

Learning Tradition: How-to Books on Spoken Japanese for Native Speakers

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0. Introduction

In this paper I give an overview of surveys on Japanese speaker's confidence in their use of *keego* 'polite/formal language' and discuss sources for acquiring the use of polite/formal expressions. Based on an ethnographic case study of a 22-year-old woman in her senior year in college, I analyze the stages in her linguistic development and her attitude toward this linguistic development.

1. Confidence in one's speech

Do Japanese speakers have confidence in their speech? Do they think that they are good at speaking in what is considered to be the "proper manner"? Many Japanese speakers answer "no" to these questions.

According to a Bunkatyoo questionnaire on language use (Bunkatyoo Bunkabu Kokugoka 1996), when native Japanese informants were asked to answer questions on their use of *keego*, approximately 30% out of 2,212 responded (c) 使いたいと思うが充分に使えていないと思う (Tukaitai to omou ga zyuubun ni tukaete inai to omou 'I want to use it, but I think I can not use it properly enough). Women showed less confidence than men, e.g. 47.6% of the 16 to 19-year-old women chose answer (c), while the figure for men was only 25.0%. Men and women over 60 showed the most confidence in their use of *keego*; only 17.5% of the men and 18.6% of the women chose answer (c) and approximately 20% of the men and women over 60 chose answer (a) 適切に使えていると思う (Tekisetu ni tukaete iru to omou 'I think I use it properly'), and nearly 60% chose answer (b) 人並みに使えていると思う (Hitonami ni tukaete iru to omou

'I think I can use it at the same level as other people'¹.

According to Nihon Hoosoo Kyookai (NHK) (1986), Japanese people's responses to a question about their confidence in their use of *keego* suggested that people, in particular young women, lacked confidence in their use of *keego*. Responses to the question, 敬語の使い方に自信があるか (Keego no tukaikata ni zisin ga aru ka 'Are you confident in your use of *keego*?') varied; 5% said 十分自信がある (Zyuubun zisin ga aru 'I have enough confidence'), 40% said まあ自信がある (Maa zisin ga aru 'I have some confidence'), 50% said あまり自信がない (Amari zisin ga nai 'I do not have so much confidence'), and 5% said まったく自信がない (Mattaku zisin ga nai 'I have no confidence at all'). Almost 70% of 16 to 29-year-old women answered あまり/まったく自信がない (Amari/mattaku zisin ga nai 'I do not have much confidence / I have no confidence at all') (NHK Hoosoo Bunka Kenkyuuzyo 1991:106). In response to a question about whether or not they intended to learn more *keego*, about half responded ぜひもっと勉強したい (Zehi motto benkyoo-sitai 'I definitely want to learn more') or 多少は勉強したい (Tasyoo wa benkyoo-sitai 'I want to learn some'), and about 70% of the 16 to 29-year-old women responded that they wanted to learn *keego* more (NHK Hoosoo Bunka Kenkyuuzyo 1991:102). In response to a question, 日本人に敬語は必要か (Nihonzin ni keego wa hituyoo ka 'Do you think *keego* is necessary for Japanese people?'), 95% said either 大いに必要 (Ooi ni hituyoo 'It is very much needed') (41%) or まあ必要 (Maa hituyoo 'It is somewhat needed') (54%) (NHK Hoosoo Bunka Kenkyuuzyo 1991:103).

The results of these surveys indicate the picture that people perceive a need for *keego*, and want to learn more about it because they do not have enough confidence in their knowledge and use of *keego*.

¹ The result of Bunkatyo's questionnaire is as follows:

国語に関する世論調査 (平成7年4月実施) 文化庁文化教育部国語課

<敬語の使い方> Q4 あなたの敬語の使い方は、この中のどれに最も近いですか (%)

(n=2,212)

	16-19		20-29		30-39		60歳以上	
	男性	女性	男性	女性	男性	女性	男性	女性
(a) 適切に使えている	5.9	9.5	10.1	10.1	10.7	5.6	22.6	19.8
(b) 人並みに使えている	61.8	42.9	48.1	46.6	58.0	49.6	56.8	57.4
(c) 充分に使えていない	25.0	47.6	34.1	42.6	29.3	42.7	17.5	18.6

2. Sources of knowledge regarding language use

2.1. How-to books

How do people overcome this lack of confidence? Differences in responses by different age groups in the above surveys indicate that Japanese people become more confident in language use as they become older. This suggests that experiences in daily life may be the strongest source of confidence. However, because acquiring daily life experience takes time, and people want to acquire confidence as soon as possible, many turn to handy manuals and so called "how-to" books to learn how to speak.

