Japanese characteristics associated with the concept *amae*

Bachelor’s Thesis in Japanese Studies
VT 2015

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Transcription and references

Japanese terms used in this essay will be italicized. Names and terms will be transcribed using the modified Hepburn method, unless they are known names of people and or locations such as “Tokyo”. The word *amae* will appear in its verb-form *amaeru*, and as an adjective: *amai*. Some researchers express the verb form as “perform *amae*” or “request *amae*”. This paper will express it as *amaeru* or *amaeteiru* as well as perform or request *amae*. Hence, an “*amae* requester” will also be described as person who is “*amaeteiru*”. Japanese words with significant characters will be translated and explained as footnotes. Translations are done by myself unless otherwise specified.

1. Introduction

Background

When one finds oneself in a country speaking a foreign language, one might find different traditions, mindsets and conceptions of human behavior. The need to rely on dictionaries or translators when there is no common language of communication may arise. However one may quickly discover that many expressions, phrases or words have no equivalent in the target language. Words describing concrete objects or movements such as ‘chair’ or ‘walk’ usually have equivalents in most languages and cultures. Meanwhile words of an abstract nature may not have equivalent counterparts due to varying conceptions and specific needs for them. Words for basic emotions such as happy, sad, angry may commonly be used in most languages, but words like *empathy*, which are commonly used in many western countries have no equivalent counterpart in some Asian countries. Anthropological studies have been conducted in Papua New Guinea, which showed that the local people had different conceptions of empathy compared to speakers of the English language.\(^1\) Similar discrepancies can be found in industrialized cultures with unrelated languages. The Japanese language has many words and concepts that not only lack an equivalent, but also are difficult to understand without prior knowledge of the culture and social interaction. One such term is *amae*, which is a word that has received international

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attention after a book written by the Japanese psychologist Dr. Doi Takeo. I have known of the word *amae* since I was a child, because my father is Japanese and we speak Japanese. I first encountered research concerning the concept during my studies at Kyoto University, and found it interesting because of the versatility of the word and the fact that it could not be translated. This is why I chose to write my bachelor’s thesis on *amae*.

**Introduction**

Japan has several cultural terms that have been researched by Japanese and foreign scholars over the years. Terms such as *amae* are shrouded by ambiguity and sometimes abstract concepts. As Japanese culture has received international attention, many Japanese words are becoming internationally known. People in Sweden, for example, generally know words such as *sushi, kimono, katana, samurai, ninja, manga, anime, sake* and lately even *ramen*. These are nouns that sometimes appear in popular culture and lack a variety of interpretation in most modern contexts; a samurai is a Japanese katana-wielding warrior in a kimono, and requires little to no understanding of *Bushido* or the teachings of *Hagakure*. The samurai have been romanticized in novels and movies over the years and have been gradually introduced into Western popular culture as well. However Japanese terms describing behavior or emotions have yet to receive comparable attention. *Amae* is a term that is considered an emotion as well as behavior. The term is very common in the Japanese language and it is commonly associated with the behavior of children.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to analyze why and how *amae* is considered Japanese, and to research if it is the aspect of dependence that makes *amae* considered unique. I will not evaluate the empirical validity of the statements and claims of any researcher mentioned in this study, because I lack knowledge and training in the field of psychology. The purpose is to research what they consider Japanese about *amae*. A term that can be used to describe the behavior of a child, which in another context can mean a social skill or simply inappropriate behavior, is very versatile and requires social knowledge and experience to understand its implication in different settings. The purpose is to comprehend the Japanese essence of the interpersonal interactions involving *amae*. 
The Definition of *amae*

The foreword of the English translation of “*Amae no Kozo*” written by John Bester describes *amae* as:

“[It is] the behavior of a child who desires to spiritually “snuggle-up” to the mother, to be enveloped in an indulgent love... By extension, it refers to the same behavior, whether unconscious or deliberately adopted, in the adult. And by extension again, it refers to any situation in which a person assumes that he has another’s goodwill, or takes a—possibly unjustifiably—optimistic view of a particular situation in order to gratify his need to feel at one with, or indulged by, his surroundings.”

*Amae* is therefore a behavior and emotion that adults can adopt, that can be enacted in many situations, and hence becomes an important key to understand Japanese mentality. *Amae* is translated as dependence in modern Japanese-English dictionaries, and yet there is a word in Japanese that corresponds to dependence in English. The two are not synonyms. *Amae* is the behavior and emotion that can be seen in a parent-child relation; the relation between an infant and its parent, in which, the infant is aware of its mother being independent from it. *Amae* is a request for self-indulgence and to receive love and care. This parent-child relation is according to Doi the ideal relationship in Japanese mentality. The word *amae* is similar to the word *amai*, which is an adjective meaning that something is sweet in flavor, and it is also the adjective-form of *amae*, which is the nominal form. The word can be combined with other words to produce colored or nuanced words such as *amaenbō*: a wheedling child, *amayakasu*: a verb meaning to baby, spoil or pamper. According to Doi, cultural concepts such as *enryo* (show of restraint), *uchi* (in-group) and *soto* (out-group) can be contrasted to the parent-child model of relationship where there is little or no modesty, hierarchy or sense of unfamiliarity.

Previous research

*Amae* received international attention after Japanese psychiatrist Doi Takeo published his book “*The anatomy of dependence*” in 1971. The psychology of *amae* has been a topic of discourse, and its implication and indigenousness have been discussed. A current leading author on the topic

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of *amae* is Professor Susumu Yamaguchi of Tokyo University, who has been involved in empirical research of *amae*, both in Japan and abroad. I have chosen to primarily use the works of Doi and Yamaguchi in order to establish an understanding of *amae* and its significance to Japanese interpersonal relationships. In their works, there are references and theories built upon the observations and suggestions of prominent researchers within the subject. It is my understanding that the theories of these two scholars will provide a comprehensive overview of *amae*. Doi’s work will provide information on the view of *amae* on which most of the discourse is built upon, and Yamaguchi’s view will provide a view on *amae* situations in everyday life, from a folk psychological perspective. Yamaguchi further explores *amae* interactions involving manipulation, suspension of social restraints and in vertical situations, providing evidence from other researchers and experiments. He was involved in an experiment conducted in the USA, which proved that *amae* exists outside Japan. The study titled “Amae in Japan and the United States: An exploration of a “Culturally Unique” Emotion”, also explores positive and negative emotions associated with *amae* in both Japan and in the USA.

**Material**

The material used for this study consists of books and articles written by Japanese and foreign scholars in the fields of psychology and sociology. The main works used in this study will be “*Amae no Kozo*” by Doi and the articles written by Yamaguchi and his colleagues. The books provide different perspectives on the topic of *amae* in both Japan and abroad, and the articles include a study performed in the USA, which proved the existence of *amae* as an emotion and behavior in the West. In Yamaguchi’s article “Further Clarifications of the Concept of *Amae* in Relation to Dependence and Attachment”, he emphasizes the importance of ecological validity in the definition of *amae* and attempts to demonstrate how laymen use the word *amae*. The material will be used to extract theories and facts about social interaction involving *amae*. The material contains psychological analyses of *amae* in different settings, which will not be the focus of this study. The provided examples and settings of *amae* will be analyzed in an attempt to determine the factors that are considered Japanese about the behavior and emotion. Yamaguchi provides examples and claims regarding *amae* in vertical and horizontal relationships, which will be explored in order to study aspects related to Japanese culture and customs.
Method
The association of *amae* to Japan and Japanese culture will be researched through interpersonal relationships in Japan. The existing research will be analyzed in a qualitative method to examine the examples of *amae* episodes, along with related Japanese concepts concerning interpersonal interactions. A comparison of the inappropriateness-approach of Yamaguchi and Doi’s mother-child relation based approach will be made in order to understand the difference of their perspectives on the subject. The context of the *amae* situations given in the publications will be compared and analyzed to comprehend how they are associated to Japanese mentality. The comparison between these perspectives and the *amae* situations provided by the authors is expected to clarify the elements of *amae* associated with Japanese culture.

