

Formal Expressions and Considerate Expressions
for Politeness

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0. Introduction

"In order to predict correctly the applicability of gram-
matical rules, one must be able to refer to assumptions about
the social context of an utterance, as well as to other implicit
assumptions made by the participants in a discourse."¹ R. Lakoff
discusses in her papers² with a number of examples how contextual
informations are relevant to the judgement of a sentence. She
has succeeded in substantiating her claims that a sentence cannot
be interpreted by superficial syntactic environment alone.

Among a number of linguistically significant contextual
aspects, this paper intends to deal with the aspect of politeness.
In Japanese we have honorifics and particles as essential elements
to express the speaker's polite attitudes or the feelings toward
the addressee. What do we do when we were to express those atti-
tudes and feelings in English which has no honorifics nor particles?
Lakoff claims that politeness in English is implicitly expressed
by the forms used elsewhere for other purposes. She discusses,
as examples, certain uses of modals and tag-questions which, she
thinks, can be used, under certain conditions, parallel to

Japanese honorifics and particles. However, there're some questions to this parallelism. It is true that the meanings of modals or tag-questions can be correlated to Japanese equivalents, but there're factors to be considered regarding politeness, that is, formal or informal markers attached to every sentence in Japanese.

This paper attempts to discuss the polite expressions of Japanese and those of English in a different and new approach. First the whole set of polite expressions in Japanese and English are looked over and then it is discussed how these expressions are used in their patterns of human relations. By comparing the whole structures of polite expressions and the uses of them, we would be able to find what common characteristics are and how they are different in actual use of them. The author expects to prove at the end of the discussion that the present macroscopic approach to the study of polite expression, that is, the sociolinguistic approach in which we handle language as an aspect of human behavior, is worth while clarifying some aspects of complications of polite expressions of the two languages. The clarification would be made in terms of the universality as well as the uniqueness of the two languages. The legitimate purpose of this paper is, just as Lakoff's papers are, to prove how relevant contextual and situational informations including the patterns of behavior are to the study of a sentence.

1. Problems in Lakoff's approach to polite expressions

1. 1. The humbling use of must

One of the universal elements of politeness is linguistic abasement, that is, the speaker suggest that the addressee surpasses him in status. Based on this theory Lakoff brings up some examples of abasement, among which two of the problems are to be discussed in this paper. The first one is:

- (1) You must have some of this cake.
- (2) You should have some of this cake.
- (3) You may have some of this cake.

(1) is the politest expression of the three, (2) is less polite and (3) is the least polite in a special social situation.³ The situation is that a speaker, a hostess, is offering a cake which she's baked. Must is usually a strong coercing expression and means speaker is higher in status when she uses it and so it is not polite to use it when you offer something to a guest. The fact is, however, "with second-person subject, it [must] ought to be the very antithesis of a polite way of making an offer. Yet, in certain social circles, it's considered one of the nicest ways to offer something to someone."⁴

(1) is polite because hostess assumes that the guest doesn't think the cake is too good to miss and so the hostess has to use must and coerce the guest to eat. She defines this use of must as humbling must. (1) is equal to

- (4) Have some of this cake-yecch.

Cake-yecch means the cake doesn't seem delicious to the eyes of the hostess. Thus, must is the implicit expression of the humbling cake-yecch which is not used in an actual utterance. Japanese would express it explicitly and we would say oishiku-nai keiki for the humbling expression of the cake the hostess is offering.

- (5) Oishiku-nai keiki desu kedo o-tabe kudasai.
(6) Oishiku-nai keiki dakedo tabete.

(5) and (6) are the translation for (4), that is (1). (5) is polite expression in any context in Japanese. But (6) cannot be used by a speaker in the lower status⁵ than the addressee. If he does, it's considered to be rude. "Certain uses of the modal must are parallel to the use in other languages of special honorific forms."⁶ Lakoff claims that must could be put parallel to Japanese honorifics. The fact is, as we have seen, partly true and partly false. Why is it false? This is the first question to be answered toward the end of this paper.

1.2. Tag-question vs. ne

A tag-question might be thought of as a declarative statement without the assumption that the statement is to be believed by the addressee.⁷ Therefore, Lakoff tells that a tag-question is a kind of polite statement. For example (8) is politer than (7) because it doesn't force agreement of belief on the addressee.

