

Japanese honorifics

0. Honorifics in Japanese tradition are broadly referred to as **keigo** (“respectful language”) and divided into three main categories: *sonkeigo* (“respectful language”), *kensongo* (“humble language”) and *teineigo* (“polite language”). Linguists who study honorifics as expressives usually divide them into subject honorifics and object honorifics. Also rude antihonorific forms are usually considered among honorifics, because they have similar meaning in the sense that they describe speaker’s attitude towards some referent of the situation.

1. Language examples.

- **Addressee honorifics** = performative honorifics = *teineigo* (“polite language”)

The use of addressive form of the verb shows the politeness of speech.

The use of non-addressive form of the verb shows either the absence of politeness (rudeness or familiarity) or the absence of defined addressee.

These forms can be used to refer to one's own actions or those of other people. They encode the speaker-addressee relationship and are independent of the referential context.

- (1) *Ut-ta ningen wa i-na-ku nar-imash-ita.*¹
shoot-PST people TOP be-NEG-CNV become-ADR-PST

- i. “People who shot are no longer here.”
- ii. “I am speaking politely to you.”

(A hotel-employee talks to a hotel guest. The addressee is socially higher than the speaker and is in out-group (*soto*) to him.)

- (2) *Ee, kik-imash-ita*
yes hear-ADR-PST

- i. “Yes, I’ve heard.”
- ii. “I am speaking politely to you.”

(A daughter talks to a mother. The addressee is superior than the speaker but in her in-group (*uchi*).

- **Subject honorifics** = *sonkeigo* (“respectful language”)

These forms are never used to talk about oneself. They are used when the subject is superior and from the out-group or equal to the speaker, but also from the out-group. If the subject is superior and from the in-group, honorific forms are used only if the superiority is more significant for the speaker. If the addressee is from the out-group, then these forms are not used about the subject from the in-group of the speaker.

¹ All examples are from (Алпатов, Аркадьев, Подлеская 2008).

- (3) *Gozen juuji, kootaishi go-fuufu ga*
 in.the.morning 10.o'clock crown.prince HON-spouses NOM
royaru bokkusu ni hair-are-ta
 royal box DAT enter-HON-PST
 i. “At ten o’clock in the morning the crown prince and his spouse entered in the royal box.”
 ii. “The crown prince and his wife are very honorable.”
 (Example from the newspaper. When the discourse is about the Emperor’s family members, the use of honorific forms is mandatory.)

- (4) *Dewa, dooshitemo nobas-e to iw-are-ru n des-u ka*
 so by.all.means postpone-IMP QUOT speak-HON-PRS NML COP.ADR-PRS Q
 i. “So, you say that I have to postpone [the engagement] by all means?”
 ii. Literally: “I consider you an honorable person.”
 Actually: “I’m speaking of you as of a strange person.”
 (The son speaks with his father, with whom he is on bad terms.)

- (5) *Sonna guai de, doko no ryokan ni tomat-te i-ru yara,*
 that way INS where GEN hotel DAT stay-CNV AUX.PRG-PRS PRT
sappari kentoo ga tsuk-imas-en
 in.no.way estimation NOM get-ADR-NEG.PRS
 “Thus we have no idea, in what hotel he stays.”
 (The employee speaks with the client of his firma about his boss. Here the interesting point is that there is no honorific form. Here more significant is the position of the client in the “out-group” than the chef’s superiority. It is considered inappropriate to use honorific forms about the person from the speaker’s in-group while talking to person from the out-group.)

- **Depreciative forms = object honorifics = kensongo/kenjōgo** (“humble language”)

These forms are used to depreciate the speaker in order to show the honorability of some other person, usually the object of some action of the speaker. Depreciative forms and subject honorifics express the same respectful attitude towards different referents of the situation (objects and subjects)

- (6) *Soo itash-imas-u... Sensei, ano, watakushi, o-tetsuda-i shi-mash-oo ka?*
 so do:DPR-ADR-PRS teacher um I HON-help-CNV AUX.DPR-ADR-HOR Q
 i. “I’ll do it like this... Teacher, let me help you.”
 ii. “The teacher is socially higher than me, and I’m expressing it.”

