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Original Paper

Japanese Linguistic Politeness as Speakers' Rational Choice and Social Strategy

Xuexin Liu[1*]

[1] Department of World Languages and Cultures, Spelman College, Georgia, USA

[*] Xuexin Liu, Department of World Languages and Cultures, Spelman College, Georgia, USA

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Abstract

Japanese linguistic politeness is a commonly observed phenomenon and the speaker's being linguistically polite is an expected social behavior in the Japanese society. Most previous studies of Japanese politeness describe such a polite social behavioral pattern at a superficial or observational level without exploring the linguistic nature of such a polite behavior or the speaker's motivations for performing a polite speech act in a particular speech context. From some linguistic, sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic and sociological perspectives, this study defines "politeness" as the speaker's rational choices and a social strategy in the Japanese culture beyond surface language forms themselves. This paper claims that so-called "polite" or "honorific" language forms as commonly employed by the speaker in various social interactions do not necessarily always indicate that such a speaker must be a polite person. The so-called "polite" language is "linguistic" in nature and is thus more about a particular language form itself than about the speaker himself/herself. This paper further claims that the speaker makes rational choices of particular polite language forms to realize his/her communicative intention with the outcomes as perceived. Thus, this study explores the relationship between polite language forms and their social, cultural, and pragmatic functions. It concludes that speakers in the same speech community are conscious of linguistic choices which conform to their normative views for the interaction types; there is no simple equation between polite forms and polite speakers, and speakers are rational actors in making linguistic choices.

Keywords

linguistic, politeness, form, function, rational, normative, social, strategy

1. Introduction

Japanese linguistic politeness has long been observed by linguists, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, historians, educators, and many others who are interested in Japanese language and culture. It has become a common impression that Japanese people as a whole, whether they are old or young, well educated or less educated, rich or poor, men or women, behave in a polite manner in human contact situations, whether such situations are public or private. Japanese linguistic politeness has become an inseparable part of the Japanese social and cultural patterns or an expected social behavior in the Japanese society. However, most previous studies remain at a superficial level by describing such polite social behavioral patterns in communicative interactions without exploring the nature of linguistic politeness and sources of the speaker's speech behavior. Unlike most traditional definitions of linguistic politeness which focus on surface language forms as observed in the Japanese language in relation to the expected Japanese social manner, this paper, from some linguistic, sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic and sociological perspectives, defines "politeness" as a social strategy in the Japanese culture beyond surface language forms themselves. This paper makes two claims. One is that so-called "polite" or "honorific" language forms as commonly employed by the speaker in various communicative settings (Okamoto, 2011; Hasegawa, 2015; Haugh, 2018) do not necessarily always indicate that such a speaker must be "polite" a person. The so-called "polite" language is more about a particular language form itself than about the speaker. The other is that all speakers in the same speech community make rational choices of particular language forms to achieve their communicative intentions in particular social and cultural settings (cf. Elster, 1986, 1991). Rational choice theorists come from a variety of intellectual fields, including economics, sociology, political science, and philosophy. While most would acknowledge the effects on behavior of institutions, such as family or community, and of constructions, such as race, class or gender, they would argue that much of our behavior is intentional, directed at achieving an individual goal.

> The theory of rational action … tells people what they should do to achieve their ends as well as possible. An agent faces a feasible set of *actions* that he can take. To each action he can attach a certain set of *consequences*. To each consequence he can attach a certain *probability* as well as a certain *utility*, based on his *preferences* over the set of consequences. The theory of rational action, narrowly conceived, tells the actor to choose the action with the greatest expected utility (Elster, 1991, pp. 109-110).

In other words, the speaker's choice of a particular language form at a certain point during a discourse is not only constrained by a set of commonly observed social and cultural principles and rules but also is intentionally manipulated by speakers themselves. In other words, such an intentional manipulation of language or language forms is motivated by speakers' communicative intentions. In so doing, in the first place speakers are fully aware of the norms and principles of language use as observed by speakers in the same speech community, and thus the speaker is also aware of the fact that any intentional

"violation" or "manipulation" of such norms and principles will offer him/her the most desirable outcomes as expected. It is in this sense that we say speakers not only employ polite language forms as a social strategy in human communication but also manipulate them as a linguistic means to achieve their communicative intentions. Also, it is in this sense that we say speakers are recognized as "rational actors" because they know which linguistic form serves their communicative intentions with most desirable outcomes as perceived.

This paper explores the relationship between language forms and their social and cultural functions by focusing on some typical Japanese polite forms as commonly employed by the general Japanese public in natural communicative situations. Thus, Japanese polite forms and choices of such forms are studied in terms of their pragmatic functions. In order to do so, this study raises and answers several specific and closely related questions: (1) What causes the complexity of polite forms in the Japanese language? (2) What is the relationship between the speaker's language choice and the so-called linguistic "politeness"? (3) What is the relationship between linguistic "politeness" and the speaker's social strategy or rationality in human contact situations?

Rather than attempting to answer such questions in an abstract theoretical manner, this study explores such questions be investigating and explaining why Japanese polite forms are used as such in natural human interaction contexts, including the relationship between the addresser and the addressee, the particular speech setting where the utterance is made, speakers' communicative intentions, and the outcome as perceived and desired by the addresser. Thus, this study goes beyond the analysis of language surface forms but instead focuses on the relationship between language forms and functions. One of the most important motivations for this study is that the relationship between language forms and functions is not always or necessarily one-to-one (i.e., one form for one function). This is because one language form may serve different functions in different speech contexts. One of the crucial arguments in this study is that it is the speaker who makes the most appropriate choice of a particular language form (in this case, a particular polite language form) in order to achieve the most desirable outcome (i.e., the intended result).

