The Right to Kill/ The Right to Die:  
The Contemporary Discourse in Japanese and English  
on Abortion, Suicide and Capital Punishment

Panel General Abstract

Given the universal fact of death in human experience, a comparative study of  
the conceptual metaphoric patterns can act as a litmus test of how our conceptual   
patterns shape our cultural values and perspectives. In 2001 a research project was  
set up to study the conceptual patterns proposed by G. Lakoff et al. (1980, 1987, &  
1989) in the contemporary discourses on Death and Dying in English and Japanese.  
A data base of representative genres was established. Six general conceptual  
categories were determined necessary to make the conceptual pattern analyses.

This set of papers focuses on three topics: suicide related to the “Right to Die”  
and abortion and capital punishment related to the “Right to Kill.” The data sources  
were targeted from both the public as well as from the private domain of the  
discourse. The public discourse domain included news reportage, editorials, essays,  
specialist books, and internet organization homepages. Private and personal  
reflections were sought in interviews, dyadic discourse, and internet discussion sites.

The significance of the above discourse dichotomy was reflected in cross-  
cultural differences in the logos and mythos types of language as propounded by  
Karen Armstrong (2005), as well as significant variation between the discourses in  
English and Japanese in these discourse types.