

THE JAPANESE HONORIFIC LANGUAGE: ITS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE*

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The article focuses on the sociolinguistic context of the system of polite communication in Japanese. It discusses its roots, development as well as psychological effect on the Japanese verbal behaviour. In the light of comparison with the Korean system of polite language the uniqueness of the Japanese system is presented.

The Japanese language is not one of the languages which primary function of exchanging of information. This means that Japanese linguistic means do not serve primarily for informative transportation of some utterance. The major role of the Japanese language is establishing and maintaining harmony among the individuals in the conversation. This characteristic classifies Japanese as a social language in which, as Ružičková (2001:7) points out, the manner in which information is exchanged is far more important than the information itself. Therefore, in Japanese the way the partners speak is much more important than what they speak about. "A deep-seated reverence and need for harmony played a key role in the development and use of the Japanese language, in the daily etiquette of the Japanese, and in all the crafts and arts of their culture" (De Mente, 1997:3). Desire for harmonious relations has always been moving force of the life of Japanese society. Disruption of harmony between the partners, therefore, leads to negative consequences which affect their mutual relations for a long time.

Why does concept of harmony take priority over any other value in Japanese society?

"Harmony is to be cherished, and opposition for opposition's sake must be avoided as a matter of principle" (Lu, 1997: 23).

Worship of harmony originates from a deeply rooted Confucian demand for creating interpersonal relationships within groups which are strictly hierarchical-

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ly structured. It was (and still is) crucial and inevitable to recognize one's own position within the group and to adapt one's outward conduct accordingly. This means that what we call harmony in the Japanese cultural context is observance of a clearly defined complex of rules, which enables all group members, each of different social status, to communicate and cooperate smoothly either with in-group members or out-group members. In Mičková's view (2003): "In Japan groups are social units (like families are in tribal cultures). Their role stems from the past agricultural society in which the village was the important social unit producing rice and paying taxes."

David J. Lu in his book (Lu, 1997: 212-214) offers us evidence of the degree to which the life of village groups was regulated by a body of commands, observance of which guaranteed outward as well as inward harmony.

In Injunctions for Peasants from 1619 we read:

1. "Consider the Lord of your domain, the sun and the moon....Treat your village head as if he were your own father.
2. During the first five days of the new year, pay respect to those around you in accordance with your position.

In Regulations for Villagers from 1643 we read:

3. Concerning farmer's clothing, the village headman and his family may wear silk, pongee, linen, and cotton; lower village officials may wear only linen and cotton.
4. Neither the village headman nor the higher village officials may dye their clothing purple or crimson.... no design is permitted.
5. Farmers' normal meals must consist of grains other than rice or wheat. Rice especially must not be consumed indiscriminately.
6. *Sake* (rice wine) must not be brewed in villages. Nor can it be brought from elsewhere to be sold locally.
7. If a single farmer is unmistakably overburdened, and cannot carry on his share of farm work, entire village must in a spirit of mutual help, assist in his rice planting.
8. The village elders and higher village officials are forbidden to use any kind of conveyance.
9. No shelter can be given in the district to anyone who comes from another village and does not cultivate the fields, and is not reliable. If any farmer gives shelter to such a person, he becomes a subject to arrest and imprisonment.
10. Even in the matters of Buddhist ceremonies and religious festivals, overindulgence beyond one's own status must be avoided."

What kind of benefit did an obedient observance of the above rules bring to a village farmer? "As a reward for adhering to the common rules and working for the benefit of all, the community protected the individual and provided him with a secure and safe environment" (Mičková, 2004).

Outside the group a Japanese is totally hopeless and unable to cope with any situation. Being excluded and thereby not to be allowed to fulfil his moral obligations towards the group presents the worst nightmare for any Japanese. Thus, working for the benefit of the group is considered to be more important as well as

more appropriate than selfish behaviour, which is aimed at accomplishing one's own dreams or wishes.

