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Studies in Ethnopragmatics, Cultural Semantics, and Intercultural Communication

Meaning and Culture

This is the second in a three-volume set that celebrates the career and achievements of Bert Peeters, a pioneer of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach in linguistics. It focuses on meaning and culture, with sections on "Words as Carriers of Meaning" and "Understanding Discourse in Cultural Context".

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Chapter 2

In Staunch Pursuit: The Semantics of the Japanese Terms *Shūkatsu* ‘Job Hunting’ and *Konkatsu* ‘Marriage Partner Hunting’

Yuko Asano-Cavanagh and Gian Marco Farese

Abstract This chapter presents an analysis of two Japanese compound words that share a common suffix. The words are *shūkatsu* ‘job hunting’ and *konkatsu* ‘marriage partner hunting’. It is perhaps not entirely unexpected that the English glosses fall short of conveying the significant cultural context behind them. The shared suffix, *katsu*, comes from the Japanese word *katsudō*, which means ‘activity’. As Dalton and Dales (*Japanese Studies* 36(1):1–19, 2016) point out, *katsu* implies a high level of engagement and dedication as well as a degree of obligation or a sense of duty associated with the task. For instance, *shūkatsu* implies single-mindedness regarding the activity of job-seeking, requiring deliberate effort from the participant. Similarly, *konkatsu* implies that total devotion to the act of finding a marriage partner. *Konkatsu*, unlike *shūkatsu*, has drawn some attention from scholars (Yamada in ‘*Konkatsu*’ *genshō no shakaigaku*. Tōyōkeizaishinpōsha, Tokyo, 2010; Dalton and Dales in *Japanese Studies* 36(1):1–19, 2016), but no accurate semantic analysis of either has been carried out thus far. This study uses the framework of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach to clarify the meaning of these two Japanese compound words. The analysis reveals that the people engaged in the activities they refer to are fearful of not attaining their goal and that the use of the suffix *katsu* in the Japanese word formation process is therefore semantically rooted. The analysis also assists in identifying and elaborating on some of the contradictions and complexities of modern Japanese society.

Keywords *Shūkatsu* · *Konkatsu* · Japanese culture · Japanese compounds · Semantics-culture interface · Natural Semantic Metalanguage

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2.1 Introduction

Katsu is one of the most prolifically used suffixes in Japanese discourse today. It is a derivative of the word *katsudō*, which can be roughly translated to mean ‘activity’. Initially, *katsu* was used exclusively in words such as *shūkatsu* 就活, which is an abbreviation of *shūshoku-katsudō* (roughly, ‘the activity of job hunting’) and *bukatsu* 部活, which is a shortened form of *kurabu-katsudō* (roughly, ‘club activity’). *Shūkatsu* and *bukatsu* are the only expressions listed in conventional dictionaries (Daijirin 2006; Kōjien 2008). The phrase *konkatsu* 婚活 ‘marriage partner hunting’ was coined in 2007 by sociologist Yamada Masahiro and journalist Shirakawa Momoko, and since that time the practice of attaching *katsu* to another word has become somewhat of a ‘linguistic fad’ (Dalton and Dales 2016: 2). Numerous other expressions have been created, such as *hokatsu* 保活 ‘nursery school hunting’, *ninkatsu* 妊活 ‘fertility treatment’, *rankatsu* ラン活 ‘school bag hunting’, *yūkatsu*₁ 友活 ‘new friends hunting’, *asakatsu* 朝活 ‘morning activity’, *yūkatsu*₂ 夕活 ‘evening activity’, *bikatsu* 美活 ‘beautifying activity’, and *shūkatsu*₂ 終活 ‘preparation for the end of one’s life’.¹ The suffix *katsu* is applied to various kinds of activities and can therefore be considered a productive morpheme in modern Japanese word formation processes.

As Dalton and Dales (2016: 2) point out, a term incorporating the morpheme *katsu* indicates an ‘idea of obligation’, an ‘activity that requires dedicated and prioritized effort’. For instance, *shūkatsu* does not merely stand for ‘job hunting’. Conventional dictionaries (e.g. Daijirin 2006) state that the meaning of *shūkatsu* encompasses the broad range of activities that high school, undergraduate and postgraduate students in Japan engage in shortly before graduation, for the purpose of finding employment. *Shūkatsu* typically refers to the wholehearted and intense pursuit of full-time work.² Similarly, *konkatsu* does not simply refer to ‘marriage partner hunting’, but to active engagement in the process of finding one’s future husband or wife, such as registering with marriage agencies, participating in ‘singles’ parties, or having formal matchmaking interviews (Dalton and Dales 2016: 2). As Yamada and Shirakawa (2008: 19–20, 176) suggest, the participant’s engagement, deliberate action and any initiatives taken in regard to attaining their goal are vital. It can be assumed that those who do not seriously and fully commit to the task will not achieve their goal.