- (7) John is here.
(8) John is here, isn't he?

A particle ne is put parallel to tag-question.⁸

- (9) John is here, ne.
(10) John wa koko ni imasu ne.
(11) John wa koko ni iru ne.

Lakoff writes (9) as a parallel form of (8), and if we put (9) into Japanese we get either (10) or (11).

Ne is a particle implying, just like a tag-question, that the statement with ne at the end of a sentence is without the assumption that the statement to be believed by the addressee. In other words ne implies a request for addressee's agreement.⁹ It also shows that the speaker is in rapport with the addressee.¹⁰ By adding ne one can impress the addressee that you are on familiar terms, and therefore we cannot use ne in formal context or when the addressee is higher in status than the speaker. Lakoff, however, put three conditions for the use of ne as follows:

- (i) The status of the addressee should be somewhat higher than that of the speaker, since offering a choice is an act of deference. . . .
(iii) The status of the addressee cannot be lower than that of the speaker, since then he would not have the right to MAKE a choice.¹¹

Underlined parts are wrong. Why have she come to draw these conditions in spite of her logical discussion? This is the second problem to be clarified.

What we can do to explain these contradictions is to look at the problems from a different angle and scope. It is to look at the whole structure of polite expressions from the macroscopic view.

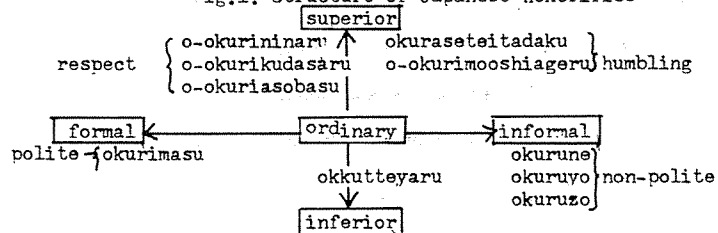
2. Formal expression and Considerate expression

2.1. Formal expression

As far as we can see in English and in Japanese, polite expressions consist of formal expressions and considerate expressions. These two kinds of polite expressions are quite different in their characteristics and usages. But, both are found in Japanese and in English. It was after I studied implicit considerate expressions in English that I have realized that there's considerate expressions in Japanese. Lakoff (1972) found considerate polite expressions such as the use of modals or tag-question in English but she has not mentioned any formal polite expressions in English. In fact, English, too, has formal expressions.

Formal expressions are sets of fixed expressions expressing politeness. They are the fixed formal expressions which change according to the status and familiarity of the speaker and the addressee and formality of the context. Japanese formal expressions consist mostly of honorifics: respect, humbling and polite words. Let us see how Japanese honorifics vary, with the example of a verb okuru.

Fig.1. Structure of Japanese Honorifics



The status difference between the speaker and the addressee and the person spoken of decides the choice of words in the vertical line in fig. 1. When the speaker who is lower in status sends something to his superior, he uses the humbling word okurasete-itadaku and when he speaks of his superior's sending something, he uses respect word o-okurini-naru. On the horizontal line lies variation of words which are to be chosen according to the formality and informality of the context. In the formal context okurimasu is used, in the plain context okuru is used and in the informal context okuru-yo is used. When the situational context is formal, desu or masu is put at the end of each sentence. Without them it is plain style. With ne or yo and other particles at the end of the sentence it will give the sense of informal as well as familiar. It is worth noticing that no analogous structure of polite words as in fig.1. can be found in English polite expressions.

Besides sets of honorific words we have address forms or greetings as formal expressions. How does the speaker call the addressee has much to do with the politeness. Name plus sensei (meaning teacher) and sama (meaning Mr. or Mrs. with formal feeling), give politeness, while addressing someone only by first or last name gives informal and impolite feeling. Japanese formal expressions, that is, honorifics, addressing forms and greetings are the major part of polite expressions in Japanese.

What are the English formal polite expressions?

English formal polite expressions are mainly address forms. Title plus last name makes formal expression, while first name makes informal.¹² Other polite addressing forms are: sir, ma'am, Your Majesty, etc.

Fixed forms of greetings such as Hajimemashite and How do you do? are also formal expressions.