During the seven centuries of feudal warrior rule, which began with the Kamakura Shogunate in 1192 (especially during the Tokugawa Shogunate 1600-1867) a complex system of regulations issued by the central administration reached every single village and household even in remote mountain regions. The life of any vertical group either family, village, or professional to which an individual belonged, was strictly controlled by the authority above. However, as can be seen from the above regulations it was not just the main course of society life that was manipulated by the rules. Even the most insignificant aspects of the individual's life became subject to severe control. No wonder that in such an atmosphere the language as a mean of communication must have also reflected the life of vertically structured groups. "Knowing one's place was not just a social nicety; a wrong word might be the speaker's last, with a quick slash of the insulted party's sword putting an immediate end to impudence, real or perceived" (Kaim, 2002). Therefore, the use of highly formalized respect language came into existence as nothing more than a matter of course.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE JAPANESE HONORIFIC LANGUAGE

There are two distinct levels of speech in Japanese, which can be identified by the final verb phrase of the sentence:

- a) the plain form (*da, -u/-ru*) e.g. *da-* is, are; *suru-* do, *shita-* did
- b) the polite form (*desu, -masu*) e.g. *desu-* is, are; *shimasu-* do, *shimashita-* did

Within each style we can distinguish three degrees of politeness varied by the use of other honorifics. This extensive system of honorifics including verbs, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs and conjunctions, referred to as *keigo*, is normally classified into three groups:

- a) *sonkeigo* (exalted terms)
- b) *teineigo* (neutrally polite terms)
- c) *kenjoogo* (humble terms)

Sonkeigo – honorific terms are used to refer to the addressee enjoying higher status than the speaker and to anything directly associated with the addressee, such as kin, possessions, a company he works for, etc. On the other hand, *kenjoogo* – humble terms are used to refer to the speaker himself and to anything associated with the speaker. *Teineigo* – neutrally polite terms are used without reference to addressee or speaker and are the most widely used terms in everyday life. Elevating the addressee through exalted terms and lowering the speaker through humble terms creates a greater social distance between the two and thereby deeper respect for addressee is expressed. This corresponds to Krupa's view (1991: 23) about the achievement of "the proper polite effect. He says it may be achieved by means of two complementary devices:

- (1) by upgrading non-ego and
- (2) by downgrading ego."

Most exalted and humble verbs are derived from neutral verbs by grammatical rules. However, there is a series of independent underived verbs both exalted and humble with no resemblance to their neutral counterparts, for example:

neutral	exalted	humble
<i>miru</i> (to see)	<i>goran ni naru</i>	<i>haiken suru</i>
<i>taberu</i> (to eat)	<i>meshiagaru</i>	<i>itadaku</i>
<i>suru</i> (to do)	<i>nasaru</i>	<i>itasu</i>

In the case of the verbs that do not have their independent polite equivalents the rule *o + verb + ni naru* is applied to create their honorific counterparts and the rule *o + verb + suru* is applied to create their humble equivalents, for example:

neutral	exalted	humble
<i>yomu</i> (to read)	<i>oyomi ni naru</i>	<i>oyomi suru</i>
<i>hanasu</i> (to speak)	<i>ohanashi ni naru</i>	<i>ohanashi suru</i>
<i>aruku</i> (to walk)	<i>oaruki ni naru</i>	<i>oaruki suru</i>

There is still one more device for composing exalted verb form from the neutral form. It is attaching the honorific auxiliary *-reru*, *-rareru* to the verb. Thus from the verb *yomu* (to read) we obtain *yomareru*, from *hanasu* (to speak) *hanasareru*, from *aruku* (to walk) *arukareru*. However, out of the honorific speech, *-reru*, *-rareru* forms of the verbs signalize the passive voice of the sentence.

The creation of honorific nouns obeys the following rule: honorific prefix *o-* is attached to the nouns of Japanese origin; e.g. *hana* (a flower) – *ohana*, *shigoto* (work) – *oshigoto*; honorific prefix *go-* is attached to the compounds of the Chinese origin; e.g. *kekkon* (marriage) – *gokekkon*, *kazoku* (a family) – *gokazoku*.

When showing respect towards an individual the term *san* or *sama* (more polite) is used after his/her name: Mr./Mrs. Tanaka – *Tanaka san*, *Tanaka sama*. In the case of nouns referring to people *-san* is suffixed in addition to the prefix *o-*; for example: *kyaku* (a customer) – *okyakusan*, *isha* (a doctor) – *oishasan*. The same rule is observed as far as deriving of the exalted kinship terms is concerned, for example *okaasan* – your mother, *oniisan* – your older brother, *ojiisan* – your grandfather. Since these terms consist of the honorific prefix as well as suffix it is understandable that in conversation they can never be used to refer to the speaker's family members, they always must refer to addressee's family members. When talking about or approaching one's own family members in the setting other than the in-group family one, one is supposed to use humble terms. Thus *haha* stands for "my mother", *ani* for "my older brother", *sofu* for "my grandfather". However, within the family setting, mother is called by her children *okaasan* or *okaachan*, older brother is *oniisan* or *oniichan*, grandfather is *ojiisan* or *ojiichan* (*-chan* is a familiar suffix used among friends and family members instead of the polite suffix *-san*).

