

Beyond politeness: The strategic use of addressee honorifics and plain forms in Japanese self-introductions on a gay dating application

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Abstract. This study investigates the strategic use of Japanese addressee honorific (AH) and plain forms in written self-introductions on a gay dating application in Japan. While earlier approaches posited a one-to-one relationship between AH and politeness, treating AH as governed by socially prescribed norms, more recent indexical approaches argue that speakers strategically deploy these forms to construct interactional meanings. To examine whether such strategic use extends to written digital discourse, 50 profile self-introductions were collected, yielding 493 clause-final predicates (318 AH; 175 plain). Although AH forms predominated overall (64.5%), substantial individual variation and frequent style mixing were observed. A binomial linear mixed-effects model tested whether relationship-seeking intentions (friendship, long-term partnership, brief encounters) predicted AH use. Results show that users seeking friendship were significantly more likely to use AH forms, while this effect was attenuated when long-term relationship intentions were simultaneously signaled. These findings demonstrate that AH and plain forms function as strategic, indexical resources shaped by interactional goals rather than as fixed markers of politeness.

Keywords. Japanese honorifics; indexicality; politeness; addressee honorifics; plain form

1. Introduction. In Japanese, clause-final predicates require speakers to choose between the addressee honorific (AH) *-masu/desu* forms and the non-honorific plain forms (Jordan & Noda 1987; Cook 1998). Because this binary choice is obligatory, it has long been treated as central to analyses of Japanese politeness. Earlier studies argued for a direct relationship between AH and politeness, suggesting that speakers select AH or plain forms in accordance with social rules such as status differences (Matsumoto 1988; Ide 1989, 2005; Ide & Yoshida 1999). However, more recent research observed that speakers often mix AH and plain forms within a single speech (e.g., Cook 1997, 2011; Okamoto 1997, 2010), casting doubt on the proposal of the one-to-one mapping between AH and politeness. These studies argue instead that Japanese speakers are active agents who strategically choose AH or plain forms to achieve interactional goals, such as creating social identities, and that these forms can serve multiple functions in discourse.

Notably, most data on mixed use of AH and plain forms come from naturally occurring spoken interactions, while mixed use in written data remains understudied. Also, nearly all prior research relied on qualitative analysis of style-shift cases. Quantitative analysis is needed to statistically verify whether AH and plain forms indeed serve pragmatic functions beyond politeness.

The present study addresses these gaps through a mixed-methods analysis of a written data source: self-introductions in the bio sections of user profiles on a gay dating application in Japan. A total of 50 self-introductions were collected and anonymized for analysis. For quantitative

* We thank the abstract reviewers and the audience at the 2026 Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America for their valuable feedback. We are also grateful to the Asian/Pacific Studies Institute at Duke University for their financial support. Any remaining errors are our own. Authors: Xuyang Zhang, Duke University (xuyang.zhang@duke.edu) & Yunchuan Chen, Duke University (yunchuan.chen@duke.edu).

coding, only phrases or clauses ending in a predicate were counted, as clause-final predicates index speech style through either AH or plain forms. In addition, users' self-reported relationship intentions: friendship, long-term partnership, or brief encounters were retained as independent variables for analysis.

The data show that, overall, individuals tended to use AH forms more frequently than plain forms in their self-introductions. However, analysis at the individual level reveals variation in default speech-style choice. While 9 of the 50 people used AH forms exclusively, 14 people used plain forms more frequently than AH forms, indicating that the default form selection varies across individuals. A binomial linear mixed-effects model was employed to examine whether this choice significantly depends on the type of relationship sought. Recall that there were three categories: friendship, long-term partner, and brief encounters, and users could select one or more. The data suggest that users seeking friendship were significantly more likely to use AH compared to those who were not ($p < .001$). However, this effect was moderated when users also indicated seeking a long-term partner, with AH use significantly reduced in the joint condition ($p = .045$). Seeking a long-term partner or brief encounters alone did not significantly predict speech style. These findings indicate that the use of AH and plain forms serves interactive functions beyond politeness, providing statistical support for previous studies such as Cook (2011) and Okamoto (2010).