How-to books are a genre dedicated to the clear statement of expected norms. They outline for the reader the dos and don'ts, i.e., the shared communication rules of a society, and suggest effective means of communication. These overt rule books, which state the expected norms explicitly, can be characterized in terms of the authors' projected attitude and the manner of presentation.

In the context of Japanese society it is important to note that many Japanese people do not question the value of norms. They believe that the expected norms have developed in order to promote smooth communication in Japanese society, and consider people who follow the expected norms to be well-socialized, well-educated, etc. Japanese people also use expected norms as a self-improvement tool. In contrast, American people, as I understand it, approach norms logically and tend to use norms as tools for insuring effective communication. For example, in 『家庭と社会のマナー全書』 (*Katee to Syakai no Manaa Zensyo* 'Complete Guide to Manners at Home and in Society') (Ogasawara 1987) the term おくゆかしいやり方 (*okuyukasii yarikata* 'elegant, graceful, refined way') is used repeatedly and graceful manners are described as necessary for one to become an elegant person. However, there is little explanation of why certain behaviors are expected or what effect can be expected in response to these behaviors.

Second, Japanese and American how-to books explain linguistic norms differently partly as a consequence of differences in attitude. While many Japanese books are form-oriented; i.e., words, set phrases, expressions are listed as good examples of expected norms, American books tend to be strategy-oriented; i.e.,

they present basic principles of communication (Kawasaki 1994).

『気のきいたひとこと』(Ki no Kiita Hitokoto 'A Thoughtful Word') (J.S.Kurieetaazu 1991) lists hundreds of phrases according to the situations in which they are used. For example, when a person visits a socially superior person, in addition to saying a greeting he/she is expected to say phrases such as ご無沙汰しております (Gobusata-site orimasu 'Sorry for my negligence in coming to see you') and お忙しいところをおじゃまします (Oisogasii tokoro o ozyama-simasu 'Sorry to come to see you when you are busy'), regardless of whether or not one knows if the addressee is really busy. When a person receives a visitor, s/he is expected to add 取り散らかしておりますが (Toritirakasite orimasu ga 'Sorry for the mess'), 狭いところですが (Semai tokoro desu ga 'Sorry for this small space'), etc. depending upon the space and the condition of the house. People who can choose set phrases suitable for a given situation, and say them smoothly, are considered to be more-socialized and sophisticated.

Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, in contrast, contains a surprisingly high number of abstract linguistic comments such as "Remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language," "Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves," etc. in order to make people like you (Carnegie 1981:112). Although these rationales are not absent in the Japanese books, and they tend to be added as afterthoughts.

Most of the how-to books in Japan, regardless of their genre, are written so that readers can follow the examples exactly or alter them slightly to fit their specific circumstances. They are manuals with examples, which one simply needs to follow. People buy them or borrow from libraries to learn how to speak properly on their own.

2.2. How-to articles

Articles on how to speak occasionally appear in women's magazines and magazines for businessmen and young people. How-to articles in magazines provide a "semi-conscious" way for people to learn how to speak properly, because although the reader must choose to read about linguistic etiquette among the other interesting topics in the magazines, it is not as conscious a decision as when one decides to buy a how-to book at a bookstore or borrow one from a library. Reading about linguistic etiquette in a magazine is not as active an

endeavor.

2.3. Daily life and TV dramas

The least conscious and most natural way for people to learn about language convention is by observing and imitating other people's speech. Good sources are parents, elder brothers and sisters, and 先輩 (senpai 'seniors'). In addition the effect of TV dramas can not be underestimated. Many students have told me that their image of how to speak is based on TV dramas. For people who do not have anybody around to tell them how to speak, people who do not read how-to books, and many young people, TV dramas are a handy model for learning how to speak. According to 『テレビ史ハンドブック』 (*Terebi-si Handobukku 'A Handbook of the History of TV'*) (Iyoda 1996), so called トレンディードラマ (torendhii dorama 'trendy drama') started in 1986. The stories of these dramas allow people to learn in detail about the work situations of TV reporters, nurses, teachers, psychoanalysts, policemen, young housewives, office workers at big companies, etc. Japanese television makes a deliberate effort to create a clear image for each job situation. Although these images may be exaggerated or caricatured, within the fiction made within the TV framework, the overall effect is that TV viewers acquire a kind of confidence in judging how people should speak based on their occupation and situation. Moreover, when people admire or like a TV character or job portrayed in a TV drama, they may attempt to copy them. Thus, unconsciously TV viewers learn how to speak from these dramas.