Research questions
What facets are considered Japanese regarding *amae* and is dependence important for its understanding?

Thesis statement
This study will compare and analyze two major perspectives on the concept of *amae*, with the purpose of determining the factors associated with Japanese culture. I will combine my own observations and experiences regarding *amae* and interpersonal distances in Japanese society, with the theories of the prominent researches mentioned earlier. I will argue that the function of *amae* lies in interpersonal relationships concerning the perceived distance, or familiarity, between individuals in vertical and horizontal relationships, and that these social interactions entail distances to people that can be contrasted to close interactions involving *amae*. I will point out the importance of understanding the relation of *amae* to dependence, while emphasizing that dependence is only one aspect of *amae*. My concurrence with Doi regarding the linguistic uniqueness of *amae* will be explained, and I will explain why I do not fully agree with explaining *amae* as dependence. I will claim that the vertical and horizontal relationships, in which *amae* functions, is the unique facet of *amae*, which consequently is associated to the concept itself. I will include my own experiences with *amae* and interpersonal relations in both Sweden and
Japan in order to compare and explore their significance to *amae* as a unique Japanese concept.

## 2  *Amae* and related concepts

### Definition and theories regarding *amae*

The following is the definition of *amae* from the Japanese dictionary *Super Daijirin*.

1. To beg for things or care, and intentional overfamiliar behavior.\(^5\)
2. To feely indulge in the goodwill and kindness of others, and to behave carefree expecting the goodwill and kindness of others.\(^6\)

Below is a translation from a Japanese-English dictionary from 1974:

> Presume upon another’s love; behave like a spoilt child; play the baby ((to)); be coquettish; coquet; fawn on.\(^7\)

*amae* is often translated as *dependence* in modern Japanese-English dictionaries. The definition as dependence is attributed to the result of Doi’s research on *amae*. He explains *amae* as an imitation of a parent-child relationship, and suggests that this is dependence. Doi uses the basic behavior of a child towards its parents, typically a mother, to explain the foundation of *amae*. A child’s desire to be loved by its mother is the essence of *amae*, and according to Doi, this desire remains in adults and is expressed in various ways in interpersonal relations.\(^8\) Early in *Amae no Kōzō*, Doi recalls a dialogue with his professor during his studies at the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Tokyo, when Doi suggested that *amae* is unique to Japan and professor replied, “Do you think so? Even puppies *amaeru*”.\(^9\) Though Doi assumes his professor meant that such a universal word that even includes the behavior of animals must exist in other languages, the fact

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\(^5\)モノをねだってかわいがってもらおうとして、ことさらになれなれしく振る舞う。甘ったれる。
*Mono wo nedattari kawaigatte moraôto shite, kotosarani narenareshiku furumau. amattareru*

\(^6\)人の好意親切を遠慮なく受け入れる。また、好意親切をあてにして、気ままに振る舞う。人を好いてしまう。
*Hito no kô shinsetsu o atari ni ukéreru. Mata, kô shinsetsu o ate ni shite, kimama ni furumau.*


\(^9\)Doi, 1976, 「そうかね、君。子犬だって甘えるよ。」 7.
of its nonexistence intrigued Doi, and led him to believe that there is a connection between *amae* and Japanese mentality. Doi recounts speaking with a Japan-born English mother of a patient he was treating, whom he was speaking in English with until she said: “this child did not *amaeru* much”, in Japanese.\(^\text{10}\) When asked why she said it in Japanese, she replied that it could not be expressed in English. In the English publication of *The anatomy of dependence*, the translator John Bester adds an explanation in parenthesis regarding the child who did not *amaeru*, which is not present in the Japanese edition:

\[
\text{(in other words, she kept herself to herself, never “made up” to her parents,}
\]

\[
\text{never behaved childishly in the confident assumption that her parents would}
\]

\[
\text{indulge her)}^{11}\]

It suggests that bilingual individuals proficient in English as well as Japanese have difficulties expressing thoughts concerning *amae* in English. The reason why there is no explanation in the Japanese edition, is simply because there is no need for it. Japanese readers will understand the implication, and also that it is difficult, or even impossible to express it with a few words in English. He notes that newborn babies do not *amaeru*, and it is only when the child starts to desire its mother when one can say that “this child is *amaeteiru*”.\(^\text{12}\) Meaning that a child must develop mentally to a level that it can recognize its mother as separate from itself, and the desire for its mother is what *amae* is. In other words, until the child starts to *amaeru*, the mental state of the child is only an extension from its time in the mothers’ womb.\(^\text{13}\) Therefore Doi suggests that *amae* may be described as “to psychologically deny the fact of separation from its mother”.\(^\text{14}\) Which can be thought of as affirming its dependence to the mother, and this is why *amae* is often regarded and translated as dependence. Yamaguchi and Ariizumi Yukari note in their article: “[Because] Doi’s definition has been broad and has fluctuated over time, researches have criticized the ambiguity in his definitions and some have proposed their own definition of *amae*”,\(^\text{15}\) and based on his own and previous research he claims that *amae* can be defined as

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\(^\text{11}\) Ibid., 18.
\(^\text{12}\) Doi, 1976, 「この子は甘えている」80.
\(^\text{13}\) Ibid., 81.
\(^\text{14}\) Ibid., 82.
“presumed acceptance of one’s inappropriate behavior or request (Yamaguchi, 1999a)”\textsuperscript{16} He refers to Doi’s later publications where he responds to criticism, and elaborates further on his theories. Yamaguchi’s definition is close to the second definition of amae, provided by the Japanese Super Daijirin dictionary. Doi read Michale Balint’s book \textit{Primary Love and Psychoanalytic Technique}, and realized that what Balint had explained as “passive object love” was in fact amae.\textsuperscript{17} Doi explains a characteristic of amae by comparing the relation between close personal relations and strangers, i.e. people with no previous relations or connections. Therefore, the further away from a parent-child relation a relationship is, the less familiar it is.\textsuperscript{18} Familiarity regarding amae interaction is prevalent in studies performed by Yamaguchi and Niiya, which focus on the empirical validity rather than psychological analyses and speculation. The closeness of a relationship determines the level of intimacy that allows amae to be expressed successfully.