2. Previous studies on Japanese addressee honorific and plain forms. In Japanese, every sentence with a clause-final predicate ends in either an AH form or a plain form, as shown in examples (1) and (2).

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|-----|---------------------------------|------------|-----------|----------------|
| (1) | Ashita | watashi-wa | gakko-e | iki-masu. (AH) |
| | Tomorrow | I-TOP | school-to | go-COP |
| | 'I will go to school tomorrow.' | | | |
| (2) | Ashita | watashi-wa | gakko-e | ik-u. (Plain) |
| | Tomorrow | I-TOP | school-to | go-COP |
| | 'I will go to school tomorrow.' | | | |

Examples (1) and (2) are identical in referential meaning, differing only in the suffix of the clause-final predicate: example (1) uses the AH *-masu* form, whereas example (2) uses the plain *-u* form. Although the two sentences are semantically equivalent, they have traditionally been argued to differ in their pragmatic implications. Under traditional accounts (Harada 1976; Ide 1989), the AH form is analyzed as indexing politeness, formality, or deference toward the addressee, while the plain form is associated with informality, familiarity, or intimacy.

One of the earliest and most widely cited discussions of the relationship between Japanese honorifics and politeness originates with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. According to this theory, people in interaction possess face, defined as a public self-image that individuals seek to maintain. Brown and Levinson distinguish two types of face: positive face, the desire to be liked, approved of, and acknowledged by others, and negative face, the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition. Acts that potentially threaten either type of face are referred to as face-threatening acts (FTAs). For example, asking someone for help is considered a threat to the hearer's negative face. Within Brown and Levinson's framework, Japanese honorifics are analyzed as negative politeness strategies that function to mitigate such threats to negative face. This is because they are traditionally regarded as linguistic resources for indexing

deference toward the addressee, thereby reducing the degree of imposition. The use of such strategies is also assumed to involve rational, speaker-driven decision-making in response to potential FTAs.

However, Brown and Levinson's analysis has been challenged by scholars such as Ide (1989) and Matsumoto (1988, 1989), who argue that Japanese politeness is not grounded in the strategic protection of the hearer's positive and negative face wants but in the recognition of social relations and conformity to socially shared norms. According to them, Japanese honorifics should not be considered negative politeness strategies used to protect the hearer's negative face, but rather as linguistic resources that index social appropriateness based on culturally prescribed norms and rules. A classic example Matsumoto (1988) provided is given in (3):

- (3) kyoo-wa doyoobi desu.
Today-TOP Saturday COP
'Today is Saturday.'

Example (3) is a statement of fact that involves no imposition on the hearer. However, the addressee honorific *-desu* is used. On this basis, Matsumoto argues that Japanese honorifics cannot be simply analyzed as strategies for protecting the hearer's negative face, which is the desire to be free from imposition, because honorifics can occur even in the absence of an FTA.

Matsumoto (1989) further argues against Brown and Levinson's treatment of honorific use as a strategic decision. She points out that Japanese speakers are forced to choose between plain and honorific forms in almost every utterance, and that there is no neutral or 'safe' form that can be used across all contexts. Thus, the selection of an appropriate form is obligatory given the social context rather than the result of a discretionary, speaker-driven choice.

Ide (1989) proposes a similar argument, suggesting that politeness in Japanese is regulated by discernment. This concept, known as *wakimae* in Japanese, refers to speakers' passive submission to societal requirements (Hill et al., 1986) and, in the context of politeness, to the recognition of socially defined norms governing appropriate linguistic behavior. In line with Matsumoto (1988, 1989), Ide argues that honorific use is norm-governed rather than strategic and is based on socially given categories such as relative status, role relations, age, and the formality of the situation. Failure to exercise discernment is therefore evaluated as rude or socially inappropriate.

Despite differences in their accounts of what motivates politeness in Japanese, Brown and Levinson (1987), on the one hand, and Matsumoto (1988, 1989) and Ide (1989), on the other, all assume a direct relationship between honorific use and politeness. In other words, honorifics are considered to have a one-to-one relationship with politeness and directly index it.