The language performance data for the study are some selected instances of the use of Japanese polite forms as observed in Japanese native speakers' natural conversations in various speech contexts. The language performance data provide empirical evidence supporting the arguments presented in this paper. Several conclusions are reached through this study: (1) Japanese polite forms, especially polite addressing forms, are developed through the Japanese social hierarchical structures, which include specific social relations determined by the Japanese social structure, relations between the genders, and relations among family members. As a result, Japanese has established a complicated addressing form system and corresponding morphosyntactic rules to be observed by all members in its society, and the violation of these "prescribed" rules may have undesirable consequences. (2) The speaker's "politeness" should not be determined by the

conventional language forms alone, because the use of so-called “polite” language forms in a particular communicative setting does not always mean that the user is necessarily a polite person. (3) The speaker may choose a particular addressing form to either lengthen or shorten the perceived social distance that he/she is currently having with the addressee. It is the speaker who chooses the most appropriate linguistic form at a certain point during a discourse to achieve his/her communicative intention and the most desirable outcome.

2. The Matrix of Speech Production

There have been many discussions on the relationship between language forms and functions. One of the most commonly accepted notions is that language forms serve their corresponding functions. That is, a particular language form is used for a particular function. Perdue (1993) proposes that language forms come before language function (i.e., form before function) in language acquisition. The basic idea of this proposal is that particular language forms express particular meanings or serve particular functions. That is why language-specific forms must be learned as such in order for them to be used appropriately in communication. It is true that there exists a conventional relationship between language forms and functions. Sharing the idea of “form before function” proposed by Perdue (1993), Wei (2000a, 2000b) investigates adult second language acquisition of various English morphemes in terms of acquisition and accuracy orders. Wei’s research findings provide empirical evidence that different linguistic forms play different functions depending on how morphemes are activated in the mental lexicon and that there is a natural relationship between linguistic forms and functions in language acquisition. It is claimed that linguistic forms are acquired at a different rate because they play different functions in communication.

Without an understanding of the relationship between language forms and functions, any discussion of language use or choice would be impossible or incomplete. This paper describes speech production in terms of a matrix of speech production. Such a matrix is understood as an interconnected network of relationships between language forms and functions and between the addresser and the addressee (see Figure 3). Thus, speech production, including any choice of a particular language form, is explained in terms of such relationships. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between language forms and functions.

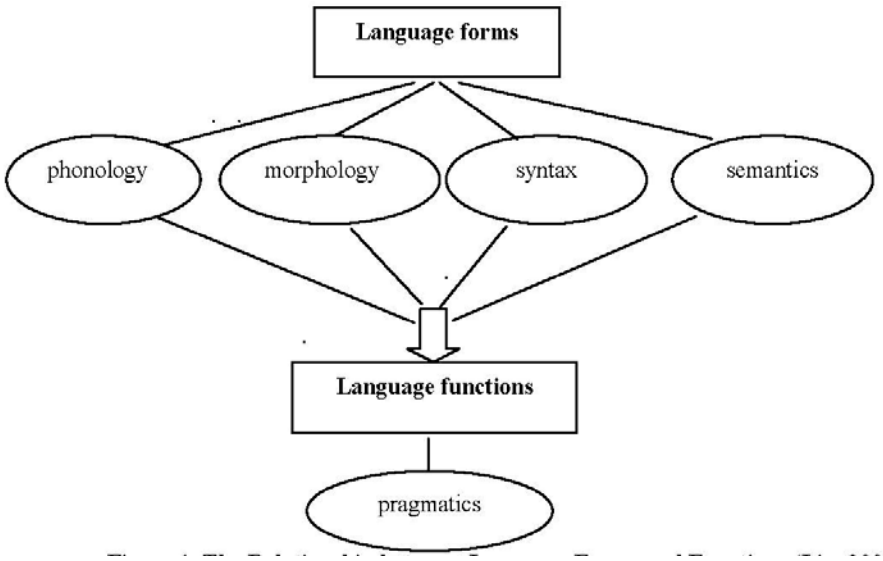

Figure 1. The Relationship between Language Forms and Functions (Liu, 2004)

Figure 1 shows that language forms contain several linguistic components or fields: phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Phonology is about structural organization of speech segments (i.e., how speech segments are organized into a sequence based on language-specific phonological rules), morphology is about word structures (i.e., how words or morphemes are formulated based on language-specific morphological rules), syntax is about grammatical structures (i.e., how sentences are formulated or structured based on language-specific syntactic rules), and semantics is about word meanings (i.e., how meaning, including both word and sentence meaning, is realized based on language-specific semantic rules). Each of these linguistic components or fields (as indicated by the lines) has its own principles for organizing language forms, and these linguistic fields and principles are closely related to each other and serve specific language functions (as indicated by the arrow). Language functions in turn serve language use, which is studied in the linguistic field of pragmatics. Thus, the four linguistic fields (as indicated by each oval) are connected through the relationship between language forms and functions. However, this paper proposes that although language forms and functions are inseparably connected, the choice of a particular language form for a particular function is not “static” but “dynamic” in the sense that it is the speaker who makes rational choices for his/her communicative intentions in a particular speech event. This leads us to Figure 2.

