I.2. The reason for this could be the fact that the behaviour like *ozendate* is not a part of Polish culture and also conducting such “research” prior to the banquet and then serving guests a drink without asking them to choose it could be considered impolite.

The second part of the survey showed results deserving more attention. The word “please” used in examples of expressions, presented in the Japanese language as *kudasai*, is experienced by Polish native speakers as information, empathy or order. The survey written in the Japanese language, which includes *kudasai*, and presented to Japanese native speakers could give an answer whether Japanese people also interpret these expressions in a similar way to Polish native speakers or whether it is something typical for the Polish language, and therefore further research is required. I argue that all of the presented expressions could be assumed to contain the *omoiyari*. However the Polish respondents could understand that the empathy can be shown by expressions only for us as the readers of the expression, but not to the people around us.

I think that in order to obtain a more comprehensive view on behaviour similar to the concept of *omoiyari*, a more detailed research is needed and thus this paper could serve as a starting point and foundation for further research. For instance, the number of respondents and age range of respondents should be wider. Furthermore, the same survey could be presented to the Japanese people in order to conduct contrastive analysis. Afterwards, combined results could give a more comprehensive answer to the question from the beginning of this paper, namely: Is *omoiyari* a strictly Japanese concept or could it be found in Polish as well?

## Appendix

**1. In the examples below choose the option which best describes your behaviour in a given situation.**

- 1. The teacher enters the classroom and says “It’s hot today, isn’t it?”**
  - a. You agree and this is your only reaction.
  - b. You stand up and open the window.
  - c. You don’t pay attention to the teacher’s comment.
  - d. Another type of behaviour.
  
- 2. As a company employee, you serve guests during company’s banquet. There are only a few guests.**
  - a. You ask guests what they would prefer, for example tea or coffee.
  - b. You do some research on the guests’ taste/preferences prior to the banquet and serve them something based on the gained information.
  - c. Another type of behaviour.
  
- 3. You are a canvasser on the street but instead of leaflets, you give away pocket-sized tissues with a company’s advertisement printed on the back.**
  - a. You give them away without saying a word.
  - b. You wish pedestrians a good day/saying: “Here, it could be useful for a hot day like this” etc.
  - c. You give tissues away mumbling that the company is hopeless; they are thieves etc.
  - d. Another type of behaviour.
  
- 4. You are a member of company’s management and your company’s mistake causes financial damage to your customers.**
  - a. You apologize in public, promise that it won’t happen again and you talk about compensation for the customers.
  - b. You cover up the mistake.
  - c. You blame someone else for your mistake (for example, the government).
  - d. Another type of behaviour.
  
- 5. You are sitting on a bus/tram and you see an elderly person entering it.**
  - a. Without waiting for a request, you give up your seat to the elderly person.
  - b. You don’t give away your seat, because you think that you have paid for your ticket, so you can sit.



- c. You don't give up your seat, because you think that it would be inappropriate, because the elderly person might think that he/she isn't too old to stand up.
  - d. Another type of behaviour.
- 6. A girl/boy whom you would like to date is having a very important exam soon.**
- a. You want to date so you are asking him/her out.
  - b. You wait with the date until after the exam, because you don't want to distract her/him.
  - c. You decide to date someone else, someone who just likes you, is not busy.
  - d. Another type of behaviour.

**II. Look at the expressions below and decide which language function (a, b or c), according to you, is the most accurate.**

Informative function – shows only information.

Empathic function – shows care toward others.

**1. “Please do not slam the door”**

- a. More informative.
- b. More empathic.
- c. Another type of function.

**2. “Please stand behind the white line”**

- a. More informative.
- b. More empathic.
- c. Another type of function.

**3. “Please do not leave your belongings behind”/ Please make sure you take all your belongings with you**

- a. More informative.
- b. More empathic.
- c. Another type of function.

**4. “Please do not leave your belongings unattended”**

- a. More informative.
- b. More empathic.
- c. Another type of function.

**5. “Please beware of pickpockets”**

- a. More informative.
- b. More empathic.
- c. Another type of function.

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