3. An ethnographic case study of a 22-year-old college senior

In an effort to discover how people actually learn how to speak, I chose a 22-year-old senior female student of Tsukuba University, S, to be my informant. I interviewed S in January of her senior year in college. She was the type of student who was mindful of the way she spoke.

I began the interview by asking S to discuss the stages of her own linguistic development. S perceived her linguistic growth in stages that were associated very strongly with her age as well as social role. The first stage of her linguistic development was in elementary school. She said she found school to be きちんとするところ (kitin to suru tokoro 'place where she has to be formal'). Her second stage of linguistic development was in junior and senior high school. In this stage,

she became conscious of different ways of speaking in casual and formal occasions and the use of polite expressions. Her third stage was in college when she met many new people. She said that she began to care about other people by trying to guess how they were feeling. Her fourth stage was also in college, after she started living alone in an apartment and working at part-time jobs. She moved to an apartment after living in a college dormitory for one year. She reported that she had difficulties in getting rid of salespeople and solicitors who came to her apartment, because she had no experience in saying 'no' to strangers and it was her first time to face the outside world by herself. In this stage she used common polite expressions of refusal towards solicitors for the first time, e.g., まにあっています (Maniatte imasu 'I don't need it'), 今手がふさがっていますので (Ima te ga husagatte imasu no de 'I am busy right now'), and お引き取りください (Ohikitori kudasai 'I request you to go back'). She began to know and understand the world outside of the university and realized that she had to act as a responsible person. She had been teaching at a *zyuku* 'cram school' as a part time teacher since the winter of her freshman year. Her contact with students' parents as a cram school teacher provided another opportunity for her to use formal and polite expressions. She also had a part time job as a waitress at a fast-food 牛丼 (gyuudon 'beef-rice') restaurant and at a small そば屋 (sobaya 'soba noodle restaurant'). She recalled that she added many formal and polite expressions to her repertoire when she started these part-time jobs. The fifth stage in her linguistic development and the stage S was in when I interviewed her began when she had to meet strangers and make a good impression after she started job hunting. In this stage, she had to deal with, negotiate and persuade other people politely. The experience of job hunting was a pivotal experience for her because she actually had to try out her linguistic skills. She recalled that she changed a lot and became more fluent in using formal and polite expressions while job hunting. She said that this experience made her realize the power of words and the importance of speaking properly.

She also had some idea about possible future stages in her linguistic development. She expected the sixth stage would begin in the upcoming April when she would be working at a company after graduating from college, and she would be speaking as a young office worker should. She expected that her way of

speaking would also change from her young office worker stage when she was 40 or 50, though she was not sure what kind of life she would be leading at this time. She also mentioned that there might be some intervening stages with important events such as marriage or having children.

After eliciting S's views on linguistic development, I asked S four basic questions about 765 expressions from 『ちょっとしたものの言い方』 (*Tyotto sita Mono no Iikata* 'Subtle Expression') (Pakirahausu 1990). The questions related to 1) her knowledge about the expression, 2) the degree to which she felt that the expression was established in her speech, 3) her confidence in using the expression, and 4) when she started to use the expression. S's responses to my questions about her knowledge of these expressions are summarized in Chart 1.

Chart 1: S's knowledge of the 765 polite/formal expressions

		total # of expressions
1) よくわかっている		738
Yoku wakatte iru	'I know (it) well'	
2) 何となくわかっている		15
Nan to naku wakatte iru	'I know (it) vaguely'	
3) あまりよくわからない		8
Amari yoku wakaranai	'I do not know (it) very well'	
4) 想像もつかない		4
Soozoo mo tukanai	'I have no idea what it means'	

The summary of S's responses in Chart 1 indicates that she had a remarkable knowledge of polite and formal expressions. S's knowledge was considerably beyond my expectation, and this may be due to the fact that as she herself said, she was exceptionally well trained.