The relation between the self and others is affected by the sense of familiarity. An individual is assumed to behave differently with individuals of close relation in contrast to strangers, especially during formal situations. Honne (one’s true intentions or feelings) and tatemae (one’s outward appearance/face) are concepts relating to the behavior towards others in Japan. One would normally not show one’s honne toward superiors or unfamiliar individuals. That would be considered inappropriate, and appropriate behavior is highly regarded in Japan. The Japanese are oriented in in-groups, uchi, and out-groups, soto, Behavior and attitudes in each group are to be adjusted accordingly. Words such as gyōgi (manners,) and reigi (etiquette,) are generally associated with upbringing, parenting, and familiarity, as manners and etiquette become less important with familiar individuals than strangers. Modest, humble, polite or reserved behavior is guided by the sense of appropriateness in any given situation. Familiarity and self-indulgence are restrained by reservedness. Therefore, the ability to read, or sense, both vertical and horizontal distances is imminent for amae behavior. In order to comprehend the contexts in which amae functions, one must understand some aspects of interpersonal relationships in Japan involving inappropriateness, vertical and horizontal distances.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 165.
\textsuperscript{17} Michael Balint, \textit{Primary Love and Psychoanalytic Technique}. New York, Liveright publishing Co., 1965) as cited in \textit{Amae no kōzō}, 14.
\textsuperscript{18} Doi, 1976, 35.
Doi explains *enryo* as a way to measure the intimacy between people. He explains that the more intimate a relationship is, the less *enryo* there is, and the more estranged a relationship is, the more *enryo* there will be. In a relationship between two people who consider themselves *shinyû*, there is little *enryo*. The Chinese characters used for *shinyû* are literally *intimate* and *friend*, and can be seen as an indication of the importance of the familiar ideal relationship that is soaked in *amae*. If *enryo* can measure the intimacy between people, it means that *amae* can measure it from the other end of the spectrum. The less *amae* there is, the more *enryo* there would be in a relationship.

**Amae and inappropriateness**

Yamaguchi criticizes Doi for focusing only on relationships with the parent-child type relationship. He agrees with Doi on the basic psychology of *amae* regarding the parent-child relation, but also interprets the situations by inappropriate behavior. Yamaguchi focuses on the aspect of inappropriateness of the actions involving *amae*. Social restraints normally dictate behavior, but due to certain events or circumstances these social restraints can temporarily be lifted, allowing inappropriate behavior to be accepted. In an example provided by Yamaguchi, a 10-year-old boy with a broken arm asks to be dressed by his mother. Boys his age would normally dress themselves, but the inappropriateness is diminished due to his injury, and therefore would not be described as indulgence. It is noteworthy, that this example does not exclude the component of love or dependence, but focuses on the accepted inappropriate behavior. Yamaguchi explores both positive and negative aspects of *amae* within human interaction and gives examples of both. He explains M.D., PhD, Taketomo Yasuhiko’s view of temporary suspension of ordinary restraints, agreed upon by both interactants. Yamaguchi refers to a study in which he participated in 1995, which indicated that there is a vertical *amae* and a horizontal *amae*. This means that the *amae* between friends, i.e. a horizontal *amae*, is different from that of a vertical relationship, typical between mother and child.

In an article written by Yoshitaka Miike, professor of Communication at University of Hawaii,
he regards *amae* as a “social contract that allows emotions to be freely expressed with approval”.24 He gives an example of family members who can say “no” to each other because of an already established *amae* relationship. Maynard25 is quoted in Yoshitaka’s paper:

> “Everyday conflicts are mostly among *uchi* [in-group] members. Blatant and blunt confrontations often occur among close friends, where the *amae* relationship is well established. Here the raw emotions and hard feelings that may result from confrontation and conflict are usually assured of being mended. The *amae* relationship is expected to survive day-to-day emotional skirmishes among its members.”26

This statement supports Doi’s claim that the *amae* relationship is the ideal relationship, partly because it implies a strong relationship expected to endure emotional conflicts, and also because of the proximity of the interactants. The fact that *amae* occurs in *uchi*-groups is also consistent with Doi’s perspective, as *amae* cannot be successfully established between strangers. Therefore one can conclude that familiarity is a requisite for *amae* to manifest successfully. One can attempt *amaeru* to strangers, but would most certainly be received negatively due to overfamiliar behavior.

**Folk Psychology and inappropriateness**

In regard of *amae* being an everyday word in Japanese society, Professor Yamaguchi Susumu has taken a folk psychology approach, which guarantees an ecological validity of the definition, which Doi was criticized for lacking in his publications. “The definition of a concept is ecologically valid if it is consistent with lay people’s perception and judgment (Yamaguchi, 2004a)”.27 He quotes Bruner that folk psychology is expected “to provide a system by which people organize their experience in, knowledge about, and transactions with the world”,28 and how the folk psychology of *amae* would show how people use and relate to the word in everyday

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25 Maynard K. Senko, professor at the Japanese department of Rutgers State University of New Jersey.


settings. Yamaguchi explains that *amae* involves both positive and negative aspects, which means that an *amae* actor may be perceived as likable, and a person who “never requests *amae*” can be perceived as cold.\(^{29}\) The fact that *amae* is considered a social skill suggests its significance in Japanese society. It can be seen as a people-skill and therefore valued in groups, such as companies. Yamaguchi suggests that *amae* be defined as “*presumed acceptance of inappropriate behavior*”.\(^{30}\) Some of the examples provided by professor Yamaguchi have situations where the behavior may not be considered inappropriate in other countries. The example with the 10-year-old boy, who wished to be dressed by his mother, would only be considered inappropriate if all boys were expected to dress themselves. There may be cultures, however unlikely, where getting dressed by mothers could be considered normal for 10-year-old boys. An important aspect of *amae* as the presumed acceptance of inappropriate behavior is the fact that all parties involved must be aware of the inappropriateness of the given behavior. According to Yamaguchi, *amae* is established when an individual presumes acceptance of his or her inappropriate behavior. However, behavior that is considered natural, or appropriate, varies depending on cultural and social settings, and of course, by the customs of a given group. The formal behavior of Japan might be considered normal in most settings, but may be inappropriate in other countries or in certain settings. It is not uncommon to hear that many tourists and temporary visitors in Japan struggle with formalities and customs, especially during meetings and dining events. If a tourist or foreigner behaves inappropriately at the dinner table, and the Japanese companions accept the behavior, it would not be considered as *amae*, because of his or her unawareness of the inappropriateness. If the behavior that is considered *amae* is regulated by the sense of inappropriateness, it means that the aspects perceived as *amae*, would be different in other cultures. Hypothetically, if the term *amae* would be introduced in Sweden, the behavior that would be considered as *amae* would not necessarily be the same as in Japan. The basic concept of *amae* would be the same– the emotion and behavior of an infant with its mother, but the adaptation of this amongst adults would likely be different due to difference in the experienced appropriateness. Thus, the environment and context of *amae* is of importance in its comprehension as behavior.

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\(^{29}\) Yamaguchi, “Close Interpersonal Relationships,” 166.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 165-166.
Positive and negative *amae*

A study performed by Niiya Yu,\(^{31}\) and Hirahara Motoko\(^{32}\) examined the association of *amae* with pleasant emotions among Japanese people. The study showed that Japanese view person skilled at *amae* as likeable compared to a person who never engaged in *amae*, especially if the cost of granting the request is low.\(^ {33}\) They learned that the Japanese feel more positive emotions when a close friend would ask them for help rather than a professional or another close friend. Additionally, they observed that the Japanese found friends engaging in *amae*, closer than friends who do not, and if the receiver of an *amae* request suspects manipulation from the requester, the receiver will feel unhappy. Their results prove that *amae* can be seen as a social skill, and that the level of effort to grant a request and the level of inappropriateness correlates to how one would feel about an *amae* request.

**Distance in interpersonal relations**

Ambiguity is a way to create a distance between individuals by being indirect when declining an offer or invitation, or to express sensitive opinions. The Japanese are sometimes stereotyped into people who cannot say “no”. I have personally experienced this and been told this in Japanese classes by both Japanese and foreign teachers. Instead of saying “no” directly, most Japanese would likely decline an offer by saying “it’s a little difficult …”\(^ {34}\) The closer the relationship, the less ambiguity a rejection requires, and therefore close friends are able to directly decline each other more often without the need for ambiguity in their expressions. Even in close interpersonal relations, one can temporarily create a distance by being cold and unemotional to signal a lack of concern or compassion. The Japanese are able to achieve this with formal speech. If an individual suddenly switches to formal speech it would give a more serious tone. This can be done with people of equal status or lower (as one would normally always speak formally to someone of superior status). If a superior, who normally speaks casually, changes to formal speech, it would imply seriousness.

