Children's response to teachers' admonishing expression:

Basic data for teachers' metacognition on educational communication

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教師の叱り表現に対する子どもの反応
―教育コミュニケーションにおける教師のメタ認知のための基礎資料―
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要約

教師が小学生の好ましくない行動を改めさせるために、どのような叱り表現を用いるかによって生徒の反応は異なる。本研究は、5 種類の叱り表現に対する生徒側の発話意図認知、発話表現への嫌悪、不満、反省、行動改善意欲を調べることを目的とした。掃除をさぼっている生徒を注意するという場面想定で小学生の参加者に回答を求めた。主な結果は、次の通りである。①直接行動要求とセルフコントロール要求の表現は、概して教師の発話意図をポジティブに解釈されやすく、行動改善意欲を含む望ましい反応を招きやすい。②権威的脅し、否定的人格評価、突き放しの表現は、概して教師の発話意図をネガティブに解釈されやすく、相対的に行動改善意欲を含む望ましい反応を招きにくい。③表現に関わらず発話意図のポジティブな認知が他のポジティブな反応をもたらし、ネガティブな認知が他のネガティブな反応をもたらすことが示唆された。本研究の知見は、小学生に対する教育コミュニケーションの中で、教師が効果的な叱り発話表現を用いるためのメタ認知的知識として活用されることが期待される。

Key words

admonishing expression, intention of utterance, educational communication, metacognition, elementary school student

1. Introduction

In school education, communication between teachers and students is crucial. Although well-established educational communication makes it easier for teachers to guide their students effectively, communication between the two parties is not always successful. In fact, communication often fails. The teachers who guide elementary school students may use admonishments to correct undesirable behaviors of students. The admonishing may escalate when the same warning must be repeated several times. In such a case, even if the admonishing is intended to guide the student to be a good student, the student may misunderstand the admonishing as a personal attack. Misunderstanding the intention behind an utterance—that is, pragmatic misunderstanding in communication—sometimes worsens interpersonal relationships and results in undesirable consequences (Sannomiya, 2017).

Traditional psychological research that viewed admonishing as verbal punishment was often based on the framework of the stimulus-response (SR) theory. For example, some scholars examined the intensity and timing of punishment to identify an approach that would be effective in changing children's behavior (e.g., Cheyne & Walters, 1969; Park, 1969). However, merely viewing the effects of admonishing in terms of physical factors, such as the intensity and timing of verbal punishment, has not been sufficient to arrive at a complete understanding. Along these lines, Park (1970) found that, regardless of physical factors, clearly explaining the reason for punishment to a child who had exhibited an undesirable behavior produced an improvement in that behavior. This result indicates the importance of children's own recognition that the behavior in question is undesirable in order to improve their behavior; in addition, the finding suggests that the cognitive problems of those who are being admonished must not be overlooked.

Presumably, those children who do not understand the reason why they are admonished will not be convinced with the admonishment and will not improve their behavior based on remorse. When considering that the relationship between the admonisher and the admonished will continue in the future, the admonishing must not damage the human relationship. In other words, even if the behavior is temporarily improved by an impactful admonishing, when the admonished person remains disgusted and unconvinced with the admonishing expressions and cannot reflect on their behavior, the admonishment will not lead to behavioral improvement, which is not a desirable outcome.

Sannomiya and Takeuchi (1989) asked university students to recall their own experiences of being admonished and describe cases that evoked a response of remorse or disgust. After categorizing the descriptions, they found three factors: the words used in the admonishment, the situation, and the admonisher.

Among these factors, the students most frequently mentioned admonishing words and described them in detail, suggesting that even if the situations and admonishers were the same, the use of different words for admonishment could lead to both remorse and aversion. If all admonishing words were equally perceived as an attempt to make the receiver a good child, such differences would not occur. In reality, however, the cognition of the receiver changed according to the admonishing expressions.