Nearly always they are used in the first person, but there are some rare exceptions. It is possible to use depreciative forms in the third and even in the second person when talking about people like younger members of the family or servants:

(7) *Himiko wa... Soeda san ni o-denwa shi-mas-en desh-ita kashira*
 Himiko TOP Soeda san DAT HON-phone AUX.DPR-ADR-NEG COP.ADR-PST PRT
 “Hasn’t Himiko called you, Saeda-san?”
 (A woman talks with a man about her daughter.)

(8) *Koko e o-toosh-i shi-nasai*
 here in HON-lead-CNV AUX.DPR-IMP
 “Lead her here!” (speaking to a servant)

• **Antihonorifics**

These forms show disrespectful attitude, attitude of defiance towards the subject of the sentence. (They are not used to indicate a lower social status – it is possible to say so about your younger brother or about the prime minister.)

(9) *Mata, byooin ni, maimodor-iyagat-te n da to sa*
 again hospital DAT return-AHN-CNV NML COP.PRS QUOT PRT
 i. “He is in hospital again.”
 ii. “I don’t respect him, and I want to show it.”
 (The subject is the speaker’s subordinate.)

2. **Some properties of expressives.**

i. Independence.

“For a set of expressions with honorifics and antihonorifics derived from one neutral sentence E_1, E_2, \dots, E_n , there is a basic and core meaning M , but different attitudinal expressions A_1, A_2, \dots, A_n .

$$E_1 = M + A_1$$

$$E_2 = M + A_2$$

$$E_n = M + A_n$$

“ M is the same in the sense that as long as truth value is concerned, M is invariant.”

(Kikuchi²)

ii. Repeatability.

In order to express “super-politeness” speakers can use addressee forms in non-standard places, especially with converbs:

(10) *Keiji san nanka ga nandomo mie-mash-ite ne,*
 policeman san somehow NOM several.times apper-ADR-CNV PRT
iroiro kik-are-mash-ita
 various ask-HON-ADR-CNV
 i. “The policemen came several times for some reason, asked various questions.”

² Cit. from [Potts&Kawahara 2004]

- ii. “I am speaking very politely to you.”
(A hotelkeeper talks to a hotel guest.)

Usually addressee forms appear in a sentence only once, with the final predicate. But now there is a tendency in the language (especially among younger people) to use these forms with all finite verbs in a sentence.

The normal way to use honorific forms is to use them once in a sentence about one subject. But in order to emphasize the politeness and honorability it is possible to use these forms with homogenous predicate or to use two honorifics with one verb:

- (11) *Otoosama o-modor-ini nar-are-mash-ita ka*
father HON-return-CNV AUX.HON-HON-ADR-PST Q
i. “Has your father returned?”
ii. “I respect your father deeply.”

3. Continuum between honorific forms and conventional implicatures.

Example (12) from [Potts&Kawahara 2004]:

- (12) *John-wa [Mary-ga nesugishi-chimat-ta] -koto-o shitteru*
John-TOP Mary-NOM oversleep-AHN-PAST -fact know
i. “John knows that Mary overslept.”
ii. “It sucks that Mary overslept.”
- (13) *Shikashi aitsura "Booi" no atama o nagut-te shimat-ta n da*
but they Booi GEN head ACC strike-CNV AUX.S-PST NML COP.PRS
“But they strike Booi in the head [and he is lethally wounded].”
- (14) *Naifu da shatsu o kit-te shima-oo ja na-i ka?*
knife INS shirt ACC cut-CNV AUX.S-HOR COP.TOP no-PRS Q
“Let's cut the shirt with the knife.”
- (15) *Taisoo tsukare-ta yoosu de, yuushoku o tabe-ru to,*
very get.tired-PST look COP.CNV dinner ACC eat-PRS TEMP
suguni ne-te shimaw-are-mash-ita
right.away lie-CNV AUX.S-HON-ADR-PST
“He had very tired appearance; after the dinner he went straight to bed.”

In (12-15) the same auxiliary verb *shimau* is used. It has the meaning that the corresponding action has some significant consequences, causes some irreversible changes. Often (especially in informal speech) it has negative connotations (that something bad and not expected or disappointing has happened) In (12) it is clearly an expressive form. But what about the other examples?.. There are some uses where it is just the auxiliary verb with additional meaning, and this meaning is conventionally implicated (in "classic CI" sense).

References

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