Using honorific expressions to ensure addressee compliance with commands: a case study of Japanese texts in the organisational context

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Using honorific expressions to ensure addressee compliance with commands: a case study of Japanese texts in the organisational context

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Abstract

This paper attempts to illustrate how Japanese keigo (honorific expressions) works in order to demand goods & services in organisational contexts. Japanese society is known to have a hierarchically oriented structure (Befu, 2001; Nakane, 1970). Sugimoto (1991) has pointed out that the hierarchical system is reflected in the Japanese language, especially in honorific expressions. Depending on register, texts which are exchanged express visible and/or invisible hierarchical relations. In SF theory, honorific expressions are lexicogrammatically set out in the system of HONORIFICATION and POLITENESS (Teruya, 2007). This study will explore honorific expressions as they are deployed in factual written Japanese texts in the workplace which express the speech function of command. I will examine how the writers show respect to the readers to ensure their compliance with the commands. This study also uses a Mood analysis in order to identify the selection of particular roles in the speech situation of the writers and the addressees (Halliday, 1973). The result illustrates the kinds of lexicogrammatical choices the writers choose in order to realize the speech function of command.

1 Introduction

Japanese has an intricate honorific system which is called keigo (honorific expressions). “One must always be attentive to the social status of the person to whom one talks, noting whether the addressee is higher or lower in the social hierarchy” (Sugimoto, 1991: 8). Major considerations which determine the choice of honorific expressions are age, status, and social distance (Koyama, 1992).

Due to the complexity of the honorific expressions, the cultural counsel (Bunka shingikai) produced a guideline for honorifics in 2007. The role of honorific expressions is to show a speaker/writer’s humbleness or respect towards an addressee(s)’ or an addressee’s side (Ministry of Education, 2007).

The application of SF theory to honorific expressions has been undertaken by a number of researchers. Hori (1995) investigated honorific expressions in terms of the absence of subject in a clause. The honorific expressions are lexicogrammatically set out by Teruya (2004; 2007) from their use in written and spoken texts and by Fukui (in press) who investigated their use in spoken texts. However, they do not address the organizational context because the study of the language use within organisations (Forey, 2004; Harrison & Young, 2004; Iedema, 1995, 1997; Pollach, 2003) is still limited compared with the other fields (Forey, 2004; Hewings, 2002; St John, 1996; Swales, 2000).

This paper attempts to illustrate how honorific expressions are employed in Japanese organisational texts in order to realize the speech function of command.

2 Data resources and method

2.1 Nature of the corpus

55 Japanese written texts from the Japanese organisations were selected in order to explore the honorific expressions associated with demanding goods and service, or command. The texts were collected after being used; that is, the texts are natural and authentic linguistic resources. The organisations are of three types; governmental, private business and educational organisations.
In order to analyze any linguistic differences in the hierarchical relations between the writer and the addressee(s), the corpus includes three types of hierarchical relation:
1. texts sent from a subordinate to a senior(s).
2. texts sent from a senior to a subordinate(s).
3. texts sent between equal statuses.

In order to analyze the general feature of these written Directive texts, the corpus consists of four text forms: memos, emails, letters and facsimiles.

### 2.2 Method

The texts were analyzed by using the system of HONORIFICATION and POLITENESS (Teruya, 2007), the system of MOOD and the system of SPEECH FUNCTION.

#### 2.2.1 Honorification

In order to investigate honorific expressions in the corpus, an analysis using relevant systems was performed. These relevant systems are systems of POLITENESS and HONORIFICATION as shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: System of POLITENESS and HONORIFICATION](image)

**Figure 2: System of POLITENESS and HONORIFICATION**

There are two systems related to honorific expressions. One is the system of POLITENESS and the other is the system of HONORIFICATION. Broadly speaking, the system of POLITENESS is related to social distance, and the system of HONORIFICATION is related to social hierarchy. Based on these systems, Table 1 shows a paradigm of the word, *iku* (to go) as an example.
Table 3: Paradigm of HONORIFICATION and POLITENESS for *iku* (go)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HONORIFICATION</th>
<th>POLITENESS</th>
<th>formal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>humble</td>
<td><em>mairu</em></td>
<td><em>mairi-masu</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>go-HUMBLE</em></td>
<td><em>go-HUMBLE/FORMAL</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>respectful</td>
<td><em>irassayaru</em></td>
<td><em>irassai-masu</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>go-RESPECTFUL</em></td>
<td><em>go-RESPECTFUL/FORMAL</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 1 shows, there are six ways of expressing ‘to go’ depending on the social distance and the social hierarchy.

2.2.2 Mood analysis

While the constituents which are tossed back and forth in English are Subject and Finite (Halliday 1994: 72), those in Japanese are Predicate\(^{61}\) and Negotiator (Fukui, in press; Teruya, 2004, 2007). The Predicate ‘plays a central role in the interpersonal structure of the Mood, in its position towards the end of the clause as exchange’ (Teruya, 2007: 162). The Predicate is realized by a verbal group\(^{62}\). The experiential structure of the verbal group consists of an Event which conjugates and inflectional morphemes which function to realize the various modal means such as polarity and/or modality etc.