Endo et al. (1991) collected admonishing words at home, categorized the obtained expressions, and asked undergraduate and graduate students to answer what they thought in their mind (internal utterance) and what they said to their parents (external utterance) after being admonished by their parents using each expression. The results revealed the use of a variety of expressions, some of which provoked an acceptance-based response from the receiver, while others provoked a rebellious response. It was found that a direct action demand ("Do it") was more likely to be accepted; contrariwise, expressions that conveyed a negative evaluation of the receiver's personality ("You are a sloppy child") and those that abandoned the receiver ("Do whatever you want already") were more likely to be rebuffed. Thus, it is desirable to confirm this finding with the children themselves as respondents.

Sannomiya (1993), referring to teacher admonishment as well as parental admonishment, reported that in schools, the admonishing expressions that children were more likely to accept were direct action demand for desirable behavior as well as self-control demand (i.e., making the child consider the consequences of the behavior and its effects on others). She also observed that the admonishing expressions that children were less likely to accept included negative personality evaluation, abandonment, and authoritative threat using the teacher's authority (e.g., threatening to write on the report card) as expressions that were difficult for children to accept. She assumed that the factor influencing the acceptability of admonishing might be the child's interpretation of the teacher's intention behind the admonishing utterance. It is possible that the receiver's interpretation of the background intention could change depending on the verbal expressions used by the admonishers.

While teachers may admonish with the positive intention of helping their students improve, they do not always convey this guiding intention correctly. A student who perceives the teacher's motivation as a personal attack will not be inclined to reflect on and improve their behavior. Therefore, in communicating with students, teachers need to consider the students' viewpoints and acquire accurate metacognitive knowledge of how students perceive admonishing expressions.

The purpose of this study was to investigate students' interpretations of teachers' intentions behind their utterances, aversion to verbal expressions, unconvincedness, remorse, and willingness to improve behavior in response to five typical types of admonishing expressions selected with reference to previous research. The current study collected data from schoolchildren instead of university students. Positive intention (guiding intention) and negative intention (aggressive intention) were set as the interpretation of utterance intention. The obtained results are intended to be useful to teachers by expanding their metacognitive knowledge of educational communication in school.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The participants were clients of a distance learning company, and the questionnaires were mailed individually. The receivers were then informed that the survey was voluntary, not a test, and that their responses would not be shared with others. After excluding incomplete responses, such as those from respondents who did not fill in the required fields, the total number of cases analyzed was 54. The respondents were 54 fifth- and sixth-grade students in Japanese elementary schools (36 girls and 18 boys).

2.2 Variables

The independent variable was the type of admonishing expression, and the dependent variables were the recognized guiding intention, recognized aggressive intention, aversion to the expression, unconvincedness, remorse for the behavior, and willingness to improve the behavior.

2.3 Materials and procedures

A questionnaire experiment was conducted under the assumption of an admonishing situation. The following situation was set up, considering the common experience of classroom cleaning time as a part of education in Japan: A student was admonished by a teacher for looking at a manga book at the invitation of a friend while cleaning, even though the teacher had told the students not to skip cleaning. Five types of admonishing expressions were prepared, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Five types of admonishing expressions

(a) Direct Action Demand "Clean up properly."
(b) Self-Control Demand "Think of how much trouble you will cause others if you behave like that."
(c) Authoritative Threat "I'll put that on your report card."
(d) Negative Personality Evaluation "You don't get it, no matter how many times I tell you."
(e) Abandonment "If you can't listen to me that well, you can do whatever you want."

For each of these expressions, we asked the students to rate the following questions on a 5-point scale.

- (Q1) Do you think the teacher intended to make you a good child? (Cognition of guiding intention)

- (Q2) Do you think the teacher intended to attack you? (Cognition of aggressive intention)
- (Q3) Do you dislike this expression? (Aversion response)
- (Q4) Are you unconvinced with this expression? (Unconvincedness response)
- (Q5) Do you feel remorse after receiving this expression? (Remorse response)
- (Q6) Do you consider improving your behavior after receiving this expression? (Willingness to improve behavior)

3. Results and discussion

A one-way analysis of variance and multiple comparisons (Holm's method) were conducted using the five admonishing expressions as independent variables and each of the six rating items as the dependent variable. The results of the tests and descriptive statistics by condition are displayed in Table 2.