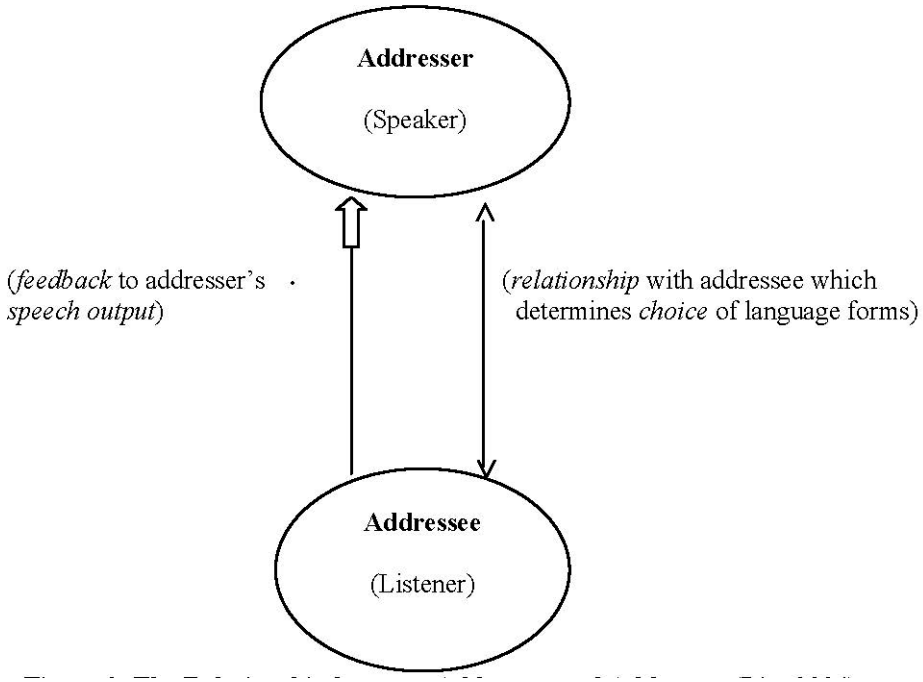

Figure 2. The Relationship between Addresser and Addressee (Liu, 2004)

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the addresser (speaker) and the addressee (listener) in any speech setting. It shows that the relationship between the addresser and the addressee is bi-directional (as indicated by the two opposite arrows linked by a strait line). This relationship is bi-directional because language choice is not only determined by the addresser's relationship with the addressee, but it is also influenced by the addressee's feedback (as indicated by the arrow) to the addresser's speech output. This means that the addresser's language choice is also dependent on the addressee's feedback (i.e., the outcome of the speech event as expected by the addresser). Wei (2002) investigates the nature of the bilingual mental lexicon and its activity in the speech production process. One of his findings indicates that bilingual speakers switch between two or more linguistic codes at a certain point during a discourse intentionally and purposefully; however, such speakers never code switch blindly. Wei claims that speakers make appropriate linguistic choices depending on their perceived outcomes and also crucially depending on the addressee's feedback. According to him, the speaker's "preverbal message" (i.e., the speaker's communicative intention) at the conceptual level of speech production activates appropriate linguistic choices before the actual speech production comes into play. If the feedback from the addressee is not what the speaker desires, linguistic choices should be reconsidered if the speaker chooses the bilingual mode or code switching. If the addressee's feedback satisfies the addresser's intention or expected outcome, the communication is successful. Otherwise, the addresser must reconsider his/her language choice in order to achieve the most desirable outcome.

In addition to the relationship between language forms and functions (Figure 1) and that between the

addresser and the addressee (Figure 2), this paper further proposes that it is social and cultural principles and rules in any society that govern human communication. This proposal claims that all speech behaviors are governed or constrained by a set of social and cultural principles and rules as commonly observed by the members in the same speech community. What makes the "model" illustrated in Figure 3 different from other models of communication is that this model presents a network in which the relationship between language forms and functions and the relationship between the addresser and the addressee are interconnected and governed by a set of social and cultural principles and rules for human communication.

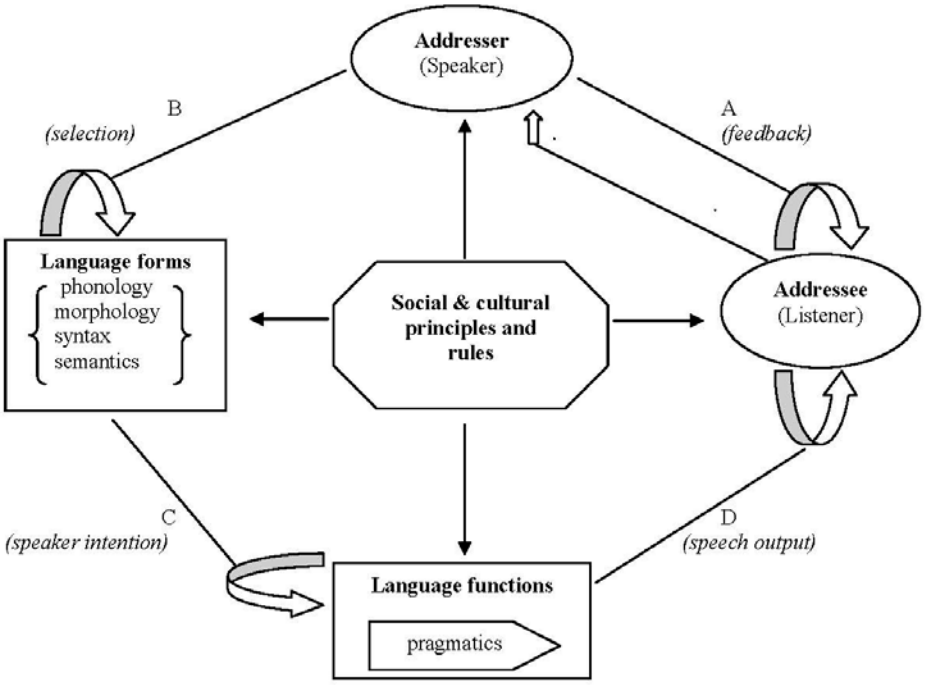

Figure 3. Social & Cultural Principles and Rules for Human Communication (Liu, 2004)

Figure 3 shows that language forms (indicated by line B) are chosen by the addresser who pays attention to his/her relationship with the addressee (indicated by line A) in terms of appropriate language forms for effective communication. Thus, language forms, the addresser and the addressee are interconnected. The appropriate language forms as chosen should serve the addresser's communicative intention (indicated by line C) and play particular communicative functions. Such well-intended communicative functions perform important pragmatic roles (i.e., linguistic pragmatics) in communication. Thus, the speech output produced by the addresser for particular pragmatic effects on the addressee (indicated by line D) results in a perceived outcome. However, successful communication is also based on the addressee's feedback to the addresser's message. If the feedback is the desired outcome as perceived by the addresser, the communication is successful; otherwise, it is not. If the

latter happens, the addresser must repeat this process by reconsidering A and B (cf. Wei, 2002).

