

REPORTING STYLES AS DISCOURSE STRATEGIES

—A study in Japanese and English—

Claudia Ross

*University of Michigan*

1. Introduction

Perhaps the most difficult differences to account for between languages are those of the usage of corresponding language structures, i. e. differences in the application of similar or identical syntactic rules, or in the use of particular sentence types, or in the distinctions made by vocabulary to describe similar real world phenomena. These differences tend to be labelled 'stylistic', and dismissed from the realm of linguistic concern as unsystematic peculiarities of languages, which, especially in the case of vocabulary, tend to reflect facts about their speakers rather than about the languages themselves.

This paper will suggest that stylistic phenomena are systematic, and work in conjunction with syntactic rules in languages. It will be illustrated here that seemingly unrelated stylistic differences between Japanese and English can be accounted for in terms of one basic discourse level difference between them: the tendency to directly report in Japanese, and to indirectly report in English.

I will begin with a discussion of direct and indirect reporting in Japanese and English, showing that the tendency to directly report in Japanese, and to indirectly report in English, is in part the result of different syntactic constraints on reporting, and in part the result of different language preferences for indirect and direct style reporting. I will then show that these reporting styles act as discourse strategies,