First, there was no significant difference between (a) and (b) for any of the rating items. In contrast, there was a significant difference between these two and (c) on all items. The results revealed that (a) and (b) were more likely than (c) to evoke stronger cognition of guiding intention, a remorse response, and a willingness to improve behavior. Meanwhile, (a) and (b) were lower than (c) with respect to cognition of aggressive intention, an aversion response, and unconvincedness. These similar findings were also obtained for (d) and (e), for example, (a) and (b) were significantly higher in cognition of guiding intention and a willingness to improve behavior. Although some combinations did not reach significance, (a) and (b) were higher than (d) and (e) in a remorse response and lower in an aversion response and unconvincedness. No significant differences were found between (c), (d), and (e) in terms of cognition of aggressive intent, unconvincedness, a remorse response, and a willingness to improve behavior. Conversely, (d) was significantly higher than (c) and (e) in terms of cognition of guiding intention. Concerning the aversion response, (c) was significantly higher than (d).

These results indicate that utterances of direct action demand and self-control demand generally elicited positive cognition and responses and were more likely to lead to desirable outcomes. In contrast, authoritative threat, negative personality evaluation, and abandonment were generally more likely to elicit negative cognition and responses and less likely to lead to a remorse response and a willingness to improve behavior.

Pearson's correlation coefficients were obtained to examine the relationship between the rating items in each admonishing expression (Table 3). An examination of the correlation between the cognition of guiding intention and the cognition of aggressive intention was conducted to confirm the relationship between the two. A fairly high negative correlation of −.59 was found for (a) and −.70 for (b). This outcome demonstrates that in expressions (a) and (b), when the cognition of guiding intention was high, the cognition of aggressive intention was low, and vice versa. Conversely, a negative correlation was found

between (c), (d), and (e): specifically, −.38 for (c), −.27 for (d), and −.30 for (e), which was not very high. Thus, the results for (c), (d), and (e) suggest that positive and negative cognition of intention were not necessarily exclusive. As for the correlations between a remorse response and a willingness to improve behavior, fairly high positive correlations of .83, .86, .84, .90, and .94 were found for (a), (b), (c), (d), and (e), respectively. This outcome indicates that regardless of the type of admonishment, when the children showed a remorse response, their motivation to improve their behavior was also high, thus confirming a strong relationship between a remorse response and a child's motivation to improve behavior.

Even if such an expression is generally unfavorable, the receiver may not always interpret the intention negatively. Therefore, we conducted a supplementary analysis of how other responses differed depending on whether the utterance intention was interpreted positively or negatively.

Among the admonishing utterances that yielded unfavorable results, we focused on (c) authoritative threat, in which aggressive intention was most strongly perceived. In $(Q1 + (6 − Q2)) / 2$, those who scored 4 or more were regarded as positive interpreters, while those who scored 2 or less were considered negative interpreters. An analysis was then conducted to examine the relationship between the interpretation of utterance intention and other responses (Table 4). The results disclosed that the responses were quite different when the intention was positively or negatively interpreted. From this outcome, it is plainly evident that even admonishing utterances, which are generally difficult to accept, can invite positive responses when the receiver interprets the intention in a positive way.

The case of favorable admonishing utterances also had to be examined. As an example, we focused on (b) self-control demand, which had the highest cognition of guiding intention. Notably, there were 31 cases of positive interpreters compared to 5 cases of negative interpreters, revealing an imbalance. Considering that the cognition of intention toward (b) was generally favorable in the first place and that there was a high negative correlation ($r = −.70$) between the two types of cognition of intention, this imbalance was judged to be unavoidable, and the test was conducted as is. The results, which can be found in Table 5, demonstrated that the responses were, as before, quite different when the intention was positively or negatively interpreted. From this outcome, even an admonishing utterance that is generally well-accepted can lead to a negative response when the receiver interprets the intention negatively.

The above results indicate that exceptional interpretations of utterance intention can occur and that, regardless of the general acceptability of admonishing utterances, responses will differ depending on whether the intention behind the utterance made by the teacher is interpreted positively or negatively.