In addition to this speech production process, the crucial part lies in the center of this matrix (i.e., the network). This center contains a set of social and cultural principles and rules and functions as an axle which controls or governs human communication, including all the parties involved, such as the addresser, the addressee, language forms to be chosen, and language functions to be desired. Figure 3 is not simply a combination of Figure 1 and Figure 2. It illustrates what elements are involved in human communication and how such elements are interconnected and governed by the social and cultural principles and rules as observed by all speakers in the same speech community.

Relevant to the current study are the issues of conventional language forms and their functions, the relationship between polite language forms and a "polite" person, and the role of the speaker in relation to the appropriate language forms and his/her communicative intentions. This paper proposes that without the matrix which interconnects all the parties and factors involved in human communication and the axle which controls or governs human communication as illustrated in Figure 3, any discussion of these issues would remain at a superficial level.

3. Conventional Language Forms and Functions

The relationship between language forms and functions has long and widely been discussed by linguists, including sociolinguists and psycholinguists, with a focus on the normative use of language in various social contexts. It has been commonly recognized that particular language forms serve particular functions in human communication. As illustrated in Figure 1, language forms are composed of four discrete and interrelated linguistic levels: phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Structural principles at any of these linguistic levels govern and constrain the formal organization of a particular linguistic component. For example, phonology studies how speech segments (i.e., phonetics) are organized into phonological units, morphology studies how elements are organized into meaningful units (i.e., word formation), syntax studies how morphemes are organized into meaningful sentences (i.e., sentence structure), and semantics studies how meanings are realized at any levels of linguistic structure. In other words, the output of the linguistic structure at any of these levels is the language form. Any human language must have its own language forms (i.e., language forms are language-specific), and without such language forms, human communication would be impossible. The language forms that the speaker chooses in a particular communicative setting to a particular addressee are assumed to play their specific functions. Language forms and functions are "conventional" in the sense that all speakers in the same speech community realize the connection between a particular language form and its particular function (i.e., the intended "meaning"). According to Sperber and Wilson (1982) and Wilson and Sperber (1991), *relevance* is the most important of the maxims (i.e., a number of subprinciples), meaning that a reader/listener will carry through comprehension processes under the assumption that utterances in a discourse are relevant to it, and will favor interpretations of

utterances which give them the most relevance. Minami (1989) and Kikuchi (1997) discuss some similar issues of language forms and functions in terms of relevance. Of course, because language evolves, language forms in a language may develop or change synchronically and/or diachronically. This paper studies most commonly used Japanese polite forms with a focus on their morphological structure and communicative functions.

This study assumes that Japanese polite forms are deeply embedded in the Japanese social hierarchical structure through its history of social and cultural development. This is because the sources of Japanese addressing forms originate in the clearly stratified social status of individuals. Thus, various Japanese polite forms directly reflect the social status that the addresser is currently holding in relation to the addressee. Goffman (1967, 1971) takes a fine-grained look at how the coordination of linguistic behavior in a dyadic relationship enacts our particular cultural understandings of personhood. He points out that it is the goal of interactants in a social encounter to protect the fragile self-esteem they have of themselves; at the very least, to minimize damage to this esteem, at best, to increase it. Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61) define this self-esteem as “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself”. Kikuchi (1997) explains some natural language instances in terms of the relationship between the discourse participants.

In Japanese society people are supposed to pay tribute to the social hierarchy which is strictly based on the individual’s status, age, and gender. Japanese social and cultural principles and rules require the speaker to use polite language to show his/her respect for the other person’s position, whether at work, at home, in school, or in any other places. If you cannot use polite language (e.g., polite addressing forms) properly, you cannot do business in Japan, or your speech behavior will be regarded as unacceptable. This means that the normative use of polite language is a common practice and a socioculturally expected speech behavior.

It has been noticed that all speakers in Japanese society are fully aware of the importance of using appropriate language, including polite language forms and their corresponding conjugations (i.e., inflectional morphology) and required morphemes, in various human contact situations. Speakers involved in a discourse are very conscious of their differing social status and use “polite” addressing forms accordingly. Social status may involve hierarchies such as superiors vs. subordinators, advisors vs. advisees, older vs. younger, men vs. women, and so on.

[1] ***Senpai***, *hitotsu* ***ikaga*** *desu ka.*
“Shall I pour a drink, senior?”

[2] ***Sensee*** *no oku-****sama*** ***o****-kagen* ***ikaga*** *desu ka*.
“How is teacher’s (your) wife?”

[3] *Kore wa* ***sensee*** *ga* ***o****-kaki* ***ni natta*** *hon desu ka*.
“Is this book written by professor (you)?”

[4] *Tanaka-****sensee*** *wa ne ni gokai mo shiken o* ***nasaru*** *n desu*.

"Professor Tanaka gives tests five times a year."

[5] ***O**-ji-**san** no hige wa nagai ne*.

"How long Grandfather's beard is!"

[6] ***O**-nee-**chan**, doko ni iku no*.

"Where are you going, old sister?"