At the same time, terms containing the suffix *katsu* reflect an important feature of modern Japanese society and can help explain some of the typical behavioural characteristics of Japanese people today. Looking at such terms from a cross-cultural perspective, it can be safely assumed that, although the phenomenon is not unique to

Japanese culture and society, there are no exactly equivalent words in many other languages. A literal translation does not convey the layers of embedded cultural meaning; the latter are contextual and reflect the social, political and cultural pressures that weigh on Japanese people today.

This chapter examines the meaning of *shūkatsu* and *konkatsu*, using the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach. The semantic analysis will pinpoint the cognitive states associated with each of the terms and emphasize an important aspect of modern Japanese culture, namely the preoccupation of many people with the idea that they must be fully engaged in an activity in order to achieve the desired result. The chapter is organized as follows. Section 2.2 gives a brief historical background of *katsu* used in *shūkatsu*. Section 2.3 describes the methodology adopted for the present analysis and includes information on the emergence and frequency of the two words selected for scrutiny. Section 2.4 starts with the examination of *shūkatsu*, followed by an analysis of *konkatsu*. Finally, Sect. 2.5 summarizes the findings and provides a conclusion.

2.2 Socio-Cultural Background of *Shūkatsu* and *Konkatsu*

Yamada (2010) states that the expression *shūshoku-katsudō* reflects the freedom of choice with respect to one’s occupation in modern Japanese society, which only became possible after the Meiji Restoration (1868). Previously, Japanese people used to continue the family business. Those born into a tradesman’s family, for instance, had little choice but to inherit the parental business. Basically, this meant that no effort was required to find a job during the feudal era in Japan. After the Second World War, however, Japan underwent major socio-economic change. Rapid industrialization in the 1950s brought with it a dramatic growth in the number of white-collar workers and widespread urbanization. An increasing number of people moved to large cities and chose to be employed as office workers (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2006). With the modernization of society, Japanese people began to experience more freedom of choice in relation to their occupation (Kosugi 2002; Yamada and Shirakawa 2008). Another significant change associated with job hunting occurred around the time when the Japanese economy collapsed in the late 1990s, which at the time was referred to as the bursting of the bubble economy (Yamada and Shirakawa 2008). Before the economic collapse, Japan had been on a consistent trajectory of growth, which meant that job hunting was not as intensely competitive as it is at present. Now, many people work part-time or are employed in temporary positions (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2017). Job seekers, today, must be totally dedicated to the act of job hunting if they wish to find a full-time position and long-term employment.

¹It is not known whether *seikatsu* 生活 ‘daily life’ is an abbreviated word composed of the suffix *katsu*. It could be an abbreviation of *seizon-katsudō* ‘activities to live or exist’.

²Another phrase is used for individuals who have temporarily been out of work; e.g., women who leave the workforce to have children. When they seek to regain employment, their engagement in job hunting is referred to as *sai-shūshoku katsudō*.

Similarly, socio-cultural changes after the Second World War influenced people's attitude towards marriage in general. Under the traditional family system, people had little choice but to marry someone whom their parents had chosen for them (Yamada and Shirakawa 2008; Sugimoto 2014). It was also the cultural norm for people to marry before turning thirty (Imamura 2009), having most likely met their marriage partner through an introduction by a third party. However, since the 1970s, with the significant economic growth of the country, the number of nuclear families has risen sharply, and the marriage rate has declined (Statistics Bureau 2017). More people consider marriage to be something that is not entirely necessary (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2013). However, concurrently, people have started to approach the act of finding a marriage partner with a higher degree of seriousness. In fact, the increased freedom around marriage has made it more difficult to get married (Yamada and Shirakawa 2008). Reflecting this fact, the *konkatsu* industry has been growing rapidly in Japan. The Japanese government has even made a commitment in relation to assisting people with *konkatsu*, in order to help solve the issues of an ageing population and a falling birth rate (Cabinet Office 2014a).

