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From *Keigo* 'Honorifics' to *Keii-Hyougen* 'Respect Expressions': Linguistic Ideologies of Japanese Honorifics[1]

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0. Introduction

Japanese honorifics are often associated with hierarchy and seniority. To many native speakers of Japanese, honorifics are markers of hierarchy and power, as they say that they *must* use honorifics to someone older, superior, or unfamiliar. However, in actual speech practices, speakers who claim that honorific usage is based on hierarchy and power sometimes use honorifics among peers and communicate a sense of solidarity and camaraderie with them.

In this paper, I first examine how a reformulation of the linguistic ideology of Japanese honorifics has become a focal point for a broad-ranging process of institutional restructuring in contemporary Japan. I demonstrate that a shift in honorification terminology from *keigo* 'honorifics' to *keii-hyougen* 'expressions of respect' indexes a more general change in language use, perceived to be necessary for a transformation of institutional system based on hierarchy to one based on efficiency and performance. I point out an ideological shift of honorification in various institutions and their prescriptions. Then I examine a series of honorific usage and demonstrate that depending on the contexts in which people use them, honorifics signify hierarchy on the one hand, and solidarity on the other.

1. Situating Honorifics in Socio-political Contexts of Japan

In contemporary Japan, a reformulation of the linguistic ideology of Japanese communication has become a focal point for a broad process of institutional restructuring. Changes are occurring in the underlying demographic and financial structure of the economy, governmental organizations, and educational institutions. As a result of these social changes, traditional Japanese forms of

[1] An earlier version of this paper in part appeared in Takekuro (2005). It was presented at the 2005 Meeting of American Ethnological Society in April 2005. I wish to thank Charles Briggs and Michael Silverstein for inviting me to the Keyword Panel and the participants for their questions and insightful comments. Needless to say, I am solely responsible for the data and analysis.

institutional organizations are perceived as inefficient, opaque, and hierarchical as opposed to new (usually American or Western) forms of institutional organizations, perceived as efficient, transparent, and egalitarian. Institutional reformulation in many parts of the society necessitates a more general change in communication, including the usage of honorifics.

Honorifics are one of them that have first become a target for change. At the government level, a change in language policy was announced in December 2000, when *Kokugo Shingikai* (the Japanese Language Council) submitted guidelines of language use, originally submitted to the Minister of Education in 1952 (Kokugo Shingikai 2000). Unlike the previous guidelines for honorific usage, in which prescriptive honorific usage was emphasized, the new guidelines of the Council minimized the use of the term *keigo* 'honorifics'. Instead, they introduced the new term *keii-hyōgen* 'respect expressions', incorporating ideas related to linguistic politeness in Anglo-European sociolinguistic studies (Lakoff 1973, 1975; Brown and Levinson 1987[1978]; Leech 1983). In discussing language use in the New Age of Japan, the Council acknowledges the general public's divided opinions concerning Japanese honorific usage. Some who are concerned about *midareta* 'corrupted' honorific usage in contemporary Japanese argue that honorifics signify the refinement of the traditional Japanese culture, as many linguists in *kokugogaku* 'National Language Studies' romanticized honorifics and said that they manifest "a refined custom of deference for Japanese" (Yamada 1924) and "[the] thoughtfulness in our national character" (Matsushita 1925; both translated by Wetzel 2004:21). Other people argue that honorifics are no longer necessary in contemporary Japanese society. Honorifics symbolize old, hierarchical, and undemocratic social structures, thus should be either simplified or abolished. The Council states that successful communication is not limited to the use of honorifics, but rather involves all kinds of communicative behavior that indicate "considerations towards others and situations" (*aite ya bamen he no hairyo*). Thus, the Council introduced the notion of *keii-hyōgen* which is based on "reciprocal respect" (*sōgo sonkei*) rather than hierarchy and seniority. According to the members of the Council (Asamatsu 2001, Ide 2001) and the researchers involved (Sugito 2001), their reports were made with the hope that people with different social backgrounds, dialects, and beliefs about language could still achieve successful communication by employing honorifics, respect expressions, and other linguistic and semiotic means.

In business, dramatic changes in honorific usage are often mentioned. On October 30, 2003, the *New York Times* journalist Norimitsu Onishi reported a growing trend to drop honorifics in Japanese corporate culture.