Most of the expressions which were unfamiliar to S were less commonly used very polite forms. For example, she was not familiar with 不調法で (*Butyoohoo de* 'I am not good at'), which is used when the speaker wants to refuse alcohol. This phrase can be paraphrased by more commonly heard forms such as たしなみませんので (*Tasinamimasen no de* 'I do not do it') or an even simpler form such as いただきませんので (*Itadakimasen no de* 'I do not drink [humble] it')

or 飲めませんので (Nomemasen no de 'I can not drink'). These expressions are what I refer to as 出世魚 (syusseuo)² type social phrases. There are various ways to say something and the more euphemistic forms are preferred when people want to be more formal or polite. Many of the great number of euphemistic highly polite forms in the Japanese language are now used primarily by a limited number of people who have preserved the more polite ways of speaking. The expressions which S was not familiar with tended to be these less commonly used highly polite expressions.

I have summarized S's responses to my questions about the degree to which she felt the expression were established in her speech in Chart 2. Among the 738 expressions which S knew well, she said that she was fully experienced in using about half, i.e., 379 expressions. Of these 379 expressions she said that she could use 110 expressions when necessary or when she wanted to use them, and although she had never used the other 203 expressions, she expected that she would use them in the future (140 within a year or two and 63 when she reached the age/status which required her to use them). These responses indicate that S knew a lot about the polite/formal expressions, and had stored 27.5% of them for her future use.

Chart 2: The degree to which S felt the polite/ formal expressions were established in her speech

	(n=738)
1) かなり使い慣れている Kanari tukainarete iru 'I am quite experienced in using it'	379
2) 使うべき時、使いたい時にうまく使える Tukau beki toki, tukaitai toki ni umaku tukaeru	110

² *Syusseuo* are fish which Japanese people name differently based on their size, which changes according to the age of the fish. For example, the fish yellowtail is called イナダ (inada 'a young yellowtail') when it is small, ワラサ (warasa 'a middle sized yellowtail'), and ブリ (buri 'yellowtail') when it is full grown. The fish is the same kind although it is called different names. I first used the term "*Syusseuo* type expression" in a paper I presented at the Jordan Festival held at Portland State University in 1995.

- I can use it well when I am required to, or when I want to use it
- 3) あまりうまく使えず、あとでこういえばよかったと思うこともある 15
Amari umaku tukaezu, ato de koo ieba yokatta to omou koto mo aru
'Not being able to use it very adeptly,
there are times when I wish that I had used it'
- 4) 使おうと思うこともあるが、何となく使えない 3
Tukaou to omou koto mo aru ga, nantonaku tukaenai
'There are times when I want to use it, but somehow I cannot use it'
- 5) 全然使わない 9
Zenzen tukawanai
'I do not use it at all'
- 6) 使ったことはないが、そろそろ使おうか(1,2年のうちに)と思う 140
Tukatta koto wa nai ga, sorosoro tukaoo ka (1, 2 nen no uti ni) to omou
'I have never used it, but I think I will use it in the near future
(in a year or two)'
- 7) 使ったことはないが、使うような年齢・立場になったら使うだろう 63
Tukatta koto wa nai ga, tukau yoo na nenree/tatiba ni nattara tukau daroo
'I've never used it, but will probably use it when I reach the age/
status in which one uses it'
- 8) 使ったことはないし、将来も使わないだろう(理由_____) 19
Tukatta koto wa nai si, syoorai mo tukawanai daroo
'I've never used it, and will probably never use it in the future either
(reason: _____)

Next, I will summarize some tendencies related to S's beliefs about how she learned to use formal and polite expressions based on observations I made during my interview with S. Although I was particularly interested in knowing how many and which of the expressions that S knew she learned from her parents, elders around her, TV dramas, how-to articles in magazines, how-to books, etc., it was almost impossible to identify the sources of her knowledge with certainty. This is probably because people usually do not remember such details unless they made a major impression on them at the time.

During elementary and high school, S mainly heard and learned the basic polite/formal expressions from her parents, teachers, and senior students in club activities through unconscious imitation. However, during college she also learned these expressions from a how-to book available at the cram school where she taught as a part-time teacher and from a how-to book which she used while job hunting. The head of the cram school used the how-to manual to train all the

part-time teachers to sound like real teachers because they did not want the parents of students who came there to study to know that some of the teachers were university students. S's how-to book for job hunting contained many dos and don'ts of linguistic etiquette for college students who were on the job market. In addition S also seemed to learn a lot from magazines. She mentioned that she liked reading magazines, and had read several articles on linguistic etiquette in magazines.