These instances of the normative use of polite addressing forms reflect that speakers are aware of the differential social status that their addressees are holding. In [1] the speaker regards the person being addressed as being "higher" than himself in terms of expertise, knowledge, years of experience, ranking, and so on. The addressing forms like "senpai" and "ikaga" are the indicators of the speaker's respect for the person being addressed. In the same manner, in [2]-[4] the speakers address their professors always by using "sensee" and other corresponding polite terms or morphemes such as "-sama" and "o-". Also, in [5] and [6] the speakers use the appropriate terms and the corresponding polite morphemes like "-san" and "-chan".

The above uses of the polite forms provide evidence that conventional language forms are employed by speakers to serve communicative functions by following the normative use of language in their society. The so-called normative use of language is the communicative interaction pattern shared by all speakers in the same culture (see Figure 3). The examples reveal the fact that speakers' speech behavior is constrained and governed by a set of social and cultural principles and rules, and the violation of such principles and rules would result in an unacceptable social behavior. In other words, the polite addressing form that the speaker uses to a particular person is not always what he/she can freely choose but is determined by the social hierarchical relation that he/she is currently holding with the addressee. It has been well known that in Japanese society or in everyday Japanese social life, if the speaker fails to use polite language properly, he/she will never succeed in business, in education, in everyday life, or in any other aspects of Japanese life. The importance of using polite language properly in Japanese society can never be overemphasized. In other words, the normative use of conventional language forms is what the society expects from all speakers observing its social and cultural principles and rules. All this concludes that speakers naturally accept the norms of language use in their speech community in a conventionalized interaction type.

4. "Politeness" as a Social Strategy

One of the central concepts in linguistic pragmatics is politeness. It has been suggested that politeness is another level to conversational interaction besides other rules and principles governing human communicative interaction (e.g., Lakoff, 1972, 1973, 1977; Leech, 1980, 1983). Lakoff (1977, p. 88) proposes three rules of politeness: 1. formality: don't impose/remain aloof; 2. hesitancy: give the addressee his options; 3. equality or camaraderie: act as though you and the addressee were equal/make him feel good. Leech's view of politeness involves a set of politeness maxims (1983, p. 132): Tact

Maxim: Minimize cost to *other*. Maximize benefit to *other*. Generosity Maxim: Minimize benefit to *self*. Maximize cost to *self*. Approbation Maxim: Minimize dispraise of *other*. Maximize praise of *other*. Modesty Maxim: Minimize praise of *self*. Maximize dispraise of *self*. According to Leech, these add up to "an essential asymmetry in polite behavior, in that whatever is a polite belief for the speaker tends to be an impolite belief for the hearer, and vice versa" (1983, p. 169).

In the framework proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness is a notion understood as a regulative procedure in communicative behavior between individuals involved in any discourse. Brown and Levinson (1978) have developed an explicit model of politeness which is assumed to have validity across cultures. Their model is based on the idea that people take various strategies for interactional behavior because people engage in rational behavior to achieve satisfaction of certain wants. Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) develop a rich theory of linguistic politeness etiquette around Goffman's (1967, 1971) concept of face. Politeness is a battery of social skills whose goal is to ensure everyone feels affirmed in a social interaction, so its link to a theory of face is transparent (for other views on linguistic politeness, see Lakoff (1973, 1977) and Leech (1983)). Brown and Levinson break Goffman's concept of face into two aspects, positive and negative face. "The positive consistent self-image or "personality' (crucially including the desire that his self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). Negative face is one's freedom to act, "the basis claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction—i.e., to freedom of action and freedom from imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). Brown and Levinson see the two aspects of face as the basic wants of any individual in a social interaction—to be affirmed in his positive self-esteem by at least some others and to be unimpeded in his action. According to Brown and Levinson, linguistic politeness is basically the redressing of the affronts to face posed by face-threatening acts to addressees. Connected to the two aspects of face, we find both positive and negative politeness. Positive politeness seeks to redress the affront to the hearer's positive face. Negative politeness is oriented to the hearer's negative face, his desire for autonomy. According to Brown and Levinson, the wants related to politeness are the wants of "face", "something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction" (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 66). The notion of "face" is directly related to the folk-expression "lose face", which is about being humiliated or embarrassed. The rational actions people take to preserve their own faces and those of the people they interact with essentially add up to politeness.

A strength of Brown and Levinson's model of politeness over the normative or rule-oriented presentations of politeness is that their model attempts to explain politeness by deriving it from more fundamental notions of what it is to be a human being (i.e., human beings are rational and have face wants). Their model offers two advantages. First, norms are discoverable and valid within a particular culture and therefore not too useful in understanding a concept like politeness cross-culturally. Second,

even to posit universal, rather than culture-specific, rules as arbitrary primitives is "to invent a problem to be explained, rather than to explain it" (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 91). In other words, a set of rules may help us understand politeness phenomena in terms of these rules, but we do not learn very much about why there should be such rules in the first place. Brown and Levinson ask us to accept that people are rational and have face wants rather than offer a set of rules designed specifically for politeness itself. Directly relevant to this study on politeness in Japanese culture are the notion of politeness as a social strategy and the notion of "rationality" of speakers in linguistic pragmatics.

Thus, in addition to the normative use of language, this study argues that politeness in language use is actually the speaker's social strategy in Japanese culture. On the one hand, the speaker must follow the social and cultural principles and rules for communication; on the other hand, the speaker may exploit so-called "polite" language forms as a social strategy in realizing his/her communicative intention (cf. Suzuki, 1978; Craig, Tracy, & Spisak, 1986; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Minami, 1989; Kikuchi, 1997). According to those authors, polite language forms may serve more than one single purpose of being polite. On the one hand, speakers must use polite language forms in various communicative settings and/or for clearly defined human hierarchical relations as commonly observed in a particular social/cultural domain, but on the other hand, speakers may use such polite language forms in various speech contexts to express other feelings or emotions rather than "true" politeness toward the addressee.