Table 2: Results of one-way ANOVA and multiple comparisons

Dependent variable: (Q1) Cognition of guiding intention						
One-way ANOVA	$F(4, 212) = 21.08, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.28$					
	M	SD	t-value ($df = 53$)
			(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
(a) Direct action demand	3.19	1.13	−1.12	4.75 ***	3.07 *	6.21 ***
(b) Self-control demand	3.35	1.26		6.00 ***	3.96 **	6.45 ***
(c) Authoritative threat	2.28	1.34			−2.54 *	1.22
(d) Negative personality evaluation	2.67	1.15				3.68 **
(e) Abandonment	2.11	1.21				

Dependent variable: (Q2) Cognition of aggressive intention						
One-way ANOVA	$F(4, 212) = 8.66, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.14$					
	M	SD	t-value ($df = 53$)
			(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
(a) Direct action demand	1.80	0.98	−0.22	−4.66 ***	−2.89 *	−2.79
(b) Self-control demand	1.81	1.10		−4.25 ***	−2.43	−2.34
(c) Authoritative threat	2.54	1.44		2.58	1.90	
(d) Negative personality evaluation	2.15	1.16			−0.39	
(e) Abandonment	2.20	1.29				

Dependent variable: (Q3) Aversion response						
One-way ANOVA	$F(4, 212) = 13.17, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.20$					
	M	SD	t-value ($df = 53$)
			(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
(a) Direct action demand	3.11	1.18	−1.57	−5.93 ***	−5.93 **	−4.35 ***
(b) Self-control demand	3.37	1.26		−4.74 ***	−2.39	−3.26 *
(c) Authoritative threat	4.17	1.09			2.86 *	1.32
(d) Negative personality evaluation	3.78	1.11				−1.27
(e) Abandonment	4.00	1.15				

Dependent variable: (Q4) Unconvincedness response						
One-way ANOVA	$F(4, 212) = 13.76, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.21$					
	M	SD	t-value ($df = 53$)
			(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
(a) Direct action demand	2.33	1.08	−1.90	−6.04 ***	−4.05 **	−4.77 ***
(b) Self-control demand	2.63	1.10		−5.05 ***	−2.36	−3.82 **
(c) Authoritative threat	3.59	1.27			2.40	1.61
(d) Negative personality evaluation	3.11	1.21				−0.93
(e) Abandonment	3.33	1.29				

Dependent variable: (Q5) Remorse response						
One-way ANOVA	$F(4, 212) = 9.34, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.15$					
	M	SD	t-value ($df = 53$)
			(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
(a) Direct action demand	3.31	1.16	−0.73	3.92 **	3.06 *	2.51
(b) Self-control demand	3.39	1.23		4.54 ***	3.45 **	2.90 *
(c) Authoritative threat	2.63	1.34			−1.85	−1.67
(d) Negative personality evaluation	2.85	1.25				0.15
(e) Abandonment	2.83	1.48				

Dependent variable: (Q6) Willingness to improve behavior						
One-way ANOVA	$F(4, 212) = 9.90, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.18$					
	M	SD	t-value ($df = 53$)
			(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
(a) Direct action demand	3.72	1.17	1.77	4.26 ***	4.09 **	3.57 **
(b) Self-control demand	3.56	1.19		3.75 **	3.41 **	2.93 *
(c) Authoritative threat	2.98	1.37			−0.50	−0.67
(d) Negative personality evaluation	3.06	1.28				−0.14
(e) Abandonment	3.07	1.45				

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, +$p < .10$.