The words *shūkatsu* and *konkatsu* reflect culturally specific undertakings and ways of thinking that are characteristic of Japanese society, due to the socio-cultural changes that have occurred in the country over the last couple of decades. Both words imply a sense of compulsion and competition as people are aware of the risk that, if they are not fully committed, others will achieve the desired result before or instead of them. Therefore, they cannot be translated simply as 'job hunting' and 'marriage partner hunting', respectively. The intense thoughts and feelings of the speaker are embedded in the complex meanings of these compound words. The role of the semanticist is to pinpoint these thoughts and feelings as well as the semantic contribution of the suffix *katsu*.

2.3 Methodology and Data

This study employs the NSM approach (Goddard 2008, 2011; Peeters 2006; Wierzbicka 1996, 2006; Wierzbicka and Goddard 2014) to explicate the meaning of *shūkatsu* and *konkatsu*. The examples adduced in this chapter are taken from online sources including newspapers, advertisements, magazines and blogs, and were collected between 2007 and 2018. Websites, in particular, constitute a huge repository of various discourse genres, revealing aspects of contemporary culture (Kondo 2007; Pauwels 2012). The examples taken from the corpus illustrate how the Japanese people use the expressions *shūkatsu* and *konkatsu* in everyday discourse. Table 2.1 indicates the approximate prevalence of *shūkatsu* and *konkatsu* on the Internet between January 2007 and December 2017. Although Google frequencies are not entirely reliable, in the sense that the number of indexed web pages changes daily (Lüdeling et al. 2007), the data illustrates a distinct increase in the prevalence of *shūkatsu* and *konkatsu* in current Japanese discourse.

Table 2.1 Frequency of occurrence of *shūkatsu* and *konkatsu* on the Internet

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<i>Shūkatsu</i>	234	243	240	301	431	548	637	562	607	629	602
<i>Konkatsu</i>	0	55	384	338	414	514	574	619	763	1062	1159

Source <http://www.google.co.jp/trends/> (accessed 8 November 2018)

2.4 Semantic Analysis

2.4.1 *Shūkatsu*

When people grow up, they seek work because they need an income. The incentive to *shūkatsu* is therefore more or less the same as the one implied in the English phrase *job hunting*, as illustrated in (1):

- (1) 『なぜ働くのか』『何のために働くのか』就活が始まったばかりの学生女です。先日あった行内面接でこのような質問をされました。その質問に対し『収入を得るためです。収入がないと生活できないし、親元を離れて自立したいからです』と答えました。
 “‘Why do we work?’ ‘What for do we work?’ I am a female student who just started *shūkatsu*. At the mock job interview which was held at my university, I was asked these kinds of questions. I replied ‘In order to obtain an income. I cannot live without an income, and I would like to leave my parents’ house and be independent.’”
 (https://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q11167838436 [2016]).

Unless people have enough money to support themselves, they have no choice but to commit to job hunting. There are of course other reasons for seeking employment, such as the wish to contribute to society, to gain diverse work experience, or to help others in some way. However, as example (1) indicates, people are often engaged in *shūkatsu* in order to earn a living for themselves.

Shūkatsu means more than this, however. It refers to carrying out a series of activities and remaining dedicated to the task, usually within a specific, widely accepted timeframe (Shimomura and Kimura 1994; Fujisato and Kodama 2011). Jobs for new recruits and corporate trainees conventionally begin on April 1st, which is the start of the Japanese financial year. Therefore, applicants must give the best possible impression to any prospective employer in order to be selected within the required timeframe. Due to the current and prolonged economic recession in Japan, job seekers will not be successful if they present themselves as ordinary graduates. In fact, some university students go to great lengths, joining a high standard athletics club (*taiikukai*), taking on additional postgraduate courses, or travelling overseas as backpackers, specifically to prepare for and present well at job interviews. This is illustrated in example (2):

- (2) 再挑戦のため、企業の評価が高い有名国立大の大学院に進んだ。学問や 研究の道を進むためではなかったが、就活の準備は怠らなかった。就職試験の面接で使う話題にもなると、バックパックを背負って海外を旅した。

‘In order to take on the challenge again he enrolled in a postgraduate course at a national university that has a good reputation amongst companies. This was not to further his study or to engage in research, but because he would go to any length to prepare for *shūkatsu*. He even went overseas as a backpacker so that he could talk about his trip at a job interview.’