The honorific prefix *o-* or *go-* can also be attached to some adjectives to create polite terms. However, not all adjectives are used with these prefixes. Adjectives

having good implications incline to be used in this way, while those with poor implications do not.

In the Mizutanis' manual (1987:93) of the Japanese polite language we find the following appropriate examples:

"Adjectives often used with <i>o-</i> or <i>go-</i>			Adjectives seldom used with <i>o-</i> or <i>go-</i>	
<i>o-</i>	<i>hayai</i>	(early)	<i>osoi</i>	(late)
<i>o-</i>	<i>joozu</i>	(skilful)	<i>heta</i>	(unskilful)
<i>o-</i>	<i>kirei</i>	(pretty)		
<i>go-</i>	<i>shinsetsu</i>	(kind)	<i>fushinsetsu</i>	(unkind)
<i>go-</i>	<i>nesshin</i>	(enthusiastic)	<i>funesshin</i>	(not enthusiastic)"

USE OF PRONOUNS

Since in Japanese the grammatical subject can be omitted whenever it is understood from the context, there is a tendency to avoid using personal pronouns. Especially the second-person – pronoun *anata* is considered to be an insult when used in speaking to an addressee who is of higher social status or who is not an intimate equal. *Anata* can be used indiscriminately only towards intimate equals or individuals whose status is lower than ours. Therefore, in polite conversation the term *anata* is replaced by the addressee's name plus the honorific suffix *-san/-sama* or by his/her title. E.g.: *Yamada san* (Mr./Mrs. Yamada), *shachoo* (a president of a company), *sensei* (a teacher, doctor, politician).

When referring to a third person, decision about the level of politeness depends on the third person's group membership. If a third person belongs to the addressee's group he must be treated linguistically in the very same way as the addressee is. Therefore, even if the third person's relative status is obviously lower than that of the speaker, yet a third person must be spoken of in exalted terms because of his belonging to the group of the addressee. On the other hand, if a third person is a member of the speaker's group, no matter how high his relative status is within the group, he is referred to with the same humble terms as the speaker would use when mentioning himself. Thus, "an employee of a company, dealing with customers or outsiders in his official capacity, will refer to his boss, an in-group member in this situation, not with exalted terms but with humble terms. Within the company, however, the same employee will address his boss with exalted terms and will refer to him in such terms when speaking to co-workers" (Niyekawa, 1983: 226).

To summarize, in an in-group setting a person of lower status is expected to use exalted terms to varying degree when addressing or speaking of a person of higher status. In the reverse case, an individual of higher status may choose whether he gives preference to polite style or plain style of speech. Usually intimacy of their mutual relation is a factor determining the decision about speech style. However, in in-group↔out-group interaction the out-group members are always treated as seniors in the vertical social hierarchy and therefore addressed only by exalted terms whereas the in-group members, regardless of their status within the group,

treat themselves as lower status persons and therefore use humble terms when mentioning themselves.

In referring to a third person who does not belong to either the speaker's or addressee's group, the speaker may choose whether to use the exalted or neutral polite terms. His decision depends on the relative status of the third person and on personal attitude and feeling of the speaker towards the third person.

HISTORY OF THE JAPANESE HONORIFIC LANGUAGE *-keigo*

According to Nishida (1992:227) there are three basic theories and explanations as far as the origin of *keigo* is concerned.

- (1) *Keigo* stemmed from need, shared in many cultures, to avoid using certain words or expressions considered to be taboo in the society.
- (2) Respect language was established as a means of glorification of the sovereign and God.
- (3) The old texts explain *keigo* as a kind of language used towards the Emperor and God. That means it was born from mutual relation between the Emperor and his subjects.

Tracing the origin of *keigo* leads us back to the 3rd century when the Chinese historical document *Gishiwajinden* was written. It describes in detail conditions of the Japanese society before unification of the nation and portrays the society as being strictly vertically structured. However, the way of paying respect towards an individual enjoying higher social status, and especially towards the emperor, did not lie in linguistic devices. Rather it was indicated by a prescribed way of body movements. Though the *Gishiwajinden* does not provide us with the evidence indicating that respect language as such was already established in the 3rd century, yet the possibility of its existence is great.