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\(^{31}\) Hosei University, Department of Global and Interdisciplinary Studies

\(^{32}\) Tokyo Women’s Christian University


\(^{34}\) 「ちょっと難しいです」 *chotto muzukashī desu*
Interpersonal concepts

Doi explains *amae* by the term *enryo*, the show of restraint, or to be reserved, or modest. In a parent-child relationship, there is no *enryo* because they are not strangers and the relationship is permeated with *amae*. Relationships between close friends usually have little *enryo* because, according to Doi, people do not wish to feel *enryo* by nature.\(^{35}\) However, people do not wish to *amaeru* to the goodwill of others and therefore choose to *enryo* instead. Inherently people wish to *amaeru* to others but are hindered by social constraints. He states “Generally Japanese people dislike *enryo* when it comes to themselves but have an inclination to want it from others. This is likely because the psychology of *amae* is the fundamental rule of social life.”\(^{36}\) Doi recalls being introduced to an American by a friend during his stay in the USA, when he was offered ice cream. He thought he could not admit that he was hungry because it was the first time they met, so he replied he was not hungry, thinking that he would be offered again.\(^{37}\)

It is of Japanese custom to be vague in expressions to avoid sounding or appearing rude or too frank. The way of addressing superiors, complaining and boasting are often shrouded by ambiguity. In a certain situation where one can *amaeru*, one can temporarily make a request to a superior which would in another situation be inappropriate. The distance between the two parties has temporarily become closer, which allows *amae* to be felt and acted upon.

Yoshio Sugimoto, author of *An Introduction to Japanese Society* explains *honne* and *tatemae* as concepts to “sanitize official appearances and hidden reality”. He explains *tatemae* as “formally established principle which is not necessarily accepted or practiced by the parties involved”, and *honne* as “hidden, camouflaged, and authentic sentiment.”\(^{38}\) These terms involve a distance in interpersonal relations; they concern the behavior of individuals in the presence of another person of superior, inferior or equal hierarchal status, and consequently a distance, which restricts familiar behavior. This type of relationship can form between friends, colleagues, classmates, couples, and employer employee relations, meaning that virtually all Japanese have experience of such horizontal and vertical distances. Professor Nakane Chie explains that the

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35 Doi, 1976, 36-37.
36 Ibid., 「一般的に自分のこととしては遠慮を嫌っても、他人には遠慮を求める傾向があるが、これは結局甘えの心理が社会生活の根本ルールになっているからであろう」ippanteki ni jibun no koto toshite wa enryo o kirattemo, tanin ni wa enryo o motomeru keikō ga aru ga, kore wa kekkyoku amae no sinri ga shakaiseikatu no konpon rārū ni natte iru kara de arō, 37.
37 Ibid., 1-2.
Japanese refer a group or organization they belong to as *uchi*, and the group of the dialogue partner as *otaku-no* (yours), when explaining social interaction in Japan.\(^{39}\) Note that *otaku-no*, is honorific expression, showing respect and thereby marking a distance to the listener.

**Vertical and horizontal relationships**

Nakane explains the parent-child relations as vertical, and the sibling relation as horizontal.\(^ {40}\) Due to the hierarchal nature of Japanese interpersonal relations, people learn to distinguish formal behavior required in vertical relationships, and casual behavior common among friends. The distinct difference in behavior and emotion is what makes *amae* unique to Japan. A notable difference between vertical relationships in the West is that in Japan they extend far beyond one’s work-related superiors. One is usually expected to speak formally in first time encounters, towards elders, and people with more experience. Everyday expectations of formality may have influenced the inclination to *amae* behavior.

Growing up in Sweden while attending both a Swedish elementary school and a Japanese school during weekends, I experienced cultural differences in distances between people in elementary school. I learned that the casual “yes” for affirmation, which I associated to “*un*”\(^ {41}\) was not appropriate when addressing a teacher, and as I got older, I gradually adopted formal speech to my Japanese friends’ parents, to whom my familiar attitude began to fade. I learned the vertical distance from Japanese culture, but I emphasize that I have learned the horizontal distance from both Swedish and Japanese culture because the sense of unfamiliarity towards strangers are similar. Verticality exists in Sweden as well, to a certain extent. For example, there are employer-employee relations, where the employer is of a higher status than the employee. However, there are no predetermined ways of addressing superiors in Sweden, no formal speech, and one can generally assume a familiar attitude towards superiors without being disrespectful.

**Verticality in Japan**

Japan has a vertical society, meaning that there is a stricter social hierarchy compared to the


\(^{41}\) 「うん」used to casually consent or to affirm. Idiomatically rendered “*yeah*” in English.
West. Doi mentions *amae* within the vertical society of Japan, and the importance of *amae* in understanding Japanese society with reference to Nakane’s perspective of the vertical society of Japan.\(^{42}\) The vertical relationships require a person to adapt behavior and speech depending on the addressee or subject. That is to say, one would not use the same pronoun or verb for a supervisor, as one would a friend. Therefore the manners of behavior are different in a vertical and horizontal relationship because of the expected behavior. Modesty is another way to distance oneself on the vertical spectrum, by lowering oneself in relation to the listener or the subject of the dialogue. One does this by verbally belittling oneself or people within one’s in-group, which consequently temporarily decreases one’s worth. The Japanese commonly belittle their gifts for others by saying “this is only a dull thing…”\(^{43}\) It is also common to belittle individuals belonging to one’s in-group such as members of the family or company by using negative terms such as *bakamusuko*, stupid son, or *gusai*, foolish wife.

One can show respect to the listener or a third party by the use of *kenjôgo*, which is a category of formal language used to pay due respect and emphasize one’s inferiority.\(^{44}\)

Japan has several ways of distancing oneself from others, both horizontally and vertically by speech. One can distance oneself horizontally by simply using formal speech, and one can distance oneself vertically by using honorific forms and thereby lowering oneself towards the listener. Trying to understand *amae* without any understanding of Japanese tradition and culture may be challenging. This is not because concepts such as *honne* and *tatemae*, *uchi soto*, *ie*, *sempai–kôhai* and so forth are similar to *amae*, but because they coexist in the same mentality, concerning distance between individuals. What these concepts have in common is that they all involve other people and how to relate and behave to any interactions with them. They are concepts that are associated with accepted or appropriate social behavior, or in other words restricting social behavior. For example, *honne* could sometimes be the desire to be loved, but is restricted by *tatemae*.

\(^{42}\) Doi, 1976, 23.