(<http://www.asahi.com/edu/articles/TKY201305160278.html> [2013]).

As illustrated in the above example, *shūkatsu* requires students to have foresight. They need to plan and take deliberate action while they are still at school or university, in order to improve their employability. However, knowledge, professional skills or work experience are not generally considered the top priority, except in cases where a company is deliberately recruiting graduates with specific knowledge or skills. In fact, Japanese companies prefer recruiting batches of new graduates directly from school or university and providing them with training and professional development in a systematic way, all for the purpose of long-term employment (Shimomura and Kimura 1994):

- (3) 新卒にこだわる理由は様々でしょうが、よく聞くのは「他の会社の常識にとらわれてない、まっさらな人材を一から育てた方が将来企業にプラスになる」という理由です。

‘Although there are various reasons why Japanese companies are particular about recruiting new graduates, people often say: “It is better for the company’s future to train fresh graduates who are not already tied up with the corporate values or expected conduct learned at other companies”.’

(https://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q10182648880 [2011]).

Applicants are therefore advised to show a passion for and willingness towards learning new things, rather than to attempt to sell themselves solely on their acquired knowledge or skills. Example (4) illustrates the aspects an interview panel is generally looking for in an applicant:

- (4) ポイントとしては

- 自分の会社に対する熱意があるかどうか
- 新しいことでも積極的に吸収チャレンジしようとするガッツがあるかどうか
- 面接官自信が「一緒に働いて見たいな」と思えるような人柄かをうまくアピールすること
思います。どんな職種でも上記は共通して求められる事項だと思います。

‘Important aspects are:

- Whether or not the applicant has a passion to work for the company;
- Whether or not the applicant has the courage and willingness to learn, absorb, and challenge themselves in new ways; and
- Whether or not the applicant portrays his/her personality well so that the members of the interview panel feel like they would like to work with the applicant. Regardless of the industry, these points are commonly considered desirable.’

(https://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1017624430 [2008]).

In short, candidates need to emphasize their potential to be of use to the employer, based on the experience gained during their university or school life.

Shūkatsu, in Japan, also includes a long and complicated process of meeting with numerous people (Shimomura and Kimura 1994; Fujisato and Kodama 2011). Job hunters must first of all attend corporate seminars and submit their resume as well as a completed ‘entry sheet’ (which contains details about their accomplishments, strengths and weaknesses).³ After passing the document screening stage, they can move on to complete not only written exams but also aptitude and personality tests, to partake in group work, and to participate in multiple rounds of interviews. This, then, is the process of *shūkatsu* in its entirety; it is the process that needs to be followed for each of the jobs for which a person applies. See examples (5) and (6):

- (5) ずっと就活している学生です。はや140社近く受けて内定はゼロ。一次面接すら10社ぐらいしか通らないダメ人間です。

‘I am a student who has been engaged in *shūkatsu* for a long time. I have already applied at 140 companies, but I haven’t even received one informal job offers. I am a hopeless individual as I have only gotten to the first round of interviews in about 10 companies.’

(https://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q13107733388 [2013]).

- (6) 就職活動で面接して何次(何回)まで最高あるもんですか?私の場合、最高でも4次面接までだったのですが、友人が7次面接まであったとか...

‘How many interviews are people compelled to go through during *shūkatsu* (to get a job offer)? I, for one, have been through four rounds of interviews so far, but a friend has been through seven of them.’

(https://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1035797410 [2010]).

As shown in these examples, participants in *shūkatsu* are required to send job applications to a vast number of companies, go through several stages of interviews and meet with numerous people to obtain even one job offer.

Furthermore, conformity with social norms is a particularly salient part of Japanese culture (Clancy 1986; Davies and Ikeno 2002). As Dalton and Dales (2016) point out, job applicants need to comply with strictly defined norms relating to their appearance and behaviour, including norms associated with *shūkatsu*. Participants in *shūkatsu* are advised to wear the appropriate coloured business suit and shoes:

- (7) 本当の就職活動のスーツの色と柄は、紺無地やグレー無地のスーツです。

‘The real colour and design for the job interview process is a navy blue or grey suit without any pattern or design.’

(https://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q10182648880 [2017]).

³According to a survey conducted by DISCO (2017), the average number of entry sheets submitted during *shūkatsu* in 2017 was 47.1 per candidate.