The impact of Chinese civilization beginning in 552 played a crucial role in developing the system of honorific language. At that time the imperial court was divided between rival kin groups. Prince *Shootoku* (574-622) wanted to curtail the powers of those great clans and enhance the prestige of the imperial institution. Hence in 604 Prince *Shootoku* promulgated the so-called 17 Article Constitution, which reflected his attempts (inspired by China) to create a bureaucracy to replace the domination of the area clans. The Constitution emphasized the importance of being self-conscious of one's position within the sovereign-subject vertical relations. "The ministers and functionaries must act on the basis of decorum. If the superiors do not behave with decorum offenses will ensue. If the ministers behave with decorum, there will be no confusion about the ranks" (Lu, The Seventeen Article Constitution, 4th article, 1997: 24).

Emperor *Temmu* who reigned from 672 to 686 furthered the administrative reforms and established an efficient central bureaucracy. He also "revised the system of ranks of the members of the court nobility and classified the important families according to their lineage and social status by means of eight honorific cognomens postfixed to their family names" (Kitamura, 1983: 382). During the reign of Emperor *Temmu* the norms of court etiquette (imitating the Chinese mod-

el) and highly desired honorific language to be used at the court were set up. Moreover, Emperor Temmu abolished the old ways of paying respect known from *Gishiwajinden* including kneeling down and creeping in front of the superior. Instead, the Chinese model of paying respect while standing and bowing was adopted. Mastering the proper use of honorific language became a must among the members of the court. A single word tasting of impoliteness would lead to their death.

A typical feature of the early *keigo* is characterized by so-called *jikeihyoogen*. We might translate this term as the expressions showing the respect to ourselves. In another words it means the use of respect language towards the speaker himself. The origin of *jikeihyoogen* is conjoined with the divine character of the emperor. According to the court etiquette the emperor, as someone who is coeval with heaven, had to abstain from holding ceremonial speech to his subjects. Therefore, the speech was composed as well as delivered by a specially nominated person. That person, while drafting the speech, included into it his own feelings of respect towards the emperor. Thus when the speech or the imperial edict was presented to the public it gave the impression that the emperor showed respect to himself.

The Heian Period (794-1185) is considered to be an era when the honorific language was spread from the imperial court to the remote villages as well. Interestingly enough, many of the common villagers acquired *keigo* together with *jikeihyoogen*. Thus they paid linguistic respect to their family members when talking about them in front of superiors or other out-group members which was (and still is) strictly forbidden. No wonder, these villagers became a subject of severe scorn.

During the Tokugawa Period (1600-1867), when Japan was cut off from any intercultural exchange, the system of honorific language became very complex and difficult to master. Especially the level of humble terms became rather complicated. *Jikeihyoogen* (self-respect terms) were still a part of the spoken as well as the written language of shoguns and samurais.

After the Second World War, when the Emperor Hirohito denied his divine origin, a process of huge simplification of *keigo* began, as might be exemplified in the words of Mizutani's (1992: 2,3):

- (1) Special polite terms used for referring to the emperor and his family have been abolished. Now a minimum polite wording is used for the imperial family.
- (2) Terms referring to oneself and terms of respect referring to others have been tremendously simplified. The terms *watakushi*, *atakushi*, *atashi*, *atai*, *ore*, *washi*, *wagahai*, *temae*, *shoosei*, *kotchitora*, etc. were used before the war to refer to oneself, whereas now just a few terms, such as *watashi*, *boku*, *ore* (last two to be used only by men) are used in most cases.
- (3) There used to be great differences in politeness of language between two different social classes such as between bosses and workers, customers and salesmen. Now the former talk more politely, and the latter less politely than before.
- (4) Gender differences in language usage have been minimized. Some very feminine expressions have disappeared since the war. For example: *odekake aso-*

bimashita (he went out) is seldom heard in polite female speech. At the same time, male speech has become more refined. Men add the honorific prefix *o-* to more words than before: *ocha* (tea), *okashi* (candy) are more common than *cha*, *kashi*.

However, the use of honorific language according to age differences what has not undergone so many changes. The old enjoy great respect even in present-day Japan. Privileging the older compared to the younger reflects well known principles of Chinese ethics imported to Japan at the very early stage of history as we already mentioned. Thus when we decide what level of politeness to choose in a concrete situation the age of the addressee is the most important factor determining our decision.