S gave me more evidence of her reliance on how-to books in the middle of February of her senior year after S had been accepted by a company to start working on April 1st. S told me that she had recently bought a good book which would help prepare her for her new life as an office worker, a book from the series of 『きれいになりたい』 (*Kiree ni Naritai 'I want to Become Beautiful'*) entitled 『マナー BOOK』 (*Manaa Bukku 'Manner Book'*). The issue covered topics such as how to walk, manners for making and accepting invitations, table manners, talking over the phone in an office, writing letters to higher ranking people, etc. S also indicated that because many of the office situations that she would encounter on her new job would be new to her, she felt a strong need to buy this kind of how-to book.

Although these concrete sources were crucial for S's linguistic development, S's experience actually using polite/formal expressions in the real world was even more important. According to S, when she discovered an expression she wanted to use, she tried it out first with some awkwardness, and gradually got used to it before mastering it completely. When she tried to use some expressions, there was always some question in her mind about whether it was proper for her to use it or not. She also avoided some of the less commonly used very polite expressions because she said they sounded too polite for her.

4. Stage, experience, social maturity and linguistic development

In English, there is a saying "The clothes make the man." I interpret this to mean that one's outward appearance is primary, and the inner or underlying reality less important. However, as I understand it, actual popular belief is the opposite of what this phrase indicates. In other words, Americans are more likely to believe that outward form is mere window-dressing, and can even be

misleading; what counts is what's actually inside that "suit." The Japanese attitude, I dare say, is quite different. In Japan, not only is there meaning in form, but aspiring to the form alone is a mark of achievement. Japanese tend to be far more confident in the substance that underlies form, and are confident that people can grow into the contour that their roles provide.

This Japanese reliance on form underlies what I see in S's consciousness of her linguistic development. I use the word "stage" throughout this paper, because to move up to the next stage means a great deal to Japanese people. For example, the stage where one starts working after graduating from college is a major because one departs from a familiar world into a different unfamiliar one. This stage also carries with it a feeling of no more freedom, no more selfish behavior, no more 甘え (amae 'selfish dependence'), etc. S felt confident in her ability to use approximately 140 polite/formal expressions after college. It is easy to imagine that S's way of speaking will change drastically when she starts working as an office worker. S herself also expects that she will change her attitude and her way of speaking in her new work place.

When I asked S why she thought Japanese people have such a different image of being college students vs. 社会人 (syakaizin 'adult members of society') She said that she would change her way of speaking because the expectations would be different. The society would expect her to behave like an office worker and she would want to behave as expected, so that she would be evaluated as a capable office worker. S also commented that she thought that social evaluation and the evaluation by people in a company were totally different from evaluation at college. She felt that the first thing that she would have to change as an office worker was her way of speaking, because whether or not she speaks properly would make a difference in how things would go in the office. She felt this way because she had read about many examples about how office workers got themselves into trouble at work due to their poor usage of polite and formal expressions. For S, language was the crucial key to success in living up to her expectations as a capable office worker. While S's linguistic awareness at the stage in which I interviewed her was mainly motivated by her desire to live up to these expectations, I assume that after she starts working she will realize that it is not only the form that she uses, but also strategies according to which she uses

these expressions that are important. At that time how-to books will not be enough, and she will need to increase her daily experiences in order to develop her linguistic ability.

5. Conclusion

Japanese people, in particular young Japanese women lack confidence in using language, especially polite/formal expressions. They believe that polite/formal expressions are important in Japanese society, and continue to learn how to use them throughout their lives. Japanese people acquire polite/formal expressions unconsciously through their daily experience, and consciously through how-to books and magazines. How-to books published in Japan are organized according to the form of the polite/formal expressions and describe the situations in which these forms are used. Based on an ethnographic case study of a 22-year-old woman in her senior year in college, I demonstrated that there was a gap between the knowledge of polite/formal expressions and whether or not she actually used them. Although the informant was aware of a surprisingly large number of polite/formal expressions, she indicated that she stored more than a fourth of them for future use. The informant organized the stages in her linguistic development in her mind according to the changes in her age and her role in the society. She used expressions suitable for the stage she was in at the time, and stored expressions suitable for subsequent stages, such as a future young office worker, to be ready for use when she reached that stage.

*This paper was originally presented at the 51st Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Boston, March 13th, 1999. I would like to extend special thanks to Dr. Eleanor Jordan, the discussant, and Dr. Patricia Wetzel, the chairperson of the symposium at AAS for their valuable comments on this topic, and to Dr. Polly Szatrowski and Dr. Yvonne Stapp who helped edit the final version of this paper.

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