> [M]any Japanese companies, traditionally divided rigidly by age and seniority, have dropped the use of titles to create a more open - and, they hope, competitive – culture... The long economic slump has forced companies to abandon seniority in favor of performance, upsetting the traditional order," which forced companies to discourage their employees from using "honorifics that Japanese have traditionally used toward an older person, a boss, a customer, a stranger. (Onishi 2003)

Onishi reports that some companies have introduced this new policy of dropping honorifics by discouraging their employees from addressing each other by honorific titles (e.g. 'president,' 'department chief,' or 'manager').[2] Instead, they encourage the use of the polite suffix *-san* added to names, such as Takekuro-*san* 'Ms. Takekuro' as opposed to Takekuro-*buchō* 'Department Chief Takekuro'. By addressing each other by names rather than by honorific titles, companies hope that their employees will exchange ideas freely, make decisions quickly, and develop innovative ideas and better human relationships. One female employee commented on this new language policy in her company: "There is less distance and human relations in the workplace have improved."

The journalist further points out that for many young Japanese, using honorifics hinders innovation, openness, and personal touch in communication. But for many older Japanese, not using honorifics means "losing the deep beauty of their language" and "the coarsening of the social culture," bringing chaos to society. This article portrays honorifics as something that symbolizes cultural refinement. On the other hand, honorifics support or reflect Japan's rigidity and traditional social structures based on seniority or hierarchy, by hindering open communication, information disclosure, good human relations, and flexible attitudes to accept new ideas. In his latter interpretation, the dropping of honorifics is perceived as if it could create open-mindedness, equality-based social structure, quick decision-making, innovation, more intimacy in communication, and better human relations.

Linguistic ideologies of Japanese honorifics seem to be shifting to the direction of developing a more fluid understanding of honorifics, dropping honorifics, or even abolishing honorifics at the expense of efficiency and better human relationships. However, if honorifics were truly undemocratic and useless to users of the language or to the society, they would have disappeared by now. But honorifics die hard in Japanese. This suggests that honorifics serve people's purposes. Honorific usage in some situations can be a solidarity-based, dynamic, and spontaneous phenomenon that promotes close and flexible communication. Hence, it is important to investigate why and under what circumstances honorifics are interpreted as markers of distance, power, and inequality, as opposed to markers of closeness, solidarity, and equality.

2. Unconventional Honorific Usage Among Young Speakers of Japanese

We have thus far seen that institutional authorities such as the Language Council

[2] This attempt is similar to feminists' attempts to change English pronouns in 1970s. Attempts were made to avoid *he*, the "neutral" masculine pronoun, and to use *he or she*, *s*/*he*, or syntactic circumlocutions like passivization, *they* (Lakoff 2004:103). There have been attempts to substitute *Ms*. for *Miss* and *Mrs*. as a title for women (Lakoff 1975). Today, *Ms*. is in many cases the norm, even though non-parallelism still exists in that men only have one choice for the title while women are often offered a three-way choice (Lakoff 2004:112). This suggests that actual language usage does not fully follow authorities' prescriptions.

and corporations suggest solutions, by promoting the dropping of honorifics or encouraging the use of *keii-hyougen* 'respect expressions,' in order to be mutually respectful. The new guidelines of the Language Council explicitly mentioned that the "correct" use of honorifics is not the only goal in successful communication. Whether or not the institutional authorities' suggestions are influential to actual speakers' speech is open to investigation, but some young speakers of Japanese use honorifics unconventionally in some contexts. By analyzing examples of unconventional honorific usage, this section suggests that young speakers convey mutual respect, affinities, or humor with honorifics in ways that are different from what the institutional authorities had expected.

Before analyzing my data, I should mention general rules of honorific usage in contemporary Japanese. The major characteristics of honorific usage in contemporary Japanese is to raise others or to lower the speaker and the speaker's ingroup members. To raise others, respectful forms including the honorific prefix are used. To lower the ingroup in respect to oneself, humiliative forms are used so that the status of others is relatively raised. Using respectful forms in reference to oneself is pragmatically inappropriate, although it is syntactically possible. In the speech of young people, however, there are some "pragmatically inappropriate" uses of respectful forms.

Example (1) is an opening in a conversation between two friends. Rika and Yumi are females in their late 20s. Notice their use of the honorific prefix *o-*.

(1) 1 Rika: *Yumi-chan* ***o-genki?***[3]
Yumi-DIM **HONP**-fine?
'Yumi, (are you) honorably fine?'
2 Yumi: *un* ***o-genki***
yeah **HONP**-fine
'Yeah, (I'm) honorably fine.'
3 Rika: *atashi* *mo*
1sg too
'Me, too.'