Table 3: Pearson's correlation between the responses in each condition

	(Q1)	(Q2)	(Q3)	(Q4)	(Q5)
(a) Direct Action Demand					
(Q1) Guiding intention	–				
(Q2) Aggressive intention	–.59	–			
(Q3) Aversion	–.40	.40	–		
(Q4) Unconvincedness	–.41	.55	.44	–	
(Q5) Remorse	.63	–.66	–.45	–.61	–
(Q6) Willingness to improve behavior	.54	–.61	–.29	–.65	.83
(b) Self–Control Demand					
(Q1) Guiding intention	–				
(Q2) Aggressive intention	–.70	–			
(Q3) Aversion	–.49	.48	–		
(Q4) Unconvincedness	–.57	.52	.48	–	
(Q5) Remorse	.72	–.63	–.48	–.46	–
(Q6) Willingness to improve behavior	.73	–.60	–.38	–.49	.86
(c) Authoritative Threat					
(Q1) Guiding intention	–				
(Q2) Aggressive intention	–.38	–			
(Q3) Aversion	–.28	.45	–		
(Q4) Unconvincedness	–.48	.52	.70	–	
(Q5) Remorse	.63	–.44	–.41	–.57	–
(Q6) Willingness to improve behavior	.57	–.42	–.45	–.48	.84
(d) Negative Personality Evaluation					
(Q1) Guiding intention	–				
(Q2) Aggressive intention	–.27	–			
(Q3) Aversion	–.34	.36	–		
(Q4) Unconvincedness	–.22	.31	.50	–	
(Q5) Remorse	.54	–.38	–.39	–.20	–
(Q6) Willingness to improve behavior	.47	–.41	–.28	–.20	.90
(e) Abandonment					
(Q1) Guiding intention	–				
(Q2) Aggressive intention	–.30	–			
(Q3) Aversion	–.41	.39	–		
(Q4) Unconvincedness	–.35	.43	.54	–	
(Q5) Remorse	.58	–.40	–.47	–.50	–
(Q6) Willingness to improve behavior	.58	–.43	–.44	–.49	.94

Table 4: Results of *t*-test on children's response depending on the way of interpretation of utterance intention in condition (c) authoritative threat

	Positive ($n = 12$)		Negative ($n = 15$)		t	df	p	95 % CI	
	M	SD	M	SD					
(Q3) Aversion	3.58	1.31	4.80	0.41	–3.09	12.8	< .010	–2.07	–0.37
(Q4) Unconvincedness	2.75	1.14	4.60	0.63	–5.04	16.3	< .001	–2.63	–1.07
(Q5) Remorse	3.67	0.98	1.53	0.74	6.22	20.0	< .001	1.42	2.85
(Q6) Willingness to improve behavior	4.00	1.21	1.87	1.06	4.82	22.2	< .001	1.22	3.05

Table 5: Results of *t*-test on children's response depending on the way of interpretation of utterance intention in condition (b) self-control demand

	Positive ($n = 31$)		Negative ($n = 5$)		t	df	p	95 % CI	
	M	SD	M	SD					
(Q3) Aversion	2.97	1.14	5.00	0.00	–9.93	30.0	< .001	–2.45	–1.61
(Q4) Unconvincedness	2.16	0.86	4.20	0.84	–5.04	5.5	< .001	–3.05	–1.02
(Q5) Remorse	4.06	0.77	1.20	0.45	11.77	8.5	< .001	2.31	3.42
(Q6) Willingness to improve behavior	4.16	0.86	1.20	0.45	11.72	9.7	< .001	2.40	3.53

4. General discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of different admonishing expressions on students' cognition of speaker's intention, as well as responses such as aversion, unconvincedness, remorse, and willingness to improve behavior, using elementary school students as participants. In Japanese school culture, cleaning one's own classroom together is part of the educational process and daily occurrence, so we set up a scene where students would be admonished by their teachers if they don't clean. The results revealed the following observations.

(1) The cognition of guiding intention was stronger for the direct action demand and self-control demand expressions. At the same time, the cognition of aggressive intention was weaker, and the other responses were also relatively positive. These two expressions can be regarded as effective admonishing expressions that are easily accepted by students and readily motivate the receiver to improve behavior.

(2) The cognition of aggressive intention was stronger for the expressions of authoritative threat, negative personality evaluation, and abandonment, while their cognition of the intention to guide was weaker, and the other responses were relatively negative. These three expressions can be regarded as ineffective admonishing expressions that are difficult for students to accept and do not motivate them to improve their behavior.

