

Polysemy and Function of the Japanese Adverb "Chotto"

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Abstract

It is often said that the usage of the Japanese adverb "chotto" is very ambiguous. Consequently we have outlined the different meanings and communication functions of "chotto" and explored the way to teach "chotto" to Japanese learners.

Non-native learners who are studying Japanese as a second language often misunderstand the meaning of "chotto." Most of the misunderstandings come from their interpretation of "chotto," as meaning "a small number," "a short time," and "to a small extent." "Chotto" has many different meanings. It means not only "low standard" but also the opposite meaning "high standard", which has the same meaning as "to a large extent" meaning "a pretty large amount or extent beyond a certain standard."

Most Japanese language textbooks do not cover this usage of "chotto" and do not offer sufficient explanation of this usage. In colloquial Japanese, people use this "chotto" very often, and we think Japanese teachers should present this usage and its meaning beginning with elementary level studies.

As one teaching method, we have divided these "chotto" communication functions into six categories: 1. softening the burdens of a request or instruction; 2. introducing negative content so the listener will accept it; 3. inducing listeners to accept negative answers; 4. calling attention; 5. blaming; 6. connecting two phrases.

By presenting these functions more efficiently to Japanese learners, we expect that Japanese learners can adequately interpret the word "chotto" in various contexts.