In asking about Yumi's health, Rika said *o-genki?* in line 1. Typically, close friends would not normally use the honorific prefix *o-*. Rika's unusual use of the honorific prefix influenced Yumi to answer in an unusual way in the next turn. In line 2, Yumi said *un o-genki* 'yeah, I'm fine.' Yumi's use of *o-genki* with *o-* is incorrect, because the honorific prefix *o-* is conventionally used to describe objects or people that are worthy of the speaker's respect.

Yumi would not have used the honorific prefix with people that she would not

[3]Transcription conventions are as follows: COP=copula; DAT=dative; DIM=diminutive; HONP=honorific prefix; HUM=humble form of referent honorific; NEG=negative; NOM=nominalizer; O=object; PAST=past; POL=polite form (addressee honorific); Q=question; QT=quotative; RESP=respectful form of referent honorifics; SFP=sentence-final particle; SUB=subject; SUF=suffix; TOP=topic; ?=rising intonation; (( ))=scenic detail.

feel comfortable with. Her use of the honorific prefix to herself suggests that she and Rika are in good and close social relationship. Thus, Yumi's use of the honorific prefix not only signified her effort to attune to Rika's unusual and playful ways of speaking but also acknowledged and reassured their relationship of camaraderie.

The next example is part of a conversation among Fumiko (female), Mika (female), and Sakio (male). Sakio, age 33, is Fumiko's boyfriend. Mika, age 29, and Sakio have known each other for years. Fumiko, age 24, and Mika met through Sakio two days before this conversation was recorded. Throughout the conversation, Fumiko invariably used polite forms (*desu* or *masu* ending) to Mika and even to Sakio, her boyfriend. Mika and Sakio used plain forms (without *desu* or *masu* ending) in their conversation.

(2)

1	Fumiko:	Tanabe-san	yoku	**go**-ryokoo	toka	
		Miss Tanabe	often	**HONP**-trip	sort	
2		***nasaru***	*n*	***desu***		*ka*?
		do:**RESP**	NOM	COP:**POL**		Q
		'Ms Tanabe, do (you) often do honorable-traveling?'				
3	Mika:	((smiling))	***nasai-***		***mas****en*	
			do:**RESP**		**POL**:NEG	
		'(I) honorably do not.'				
4	Sakio:	*ima*	*no*	*haamonii?*		
		now	NOM	harmony		
		'(Was that) a harmony?'				
5	Mika:	*datte*	*go-ryokoo*	*nasaru*		*nante*
		cause	HONP-trip	do:RESP		like
		'Because (Fumiko) said 'honorable-travelling,'				
6		*chou*	*teineini*	*iu*	*n*	*damon*
		super	politely	say	NOM	COP.SFP
		'and (it) was super polite.'				

In lines 1 and 2, Fumiko uses the polite form of the copula *desu* in addition to two respectful forms: the honorific prefix *go-* and the respectful form of the verb 'to do' *nasaru*. Because of the two instances of the respectful forms, Fumiko's speech sounded to Mika too deferential, as Mika said in lines 5 and 6. Mika was overwhelmed that Fumiko was giving too much deference to her. In response to Fumiko's highly respectful speech in lines 1 and 2, Mika copied the respectful form of the verb 'to do' *nasai-* from Fumiko's speech, and negated it with *masen*, the negative form of the copula in the polite form. This use of the respectful form in line 3 is a violation of Japanese honorific usage because the speaker is not supposed to honorify herself. But as Mika explained later, she violated the conventions of honorific usage in Japanese, in order to remove the referentially encoded deference. By her unconventional and sarcastic use of honorifics, she suggested that Fumiko can speak to Mika without too many honorifics. In (2),

honorifics are used to diminish their status difference and to make their distance close.