In other words, *shūkatsu* involves paying full attention to appearance according to widely understood and accepted social norms. Although applicants need to stand out in terms of their willingness and passion, their appearance and attitude should comply with widely accepted conventions.

Last but not least, *shūkatsu* is analogous to a serious game of win or lose. The idea is that those who are not actively and fully engaged in it will miss out. In example (8), students attend a formal ceremony to start their *shūkatsu*. In a passage not reproduced here, the ceremony is being likened to the departure for the front in times of war, or the tension created by the start of an election campaign.

- (8) 「内定勝ち取るぞ!」専門学校生が「出陣式」名古屋
 “I am determined to win an informal offer of employment!” Vocational college students in Nagoya City attended the kick-off ceremony for their *shūkatsu*.
 (<http://www.job.chunichi.co.jp/news/detail.php?nid=2701&ts=1425490687> [2015]).

For many participants, not receiving an offer of employment before graduation in March equates to a significant failure in life (Karube et al. 2014). Naturally, the amount of stamina and capability required for *shūkatsu* is intense and the process is very stressful (Shimomura and Kimura 1994, 2004). Those involved in *shūkatsu* are likely to feel very insecure or apprehensive about their future:

- (9) 大学3年生です。就活が不安でつらいです。夜も眠れません。
 ‘I am a third-year university student. I am painfully worried about *shūkatsu*. I cannot sleep at night.’
 (https://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1080563690 [2012]).

Shūkatsu often causes fear and anxiety. However, there is no other option for soon-to-be graduates but to take part and persist. *Shūkatsu* is a compulsory activity for whoever seeks employment. Those involved in it are fearful because not finding a job means they have no way of making a living. The process has to be repeated until a job offer is received:

- (10) 早くこんな辛い状況打破するには就職決めるしかないんです。
 ‘The fastest and only way to escape the painful situation is to find and decide on a job.’
 (https://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1127377191 [2009]).

In summary, engaging in *shūkatsu* means carrying out job-seeking activities with single-mindedness and wholehearted dedication. The meaning of the word can be explicated as follows:

[A] *shūkatsu*

- a. it can be like this:
 someone thinks like this:
 b. “I am not a child [m] anymore
 c. I want to do something of one kind now, like many people do when it is like this:
 they are not children anymore
 they want to live well, they want some other people to live well
 because of this, they can't not do things of some kinds for a long time
 d. if I don't do it, I can't live well
 e. because of this, I want someone else to think about me like this:
 ‘this someone is very good
 this someone did many good things before
 this someone can do many good things now, I know it’
 f. if this other someone can think like this about me,
 I can do something of one kind for a long time, as I want
 g. I want it to be like this
 h. I don't know where this other someone is
 i. I want to know
 j. because of this, I think like this:
 “I can't not do some things now like many people do
 I can't not think about these things, I can't think about anything else
 it can be very bad for me if I don't do these things, I know this well
 if I don't do these things, someone else will do these things; I don't want this”

The final section of the explication captures the element of ‘anxiety’ that is inherent in the meaning of *shūkatsu*. The cognitive scenario also includes the speaker’s awareness of the fact that if they do not take action and do certain things, a negative or undesirable outcome will be inevitable and consequently others may benefit from the available opportunity. The explication furthermore captures the idea of ‘prioritized effort’ emphasized by Dalton and Dales (2016). The component ‘I can’t not do some things now like many people do’ is vague on purpose and does not specify what the speaker commits to. The activities related to the practice of *shūkatsu* are unique in nature and scope; it is unnecessary to specify them in the explication. The idea of having to do certain things was the key element that needed to be included in this cognitive scenario.

2.4.2 *Konkatsu*

People who engage in *konkatsu* are grown-up adults who are ready to tie the knot. As previously mentioned, *konkatsu* refers to the various activities that are part of a dedicated search for a marriage partner. Example (11) demonstrates how hectic the search can get; it is a statement by a woman who found a husband after being engaged in *konkatsu* for several months.

