



Culture Unique Words in Translation

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IMT 4125 Fall 2019

Introduction

Main goal of this study is to see if culture-unique words lose their meanings when translated or if they can closely represent the original meaning.

Our focus is mainly German and Japanese since those are the languages harboring for many culture specific words. Since these words express complex emotions and scenes within them they cause for translators. difficulty

We conducted a survey for native speakers and translators to see how they would translate and react to these culture-unique words.

Case

We can safely conclude that factors determining culture-unique words are geography, culture, wars and traditions. These play a crucial role on the emerging of these words.

For example in some cultures like in eskimos, we can see that they have plenty of words that related to fish, ice and cold in their language because languages mirror the conditions and necessities of its people. Same can be said about the bedouin or rainforest tribes.

As we know Latin alphabet unlike kanji, characterizes the sounds of the words and has no meaning on its own or resonates anything whereas in kanji a single or two strokes can have multiple meanings.

Methodology

- We conducted a survey including 5 native Japanese speakers and 5 German translators
- We intentionally handpicked culture-unique words that express a universal behavior such as *Irusu* (Pretending to be out when someone comes by to visit.)
- Although such emotions, scenes and situations embedded in cultural words exist in many countries, their vocabularies do not include these culture unique words. In order to demonstrate that another culture or language has come up with a word to express a certain emotion or a scene, we decided to add *ohrwurm* as an example because *ohrwurm* as a culture unique word has entered the English language from German language

Culture unique words included in our survey are:

German

Schadenfreude: Taking pleasure from someones' pain.

Treppenwitz: Coming up with an answer to a problem or a conversation that is already in the past.

Ohrwurm: Earworm. A song you heard on the radio that stuck in your head.

Japanese :

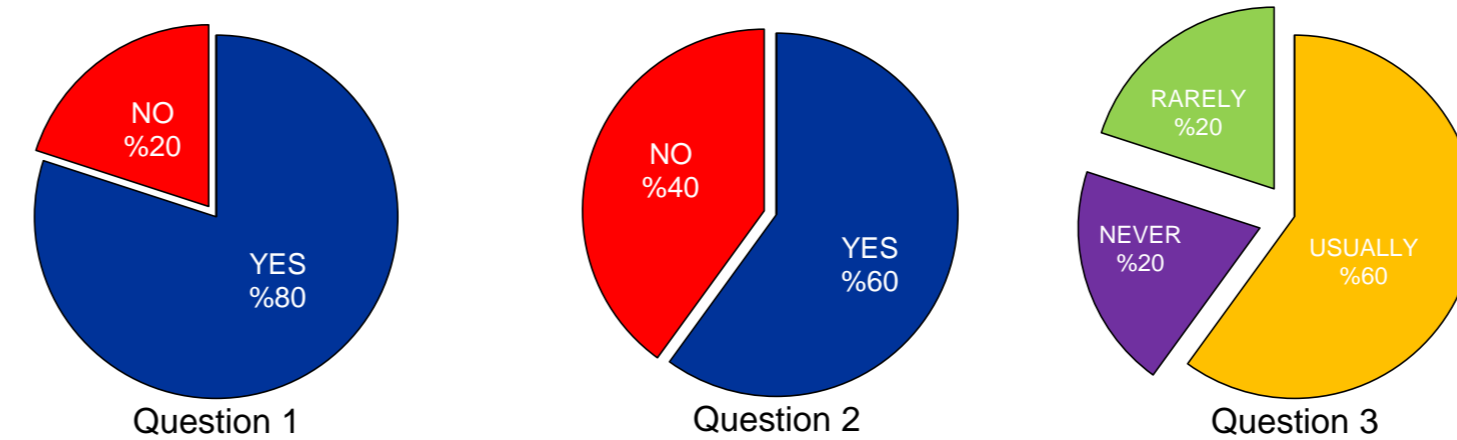
Irusu: Pretending to be out when someone comes by to visit.

Karoshi: Death caused by overworking or job-related exhaustion.