In order to gain a wide range of responses, I played the recordings of these examples and collected native speakers' metalinguistic commentaries from speakers of different generations. To subjects in their 50s and 60s, the examples were unbearable to listen to (*kikizurai*) and therefore hard to comprehend (*wakarinikui*), because they found "mistakes" in the examples. When they heard the examples, their main concern was whether these forms were grammatically correct and pragmatically appropriate. They attributed the unconventional uses of respectful forms to speakers' lack of common sense and proper education. All the subjects in their 20s and 30s admitted that using respectful forms to oneself is generally not considered *tadashii keigo* 'correct use of honorifics,' but they did not associate the speakers' uses of respectful forms with a lack of common sense or proper education. Rather, they interpreted such unconventional uses of respectful forms as demonstrating a sense of humor. One subject in her early 30s said, "By daring to use respectful forms unconventionally, the speakers in the examples try to present their friendliness rather than rudeness and ignorance." Another subject in his late 20s said that "using respectful forms to oneself is to make the hierarchical relationship implied by previous speakers' use of respectful forms ambiguous and useless." This way, the speakers can lessen the deference that the previous speakers showed to themselves and demonstrate their egalitarian relationship with their addressees.

These young speakers' use of self-respectful forms and their metalinguistic commentaries suggest two points. First, young speakers are less constrained than are older speakers by the prescriptive conventions of honorific usage. Young speakers understand the convention but are not bound by it. Second, actual speakers' honorific usage is not overdetermined by prescriptions or explicit proposals of the Council and corporations. Speakers especially in younger generations are trying to find innovative and less-hierarchical ways of using honorifics, independently of prescriptions from institutional authorities. Thus, authorities' linguistic ideologies only partially influence actual speakers' communicative practices.

3. Reciprocal and Non-reciprocal Uses of Honorifics

Despite various functions of honorifics, most native speakers of Japanese believe that honorifics are markers of social hierarchy. Their belief is so strong that honorifics are not considered apart from the traditional Japanese social system, based as it is on seniority and hierarchy. Some think that honorifics are the cause of social evils, because younger people or subordinates are lowered in status and prevented from speaking, when their elders or seniors misspeak or misbehave. For such people, honorifics are anti-democratic and unfair. But my analysis in this section will demonstrate that honorifics serve their diverse and meaningful purposes in situated contexts.

This section analyzes two cases in which honorifics are used reciprocally and non-reciprocally. In the first example, honorifics are used in mutually respectful ways, while in the second example honorifics are treated as power-laded linguistic resources. In other words, speakers use honorifics as part of their linguistic resources that can help them accomplish various communicative goals.

Example (3) was collected on December 28, 2002, at the community center in the village of Kariwa in Niigata prefecture (cf. Takekuro forthcoming). Mr. Suzuki is a local man in his late 60s and a head of the volunteer group at the community center. Ms. Fujita is a visitor in her 50s and has been living in a neighboring city for one year and a half. At the community center, Ms. Fujita had met Mr. Suzuki for the first time. Their relationships are variously asymmetric: older and younger, volunteer and visitor, familiar and unfamiliar with others, and insider and outsider in the region. Prior to this segment of conversation, Mr. Suzuki had used plain forms and Ms. Fujita had invariably used polite forms but had not used respectful and humiliative forms. Mr. Suzuki inserts polite and respectful forms when Ms. Fujita's speech becomes more deferential than her usual speech, as in (3).

(3) Mr. Suzuki had talked about handmade noodles that were made at the community center. Then, he served Ms. Fujita the noodles.

1	Suzuki:	*kore*	*ga*	*sono*	*soba*	*dayo*
		this	SUB	the	noodle	COP.SFP
		'These are the noodles.'				
2	Fujita:	*ara*	*maa*	*jaa*	*enryo*	*naku*
		well	wow	then	hesitation	NEG
3		***choodai itashi***			***masu***	
		HUM:receive		do:**HUM**	**POL**	
		'Well, wow, then, (I) eat them with no hesitation.'				
4	Suzuki:	***meshiaga****tte*		***kudasai***		
		RESP:eat		please:**POL**		
		'Please eat.'				

In line 1, Mr. Suzuki spoke in a plain form as usual. In line 3, for the first time Ms. Fujita included two humble forms, *choodai* and *itashi-*, in addition to the polite form *masu*. In her consistent uses of polite forms, these humiliative forms, due to the rarity of their occurrence in her speech, highlighted the change of her speech form. In line 4, Mr. Suzuki used respectful and polite forms to Ms. Fujita, demonstrating alignment with her use of humiliative and polite forms. After this exchange, Mr. Suzuki switched back to plain forms.

This example illustrates that Mr. Suzuki adjusted his own uses of speech forms, responding to Ms. Fujita's speech. In doing so, Mr. Suzuki indicated that he and his interlocutor were both respectful beings and worthy of equal amounts of respect, while making himself look like a friendly and polite person who knew how to receive and return deference. Given Mr. Suzuki's position as a head of the

volunteer group and the older person, he had a choice of maintaining his typical use of plain forms. But what made their communication successful was his willingness to adapt himself to his interlocutor's speech. Their reciprocal use of honorifics shows mutual respect to one another.