This means that the speaker's use of polite language forms does not always mean that he/she must be a "polite" person or intends to be so. Thus, the relationship between language forms and functions is not necessarily always one-to-one, that is, one form does not produce one function only. The speaker may use polite language forms to play other functions beyond "politeness" itself because of other factors involved in human interaction. This may happen in several scenarios.

[7] ***O**-too-**sama**, moo yonaka yo, mada nomi ni ika**reru** no.*

"Father (the speaker's own husband), it's midnight now, are you still going out for a drink?"

[8] *Uchi no **sensee** wa itsumo jugyoo ni chikokushite **irassharu** n desu.*

"My professor is always late for class."

[9] ***Buchoo**, dooshite wazawaza anna **sensee** o **o**-maneki **ni naru** n desu ka.*

"Chair, (director, etc.), why do you intentionally invite that kind of professor?"

[10] ***Senpai**, sumimasen ga, **o**-suki-na yoo ni **nasatte kudasai**.*

"Senior, sorry, please do what you like."

[11] (Between student and professor)

Student: ***Sensee**, konoaida **sensee** ga jugyoo-chuu ni **osshatte ita** nihon no kitsuenritsu wa machigatte iru to omou n desu ga.*

"Professor, I think your lecture on smoking in Japan during the class the other day is wrong."

Professor: *Demo ne, Yamamoto-**kun**, 2001 nendo ni watashi ga shirabeta tookee ni yoru*

to …

"But, Mr. Yamamoto, according to my statistics of the investigation in 2001 is …"

[12] (Between two female students)

A: *Ano* ***sensee*** *wa kawaii onnanoko ni wa yasashi n da yo naa*.

"That professor is very nice to pretty girls."

B: *Soo da ne. Kono aida nante Satoo-****san*** *ni tesuto no naiyoo o oshiete* ***irasshatta*** *yo. Hontoo ni nan to ka shite* ***itadakitai*** *mono da ne*.

"All right. You should know that a short time ago the professor even told the content of the test to Ms. Satoo. I really hope somehow the professor can change his behavior."

[13] (Between two students)

A: *Entoo-****sensee*** *ga yopparatte* ***irassharu*** *no yo, mata kono aida shinjuku de mita yo*.

"A short time ago I saw Professor Entoo got drunk in Shinjuku again."

B: ***O****-joo-****sama*** *ga toodai ni gookakushite sootoo yorokonde* ***irassharu*** *n deshoo yo*.

"Professor Entoo is quite happy because his daughter was accepted by the Tokyo University."

In [7] when the speaker uses the polite morphemes "o-", "-sama", and "-reru" to address her husband, it does not mean that she respects him or his behavior in this particular context. In [8] the speaker, as a student, should address her professor as expected, but, again in this case, the addressing term and the morphemes "irasshaimasu" used by the speaker do not imply that she respects her professor or his behavior. In [9] the speaker uses the polite term "buchoo", "sensee", and the corresponding polite morphemes "o-" and "-ni naru", but only a sort of complaining is clearly implied, rather than the real respect for the addresser because of what he does. In the similar manner, in [10] although the speaker uses the polite term "senpai", including the corresponding polite morphemes "nasaru" and "-kudasai", he may not necessarily indicate that he is being polite to the addressee. In [11] the student uses the polite addressing form "sensee" and the polite verbal form "osshatte ita" as conventional polite language as expected from a student to his professor. However, when the student pointed out that the professor's lecture was wrong, the professor, trying to find some reason to support his opinion, uses the polite morpheme "-kun" to address the student, his subordinate. In [12] the students use polite addressing forms like "sensee" and "-san" and polite verbal forms like "irasshatta" and "itadakitai", but it does not necessarily mean that they still respect their professor for his unacceptable behavior. In this case, the students use polite language to make sarcastic remarks. Also, in [13] the students use polite addressing forms like "sensee" and "o-joo-sama" and polite verbal forms like "irassharu" to make ironic remarks behind their professor's back for the implication that their professor thinks his daughter is much better than his students.

Such instances of polite language forms used by a particular addresser to a particular addressee provide evidence for the argument that speakers may take a full advantage of polite language forms as a social

strategy in achieving the most desirable outcome. It should be apparent that there is no simple equation between the politeness of the speakers and the polite language forms they exploit in a particular interaction type.

5. Speakers as Rational Actors

Some sociolinguists claim, among other things, that human communication is composed of speech situations (including the setting and the scene), participants (including not only the speaker and addressee, but also the addressor and the audience), speech event (divided into outcomes: the purpose of the event from a cultural point of view, and goals: the purpose of the individual participants), and norms (both of interaction and interpretation). Departing from the prevailing sociolinguistic view that linguistic choices depend on the social context, the social identities of speakers and their addressees, as well as other factors such as topic, setting, and genre (e.g., Labov, 1972; Hymes, 1972; Gumperz, 1977, 1982), this study claims that while most social context-based approaches can explain normative choices (or normative use of language), they do not explain departures from the norm. This study argues that speakers' rationality is the crucial mechanism in linguistic choices (cf. Elster, 1989, 1991; Coleman & Fararo, 1992; Myers-Scotton, 1993), and the social context alone cannot be the crucial determinant in linguistic choices. Like Elster, Coleman and Fararo are prominent proponents of rational choice theory. They add this characterization to rational choice theory:

> Rational choice theory contains one element that differentiates if from all other theoretical approaches in sociology. This element can be summed up in a single word: optimization. The theory specifies that in acting rationally, an actor is engaging in some kind of *optimization*. This is sometimes expressed as maximizing utility, sometimes as minimizing cost, sometimes in other ways. But however expressed, it is this that gives rational choice theory its power: It compares actions according to their expected outcomes for the actor and postulates that the actor will choose the action with the best outcome (Elster, Coleman, & Fararo, 1992, p. xi).