However, more recent studies have challenged both the assumption of a one-to-one relationship between honorifics and politeness and the view that honorific use is determined by socially prescribed norms. Drawing on concrete examples from Maynard (1992), Pizziconi (2003) argues that honorifics can index a range of context-dependent meanings, such as formality and psychological distance, rather than politeness per se.

Cook (1997) demonstrates that caregivers frequently alternate between the plain form and the AH form when addressing children. This finding suggests that honorific use cannot be explained solely in terms of the addressee's social status or as an expression of politeness toward the hearer. Therefore, it challenges Brown and Levinson's (1987) face-based account. At the same time, Cook's findings also go against Matsumoto's (1988, 1989) and Ide's (1989) norm-

based analyses: the mixed use of plain and AH forms indicates that honorific use is not passively determined by social norms. Instead, Cook argues that AH forms function as indexical resources that mark interactional stances such as public self-presentation, from which specific contextual functions, such as asserting authority in scolding or framing parental roles, emerge in interaction.

Cook (1998) further presents two sets of data. One comes from a television interview, in which participants predominantly use the AH form but occasionally shift to the plain form in summary and assessment turns. Cook argues that these shifts do not index reduced politeness or status differences. Rather, they foreground informational content or interactional stances. The other dataset comes from a neighborhood quarrel between a landlord and a tenant. In this interaction, speakers initially use the plain form reciprocally. Once the tenant recognizes the landlord's higher status, he switches to the AH form, while the landlord continues using the plain form. This observation shows that mixed usage emerges dynamically through interaction, rather than being passively determined by pre-existing social norms, as assumed in earlier norm-based accounts (e.g., Matsumoto 1989). Moreover, Dunn (2005) extends Cook's indexical approach by examining speeches delivered at Japanese weddings, a highly ritualized context. She shows that even in situations where honorific use is normatively expected, speakers shift between humble and non-humble forms to index changes in footing and social persona, which again demonstrates that honorific use is not determined by social norms.

Further, Okamoto (2010) presented data from her 2008 study of three dyadic conversations involving hierarchical relationships based on age and social role. She shows that despite the clear status difference, both participants alternate between AH and plain forms within a single conversation. She therefore argues that speakers do not use AH forms passively in accordance with fixed social rules; rather, they deploy them strategically to construct context-dependent interactional meanings.

By examining a YouTuber's game commentary, Christensen and Chen (2022) observed that Japanese speakers even mix the use of AH and plain forms in monologues, a context in which there is no immediate addressee and no change in the social relationship between the speaker and the audience. The study reveals that AH forms occur systematically in contexts such as announcements, expressions of seriousness, conventionalized formulae, and quotations. These functions cannot be accounted for by discernment based on social status or mitigation of FTAs. Rather, the findings provide further empirical support for Cook's (1997, 1998) indexicality-based account, according to which AH forms directly index a disciplined or public self, which in turn indexes a range of context-dependent meanings such as stance-taking.

To sum up, these more recent studies converge on the view that Japanese AH are multifunctional indexical resources whose meanings emerge dynamically in discourse. They challenge both face-based and norm-based models by showing that AH forms are neither reducible to politeness nor rigidly determined by social structure. Instead, speakers actively deploy AH and plain forms to construct contextual meanings, social identities, and interactional stances across a wide range of communicative settings.

Nevertheless, several issues remain to be addressed. First, although most previous studies on the use of AH forms have relied on naturally occurring data, such data have been largely limited to spoken or conversational contexts, including parent-child interactions (Cook 1997) and wedding speeches (Dunn, 2005). To date, few studies have examined the use of AH forms in written data, which should likewise be considered naturally occurring when produced by native Japanese speakers in non-elicited settings. Second, the majority of previous studies have relied on qualitative analyses; although a small number of studies (e.g., Cook 1997; Okamoto 2010) report raw

counts or percentages of AH and plain forms, these patterns have not been evaluated using statistical models.

To address these gaps, the present study examines written data drawn from self-introductions in the bio sections of user profiles on a gay dating application in Japan. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

(a) Do users of a gay dating application mix AH and plain forms in the self-introductions presented in their profile bios?