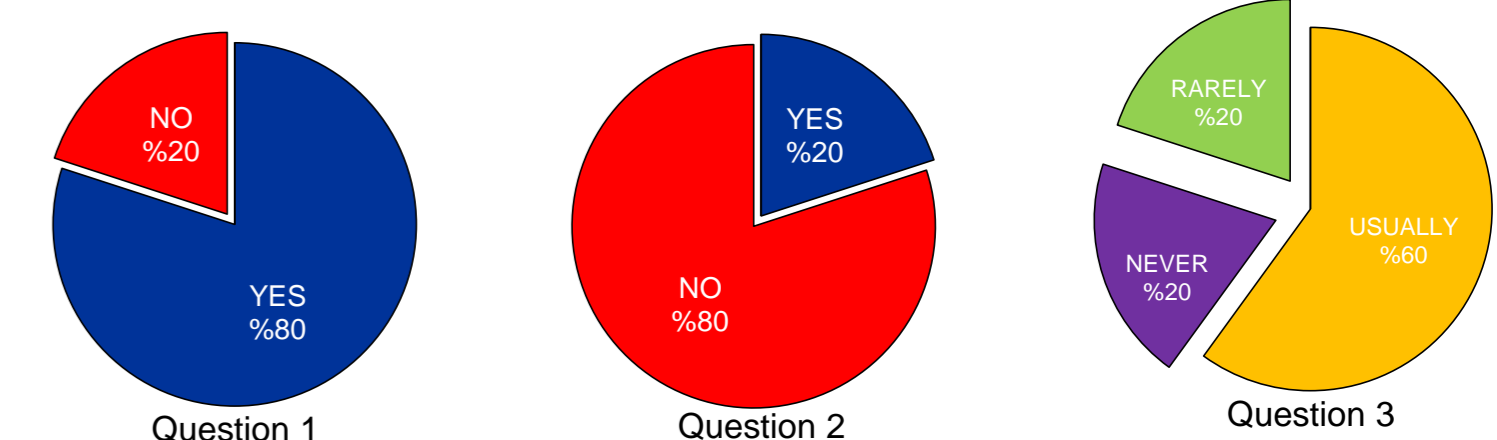
Komorebi: Sunlight that filters through the leaves of trees.