The other Mood element is a Negotiator which adds various negotiatory values by expressing the writer’s attitudinal stance (Teruya, 2007). The Negotiator is realized by interpersonal particles such as *ne, yo* or *ka*. The presence of the Negotiator, *ka* at the end of a clause decides the Mood type. When the Negotiator, *ka* is present, the Mood type is interrogative. The basic system of MOOD in Japanese is given in Figure 2.

```
MOOD
  └───indicative
      └── V, N&A  
          └── interrogative
              └── Predicate ^ Negotiator
                  (ka, kai or no)
  └── imperative
      └── V
```

Figure 3: System of Mood in Japanese

As Figure 2 shows, at the general level, the Japanese system of MOOD has two options; indicative or imperative. Further the indicative has two options; interrogative and declarative.

In addition to these lexicogrammatical analyzes, the speech function is also analyzed in order to show any discrepancies between the Mood types and the speech function.

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\(^{61}\) Two researchers propose two different terms for the same constituent. Whereas Teruya (2004; 2007) calls it *Predictor*, Fukui (in press) calls it Predicate. According to Halliday (1994: 79), *Predicate in English ‘is realized by a verbal group minus the temporal or modal operator’*. On the other hand, that in Japanese functions as Finite + Predator in English (Fukui, in press; Teruya, 2004, 2007). In order to make a distinction between English Predator and Japanese one, this paper adopts the Predicate.

\(^{62}\) Basically, the verbal group consists of three types. They are a verbal type, an adjectival type or a nominal type + copula ‘*da*’
2.2.3 Speech function

There are four types of the speech function; statement, question, command and offer depending on speech roles. Statement is congruently realized by declarative Mood, question is congruently realized by interrogative Mood, and command is congruently realized by imperative. Offer does not have a corresponding Mood type.

3 Result

There 497 free clauses in the corpus of Japanese texts. Most free clauses end with a formal form in the system of POLITENESS accounting for 327 clauses. A combination of a humble form and a formal form is the second most frequent accounting for 127 clauses. There are 42 free clauses which do not have any honorifics. These choices are affected by the tenor relations. Figure 3 gives frequencies of the choices in the system of POLITENESS and HONORIFICATION according to the hierarchical relations:

![Figure 4: Frequencies of the choice in the system of POLITENESS and HONORIFICATION in the Predicate according to the hierarchical relations](image)

As Figure 3 shows, the choices in the systems of POLITENESS and HONORIFICATION are limited. The formal form, the humble from and plain form are present in a free clause. No respect form in the system of HONORIFICATION is present. Instead, the respectful form is present only in 11 bound clauses. The choices are influenced by the hierarchical relations. The formal form only is most frequently present in the texts by the senior (73.5%). The combination of the humble and formal form is the most frequently present in the texts by the subordinate (33.6%). The frequencies of no honorifics in the texts by the subordinate account for only 1.6%. The percentage is about 1/10 of those of the texts by the equal or the seniors which amounts to 15.6% and 15.7% respectively.

Figure 4 shows the frequencies of Mood types in the corpus. The declarative is the most frequently used Mood form in the texts accounting for 403 clauses. The imperative accounts for 81 clauses, and the interrogative is the lowest accounting for 13 clauses.

![Figure 5: Number of the Mood types in the Directive texts](image)

Whereas Figure 4 shows the frequencies of the Mood type, Figure 5 shows those of the speech function.
As Figure 5 shows, the frequencies of statement and command are almost the same. Likewise, the frequencies of question and offer are the same. The incongruent realization of command by the indicative surpasses the congruent realization of command. 151 declarative clauses out of 156 clauses incongruently realize command, while 5 interrogative clauses incongruently realize command.

4 Discussion

These results suggest that a formal form is of central importance in order to realize command. Moreover, the choice in the system of HONORIFICATION is mainly the humble form rather than the respectful form. This may be associated with the channel of the corpus. Since the texts are written, the direction is one way from a writer to an addressee(s). For that reason, the writers of the texts opt to choose the humble form which functions to heighten an addressee(s) by lowering a writer.

The high frequencies of the Mood selection show that the writers are reluctant to select imperatives in order to realize command. Even if the imperative is selected, the writers use the formal form of the imperative. The degree of the honorific expressions in the Predicate differs according to the hierarchical relation. Thus, the lexicogrammar which realize the speech function, command in the organizational context is very delicate in order to enact social roles.

The different frequencies of the Mood choice or the incongruent realization of command, or the different frequencies of the honorific choice shows the writers’ strategies in order to get things done by the addressees while avoiding conflict with the addressees.

Furo (2001) referred to the importance of ‘ritual harmony’ as a cultural background which affects institutional discourse. The ritual harmony of interpersonal relationships in Japanese society manifests in the ritualistic and harmonious communication style of the Japanese people. Since “the hierarchy of the Japanese social system” (Nakane, 1970; 118) is deeply rooted in the Japanese mind, it is difficult for the Japanese people to express their requirements in a straightforward way, even in the organizations.

5 Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show how Japanese writers adopt honorific expressions in order to realize the speech function of command. The writers frequently employ the formal form and the combination of the humble and formal form. These choices are influenced by the hierarchical considerations - a feature of the tenor relation. In addition, the writers also employ the incongruent realization of command by the declarative. The low frequency of the interrogative which incongruently realizes command may arise from the fact that because the texts are written, the writers cannot get immediate feedback from the addressee(s). Even if the imperative is selected, the writers employ the formal form of the imperative. This feature is present in all hierarchical relations.
The organisation contains visible and invisible power relations. To express a command may threaten the social relationships in the organisation. In order to avoid conflict between interactants, the writers employ linguistic strategies such as the use of the honorific expression or the incongruent realization of command. In other words, these strategies are essential to the maintenance of ritual harmony.

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