\(^{43}\) 「つまらない物ですが」 *tsumaranai mono desuga*

\(^{44}\) 謙譲語 I 自分側から相手側又は第三者に向かう行為・物事などについて、その向かう先の人物を立てて述べるもの。敬語の指針、文化審議会答申、文部科学省、平成 19 年 2 月 2 日. 15. *kenjôgo 1 jibungawa kara aitegawa mata wa daiansha ni mukau kôi monogoto nado ni tuite, sono mukau saki no jinbutsu o tatete noberu mono. Keigo no shishin, bunkashinjikaitôshin, monbukagakushô, Heisei 19 nen 2 gatsu 2 ka.*
East and West

Yamaguchi compares the West and East Asia in the societal expectation of independence and autonomy. “To become an adult in a Western society means that one has acquired the requisite skills to function independently in the society”. In East Asia, interdependence is emphasized and proxy control is widely accepted.45 “Successful amae requesters are often successful in society because those who are good at amae (i.e. proxy control) can control the environment to a greater extent than those who never request amae.”46 In other words, amae can be seen as a social skill close to manipulation to acquire services or beneficial circumstances. Yamaguchi speaks of “controlling the situation” which is a kin to manipulation or even exploitation. He notes that children who do not amaeru are often seen as maladapted47 which is coherent with Dois recollection of the bilingual mother who showed concern for her child who did not amae. Yamaguchi concludes that amae should be distinguished from “similar concepts of dependence and insecure attachment”.48 This marks his disagreement with Doi’s dependence-oriented view of amae.

From Yamaguchi’s perspective, one can view skillful amae requesters as people with high awareness of their social status within interpersonal relationships, and are able to utilize this status to their benefit. In other words, a skillful amae requester is a person of high social skills and a considerable understanding of interpersonal relations. Thus meaning fluency in amae can be viewed as comprehensive understanding of one’s vertical and social position and distance in relation to individuals within one’s group.

A study in amae, conducted by one of Yamaguchi’s former student, Niiya Yu, used vignettes to depict settings to which the subjects would respond how they felt. Although the subjects were unfamiliar with the concept of amae, they experience the situations in the same way as the Japanese subjects. The study provides evidence for the existence of amae outside Japan. Albeit the behavior may not be conceptualized in other languages, one can assume that it exists as a behavior in virtually all cultures. The results of the study show that Americans associated amae

46 Ibid., 167.
requests more positively than negatively.\textsuperscript{49} There are many terms in English, especially in slang, that bear meanings close to the aspects of *amae* behavior such as “curry favor” or “suck up to”. However none of these bare the multitudes of contextual implications that *amae* provides. Doi also claims in *Amae to nihonjin*, that an equivalent of *amae* does not exist in the West.\textsuperscript{50} He mentions variations of the word *amae* in Japanese such as *amattare* (a variation of *amaenbō*) or *amayakasu*, which have negative implication of unskillful *amae*. He points out that these words do have equivalents in English (*amayakasu* = spoil/coddle). These words derive from *amae* and are therefore directly associated with the word *amae*. Doi claims that children who do not *amaeru* in their adolescence will not become properly autonomous, because if they do not *amae* properly, they will do it improperly, causing them to appear slacking or spoiling, which is what is “bringing down Japanese society.”\textsuperscript{51} He mentions that children who do not fight with their parents will be more prone to violence more than those who do fight. All young children engage in “non-verbal *amae*” but must sometimes go through their rebellious period in order to become adults, implying the importance of *amae* for the development of psychology.\textsuperscript{52}

Dependence is related to trust in many ways. The level of dependence can deepen along with the level of trust. Trust can be compared to the mother-child relation where the child is at the mercy of the mothers care, and learns to trust the mother entirely. The mother will in turn trust that the child recognizes its mother alone, as its mother. According to Doi, the more confident one is the more relaxed one will be towards others,\textsuperscript{53} which means that one may allow closer interactions with others. Due to *amae* only functioning in close interpersonal relationships, one must therefore allow close interactions to be able to express *amae*. Niiya and Hirahara’s study showed that people generally like individuals who *amaeru* more than those who do not. Hence, *amae* interaction is a requirement for developing social skills necessary to comprehend interpersonal distances in social interactions.

\textsuperscript{50} Doi, Takeo, 1976, 48.
\textsuperscript{51} 「[…]日本社会をだめにしている[…]」*nihonshakai o dame ni shite iru*, Takeo Doi (土居健郎), and Saitō Takashi (斎藤孝), *Amae to nihonjin* 甘えと日本人, Tokyo: Kadokawa, 2014 (2010), 62.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 65. 「子供は幼い頃はもちろん、非言語的コミュニケーションで親に甘えますけど、そこから巣立っていく段階で反抗期があって、そこを越えないと大人になりないことがあるのです。」
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 186-187.
3 Analyzing Japanese aspects associated with *amae*

*amae* and hierarchal relationships

The vertical society of Japan requires individuals to be aware of the distances social status, be it within one’s in-group or out-group. A parent-child relationship is vertical and therefore hierarchal, because the parents are responsible for their child and the child is dependent on their parents. Relationships involving dependence and responsibility are often hierarchal, such as employer-employee relations. *amae* can be a form of control towards individuals of higher status or superiority, as Yamaguchi explained. That is to say, one can control a situation through *amae*, by requesting a favor, which is likely to be granted due to certain changes in the circumstances, which would otherwise be considered inappropriate. Therefore successful *amae* requests requires knowledge of relational situations and circumstances and how changes in them can temporarily affect the nature of a relationship. The love-oriented *amae*, the desire to be loved, can also be expressed in hierarchal situations, especially in mother-child relationships. For example, a child who is *amaeteiru* may receive more favorable treatment from its parents, compared to when it is not *amaeteiru*, and therefore can be said to be in control.

Temporary suspension of restraints

Yamaguchi’s definition is an extension of Taketomo’s definition of *amae* involving temporary suspension of ordinary restraints:\(^{54}\)

(a) Interactions are under a temporary suspension of some ordinary restraints.

(b) The suspension is agreed upon by the interactants. In such a situation, interactants are allowed to do what they are normally expected not to do."\(^{55}\)

These restrictions of social behavioral can occur frequently in Japan. For example, if a father employs his son, the son would most likely be expected to address his father as *shachô* (president of a company) during work hours and in the presence of other employees, thus suspending their regular casual interaction. In this case the suspension is expected and therefore different than arbitrary occurrences. Another example is when two students who are close friends are one grade apart from each other and are students at the same school, and members of the same sports club.

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\(^{55}\) Susumu Yamaguchi, “Close Interpersonal Relationships,” 164.
The younger one would have to use formal language and address his friend as xxx-san. Sudden changes in appropriate behavior, especially formal speech, may occur frequently as well. A and B meet for the first time and both parties assume the other to be of equal social status, and therefore both conclude that informal speech is accepted. The next time they meet, they realize that A is in a position below B. Therefore A is now expected to speak formally while B is not, which is a sudden change in the dynamics of the relationship for A. Yamaguchi’s example with the 10-year-old boy who gets dressed by his mother is an example where amae behavior lifts the requirement to dress autonomously, is an example of temporary suspension of restraints. The Japanese uniqueness regarding the concept of amae can therefore be explained by the interpersonal relations, which under certain circumstances temporarily allow deviating behavior within the acceptable range in social situations.