(b) If AH and plain forms are mixed, is the use of AH forms random, or can it be predicted by contextual factors?

3. Data collection. The data for this study were collected from 9monsters, a gay dating and social networking application that originated in Japan. On 9monsters, users can create public profiles that other users can explore and view. Except for user-uploaded photos, profiles typically include personal attributes such as age, location, physical characteristics, and interests. In addition, users can indicate the types of relationships they are seeking: friendship, long-term partnership, or brief encounters, and may select one or more of these options. After completing the basic profile information, users have the option to write a self-introduction in an ‘About me’ section, which is the written data analyzed in this study. The app also incorporates features such as messaging and sending likes to support social engagement among users.

The data were collected in Tokyo and Osaka in January 2024. Using the application’s GPS-based “Location” view, we anchored the “my location” setting to Shinjuku Ni-chōme in central Tokyo and Dōyama-chō in Osaka, both of which are well-known hubs of queer social life in Japan. For each location, we sampled 25 user profiles that included at least five sentences in the “About me” section of their public profiles, yielding a total of 50 profiles for analysis. All users in the sample self-identified as Japanese nationals in their application profiles. In addition to the self-introduction texts, we retained users’ self-reported relationship intentions (friendship, long-term partnership, and/or brief encounters) as contextual variables. The analysis examines whether the use of AH forms in self-introductions can be predicted by the types of relationships users report seeking.

4. Data screening and categorization. We observed that the self-introduction texts in our dataset contain a wide range of linguistic units, including isolated words, complete and incomplete sentences, and standalone numbers. To ensure consistency in analysis, we therefore applied the following criteria to screen and categorize the data.

First, we classify the following units as independent phrases rather than complete sentences:

- a. Noun phrases without modifiers, such as Tokyo, occurring without additional descriptive elements.
- b. Phrases consisting of a single noun combined with a numeral or a date.
- c. Lists of nouns used to describe multiple items within a single semantic domain (e.g., hobbies).

Second, the following units are treated as not conveying stylistic information relevant to AH and plain forms:

a. Independent clauses ending in *-te kudasai* ‘please do ...’, which do not encode AH or plain forms in the clause-final predicate.

b. Fixed formulaic expressions such as *hajimemashite* ‘Nice to meet you’ and *konnichiwa* ‘Hello’. No formulaic expressions involving AH forms (e.g., *arigatō gozaimasu* ‘thank you’) were observed in the dataset.

Third, the following sentences are classified as incomplete and are excluded from AH/plain analysis:

a. Sentences lacking a clause-final predicate. For inclusion, predicates must carry specific semantic content. Constructions in which the light verb *-suru* combines with a verbal noun (e.g., *benkyō suru* ‘to study,’ *shigoto suru* ‘to work’) are treated as valid predicates and are therefore included.

b. Sentences ending in the conditional forms *-ba* or *-tara* (i.e., ‘if’ clauses) without an accompanying main clause.

c. Sentences ending with *to* used as a complementizer for verbs such as *-to omou* (‘I think ...’), where the main clause is omitted.

After excluding incomplete and irrelevant phrases and sentences, we applied the following criteria to count AH and plain forms. On the one hand, we classified a sentence as carrying a plain form if it met any of the following conditions:

a. The sentence ends with a verb or its conjugated form (a single verb also counts if it is not part of a list of verbs).

b. The sentence ends with an adjective or its conjugated form (a single adjective also counts if it is not part of a list of adjectives).

c. The sentence ends with a verbal noun, such as *benkyō* ‘study’ (a single verbal noun also counts if it is not part of a list of verbal nouns).

d. The sentence is an independent clause ending with a connective particle such as *-kara* (‘because’), *-kedo* (‘but’), etc.

On the other hand, we classified a sentence as carrying an AH form if it met any of the following conditions:

a. The sentence ends in *-desu* or *-masu* forms. A single verb, adjective, or noun also counts if it is used with *-desu* or *-masu*.

b. The sentence is an independent clause ending with a connective particle such as *-kara* (‘because’) or *-kedo* (‘but’) in *-desu* or *-masu* form.