- (11) 最初は土日のみ、お見合いをしてましたが、効率の悪さにこのままでは35歳には結婚できないと思い、スケジュールの改善。出勤前に朝活でアプローチ、昼休みはネット婚活、終業後にスポーツ婚活、打ち上げ、または婚活バーへ寄って終電で帰宅、という怒涛のスケジュールを2ヶ月こなしたところで今の旦那様と出会い、両親を連れて挨拶に行き、私の誕生日にスピード入籍しました。

'At the beginning, I used to have formal marriage interviews only on Saturdays and Sundays. But it was not effective. I decided to change my schedule as I thought I would not be able to get married by the age of 35, if I continued in this way. First, I approached men in the morning, before work. Then I did *konkatsu* activities on the net during lunch breaks. After work, I joined sports *konkatsu*, participated in *konkatsu* parties, and dropped by *konkatsu* bars, returning home on the last train. After two months of this kind of very hectic schedule, I met my current husband. We went to greet my parents and got married immediately afterwards, on my birthday.'

(<http://komachi.yomiuri.co.jp/t/2016/0509/761487.htm> [2016]).

A recent survey (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2015) answers the question why *konkatsu* is such serious business in Japan. One of the main reasons why people remain single (unless they engage in serious *konkatsu*) is that, in their daily lives, they do not have the opportunity to meet a suitable partner:

- (12) 婚活中の自営業で29歳男です。家族で自営業ということもあり出会いに乏しく、最近ネット婚活を始めました。

'I am a 29-year-old man who is self-employed and in the midst of *konkatsu*. Since I am involved with running our family business, I rarely meet anyone. So, I recently started internet *konkatsu*.'

(https://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q13139866213 [2014]).

Like the 29-year-old male in example (12), people who commit to *konkatsu* generally do so because they believe that marrying someone will be beneficial to them in some way. Not everyone shares that belief: it has been reported that people become less interested in marriage if they are financially and psychologically independent, self-sufficient and content to remain on their own (Cabinet Office 2004).⁴ Still, the underlying motivation for people who do engage in *konkatsu* is an often acute awareness that life as a single, unmarried person is not for them: they stand to gain from getting married, and their aim is to find someone they can live with for the rest of their lives, comfortably and happily (Cabinet Office 2014b). The individual engaged in *konkatsu* in example (13) is a female who believes that having a family will bring her the kind of happiness she cannot achieve by herself:

- (13) 私も婚活中です。(略)私も結構お金使いました。金の無駄だし何度か辞めようかと思いましたが、まだ頑張ってます。なぜ辞めないのか?私も家族を持って普通の幸せな暮らしをしたいからです。

'I am in the midst of *konkatsu* as well. (Abbrev.) I have spent a lot of money, too. I thought of giving up several times as it was a waste of money. However, I am still trying. Why am I not quitting? Because I want to have a family and to lead a happy life.'

(https://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q11143699771 [2015]).

Those committed to *konkatsu* usually look forward to having children of their own. The general expectation for engaged in *konkatsu* is that having children will be an aspect of their married lives, since marriage is still commonly associated with the desire to become a parent (Cabinet Office 2014b):

- (14) 婚活をしている39歳、男です。子供が欲しく、20代の女性と結婚したいと考えているのですが、なかなか良縁に恵まれません。

'I am a 39-year-old man who is engaged in *konkatsu*. I would like to have children so I wish to marry someone in her twenties, but I am just not lucky enough to find anyone.'

(https://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q14168047524 [2016]).

Admittedly, not everyone who wishes to marry in Japan looks forward to having one or more children. However, it is uncommon for someone who is not ready to have children to engage in *konkatsu*, and it is considered highly disadvantageous for someone to reveal in the course of *konkatsu* that raising children is not their aim in life.

- (15) 結婚相談所の男性は、ほぼ、子どもを望んでいる方ばかりです。(略)逆に、最初から子供いらないと言ってしまうのは、婚活では非常に不利ですよ。

'Most men who are registered with marriage agencies wish to have children. (Abbrev.). In fact, it is extremely disadvantageous during *konkatsu* to say, from the outset, that you don't want to have children.'

(https://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q12172348607 [2017]).

For those who do not wish to become parents, it is not even deemed necessary to commit to *konkatsu*, as the search for a marriage partner does not need to conclude at a predetermined time (the end of the child-bearing age for females). Research suggests, though, that most people who get seriously engaged in *konkatsu* do so after they reach their late 20s. This is presumably because they have not met anyone suitable up until that time or they were not interested in marriage previously. But as they grow older, their priorities change. They increasingly feel they need to become proactive. They are under significant pressure and aware they need to act fast since, for whatever reason, they have not found a partner now that the time has come to get married, and they are therefore at risk of remaining single:

- (16) 出会いがない 上場会社の30歳の男です。今春に海外勤務から戻った後に辞令が下りて地方勤務しています。戻ってみると国内に残っていた同期含めた友人・知人達は皆結婚してしまいましたので少し焦り始めました。

'I have no opportunities to meet someone. I am a thirty-year-old man who works at a listed company on the stock exchange. I am now working in a rural area, since being transferred after coming back from overseas this spring. When I came back to Japan, I found out that my friends and acquaintances all got married and I started to feel a bit impatient.'