According to Mizutani (1992:3-14) the next factors deciding the level of politeness are as follows:

- Familiarity (degree of intimacy)
- Social status
- Social relations (boss & worker; customer & salesman)
- Gender
- Group membership (in-group, out-group)
- Situational context

If we take into consideration all the above categories it follows, there cannot be two Japanese of the very same relative status. That means everyone is someone's social subordinate and someone's superior.

In everyday life affairs an individual who cannot recognize his relative social status and/or his partner's social status based on seniority evaluation is totally hopeless. Such an individual is not able to utter a single sentence or express his feelings in public because "the speech style adopted in any two-person interaction is basically determined by the status of the speaker and the addressee and the degree of intimacy between them" (Niyekawa, 1983: 225).

All Japanese groups that function as the basic units of the society are built on the basis of a seniority system, which is considered to be unchangeable under any circumstances. An evaluation system based on seniority principles is easier and more stable than a system of deserts. Once it is established it functions automatically without need for any form of regulation.

Since the prevalence of vertical orientation of Japanese society is extremely strong there is tendency to differentiate even among the individuals of the same qualification (belonging to the same group). Thus, for example, the distinct evaluation of locksmiths is related to their relative age, the year they entered the factory or the length of their continual occupation in the same factory. This shows that it is nearly impossible to create a group on horizontal bases in the context of Japanese society. Therefore, Japanese groups divide their professional social relations into:

- a) *senpai* (senior)
- b) *dooryoo* (a colleague of the very same social status)
- c) *koohai* (junior)

Senpai is a student or company employee who regardless of his age enjoys higher social status than his *koohai*, whose status is lower since he entered the school or company a year or more later than *senpai*. *Koohai* is supposed to use polite language when addressing his *senpai*. At the same time *senpai* may choose whether to use polite or plain form when addressing his *koohai*.

The term *dooryoo* is used only within the company and refers to the colleagues doing the very same job at the same office.

Once the hierarchy of *senpai-koohai* relations is established it is preserved forever. Thus, if an individual becomes a professor at the university which he himself graduated from, he will never consider his former professor a real *dooryoo* even if they work together for a long time on the same projects. This professor will always be considered by his former student as *senpai* and therefore approached in exalted terms (*sonkeigo*). On the other hand, professor will linguistically treat his former student as *koohai* even in front of the eyes of their common students.

COMPARISON OF THE JAPANESE AND KOREAN SYSTEM OF HONORIFIC LANGUAGE

The question of the origin of both Korean and Japanese has not been answered satisfactorily yet. According to Krupa (1996:170) "there are two lexical currents, the southern and northern one being present in Japanese. The northern current which is of Altaic origin, unequivocally predominates in the field of grammar, whereas the southern current makes itself useful in the lexical field having the character of loan words."

Research into the origin of Korean language (Genzor, 1996:166) led to the hypothesis that Korean is a member of the Altaic family of languages, especially of its Manchu-Tungus branch. This hypothesis, however, has not been proved yet. Korean as well as Japanese, therefore, are considered to be the independent languages without obvious connections to other Asian languages. Although a historical relationship between Korean and Japanese has not been established, the two languages demonstrate strikingly similar features:

- (1) Both are agglutinative languages.
- (2) Although both languages were exposed to strong and long-term Chinese cultural as well as linguistic influence their grammars were affected by Chinese grammar only minimally.
- (3) Korean as well as Japanese adopted a large number of Chinese lexical items.
- (4) The two languages existing without own writing system at the dawn of history adopted Chinese ideographic writing system.
- (5) Both Korean and Japanese possess an extensive system of honorific language.

The Korean language, like Japanese, is extremely sensitive to the nuances of hierarchical human relations. According to Pucek (1982:69) we distinguish three

basic levels of politeness in Korean based on the differences in vertical social hierarchy:

- style of speech towards older or higher status individual
- style of a speech towards an individual of the same status
- style of a speech towards younger or lower status individual, also called neutral style

However, Pucek (1982:71) further divides these three levels of politeness into five grades calling them The grades of personal orientation:

grades of personal orientation	verbal suffix of the indicative		
(1) polite grade	- <i>mnida</i> ,	- <i>sŭmnida</i>	
(2) upper middle grade	- <i>o</i> ,	- <i>uo</i> ,	- <i>so</i>
(3) lower middle grade	- <i>ne</i>		
(4) familiar grade (neutral)	- <i>ta</i>		
(5) plain grade	- <i>chi</i>		

1. The polite grade of speech is applied in formal settings such as official speeches, lectures, discussions regardless of the audience age.
2. The upper middle grade is used between the individuals of the same status or by the speaker of a slightly higher status than addressee to the addressee.
3. The lower middle grade is used by the speaker towards the individual of approximately the same status who is also an intimate acquaintance.
4. The familiar grade is used by the older to the younger when the difference of their age is rather large. However, this grade has also the function of neutral speech style being used in print.
5. The plain grade is used among the members of family and intimate friends.