Further, for sentences containing one dependent clause and one main clause, we applied the following criteria:

a. If both clauses use the AH form, we count one AH form only.

b. If one clause uses the AH form and the other uses the plain form, we count one AH form and one plain form.

c. If one clause uses either the AH or plain form and the other clause is incomplete or does not convey stylistic information, we count only the clause that indicates style (i.e., once as AH or once as plain).

d. English-only phrases without Japanese content are not counted.

5. Data analysis. After data screening and categorization, we identified a total of 493 instances of AH and plain forms across 50 self-introductions. Table 1 summarizes the raw counts and percentages of each form observed in the dataset.

	AH form	Plain form	Total
Counts	318	175	493
Percentage	64.5%	35.5%	100%

Table 1. Raw counts and percentages of AH and plain forms in self-introductions

As shown in Table 1, AH forms account for the majority of clause-final forms, with 318 instances (64.5%), followed by plain forms with 175 instances (35.5%). This distribution indicates a general preference for AH forms in profile self-introductions, suggesting an orientation toward a more formal, public-facing speech style in this context.

We now examine the distribution of AH and plain forms at the individual user level. Table 2 presents the raw counts of AH and plain forms in each user’s self-introduction.

User No.	AH	Plain	User No.	AH	Plain	User No.	AH	Plain
User 1	4	5	User 18	6	3	User 35	2	3
User 2	3	5	User 19	3	11	User 36	2	6
User 3	6	0	User 20	4	3	User 37	4	8
User 4	6	0	User 21	7	2	User 38	4	1
User 5	6	2	User 22	2	6	User 39	7	5
User 6	2	2	User 23	17	5	User 40	4	5
User 7	11	0	User 24	9	11	User 41	4	0
User 8	9	2	User 25	7	8	User 42	13	1
User 9	9	0	User 26	7	6	User 43	9	8
User 10	3	10	User 27	14	5	User 44	11	1
User 11	3	5	User 28	5	0	User 45	8	1
User 12	1	3	User 29	3	6	User 46	6	4
User 13	4	0	User 30	6	1	User 47	6	3
User 14	8	2	User 31	2	1	User 48	9	2
User 15	8	0	User 32	6	0	User 49	9	6
User 16	7	1	User 33	11	10	User 50	7	1
User 17	4	3	User 34	10	2	Total	318	175

Table 2. Raw counts of AH and plain forms by user

In contrast to Table 1, which indicates users’ tendency to use the AH form in their self-introductions, Table 2 reveals substantial variation in speech-style choice across individual users. It can be seen that nine users (Users 3, 4, 7, 9, 13, 15, 28, 32, and 41) relied exclusively on AH forms and did not produce any plain forms at all, which indicates a consistent orientation toward AH usage. The remaining 41 users mixed the usage of AH and plain forms in their profiles. Among these, eleven users (Users 1, 2, 10, 11, 12, 19, 22, 29, 35, 36, and 37) used plain forms more frequently than AH forms, which suggests that the plain form is the default speech style for some users. However, no user relied exclusively on plain forms.

Overall, these findings provide quantitative evidence that speech-style choice in written self-introductions is not simply norm-based. If speech-style choice were governed solely by social norms, we would expect users to employ a single form consistently, given that there is no change in social roles or relationships between profile authors and viewers. Instead, the data demonstrate both individual differences in default style selection and stylistic mixing. We now turn to the next step of the analysis, which examines whether this variation can be accounted for by users’ stated relationship intentions as contextual factors.

After completing their self-introduction texts, users are asked to indicate the type of relationship they are seeking on the application. Three options are available: Friendship, Long-term Partnership, and Brief Encounters. Users may select one or more options.