(<http://komachi.yomiuri.co.jp/t/2013/0727/607760.htm?g=04> [2013]).

⁴The percentage of unmarried men and women reaching the age of fifty has continued to rise since 1960; a study carried out in 2015 (Statistics Bureau 2017) found that 23.37% of men and 14.06% of women aged fifty were not married.

People engaged in *konkatsu* are typically worried about remaining unmarried for the rest of their lives, which is one of the reasons why they become involved in it. In general, those who have decided to go through the process are otherwise simply unable to meet anyone in their daily lives. They have no other alternative but to rely on *konkatsu* if they wish to get married. As noted by Yamada and Shirakawa (2008: 176), failure to act will in all likelihood result in married life remaining an unattainable goal. Consider example (17):

- (17) 婚活がおっくうなのは凄くわかります。でもやっぱり待ってるだけじゃ出会えないですよ。
‘I understand that *konkatsu* can be troublesome. But you won’t meet someone by just waiting for it to happen.’
(<http://komachi.yomiuri.co.jp/t/2017/1010/822482.htm> [2017]).

In other words, waiting for someone to just walk into your life, without taking any steps to make it possible, is not a viable option. There is likely to be a perfect match out there, but to find that person requires a lot of hard work and conscious effort.

To be successful in *konkatsu*, people must be able to demonstrate exactly what they can offer as a prospective husband or wife. It is one thing to check out another party’s profile and description and to be favourably impressed; it is quite another to ensure one’s own profile (age, personality, appearance, skills, academic background, occupation, income...) is of the highest possible standard. People who are looking for a marriage partner need to appeal to the other party as much as the other party appeals to them. Consider example (18):

- (18) 私は婚活して、昨年結婚した30代女性です。婚活だと男女ともに条件から先に入るの
で、スペックが悪いと、おそらく誰からも相手にされません。
‘I am a woman in my 30s who got married last year after engaging in *konkatsu*. In
konkatsu, both men and women first check each other’s profile. So, if your profile is
not good, no one will take you seriously.’
(https://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q12119960222 [2014]).

It is hard work to portray oneself in the best possible way, with a view to being selected ahead of other candidates. This is something *shūkatsu* and *konkatsu* have in common, as pointed out in (19):

- (19) 婚活と婚活は似てます。どちらも自分の良い点を売り、相手に気に入ってもらい。気に入ら
ないなら二番、三番候補で考えないといけない。
‘*Shūkatsu* and *konkatsu* are similar as you need to sell yourself and be accepted by the
other party. If not, you will need to consider your second or third preferences.’
(https://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1444472469 [2010]).

Like *shūkatsu*, *konkatsu* requires absolute dedication (Dalton & Dales 2016) and is similar to a game of chance. In both instances, it is necessary to convince the other party of one’s excellent overall profile: one that has all the qualities required to be preferred over others. But there is a difference as well. Compatibility is a factor in *konkatsu*, but not in *shūkatsu*. From the outset, the two parties need to make sure that they are similarly disposed towards one another, that there are shared affinities, that they are ready to share their lives together. Consider example (20):

- (20) それなりにメールをいただき、数名の方とメールやりとりしてたのですが、一人、メールの
時点で自分と感覚や波長がぴったり合う方がいて...しばらくして会うことになり、一年半
の交際を経て、無事に結婚することができました。
‘After receiving various emails, I continued to communicate with several people via
email. Among them, I found someone who had a similar outlook and similar values.
After a while, we met. We dated for one and a half years and at last were safely
married.’
(https://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q14163021274 [2016]).