In contrast, honorifics are regarded as power-laden linguistic forms in the conversation between Hide, 32, and Akira, 24. On July 12, 2003, Hide and Akira accidentally met outside the train station in Hakone, the Tokyo countryside, after they last met in the US in 2001.[4] Hide and Akira are eight years apart in age. Such a difference is usually enough to cause the younger person to use polite forms to the older one, unless both are very close friends or related to each other. Hide expected Akira to use polite forms to him, but Akira did not use polite forms unless Hide initiated the use of honorifics. Example (4) shows part of their conversation.[5]

(4) After exchanging greetings, Hide started to ask Akira about his life.

1	Hide:	[*e*	*ima*	*doko*	*sunderu?*	
		oh	now	where	live	
		'Where (do you) live now?'				
2	Akira:	*inokashira*	*sen*	*no*	*ikenoue*	
		Inokashira	line	NOM	Ikenoue	
		'(I live) in Ikenoue on Inokashira Line.'				
3		*e*	*dō?*			
		oh	how			
		'Oh, how (are you)?'				
4	Hide:	*iya*	*māmā*	(0.2)		
		no	so-so			
		'Well, so-so.'				
5		*kyō*	*wa*	*doko* *ni*	*iku* *n*	
		today	TOP	where to	go NOM	
6		***desu***	*ka*			
		COP:**POL**	Q			
		'Today where (are you) going?'				
7	Akira:	*anō*				
		well				
		'Well…'				
8	Hide:	*onsen*	*toka*	***ikareru***	*n*	
		hot spring	sort	**go:RESP**	NOM	
9		***desu***	*ka?*			
		COP:**POL**	Q			
		'(Are you) going to a hot spring or something?'				

[4] I was visiting Hakone with Hide and carrying the MD Recorder in my backpack. After this encounter, I contacted to Akira and got his consent to use this data.

[5] For the entire conversation between Hide and Akira and Hide's comments about Akira's honorific usage, please see Takekuro (2005).

10	Akira:	*a*	*mae*	*no*	*dōryō*	*to*	*au*
		oh	previous	NOM	co-worker	and	see
11		*dake*	***desu***		*kedo*		
		just	COP:**POL**		but		
		‘Oh, (I’m) just meeting my previous colleague.’					
12	Hide:	*ō*	*kuruma*	*de*	*kita?*	*odakyū?*	
		oh	car	by	come:PAST	Odakyu	
		‘Oh, (did you) come (here) by car? (By) Odakyu line?’					
13	Akira:	*odakyū*	***ssu***		*tōi*	***ssu***	
		Odakyu	COP:**POL**		far	COP:**POL**	
14		*ne*	*koko*				
		SFP	here				
		‘By Odakyu train. This place is far, isn’t it?’					
15	Hide:	*dandan*	*keshiki*	*ga*	*inaka*	*ni*	
		gradually	view	SUB	countryside	to	
16		*naru*					
		become					
17		*tte*	*iu*	*ka*	*na*		
		QT	say	Q	SFP		
		‘It’s like the view slowly turning into a country view.’					
18	Akira:	*oi*	*tanbo*		*da*	*yo*	*tte*
		hey	rice field		COP	SFP	QT
		‘It’s like “Hey, (there’s) a rice field!”’					
19		*a*	*hide-san*		*onsen*	*iku*	
		oh	Hide-SUF.POL		hot spring	go	
20		(0.1)	*no?*				
			SFP				
		‘Oh, Hide-san, (are you) going to a hot spring?’					
21	Hide:	*iya*	*uchira*	*sisimai*	*o*		
		no	1pl	lion dance	O		
22		*mi*	*ni*	*iku*	*n*	***desu***	
		see	DAT	go	NOM	COP:**POL**	
23		*kedo*					
		but					
		‘No, we are going to see a lion dance.’					
24	Akira:	*yūmeina*	*n*	***desu***	*ka?*		
		famous	NOM	COP:**POL**	Q		
		‘Is (it) famous?’					
25	Hide:	*ttsūka*		*tada*	*shiriai*	*ga*	*yatteru*	*tte*
		QT:say:Q		only	friend	SUB	doing	QT
26		*dakede*						
		only						
		‘Well, it’s just someone (I know) is performing.’						