We conducted a linear mixed-effects analysis using R (R Core Team, 2025) and the lme4 package (Bates et al., 2015), implementing a generalized linear mixed-effects model (*glmer*). The dependent variable was clause-final form, a binary outcome coded as 1 for AH forms and 0 for plain forms. The fixed effects were users' stated relationship intentions: Friendship, Long-term Partnership, and Brief Encounters, each coded as 1 if selected and 0 otherwise. Users were included as random intercepts. We initially attempted to include a three-way interaction among the factors of Friends, Long-term Relationship, and Brief Encounters in the model. However, the fixed-effect model matrix was rank deficient, indicating perfect or near-perfect collinearity among predictors. Although some users selected all three relationship types, the substantial overlap between categories meant that the three-way interaction was not statistically identifiable. In other words, the information captured by the three-way term was redundant with lower-order effects, leading the model to automatically drop the coefficient. For this reason, we report results from the two-way interaction model, which provided a stable and interpretable solution. Table 3 presents the results of the reduced model fitted to predict Form, which included all two-way interactions and a random intercept for Participant.

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	p-value
Intercept	-0.94	1.48	-0.64	0.53
Friends	2.75	1.36	2.02	*0.04
Long-term Relationship	1.29	1.2	1.08	0.28
Brief Encounters	-0.17	1.39	-0.12	0.9
Friends × Long-term Relationship	-2.34	1.0	-2.35	*0.02
Friends x Brief Encounters	-0.02	1.22	-0.002	0.999
Long-term Relationship x Brief Encounters	-0.08	0.77	-0.11	0.91

Table 3. Results of the binomial linear mixed-effects model predicting AH form use

At the fixed-effects level, there was a significant main effect of Friends ($\beta = 2.75$, $SE = 1.36$, $z = 2.02$, $p = .043$), which suggests that the presence of a Friends relationship was associated with greater use of the AH form. In contrast, the main effects of Long-term Relationship ($\beta = 1.29$, $SE = 1.2$, $z = 1.08$, $p = .28$) and Brief Encounters ($\beta = -0.17$, $SE = 1.39$, $z = -0.12$, $p = .90$) were not statistically significant. Importantly, there was a significant interaction between Friends and Long-term Relationship ($\beta = -2.34$, $SE = 1.00$, $z = -2.35$, $p = .02$), which indicates that the effect of Friends depended on whether a Long-term Relationship was also present. In other words, the positive association between Friends and use of the AH form was attenuated when a Long-term Relationship was selected concurrently. No other two-way interactions were significant, including Friends × Brief Encounters ($\beta = -0.02$, $p = .999$) and Long-term Relationship × Brief Encounters ($\beta = -0.08$, $p = .91$).

Overall, the results indicate that gay application users' choice between the AH form and the plain form was partially predicted by their relationship-seeking intentions. Users who reported seeking friends only were significantly more likely to use the AH form than those who did not (p

= .04). In contrast, seeking a long-term relationship or brief encounters alone did not produce a clear difference in AH use. Importantly, the preference for the AH form associated with seeking friends was attenuated when users simultaneously indicated seeking a long-term relationship, as AH use was significantly reduced in this joint condition ($p = .02$). This finding suggests that AH form use motivated by a desire for friendship is weakened when long-term relationship intentions are also present. No other combinations of relationship-seeking goals were associated with significant differences in the language form choice.

6. Discussion. This study examined the use of Japanese AH and plain forms in written self-introductions on a gay dating application, with the goal of evaluating whether speech-style choice can be explained in terms of politeness or socially prescribed norms. Drawing on quantitative modeling, the findings provide clear evidence that AH and plain forms function as strategic linguistic resources shaped by interactional goals, rather than as direct reflections of politeness or adherence to social norms. According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, Japanese honorifics, which are assumed to index deference and respect, are analyzed as negative politeness strategies employed to mitigate FTAs that threaten the addressee's negative face. However, the written self-introduction data examined in this study are unlikely to involve many FTAs because they primarily consist of speakers introducing themselves. Despite this, the majority of clause-final forms were in the AH form, which suggests that Japanese honorifics cannot be simply understood as politeness strategies used to mitigate FTAs. Moreover, the common presence of AH and plain form mixing at the individual level in the dataset suggests that honorific use cannot be explained solely in terms of norm-based discernment, thereby challenging the accounts proposed by Matsumoto (1988, 1989) and Ide (1989). In other words, if speech-style choice were governed primarily by social norms, one would expect consistent use of either AH or plain forms across profiles, since the relevant social norms should remain constant throughout the writing process.