2.2. Considerate expression

What are considerate expressions? They are the expressions the contents of which are considered to be polite when we judge from their situational backgrounds. They do not have any fixed forms; they are implicit polite expressions. Since English has little formal expressions analogous to Japanese one, we have to be aware of the importance of considerate expressions in English as the major means of expressing politeness.

By using devices used for other purposes such as the use of modals, tenses, etc., the speaker can make the addressee feel good. By not using coercing forces, the speaker can make the addressee feel relaxed and respected. Let us see some examples:

- (12) Close the door.
- (13) Is it OK to leave the door open?
- (14) The door seems to have left open.
- (15) Doa o shime-nasai. *been*
- (16) Doa o ake-hanashi-ni shite-ote ii-no-desu-ka?
- (17) Doa ga ake-hanashi-no yoo desu.

(12) is an order. (13) and (14) are politer because they are not coercing the addressee but implying the speaker's will by indirect

statement. (14) is still politer because of the indirectness of the statement. Japanese version of (15), (16) and (17) could be put parallel to (12), (13) and (14).

- (18) I want to ask you about that.
- (19) I wanted to ask you about that.
- (20) Sono-koto o o-tazune-shitai desu.
- (21) Sono-koto o o-tazune shiyo to ommotte orimashita.

(19) is politer than (18) because by the use of past tense the statement which is a sort of demand is obscured, thus giving softer impression on the part of the addressee. The same is true of Japanese translation of (20) and (21).

The use of modals like in (1) and tag-question like in (8) are considerate expressions.

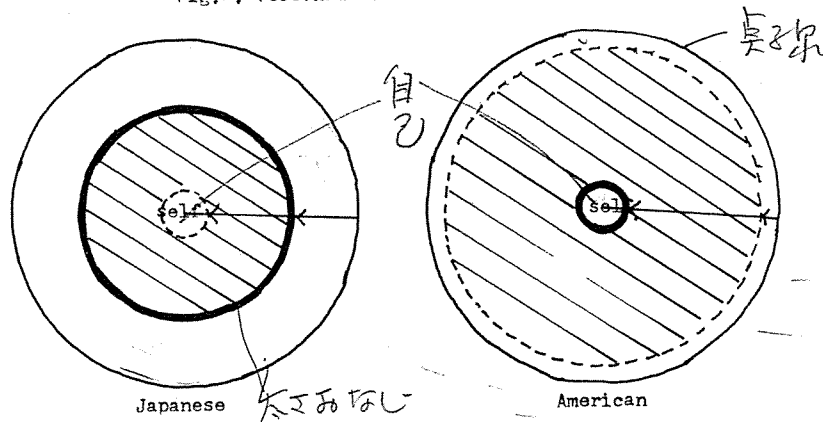
In this way politeness is expressed in Japanese and English using both formal expressions and considerate expressions.

3. Personal structure and polite expression

3.1. Personal structure and depth of human relation

Before we see how these expressions are used in the situational backgrounds, we must make it clear how differently Japanese and English speaking people keep human relations. As the speaker decides whether or not he uses polite expressions depending upon human relation with the addressee and formality of the context, it is essential to see what kind of human relations they hold. It will be best described by the drawings as we see in fig.2.

Fig. 2. Personal Structure 13



The outer circles show the whole personalities and the center circles show "selves". The circles in between the two circles are the borderlines of formal vs. familiar (and at the same time informal). The dotted lines show that the lines are easy to be broken.

The outer white areas are the parts where people associate when one gets first into contact with a stranger. Japanese one is larger in range than American's. Notice the difference of the borderlines between the white areas and oblique lined areas. Japanese one is thick lined, which means it is difficult to go into the oblique lined area from the white area. The Japanese white area is the place where most of the human relations are held. When Americans meet somebody they are formal in the beginning. But, very soon after that (depending on the situation) they get into oblique lined area and become in familiar terms much easier

than Japanese. The oblique lined area of Japanese is the area where family, close friends or acquaintances at the drinking bout associate each other. Japanese are harder to get this kind of human relation. Once they become on familiar terms they don't have to use polite expressions but they can use familiar or informal expressions. A formal expression used in this oblique lined area would be considered mizukusai meaning reserved or not frank, which causes bad effects on human relations.