Survey Results

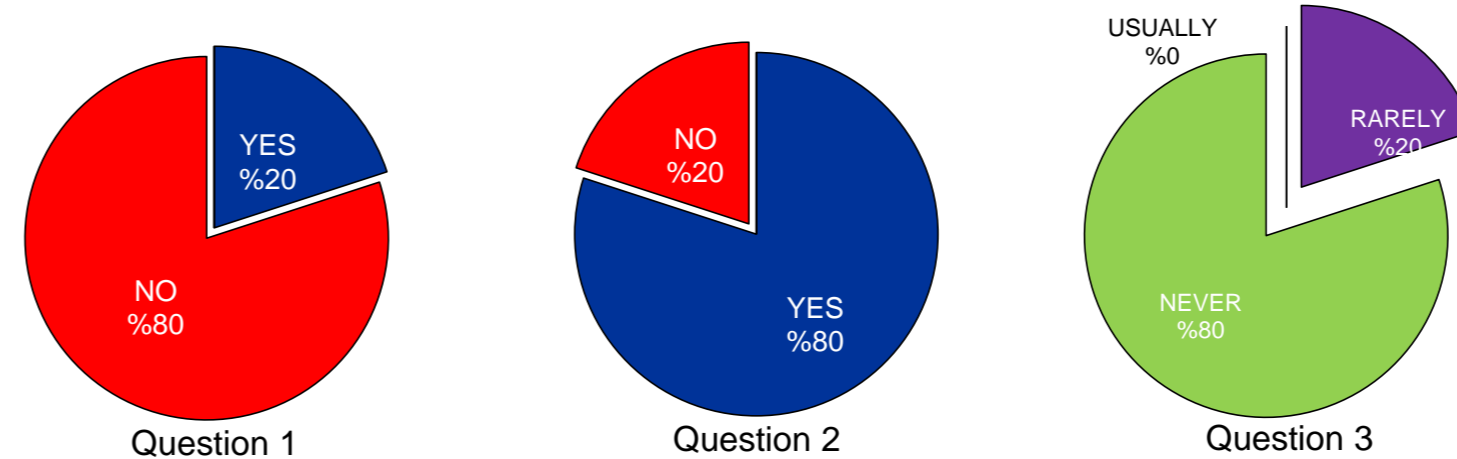
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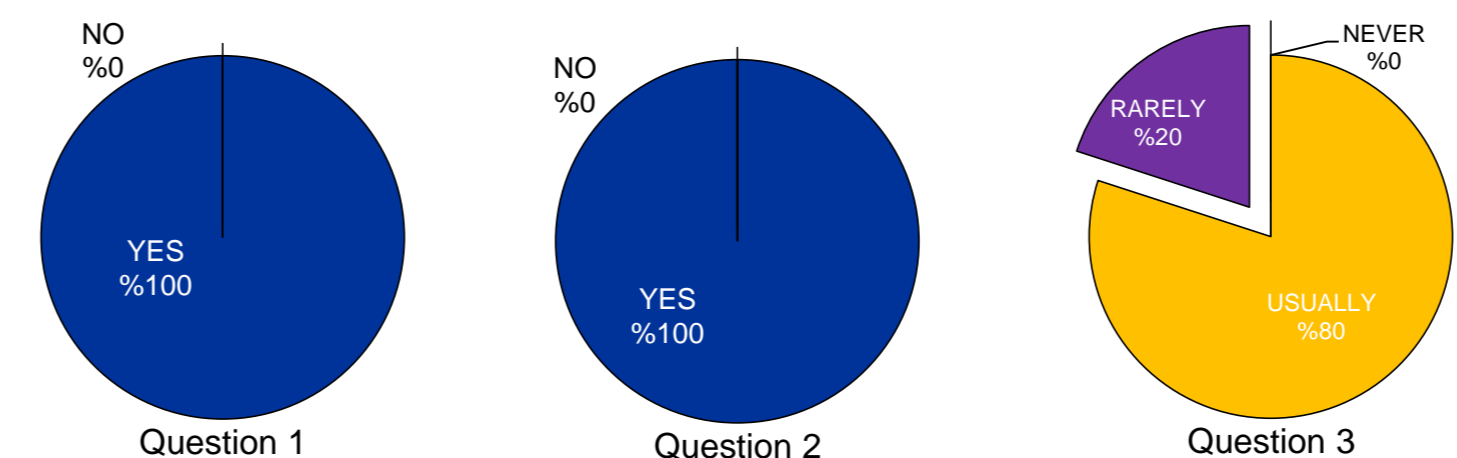
KOMOREBI