**Important terms in interpersonal relationships in Japan**

Japan has many terms that involve interpersonal relationships, and many of these have been explored and studied by Japanese and foreign scholars alike. These terms include the fore mentioned enryo, honne and tatemae, giri and ninjō, uchi–soto and tachiba. The terms enryo, honne and ninjō are all related to personal emotions and feelings. Enryo can be seen as the behavior determined by the sense of appropriateness that guides when to be reserved or show restraint, or in other words to restrain one’s desire to amae. There is a saying in Japanese used when indulging to an offer made by another: “kotoba ni amaeuru”. The idiomatic translation is: “I will indulge in your words”. This phrase can be used for example when accepting a meal another is paying for. The relationship between enryo and amae is therefore evident, and one can assume that many native Japanese speakers are aware of this fact, due to the word amae being used when abandoning enryo and indulging in an offer. The terms uchi–soto, literally inside–outside refers to in-groups and out-groups. That is to say, people of familiar relationships such as family, colleagues, teammates and acquaintances are considered uchi. Soto refers to all strangers. Although hierarchal relationships can form in one’s in-group, and one can have a relationship with little to no amae with a person within it, the fact that familiar and unfamiliar are

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56 言葉に甘える kotoba ni amaeru, or in formal language: お言葉に甘えます okotoba ni amaemasu
distinguished and important in Japanese society remains. *Tachiba*,\(^\text{57}\) or one’s position, refers to one’s social standpoint including obligations (*giri*) and feelings (*ninjō*). One’s *tachiba*, can affect one’s possibilities to *amae* depending on the *tachiba* of the target of *amae*, due to the hierarchal structure of Japanese society. *Tanin* and *tasha* are Japanese words both referring to other people, and Doi explains the significance of these words in the Japanese language.\(^\text{58}\) *Tasha* corresponds closer to the English word “other (person)” and *tanin* bears the nuance of “stranger” or unknown person. Consequently one cannot *amae* to a *tanin*, due to lacking familiarity. As mentioned earlier, familiar relations are a prerequisite for *amae* to be successful, otherwise the behavior would simply be considered strange and overfamiliar.

*Amae* and cuteness

Doi confirms that having a desire to appear cute is in fact a desire to *amaeru*.\(^\text{59}\) The mother-child-based *amae* can be said to contain an aspect of cuteness, due to the loving nature of the relationship. Most mothers think their child and its behavior is cute, regardless if the cuteness is intended or not. Young children may learn to act cute to appeal to their parents, but this would be considered calculated or manipulative *amae*. Adults strive for cuteness as well, and the appeal for cuteness is prevalent in all of Japan. Hello Kitty and many other anime or manga-themed characters are often portrayed as *kawaii* (cute). Some fictional evil antagonists or the so-called “bad guys”, also sometimes have cute disproportionate figurines. Doi would likely call this a manifestation of the *amae* mentality. Manga and anime have reached many countries around the world for decades and may have influenced more than one generation internationally. Many of the fans dress in *kawaii* outfits, which entail an appreciation of cuteness in aesthetic expression and even in everyday life. The popularity increase of manga and anime, often containing *amae* situations will provide insight to those interested in Japanese culture.

*Amae* and sexuality in contemporary Japan

The Japanese word *kawaii* (cute) and the kawaii culture of Japan are receiving considerable popularity worldwide, and manga/anime culture is becoming known in Western countries. As Doi, has explained the Japanese mentality through *amae*, and the disposition to enjoy *kawaii*

\(^{57}\) 立場 *tachiba*, literally meaning “standpoint”.

\(^{58}\) Doi, 1976, 33-34.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 202.
(cute) things and femininity can be linked to *amae*. In many cases, the aesthetic cuteness in appearances come with the intention to be liked by others, which can be compared to the *amae* request of passive love. Simultaneously, the cuteness of a given outfit or appearance may be because if its inappropriateness in relation to the age, gender or social context of the person in question. The *amae* worldview of Doi can be used to describe the *kawaii* culture of Japan. The desire to appear cute (adorable) is can be explained as a manifestation of the desire to be loved, which is the core of the *amae* mentality. Similarly, *moe*, a slang term used for a specific type of cuteness implying adolescent cuteness in appearance or cuteness can therefore be explained according to Doi’s theory of *amae*. One could argue that the recent boom of *Akiba* (short for *Akihabara*) culture is also a manifestation of *amae* mentality.

**Japanese dependence and *amae***

Like Doi suggests, the desire to *amaeru* is underlying in the mentality of most Japanese people, and permeates the social life, Yamaguchi says that East Asians are more prone to dependence. It appears that they both imply that the culture and the nature of interpersonal relations are different from those of the West, and suggest that this cultural difference is the reason why *amae* exists in Japan and not in the West. Although, there is no evidence of a similar concept in other countries in East Asia, there is a possibility that similar conceptions of distance in vertical and horizontal distance have been adopted. Doi points out that one must consider that the understanding of reality is different in Japan compared to the West, due to discrepancies in the verbal expressions.

**Western dependence and *amae***

The uniqueness of the term lies not in the conception and mentality of dependence, but in the versatility and diversity of the term and the situations that it implies. As the experiments have shown, westerners are able to relate to the aspects of *amae* when deconstructed and explained using vignettes. This means that at least some of the concepts are not alien to western cultures, but it is the vagueness and varying implications of *amae* that makes it difficult to define.

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60 動え *moe*
61 秋葉原 *Akihabara*, An area in Tokyo famous for electronic stores and cosplayers.
62 Doi, 1976, 72-73.
Yamaguchi postulates that individuals in the West are generally more autonomous than in Japan. Independence and autonomy is expected from adults. In Sweden for example, university students generally take student loans or work part-time to earn their living expenses. This is because of the expected independence. On the other hand, Japanese students are expected to depend on their parents throughout their entire education, until they become a contributing part of society i.e. start working. People over 20 years of age are legally adults, but students are generally not seen as adults. This is most likely because they are not perceived to have life experience, or lack it. In terms of hardship, responsibility, endurance and achievements. Therefore the psycholinguistic conception of dependence may be different in Japan and in the West, which may have influenced the perception of amae as behavior and emotion.

4 Discussion

As proven by Niiya’s survey, amae exists in the USA, however without a term for it. The aspect of dependence in amae adds ambiguity due to the abstract definition. What is dependence? Is dependence viewed and thought of differently in other cultures? It may be difficult to collect internationally consistent empirical evidence for the amae-related dependence, due to discrepancies in social structures and concepts. The same can be said for inappropriateness, as the factors constituting appropriateness may be specific to a certain culture. Doi explained that amae permeates Japanese society and connected several Japanese concepts to the amae mentality, and many researchers agree that these concepts may be related, which can be seen in Miike’s essay where he cites Okabe Roichi, professor of communications, when discussing frankness and speaking one’s mind in Japan.63 Yamaguchi focuses on the interpersonal relationships and analyses amae as a form of control, and how it manifests in Japanese society, not specifically on Japanese aspects of amae. Although his research suggests that the Japanese aspect of amae lies in the interaction between people, especially in the perceived fluctuating distance between the involved parties. The distance within vertical and horizontal relationships can be emphasized through speech and behavior such as enryo, or a lack of amae. The concepts that restrict social behavior in Japan can be contrasted to an amae-relationship, the ideal relationship, where there constraints are diminished. Amae is a way to mark closeness, or more specifically the desire for

closeness, while *enryo* marks distance, or the desire to distance oneself in an interpersonal relationship. Therefore *amae* and *enryo* can be said to be opposites on the spectrum of closeness in interpersonal relationships.