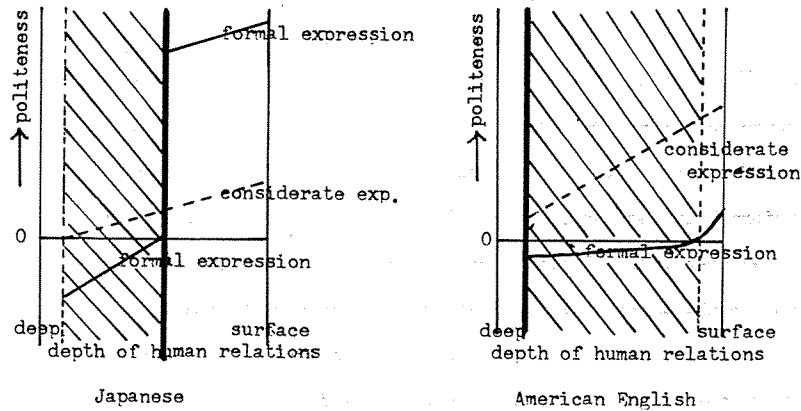
On the contrary American oblique lined area is the one where most of the human relations are held. Everybody after a brief meeting can be on this familiar terms. Most of the human relations of Americans are held in this area.

Comparing the central circles, which shows "selves", we find Japanese one is easy to be got into while Americans hold the very strong barrier to their "selves", which is the area of privacy.

3.2. Structure of polite expression

In what areas of the personality do we use formal expressions and considerate expressions? How are the effect of using them? Taking horizontal line from fig. 2. which stands for the depth of the human relation, we can get fig. 3. The vertical line stands for the degree of the politeness.

Fig.3. Structure of Polite Expressions



Japanese

American English

In fig.3 we can see the structures of the uses of two kinds of expressions. Let us see the structure of the polite expressions in Japanese. The horizontal lines which stand for the depth of human relations are determined by the speaker's evaluation of the degree of familiarity and status difference. In the surface area of the human relations, formal expressions are used quite a lot. Considerate expressions are also used in this area to express politeness. This is the area where ordinary human relation takes place and formal expressions are most highly evaluated. Since Japanese people do not care about politeness in the oblique lined area where the human relationship is familiar, the politeness in the white area is outstanding.

The white area is formal conscious and the deep oblique lined area is familiar conscious area. This is true both in Japanese

and in English. When a polite formal expression such as sayo-de gozai-masu is used in the oblique lined area, it is taken as a sarcasm. Thus formal expressions can only give negative effect in the deep human relations.

American's polite expressions consist mostly of considerate expressions. Formal expressions are used only on the surface relations in the white area. The total amount of formal expressions is so little compared with that of Japanese. As the speaker becomes familiar with the addressee whose status difference is little, they start calling each other by first names switching from last names. To show that you feel so close as to call the addressee by his first name is the good way of showing politeness among most Americans. Formal expressions have negative effect in the oblique lined area where most of human relations are held. This is why there are so little formal expressions in English. When you say "Yes, sir." to your big brother, it means "Oh, you are bossy." hence the effect of negative politeness. (Same in French?)

Universal and unique factors of the polite expressions we could get from fig.3 are:

Universal factors

- (i) Polite expressions consist of formal expressions and considerate expressions. + manner, enunciation etc
- (ii) The deeper the human relations, the less polite expressions are used. The depth of human relation is determined

other use is polite-ness → + distance slope

friendly news just for all would call polite

but everyone? isn't it? look at Japanese SI book

not a... out a... look at... Japanese SI book

consciousness only in case of 3 or at least

by 1) familiarity 2) status difference 3) formality.

(iii) Formal expressions are used in the white areas where the human relations are surface that is unfamiliar, status conscious and formal. But they give negative effect on politeness when used in the oblique lined areas where human relations are familiar, without status consciousness and informal.

(iv) Considerate expressions are effectively used in most areas. The more surface the relations, the more considerate expressions are used.

Unique factors

- (i) Japanese have more formal expressions and they are evaluated highly in the white area.
- (ii) English have more considerate expressions and they are evaluated highly in the white and the oblique lined areas.
- (iii) The differences of the distribution of these expressions are due to the differences of the white area and the oblique lined area of the human relations.
- (iv) The Japanese people are more difficult to get into the oblique lined area; that is, to become familiar terms than Americans.