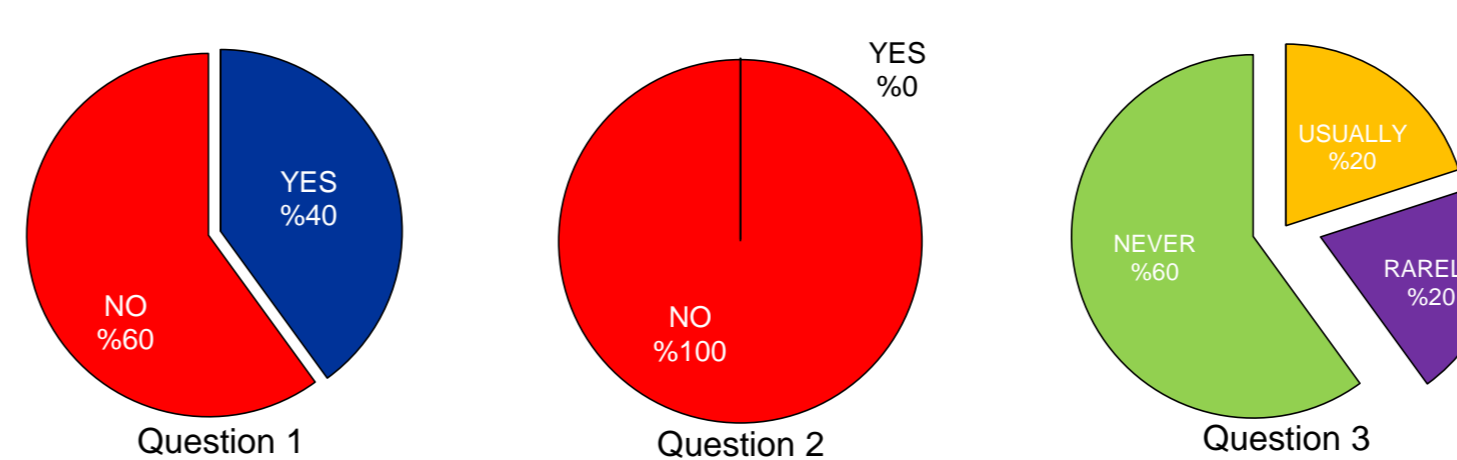
TREPPENWITZ



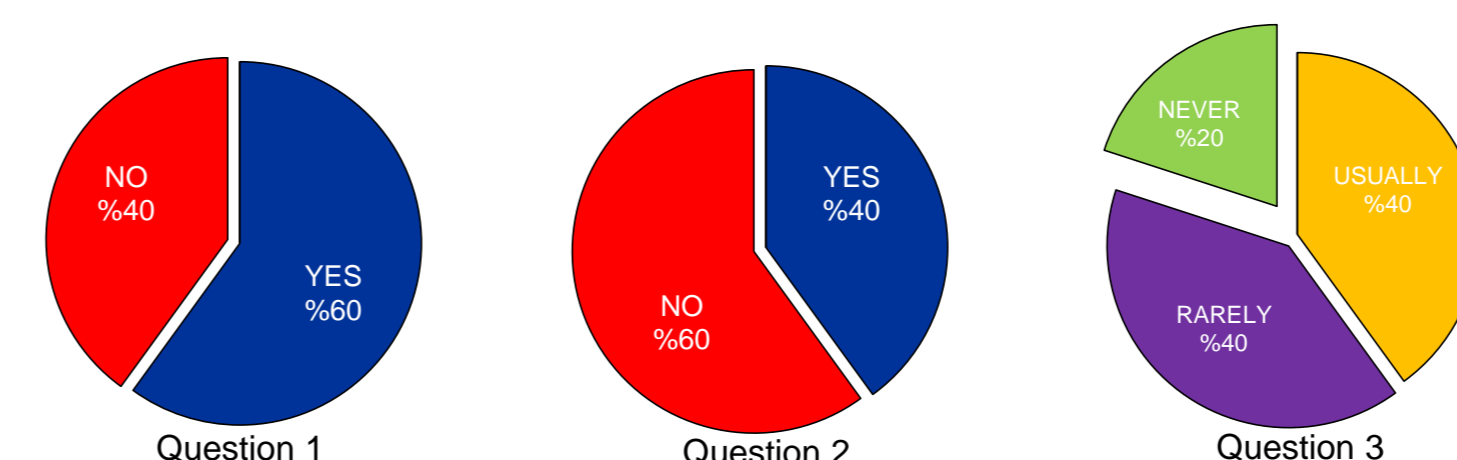
OHRWURM



IRUSU



KAROSHI



- Question 1: Have you heard about the word before? (Yes/No)
- Question 2: Can you translate the word to English in just one word? (Yes/No)
- Question 3: How often do you use/see the word in your daily life or when translating? (Usually/Rarely/Never)

Conclusion

- Emotions or virtues are expressed differently depending on their importance or role in a cultures language.
- Some cultures invent unique words for a complex emotion or situation because some emotions, situations or virtues occupy or fulfill an important role in that culture.
- We can conclude that a proper translation of culture specific words to another language is only possible if the target language's culture isn't distant from the source culture at least in word for word sense.
- Using other translation strategies can be an answer to this problem such as equivalence or adaptation to some extent.

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