All speakers are rational actors playing their individual roles in various interaction types. What is missing from most discussions is the fact that it is the speaker who makes choices available to him/her in a particular speech event. That is, all speakers are rational actors (Myers-Scotton, 1983, 1993, 1995; Elster, 1986, 1989, 1991; Turner, 1991; Sperber & Wilson, 1996) who possess such a communicative competence that they know "what they are doing" and attempt to achieve the most desirable outcome. In other words, every choice that the speaker makes is a "rational" one with its perceived outcome.

Speakers are called "rational actors" in the sense that they choose particular language forms intentionally to change the perceived social distance that they are currently having with the addressees. Myers-Scotton (1995, 1997) presents an argument for the usefulness and reasonableness of rational choice theory in understanding the linguistic selections which speakers make in their social discourse.

"Linguistic choices" or "code choices" refer to selections at all linguistic levels among available alternatives (e.g., one language rather than another, one dialect over another, one style or register over another, one form of a directive or refusal over another). The theory of rational action would explain choices among these alternatives as necessarily involving cognitive calculations. Myers-Scotton emphasizes that such a theory does not claim that people are always rational, but it does claim that a rational choice model covers the phenomenon. She argues that not only are speakers' intentions behind choices, but that speakers make choices with the expectation that addressees will recognize these choices as carrying intentions.

For example, speakers may use polite addressing forms to persons whose status is lower than theirs or use plain addressing forms to persons whose status is higher than theirs. In this case, speakers do not follow the rules for the normative interaction type but, instead, make their own linguistic choices without being constrained by the social context. Speakers are "rational" because they consciously know what linguistic choices best serve their communicative intentions. As Elster points out, "Communication and discussion rest on the tacit premise that each interlocutor believes in the rationality of the others, since otherwise there would be no point to the exchange. To understand other people, we must assume that, by and large, they have consistent desires and beliefs and act consistently upon them. The alternative to this assumption is not irrationality, which can only be predicted on a broad background of rationality, but chaos" (1986, p. 27).

[14] *Kotoshi haitta shinjin ga senmu ni "ohayoo, Kobayashi-**san**" tte iu n desu yo. Moo senmu wa kankan desu yo*.

"This new year's employee calls his executive director "Mr. Kobayashi." The executive director is very angry."

[15] ***Senpai** ga sekkaku **irasshatta** n da. Sake gurai hurumae*. (Kikuchi, 1997)

"I had come all the way just to see you. You should treat me to a lot of sake."

[16] (Wife to husband)

***Shachoo-san** nichiyoobi mo **o**-dekake **ni naru** n desu ka.*

"Mr. President, are you still going out even on Sunday?"

[17] (Father to son)

***O**-too-**sama** no **ossharu** toori ni shinasai*.

"Please do what your father says."

[18] (Wife to husband)

*Nakayama-**buchoo**, **go**-jibun no **o**-heya kurai **go**-jibun de **o**-sooji**nasattara ikaga** desu ka*.

"Mr. Manager Nakayama, how about at least cleaning your own room by yourself?"

[19] (Between mother and her married son)

Son: ***O**-kaa-**san**, kyoo no nimono wa oishii ne*.

"Mother, today's boiled food tastes very good."

Mother: *Kyoo wa michiko-**san** ga **o**-tsukuri **ni natta** kara sazokashi oishii deshoo yo*.

"Because today's food is made by Ms. Michiko (Ms. Michiko is her son's wife), so I can imagine how delicious it must be for you."

[20] (Between wife and husband)

Husband: *Michiko, ashita dooshitemo kuroi nekutai ga hitsuyoo da to itte oita daroo*. *Dooshite yooishite okanakatta n da*.

"Michiko, I might have told you beforehand I must wear a black necktie tomorrow. Why didn't you get it ready for me in advance?"

Wife: *Taihen shitsuree **itashimashita**, **go**-shujin-**sama***.

"I'm very sorry for that, master/sir."

[21] (Between two colleagues)

A: *Hayashi-**san**, iyaa mata boonasu gengaku ka. Mata hirumeshi setsuyaku demo shinai to yatte ikenai naa*.

"Mr. Hayashi, it is too bad my bonus is cut down again. I have to cut down on my lunch and other expenses once more."

B: *Oretachi ga kooshite yasui hirumeshi o kutte iru tte iu n oni, uchi no oku-**sama** wa itaria de yuuga ni **o**-shokuji o **nasatte iru** tte iu n dakara, yarikirenai yo naa*.

"Although we are eating such cheap lunch here, since my wife said that she is having a great meal elegantly in Italy now, I really can't stand that."

[22] (Between two classmates)

A: *Are, mada Satoo-**kun** kite inai no. Satoo-**kun** wa itsumo chikokusuru n da mono, komatta mon da*.

"Oh, Mr. Satoo still hasn't come here. Mr. Satoo always arrives late. He is a nasty fellow."

B: *Sono toori da yo. Kyoo mo Satoo-**kun** wa juuyaku shukkin de **irassharu** n janai kana*.

"That's right. Maybe Mr. Satoo is working also as a director today."