4. Review on problems in Lakoff.

Let us discuss again, in the light of these findings, Lakoff's remarks on considerate expressions.

a note importance of diction in Imp. politeness

Should a polite note mistake of use be?

disregard
if used
it's more a class/dialect usage
in one sense it's more a standard (used by shop sales women, mastrons, courtesans)

4.1. (1) vs. (5) and (6)

(1) You must have some of this cake.

This is a considerate expression. The translation for this in Japanese are:

- (5) Oishiku-nai keiki desu kedo o-tabe kudasai.
- (6) Oishiku-nai keiki dakedo tabete.

The humbling force of must is expressed by oishiku-nai. But in

(5) desu in oishiku-nai keiki desu and o and kudasai in o-tabe

kudasai are formal expressions to express politeness. In (6)

dakedo and tabete are informal expressions because they have no

honorifics. These informal expressions, if used in the white area

where formal expressions are appreciated, are taken as the expres-

sion of impoliteness.

It was Lakoff's contribution to have found the humbling use of must as a polite expression of English, claiming that to put the speaker lower than the addressee is a universal rule of politeness. However, when we talk about Japanese polite expressions, we realize not only the humbling expression expressed here by oishiku-nai, a considerate expression, but also the formal expressions expressed by desu (auxiliary), o (affix), etc. are essential to politeness in the white area of human relations. Therefore, the parallelism of must and oishiku-nai is not satisfactory to explain the polite expressions of Japanese.

4.2. Tag-question vs. ne

explain diff. betw. formal + consid. exp: - form - w/ egi.

Next, let us see the second problem:

- (8) John is here, isn't he?
- (10) John wa koko ni imasu ne.
- (11) John wa koko ni iru ne.

The tag-question in (8) is, as it was previously discussed, is a considerate expression. Japanese translation is (10) or (11). When we put ne at the end of the sentence, it becomes informal and familiar, since ne means not only a request for addressee's agreement but also that the speaker is in rapport with the addressee. The use of ne in the white area in fig.3 where human relations are unfamiliar, formal and status conscious are sometimes considered to be impolite.

(10) has imasu instead of iru in (11). Imasu has honorific masu and therefore politer than iru. But, (10) cannot be used by the speaker inferior in status to the superior addressee, because ne shows the familiar and intimate feeling. But, it can be used by the superior speaker to show considerate politeness by the use of ne. It is also used by the people of the equal status in the white area to show softening feeling of the statement.

In (11) iru is a negative formal expression and ne is, too, though the latter has considerate feeling. Therefore, (11) is considered to be impolite in the white area but it is used as familiar expression in the oblique lined area.

Ne is an informal marker besides the considerate meaning of the request for the addressee's agreement. This is where the

difference between English tag-question and ne lies. Another important difference is the area of human relations and the function of the polite expressions in those areas. Lakoff did not see the nature of Japanese white area where ~~the~~ formal expressions are essential. These two are the reasons why Lakoff failed in explaining the universality of politeness in spite of her deep insight and sound analyses.

5. Conclusion

Some ~~of the~~ Japanese and English polite expressions were looked into and analysed in terms of formal expressions and considerate expressions. Both English and Japanese have these expressions but they have different distribution owing to the difference of peoples' patterns of human relations. I hope to have showed, in this paper, ^{that} this macroscopic approach to ~~the~~ polite expressions helps to clarify some of the problems unsolvable ^{with a} ~~by the study of~~ microscopic approach.

Notes

1. Lakoff (1972), p.907. [] by the author.
2. Lakoff (1972), (1973 a) and (1973 b)
3. Lakoff (1972), p.910.
4. A letter from Lakoff to the author, December 14, 1973.
5. "Lower status" doesn't necessarily mean lower in social or occupational status, but it means psychological status between the speaker and the addressee.
6. Lakoff (1972) p.910.
7. Lakoff (1973 a), p. 54.
8. Lakoff (1972), p.919 and Ueno (1972) p.74.
9. Ueno (1971), p.113. When ne is used for the response utterance,

it implies the responsive agreement of the speaker.

10. Ibid.

11. Lakoff (1972), p.920. The second condition is omitted here.

12. Brown and Ford (1964)

13. Taken from Kunihiro (1973) with a considerable modification.

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