The primary aim of *konkatsu* is to find the best possible match amongst the options available, in the best possible timeframe. Decisions about whether another party matches one’s own preferences and meets one’s requirements or conditions must be made quickly to ensure that no valuable opportunities are missed. In the course of *konkatsu*, it is in one’s interest to multiply the number of social events attended and to meet as many potentially suitable parties as possible:

- (21) 婚活で一番重要な事は、とにかくたくさんの人と出会う事。そして、自分の魅力を高
める事。この2点です。
‘The most important thing during *konkatsu* is to meet as many people as possible. The
second priority is to enhance your own attractiveness. Just these two.’
(https://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q14166664564 [2016]).
- (22) 31歳のときに婚活を始め、ありとあらゆる活動をし、100人は出会いました。
‘I started *konkatsu* at the age of 31. I participated in all sorts of activities and I met
more than 100 people.’
(<http://komachi.yomiuri.co.jp/t/2016/0509/761487.htm> [2016]).

There are known instances of *konkatsu* agencies holding screenings of important sports events such as the Soccer World Cup, so that people who are in the hunt for a marriage partner can watch one or more matches together and socialize. The screenings can be advertised as in (23), where *konkatsu* itself is explicitly likened to a competition:

- (23) 絶対に負けられない婚活がそこにはある W杯PVで企画
‘This *konkatsu* you definitely cannot lose. We stage public screenings of the Soccer
World Cup.’
(http://digital.asahi.com/articles/ASG6275D6G62PTIL02R.html?iref=comkiji_txt_end_s_kjid_ASG6275D6G62PTIL02R [2014]).

Competitions are normally events where there is bound to be a winner and one or more losers. This competition, though, is different: the agency defiantly promises there will not be any losers.

On the basis of the above observations, the meaning of *konkatsu* can be spelled out as follows:

[B] *konkatsu*

- a. it can be like this:
 someone thinks like this:
- b. I am not a child [m] anymore
- c. I want to live with someone for a very long time
- d. I want to feel something very good when I am with this someone
- e. I want to do many things with this someone
- f. after I have lived with this someone for some time, I want there to be children [m]
- g. I want to think about these children [m] like this: "these children [m] are mine"
- h. because of this, I want someone else to think about me like this:
 "this someone is very good
 I feel something very good when I am with this someone
 because of this, I want to live with this someone for a very long time"
- i. if I think the same about this other someone,
 I can live with this other someone for a long time
- j. I don't know where this other someone is
- k. I want to know
- l. because of this, I think like this:
 "I can't not do some things now like many people do
 I can't not think about these things, I can't think about anything else
 it will be very bad for me if I don't do these things, I know this well
 if I don't do these things, someone else will do these things; I don't want this"

2.5 Conclusion

It has been pointed out that the meaning of a compound is not necessarily compositional, i.e. that it does not equate to the sum of its parts (Kageyama and Yumoto 1997; Ito and Sugioka 2002). However, as illustrated in the analysis, examples of usage strongly suggest that, in the case of *katsu* compounds, the semantic components of the two lexical constituents are retained and that the meaning of a *katsu* compound is a straightforward combination of the meanings of its parts. *Katsu* compounds in modern Japanese discourse carry a presumption of vigorous engagement, with a view to gaining the best possible outcome. It is because their peers seem to be so committed to pursuing a job or a marriage partner that individuals will automatically and unconsciously respond to the obligation to do likewise and be fully engaged in the activity. Many people in Japan feel pressured into complying with protocols and social norms. Those engaged in the activities described here can therefore be said to be motivated by their fears or anxiety in the face of alternative outcomes. At the same time, *shūkatsu* and *konkatsu* in Japanese discourse reflect some of the wider issues Japanese society is currently facing, such as the lingering economic stagnation, the lack of job security, and the growing number of unmarried people. The fact that many people sincerely and earnestly engage in *shūkatsu* and *konkatsu* indicates that many Japanese people still adhere to traditional values. Rather than embracing other options and lifestyles available in a modern society, many Japanese people are concerned about their status, which includes their job and family.

Both terms, *shūkatsu* and *konkatsu*, reflect intense and important thoughts and feelings pertaining to the activity being carried out. The two explications that have been provided in this chapter can be easily compared, and any differences can be identified by looking at individual components. On the other hand, the comparison highlights the presence of a shared semantic core, which is likely to turn up as well in the semantic analysis of other *katsu* compounds. A shared semantic core indicates a common conceptual denominator, as well as semantic compatibility between different words that denote proactive, concentrated and deliberate engagement in an activity, for the purpose of achieving a goal dictated by the need to conform to perceived societal pressures.

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