In [14] the person who is addressed by his employee is angry simply because he thinks that the addressing form "Kobayashi-san" is not a respectful one. In [15] the speaker calls himself "senpai" and uses the polite verb form "irasshatta" in making a request. In [16] the speaker addresses her husband "shachoo-san" and uses the polite morphemes "o-" and "-ni naru" in the home context. In [17] the speaker addresses himself "otoosama" and uses the polite verb form "ossharu" to his own son. Also, in [18] the speaker calls her own husband "Nakayama-buchoo" and uses other polite forms like "go-jibun", "o-heya", "o-", "-nasattara", and "ikaga". In [19] the son uses "o-", "-san" to address his mother, which is a conventional form in this case; however, although the mother gets angry because the food is actually not made by herself but by his son's wife, she uses the polite addressing form "Michiko-san" to her daughter-in-law and other polite forms like "o-", and "ni natta". The mother uses

the polite language when she is not expected to do so. In [20] the wife calls her husband "go-shujin-sama", which is not a normal use of polite language to apologize. Correspondingly, she also uses the polite form "itashimashita". The wife does so simply because she does not want to argue with her husband by trying to be polite. In [21] Speaker B uses "oku-sama" to address his wife and other polite forms like "o-shokuji" and "nasatte iru" when he talks about his wife, who has no job but sometimes has a better life than himself. He uses such polite language forms to express his complaint and unhappiness. In [22] both students use the polite addressing form "Satoo-kun" and the polite verbal form "irassharu". Such polite language forms are usually not expected among equals, but they use them anyway to express their complaint against Mr. Satoo's behavior.

The above instances of departures from the norm can only be explained by looking beyond the social context. In most cases speakers observe the normative use of language as determined by a set of social and cultural principles and rules commonly accepted by all members of the same speech community. However, speakers' linguistic choices are not limited or totally constrained by the rules for the normative interaction type. Instead, their linguistic choices may break the normative interaction pattern (i.e., the normative use of language) in order to realize their communicative intentions in a strategic interaction type. Speakers know that their "violation" of the norm will result in the optimal outcome as they desire. It is in this sense that speakers are rational actors in making linguistic choices. Elster (1986, p. 4) explains rational choice or rationality in this way: "To act rationally, then, simply means to choose the highest-ranked element in the feasible set". Later he adds (1986, p. 12), "…the desires and beliefs are *reasons* for the behavior." A point made repeatedly by Elster is that rationality is a "normative" theory in the sense that it tells people, "if you want X, then do Y". As such it is not necessarily predictive; rather, it explains what people would do *if* they were rational. Turner (1991, p. 92) points out, such a rational choice model "turns attention away from behavior as naturally reflecting the social background and setting in which it occurs, in the tradition of such sociological stalwarts as Durkhein and Summer. Instead, it treats the individual as a fairly autonomous decision maker, reacting to the situation rather than directly reflecting it".

6. Conclusion

This study has explored the issues of Japanese politeness by explaining the relationship between language forms and functions, the normative use of polite addressing forms in terms of the addresser's respect for the addressee's social status, and speakers' departures from the norm in making linguistic choices. Several conclusions can be reached.

First, all speakers in the same speech community are conscious of linguistic choices which conform to speakers' normative views for the interaction type in which they are participants. That is, speakers naturally accept the norms of language use in their speech community in a conventionalized interaction type. In Japanese society, speakers tend to observe the social and cultural principles and rules for using

polite addressing forms by respecting other members' social status in relation to their own. The complexity of Japanese polite addressing forms is caused by the clearly stratified Japanese social hierarchical structure, and the conventionalized language forms serve particular social and cultural functions. Bell's (1984) "audience design" model and Brown and Levinson's (1987) "politeness" model offer mechanisms for making choices. Bell's central claim is that speakers vary their styles of speaking in order to accommodate to their addressees. Thus, intentionality is a feature of his model. Brown and Levinson's central claim is that speakers face the problem of how to handle "face threatening acts". They take account of an opportunity set of linguistics choices and then go on to make choices which meet their main goal of preserving the face of their addressee. While both of these models can be considered rational choice models, both are incomplete. They limit themselves to very narrow and prescribed goals for speakers.

Second, there is no simple equation between polite addressing forms and "polite" speakers in that speakers may choose polite addressing forms at a certain point during the discourse to realize their intended but implicit meaning. This is because all speakers possess a general cognitive faculty that equips them with the necessary information processing mechanisms to understand not only what is said but also what is meant. Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model (1983, 1993) to explain linguistic choices in social discourse depends on the interaction between norms and rationality. Like Grice's cooperative principle and related maxims (1975) and Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory (1986, 1996), the Markedness Model starts with the premise that comprehension involves much more than decoding the linguistic signal. All three models include as a second premise that the gap between this decoding and what is actually meant to be communicated can be filled by inference, a process driven by the certainty that the message carries intentionality. What all three models share is the assumption that human conversation operates with a guarantee that the speaker usually is behaving rationally.

Third, all speakers are rational actors in making linguistic choices. It is speakers' rationality that provides the mechanisms necessary to explain linguistic choices. Speakers are fully aware of the rewards or the potential consequences of their linguistic choices. They may depart from the normative use of language in a non-normative interaction type. This is because such speakers believe that although there is much risk in breaking the norm, by doing so they may have a better opportunity to realize their communicative desires. Linguistic choices can be better explained by positing that rationality is the main mechanism working on speakers' linguistic choices. Tracy (1990) and Craig, Tracy and Spisak (1986) argue that speakers often use politeness strategies for self-enhancement and even aggravation. Willer (1992, pp. 51-52) points out that such principle "are used to pose problems in theory…The principle of rationality is used to pose problems that other parts of the theory are evoked to solve. For sociology, the most important examples in which rationality operates as a principle are social relationships".

This study concludes that what all speakers have in common is the intentionality of achieving some desired outcome which they see as optimal, whether observing the norm or departing from the norm. Linguistic choices are best explained by positing that rationality is the main mechanism working on a speaker's speech act. Based on the discussion of the relationship between language forms and functions, the relationship between the addresser and the addressee, and the relationship between the speaker's linguistic choice and communicative intention or rationality, this study reaches a broad conclusion that speakers employ polite language forms as a social strategy in Japanese culture.

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