These results are in line with the findings of a previous study that examined undergraduate and graduate students' cognition of admonishing expressions. However, in expressions (c) authoritative threat, (d) negative personality evaluation, and (e) abandonment, the positive and negative cognition of speaker's intention were not contradictory, and there were cases in which both states of cognition coexisted. This observation represents that (c), (d) and (e) were different from (a) and (b), in another aspect.

(3) Supplementary analysis suggested that regardless of the type of expression, positive cognition of speaker's intention led to other positive responses, and negative cognition of speaker's intention led to other negative responses. Even if an utterance is generally unacceptable, when the receiver positively perceives the speaker's intention of utterance, it is likely to lead to desirable responses, such as remorse and willingness to improve behavior. Conversely, even if the expression is generally acceptable, when the receiver perceives the intention of the utterance negatively, it is not likely to lead to a desirable response. Teachers must therefore keep in mind the potential that somewhat exceptional cognition of intention can occur, as well as realize that positive versus negative cognition of intention can affect the response in terms of remorse and the willingness to improve one's behavior.

Linguistically, among the admonishing expressions, (a) direct action demand simply conveyed the action needed, while (b) self-control demand, (c) authoritative threat, (d) negative personality evaluation, and (e) abandonment indirectly required it. In linguistics, the former is called "direct speech," while the latter is called "indirect speech"; both require essentially the same action, but the latter contains subtle nuances (Searle, 1975). As for (b), in addition to the indirect demand for the behavior of cleaning, the teacher's implicit trust in the student is conveyed, such as, "You are a person who can think for yourself and improve your behavior," which may make it easier for the student to accept the expression. On the other hand, in (c) authoritative threat, (d) negative personality evaluation, and (e) abandonment, it is clear from the context that the teacher is demanding of cleaning the room, but the teacher tends to convey unpleasant information for the students, such as threat, denial of personality, and cutting off involvement. Although students may understand that they are demanded to clean up, they may find it relatively difficult to accept this demand.

From the viewpoint of "speech act theory," Yamanashi (1986) stated that whether an utterance is appropriate or not depends on the receiver's interpretation of the intention behind the words. Even if a teacher means well to their students, the utterance is not necessarily interpreted favorably as he/she intended. Teachers should be mindful of expressions that are likely to be interpreted negatively and avoid their use; instead, they should aim to use expressions that are likely to be interpreted positively. When teachers admonish students, they need to be metacognitive; in other words, they need to adopt the student's point of view and consider how an utterance might be interpreted and what kind of response it might elicit.

Furthermore, teachers must be aware of the possibility of exceptional interpretation, as the current study demonstrated that some students interpreted the generally unacceptable expressions in a positive way, while, in contrast, students sometimes interpreted the generally acceptable expressions in a negative way. This difference in responses might have been due to the presence or absence of trust between the teacher and the student or the influence of the context, but it might also have been influenced by the student's tendency to interpret the teacher's intention. In particular, the tendency to consistently interpret others' intentions negatively cannot be overlooked. It is important to make educational efforts to encourage students who tend to interpret others' utterances negatively to pay attention to positive interpretations from time to time. It is hoped that the findings of this study will be useful in providing metacognitive knowledge for teachers to use effective admonishing expressions in educational communication with elementary school students.

5. Limitations and future directions

The following two points must be mentioned as limitations and future directions of this study. First, since the admonishing expressions in this study were presented in written form and did not include prosodic information, the participants might have recognized them differently depending on what kind of prosody

they imagined. It is necessary to control for prosody factors. Second, participants might have recalled their own similar experiences and based their responses solely on those experiences, or their responses might have been influenced by the interpersonal feelings they had toward their classroom teacher. Indeed, these influences might have been responsible for the mix of positive and negative intentional cognition in the negative personality evaluations and authoritative threats. Both prosody image and students' personal factors were extraneous variables that might have influenced the results. Thus, future research should examine the effects of admonishing expression while controlling for these extraneous variables.

Acknowledgments

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