When showing respect to an addressee's action or a 3rd person's action the Koreans employ the honorific suffix *-si* in any of the above five grades of speech, for example: *alda* – *asida* – *asimnida* (to know). Moreover, there are also some special underived forms of honorific verbs, such as:

mŏkta (to eat) – *chapsusida*, *chukta* (to die) – *toragada*, *toragasida*.

Unlike the Japanese, the Koreans do pay respect to their family members' action also in front of individuals who do not belong to their family. This fact introduces us to another important characteristic of Korean in the light of confrontation with Japanese. The Koreans do not differentiate between in-group and out-group membership. Thus, in the presence of the out-group members they do not need to employ humble terms when mentioning their in-group members who objectively deserve respect such as parents, teachers, higher status relatives, etc.

However, there are humble personal pronouns in Korean, which are used when referring to the elders and those of higher status:

person	talking to a higher status person	talking to the same or a lower status person
1st person singular	<i>chō</i>	<i>na</i>
1st person plural	<i>chōhūi</i>	<i>uri</i>
2nd person singular	<i>tangsin</i>	<i>nō</i>
2nd person plural	<i>tangsindŭl</i>	<i>nōhūi</i>

(Pucek, 1982: 33)

It was mentioned that Japanese personal pronouns are seldom used. In very polite speech the only permitted 1st person singular pronouns are *watashi* or *watakushi*. In a neutrally formal setting men can employ the pronoun *boku* and in a very informal setting the pronoun *ore* as well. Women in both settings are restricted to using only the term *watashi*.

Both Korean and Japanese avoid using 2nd person pronouns whenever possible. They rather give preference to saying the addressee's name plus honorific suffix *-san* in the case of Japanese and *-ssi* in the case of Korean spoken in South Korea.

As can be understood from the above what makes Korean honorific language style distinct from the Japanese one is the lack of what we call *kenjoogo* in Japanese – the humble level of speech by using of which the speaker psychologically dishonour his own actions. The Koreans do not recognize in-group/out-group membership and therefore do not share with the Japanese the need for elevating the out-group persons while linguistically downgrading in-group members. However, what makes both systems very similar is the tradition of deep reverence to the old clearly reflected in their constituent levels of politeness.

THE FUTURE OF THE JAPANESE HONORIFIC LANGUAGE

Young Japanese university undergraduate students express loudly their despising attitude towards the seniority system and using honorific language. Kaim (2002) explains that keigo with its conservative demand to respect established hierarchy and established ways of expressing oneself actively works against adaptability and flexibility in thought. Therefore, the young generation although famed for its constant invention and reinvention of new words are totally hopeless when it comes to keigo which does not allow them to express their true feelings and thoughts.

According to the results of survey conducted by the NHK (Japanese broadcasting network) in 1980 among the young Japanese under the age of 25, 63% of the young men and 51% of the young women consider the system of the Japanese polite language to be extremely troublesome (Nishida, 1992: 222). However, once they find a job in a company or in any other institution in which vertical hierarchy is strictly observed and use of polite language is thus obligatory, they cannot escape following the rules of the seniority system. Moreover, to become a capable employee as well as a perfect representative of an institution, young newcomers are sent for Japanese honorific language training in order to master its intricacy. It

indicates, no matter how obsolete and needless keigo is considered to be by the young generation of the Japanese yet it preserves the position of a unique linguistic medium essential for maintaining smooth and harmonious social relations.

The system of Japanese honorific language was moulded during long centuries of feudal warrior rule. It faithfully reflects the typical features of the Japanese nation, especially group-orientedness, need for vertical social structure and evaluation based on the seniority system.

No doubt that Japanese society has dramatically changed since the feudal warriors ruled the country. However, the essence of the Japanese nature and behaviour has not undergone much change. Therefore, though in present-day Japan the voices propagating abolition of the extensive system of honorifics are gaining strength, it will be preserved. Otherwise the Japanese will lose the functional way of harmonious communication, which is highly desired and respected.

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