There are two significant categories of view on *amae*: love-based mother-child relation type and the presumed acceptance of self-indulgence type. The latter does not necessarily involve love at all. Even if it is based on the love between a mother and a child, it no longer needs the aspect of to be perceived as *amae* behavior. *Amae* can occur for example between colleagues of equal status, without any significant emotional component love. The love-based *amae* is positive because both parties benefit from the behavior. It is relation-based since it requires another party and it is emotional. It is also universal since it exists in humans as well as animals. The two definitions are fundamentally different, although they are not mutually exclusive. They both describe the same behavior, although with different standpoints. A puppy that is begging for a treat, can both be showing the desire to be loved, and presumed acceptance of its inappropriate behavior. The same can be said for a child who wants help with its coat. While I agree that *amae* can be seen as passive love, I emphasize it only covers an aspect of the love-based *amae*, the desire to feel loved. It does not include the active display of the desire to be loved. This is because the passiveness is only an aspect of the emotion of *amae*. However, *amae* as a behavior is not necessarily passive. It is an active request for acceptance of self-indulgence. I agree with the definition provided by Yamaguchi: “the presumed acceptance of one’s inappropriate behavior”, because it captures at least six aspects important to *amae*. The fact that there is the requester, a receiver, presumption, acceptance, behavior and inappropriateness, and it does not exclude the aspect of love. One may argue that it contains a component of dependence, as the acceptance is presumed and therefore dependent on the acceptance for the *amae* to be successful. A situation of dependence can occur because of a hierarchal relation, and understanding how to behave in this relationship is important for smooth interaction in the Japanese society. When in need to request a sensitive favor or service, one must choose words and actions carefully. The right words and action to achieve the task is successful *amae*.

*amae* as curry favor

A way for a child to receive the desired treatment or reward from a parent is to purposely behave cute and emotionally towards a parent. The parent may or may not be aware of this manipulative behavior, and reward the child regardless. When concerning adults, *amae* as curry favor can be
received positively or negatively as explained earlier, depending on the relationship between the two adults and the nature of the request. As Niiya and Hiraharas study showed, the more time-consuming or tedious the request, the more positively the *amae* request tends to be received. This positive reception of requested favors is not unique to Japan as the study in the USA showed. In addition, it confirms that dependence, or the feeling of being depended upon, is of importance in *amae*.

**Manipulative *amae***

Acts of *amae* can occur in the relationship between couples in several ways. Asking favors from one another, or expecting gifts as displays of affection, and also the desire to be unconditionally loved. Something as simple as a tickle fight can be interpreted as *amae* because of its inappropriate, though temporarily accepted behavior. This is because the couple can be seen as mimicking the play of a parent and child. Yamaguchi gives example on a manipulative girlfriend who performs *amae* in order to get jewelry bought for her by her boyfriend. A person may *amaeru* as a form of manipulation. However it lacks the emotional component and is enacted and therefore not sincere. It is manipulation in the disguise of *amae*. The manipulative part is exploiting the others susceptibility to *amae*. This type of manipulation is also a social skill to obtain favorable treatment or gifts. *Amae* behavior may ignore the common customs for reciprocity in exchanging of gifts due to the aspect of love. If a successful *amae* episode were established, the actor would receive a gift through a display of unconditional love, without the expectation of receiving something in return.

**Linguistic aspect***

The origin of the word is unclear, and according to Doi, the entry in early dictionaries was ambiguous. He states that the Japanese have a rich vocabulary to express all the aspects of *amae*. Meanwhile he agrees that thought transcends language, he explains that the fact that there is a word for *amae* in Japanese and no word for it in Western languages means that the Japanese are more sensitive to *amae* behavior. This speculation may be true but he does not provide any concrete evidence to support this claim. Doi elaborates that words used for food and drink can be

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64 Susumu Yamaguchi, “Close Interpersonal Relationships,” 170.
65 Doi, 1976, 70.
66 Ibid., 73-74.
used in Japanese to express a deficit of amae. He provides examples of this such as hito o nomu (drink people) and nameru (lick). Both imply underestimation of others, which can be interpreted as interpersonal distance, which is why it can be explained as a deficit of amae.

Doi contrasts the Western idea of freedom to the Japanese idea of freedom (jiyū). The western idea of freedom is defined as the opposite of slavery, to being a free person. The Japanese jiyū is the freedom to do as one pleases, without the concern for others. The Western concept of freedom is positive while the Japanese jiyū is negative, because it implies selfishness. Doi claims the Japanese jiyū is therefore the freedom to perform amae. The claim lacks empirical evidence, and builds only upon speculations regarding the historical origin of the word. It is noteworthy that the book “Amae no kozo” is considered “nihonjinron”, which literally means “theory about the Japanese”. Nihonjinron are academic literature that deals with Japanese homogeneity and uniqueness. Sociolinguist Michael Haugh of Griffith University summarizes the underlying assumptions of nihonjinron made by scholars such as Befu, Dale and Sugimoto in his article “Native-Speaker beliefs about Nihonjinron and Miller’s Law of Inverse Returns”. One relevant assumption is that “Foreigners are incapable of completely understanding Japanese culture and language.” Although Doi is right in many of his speculations and claims, he seems to be making this assumption when comparing Western and Japanese cultures while emphasizing their differences. It is therefore important to keep in mind that “Amae no kozo” is biased regarding cross-cultural understanding.

Amae can be used in various grammatical ways as explained, as a noun, verb or adjective and it can be paired with other words to form compound words. The linguistic versatility of amae, in addition to being psychologically associated with many concepts and contexts, naturally makes it difficult to translate. Words with the same pronunciation but different meanings are common in Japan, but they usually have different kanji (Chinese characters) to distinguish them. In a verbal setting, Japanese people can identify the words with the same pronunciation through context. It is said that they can see the kanji floating in their minds. This means that Japanese people identify concepts relating to words through contexts, which is presumably the same with amae. Though amae has no equivalent in pronunciation, it may induce as many associations as would a phonetic

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67 Ibid., 28.
68 Ibid., 94-95.
pronunciation pertaining to several different words connected to a number of different meanings and contexts. All uses of the word *amae* do not necessarily involve love as an emotion, but they all imply childlike behavior, and therefore Doi’s interpretation of *amae* as imitation of the interaction between a child and its mother is accurate. As Niiya and Hirahara showed in their experiment, the emotion and behavior concerning *amae* does in fact exist in the West. Some sayings and phrases in Western languages may cover some aspects of *amae*, but it is impossible to translate into one word. American social psychologist Roger Brown cites Kaji Junko, an undergraduate concentrator in psychology at Harvard, from her honor thesis where she described *amae* as *curry favor*. This is correct, but also only covering one aspect of *amae*. Even though, unique linguistic expressions can presumably be found in most languages, Doi is correct in pointing out the linguistic uniqueness of *amae*. A linguistic aspect of *amae* that relates to a social skill is the term *amaejôzu*, literally “skilled at *amae*”. It is evidence for *amae* being a social skill.

I was introduced to the word *amae* as a child because I grew up with a Japanese father who always spoke Japanese with me. I spoke three languages as a child, and noticed that some words could not be translated with another word. One example is *amae*. I remember occasions when my father explained that my own behavior was *amae*, when I wanted a toy bought and was asking for it nicely. Or when he was describing a dog desiring a treat from its owner. Although I knew that an equivalent word did not exist in any other languages that I spoke (Swedish and Finnish), I did not recognize the concept as unique to Japan. This is because I assumed some things are impossible to translate. I grew up in a culturally diverse suburb of Stockholm where many languages were spoken. In school, I remember classmates speaking and laughing in a language foreign to me, and when I asked them to explain the joke, they simply said: “it can’t be translated to Swedish”. Thereof my assumption, that it required knowledge of culture or language specific references, which would allow one to understand puns and sarcasm. Being exposed to Japanese culture in Sweden from Japanese people, and from my visits to Japan and attending Japanese schools, I learned that Japanese culture has a stricter attitude towards manners and etiquette in general compared to Sweden or Finland. The way one was expected to address and behave towards elders was stricter, and the expectation of behavior and language was different. I saw this in what my parents expected of me, and also from other children and their parents. In contrast, I

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learned that the Swedish society valued individuality and self-determination.\footnote{självbestämmande} Due to this individuality in Sweden, where individuals have more room to choose their behavior regardless of social hierarchy, i.e. addressing a teacher as a student, there are fewer restricting social expectations compared to Japan. The Japanese usually say that they feel more distance to their dialogue partner when using formal language, and therefore the formal speech can be used to create distance. Arguably, one can distance oneself in English by choice of words and expression, but in it is incomparable to the formal speech of Japan, because of the ambiguity in the reason for formal speech. That is to say one can speak formally out of politeness, habit or unfamiliarity.