Instead, our written data align with findings from previous studies of spoken interaction, which demonstrate that speakers shift styles dynamically even in contexts with stable participant roles (e.g., Okamoto 2010; Christensen & Chen 2022). Importantly, the quantitative analysis demonstrates that this variation is neither random nor idiosyncratic. Users who reported seeking friendship were significantly more likely to use AH forms, which suggests that AH use is positively associated with the social stance of friendliness that users aim to project in their dating application profiles. Moreover, we observed that the effect of seeking friendship on AH use was attenuated when users simultaneously indicated seeking a long-term relationship. This interaction indicates that AH use is sensitive to competing interactional goals. When friendship is the sole stated intention, users seem to favor a more public-facing style, possibly to signal friendliness, safety, or non-sexualized intent. However, when romantic intentions are also present, users may prioritize a more intimate or personable stance, resulting in reduced AH use and greater reliance on plain forms. This result aligns with indexical approaches to honorifics, which emphasize that linguistic forms do not encode fixed social meanings but instead index stances that are interpreted in context (Agha 1993; Okamoto 2010; Cook 2011). In this sense, AH forms do not simply signal politeness or deference; they participate in the active, strategic construction of social stances. The attenuation effect observed here suggests that the disciplined, public-facing self-presentation stance indexed by AH forms may be perceived as incompatible with, or less effective for, signaling romantic availability or emotional closeness. On the other hand, seeking a long-term relationship alone or brief encounters alone did not significantly predict AH use. This

asymmetry further implies that AH use is modulated by specific social stances that users strategically adopt, rather than being passively determined by relationship intentions per se.

The present study contributes to the literature on Japanese honorifics in three main ways. First, it extends research on AH and plain forms to written digital discourse, demonstrating that stylistic mixing and strategic use are not limited to spoken interaction. Self-introductions on dating applications constitute a written yet interactional genre, making them a valuable site for testing theories of indexicality and stance. Second, by using a generalized linear mixed-effects model, this study offers statistical support for claims that have largely been based on qualitative analysis. While earlier studies have persuasively documented the multifunctionality of Japanese honorifics, quantitative evidence linking style choice to contextual variables has remained limited. Addressing this gap, the present findings demonstrate that relationship-seeking intentions significantly predict AH use, thereby reinforcing indexical accounts with inferential statistical evidence. Third, by focusing on a gay dating application, this study broadens the sociolinguistic scope of honorific research. Whereas much prior work has examined institutional or familial settings, this study highlights how speech-style choice operates in queer digital spaces, where users actively manage visibility, safety, and desirability. The findings suggest that AH forms can be mobilized to navigate these concerns, particularly when users seek to present themselves as approachable without appearing overly intimate.

7. Conclusion. This study examined the use of Japanese AH and plain forms in 50 written self-introductions collected from a gay dating application in Japan. A total of 318 AH forms and 175 plain forms were observed. Although users tended to use AH forms more frequently than plain forms overall, analysis at the individual level revealed substantial variation: while some users consistently employed AH forms throughout their self-introductions, many mixed AH and plain forms, and some relied more heavily on plain forms than on AH forms. Relationship-seeking intentions (friendship, long-term relationship, and brief encounters) were then included as contextual variables and analyzed using a mixed-effects model. The results show that users who reported seeking friendship only were significantly more likely to use AH forms than those who did not. In contrast, seeking a long-term relationship alone or brief encounters alone did not significantly predict AH use. Moreover, the positive association between AH use and the intention to seek friendship was significantly attenuated when users simultaneously indicated seeking a long-term relationship. Together, these findings suggest that AH forms are strategically employed to construct social stances and identities, rather than functioning as static markers of politeness or social structure. By providing inferential statistical evidence, this study strengthens the empirical foundation of indexical accounts of Japanese honorifics and moves beyond prior work that relied primarily on qualitative analysis. Finally, the findings demonstrate that written digital discourse can also serve as a productive site for investigating honorific use, pointing to future research on other digital genres and languages.

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