On the surface, their interaction seems to be normal and smoothly completed. But Akira used honorifics only after Hide did so, as in lines 10-11 and 24, and dropped honorifics when Hide did so, as in lines 3 and 19-20. In fact, after the conversation with Akira, Hide expressed his annoyance. He said to me that because Akira was younger than he was, Akira had to use honorifics at all times while Hide did not. To summarize Hide's comments, he expected complementary uses of plain and polite forms between himself and Akira. Although Akira did use polite forms, Akira's use of polite forms was neither voluntary nor spontaneous because they were used only to respond to or align with Hide's. Since Hide expected Akira to use polite forms spontaneously and complementarily, Hide found Akira's overall speech both unsatisfactory and irritating. Hide explicitly said that he used honorifics in order to induce Akira's use of honorifics. In their interaction, Akira clearly failed to figure out Hide's expectation, but Hide also failed to understand Akira's view of honorifics. The cause of their unsuccessful interaction was not only Akira's insufficient amount of honorific use but also Hide's one-sided imposition of honorific use on Akira.

These examples make clear that honorifics may signify hierarchy and solidarity, depending on the contexts in which people use them. What is undemocratic are often people's imposition of honorific use on others and their refusal to use honorifics themselves, as in example (4). Therefore, viewing honorifics as inherently undemocratic and hierarchical linguistic forms is an oversimplification. The problem does not lie in the linguistic form itself, but in the uses to which it is put. In interaction, honorifics are linguistic resources that can help people accomplish their communicative goals.

4. Is the Function of Honorifics Shifting from Power-based to Solidarity-based?

We have seen that an ideological shift of honorifics from power-laden linguistic forms into performative ones. Some speakers, especially younger ones, seem to start using honorifics as markers of solidarity. Does this mean that Japanese honorifics are shifting from a power-based system to a solidarity-based one?

Studies in *kokugogaku* ('National Language Studies') suggest that Japanese honorifics started among the nobility in pre-Old Japanese (before A.D.710) and Old Japanese (A.D.710-794) (Tsujimura 1992). In Middle Japanese, honorifics came to be used based on intimacy, formality, or group membership. In contemporary Japanese, membership in an ingroup or an outgroup is described as the most crucial factor in the use of Japanese honorifics (Wetzel 1984, 1994; Inoue 1999). Moreover, some argue that the function of honorifics has shifted from a power-based system to a solidarity-based one over a long period of time (Mizutani and Mizutani 1987), as Brown and Gilman's study (1972[1960]) indicated such a path in pronouns in European languages. Traugott and Dasher (2002:229) summarize Held's study on politeness in Japanese and quote shifts in power relations as a change from social rank to social value, and from vertical to horizontal distance, in which social hierarchy is replaced by "psychological,

affective components of proximity, familiarity" (Held 1999:24). Indeed, some of the examples of honorific usage and native speakers' metalinguistic commentaries about honorifics presented in the above show change in progress in Japanese honorific usage. However, this by no means suggests that the function of Japanese honorifics has shifted from a power-based system to a solidarity-based one for several reasons.

First, even though younger speakers sometimes use honorifics playfully as a demonstration of solidarity, much of their honorific usage is still based on conventional Japanese honorific usage. For example, young people expect much younger people to use honorifics to them, as illustrated in Hide's interaction with Akira and in some junior-high and high schools, in which senior students expect (or require) junior students to use polite forms. Even though each instance of honorific usage carries different meanings in different contexts, honorifics are most conventionally used to indicate speakers' respect and hierarchical differences among participants.

Second, speakers' use of self-respectful forms of honorifics becomes effective, only when speakers understand and share the conventional uses of honorifics. If speakers do not, unconventional or unexpected honorifics cannot be used to provide additional meanings in an interaction. Using self-respectful forms of honorifics is not yet part of Japanese pragmatic conventions.

Depending on the interactive situation, speakers of Japanese of all ages use honorifics, in order to invoke conventional meanings such as hierarchy and formality or unconventional meanings such as solidarity and playfulness. It is too early to claim that Japanese honorifics have shifted to a solidarity-based system. Today's honorific usage is both power-based and solidarity-based, not in opposition but in co-habitation. Because of these different functions that honorifics serve in situated contexts, speakers can utilize them for many purposes in social interaction. More studies are necessary if we are to come to grasp honorifics in relation to socio-political situations and actual speakers' communicative practices.

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