Assuming that amae is the psychological basis for much of the Japanese behavior, one can claim that amae is the key to understanding Japanese customs and behavior. If all vertical interpersonal situations arising in Japan can be understood through a contrast and comparison to a parent-child relation, or amae, it would change the views of concepts such as enryo. The experienced distance, both horizontal and vertical, could be explained from of an amae perspective, because amae can be explained as a relationship where there is no distance.

**Own experiences of amae**

I have grown up speaking Japanese at home with my Japanese father, and I recall understanding the difference between amae in both positive and negative forms. When being a wheedling child or being sad and wanting to be carried or held by my parents I remember being lovingly called an amae. I played tennis during elementary school and remember being told that I was amai on my approach to practice and progress in my playing, meaning that I did not take practices seriously enough to progress and lacked persevering effort. I recognized amai as negative due to the implication of lack of effort. However, I never reflected upon the existence of positive and negative amae. Speaking three languages at a young age, I remember realizing that some things cannot be expressed with the same nuance in other languages due to lack of equivalent expressions with the same connotation. Even today, I believe that there are many expressions that simply cannot be translated, but they can be explained.

During my exchange studies at Kyoto University I joined a research group aiming to define amae and other Japanese cultural concepts in English. The members consisted of 3-4 Japanese
students and also foreign students fluent in Japanese and English. We read the definitions provided by Doi and Yamaguchi and discussed the concept of *amae* and what it means in different contexts. A topic that was frequently discussed was *amae* as dependence, and that most Japanese people would agree that *amae* is dependence. However we disagreed that *amae* can be explained as passive love, because in most cases *amae* is an active behavior. We discussed unconscious *amae* and how it related to unaware self-indulgence. A form of *amae* not prevalent in academic discourse is the *amae* involving only one person; the requester and receiver of *amae* is the same person. That is to say, when one allows oneself to indulge in inappropriate behavior. For example a student who should be studying night before an important exam, but instead sees a movie is self-indulging and also performing *amae* (*amaeteiru*), or can be said to have an *amai* attitude towards the exam. The term *amai* refers to an underestimating attitude. One can be *amai* towards a task, like the example above, or people. A common phrase is “*amaku miteiru*”, which means to view something lightly. The phrase would literarily translate into “view sweetly”, since *amai* is also an adjective to describe a sweet flavor. As explained, Doi claims this a uniqueness of the Japanese language, and ties this to the prevalent *amae* mentality of the Japanese people. An individual can release another from the need to speak formally. If an individual, by their own volition, choose to speak casually to another of higher status, they can be said to be *amai* towards the latter.

Understanding *amae* will provide an insight to the Japanese mentality and will help understand other concepts such as *enryo*, etc. The significance of social status (*tachiba*) in interpersonal relationships is an important factor in Japanese social life as well as professional life. The behavior during working hours compared to leisure time has a bigger difference than in the West, and the outward face is generally of greater importance in Japan. Formal behavior is standard in new encounters in everyday life as an act of politeness and respect. Therefore *amae* can be away to mitigate the strict formalities and temporarily allow for emotional components in interactions.

5 Conclusion
The Japanese facet of *amae* lies in the wide range of meanings and implications the word has in a wide range of situations and contexts. It can imply simple behavior in animals or children, to
intricate social behavior that temporarily allow inappropriate requests or behavior. The uniqueness of the concept of *amae* is not in the emotion, since it can evidently be found in other cultures, but in its many-faceted prevalence in the Japanese language and society as behavior, emotion and as a social skill. Understanding the aspect of dependence in *amae* is of importance to comprehend the fundament of *amae*, the emotions within a mother-child relation. Comprehension of *amae* only as emotional dependence will not help one understand the implications of the term in social contexts, and how it may be received by those involved. However, understanding the interrelation between presumed acceptance of self-indulgence and temporary acceptance of inappropriate behavior in both vertical and horizontal interactions, based on the mother-child relation of love, will provide a thorough insight to the phenomenon of *amae* and its function in Japanese society. Therefore, dependence is of importance to comprehend the aspect of love in *amae* interactions.

Concepts such as *enryo*, *tatemae*, *honne*, *uchi*, *soto* and *amae* are all affected by the intimacy, or familiarity of a relationship. The need to be modest in one’s in-group is diminished in close relationships between family members, friends or couples. *Amae* behavior is the opposite as it is given more room in close relationships. Since the emotion and the behavior of *amae* exists within close relationships in other cultures and languages as well, the Japanese aspect of *amae* lies in the dynamical nature of the concept; the fundamental emotion based on unconditional love, which is adopted into a social skill to obtain beneficial conditions, which can be calculated and used for manipulation. The interpersonal space in which *amae* functions; the horizontal and vertical distances between people, is what makes *amae* unique to Japan, rather than the linguistic aspect or the emotion itself. I conclude that the Japanese facet of *amae* is the environment in which it manifests; the vertical and horizontal distances in interpersonal relations which regulate familiar behavior.

### 6 Summary

This paper has summarized two of the primary theories concerning the behavior and emotions regarding *amae*. I have introduced the basic psychological aspects provided by Doi and Yamaguchi, required for the comprehension of the discourse regarding the concept of *amae*. The paper begins with an introduction of my research, where I provide information on previous research on the subject. I explain how I will use the material and what I intend with this paper. I
explained that the theories of Doi have been criticized for being vague and ambiguous, yet his definition of *amae* as the mother-child relation has remained accepted. Doi’s views regarding linguistic aspects, and especially distances have been explained and analyzed and contrasted to the approach of Yamaguchi. Furthermore, I have explained related concepts of social interactions and contrasted them to *amae* in order to understand how *amae* is manifested in interpersonal relationships. Different forms of *amae* have been introduced and explained to emphasize the versatility of the concept, such as emotion, manipulation, curry favor and linguistic aspects. The importance of understanding how familiarity is related to several Japanese concepts regarding human interaction has been stressed. The term *enryo* has been explained along with its relation to *amae*. Doi’s view of being able to measure intimacy in a relationship by *enryo* has been explained, and I have claimed that *amae* is able to do the same, from the other end of the spectrum of intimacy. My own experiences of *amae* and distances in interpersonal relations have been included to add substance to my claims about what I consider to be the Japanese aspects of *amae*. My experiences from Sweden have been brought up to contrast my experiences of Japanese culture. The importance of familiarity in social interactions has been emphasized. I concluded that the vertical structure of the Japanese society and the interpersonal relationships within it are unique, and that it is in this unique environment that *amae* functions, which is what is associated to Japan concerning the concept.

**Acknowledgements**

I would like to express gratitude to the Scandinavia-Japan Sasakawa Foundation for granting me a scholarship, during my exchange studies at Kyoto University. Their contribution aided me in purchasing literature and lightened my traveling expenses to and from, and within Japan. I thank my supervisor, Professor Ogawa for his guidance and support. I would also like to thank Professor Dalsky at Kyoto University for introducing me to the discourse concerning *amae* and for inviting me to his office and research group on cross-cultural psychology, which gave me a deeper understanding of *amae* and provided me with research material.
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