

# The functions of “speech levels” and “utterances without politeness markers” in Japanese and Korean: from the perspective of discourse politeness

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## 1. Introduction

Both Japanese and Korean are known as languages with complicated honorific systems, and there has been a long tradition of research, as well as comparative and contrastive studies of the honorific forms of the Japanese and Korean languages (e.g. Ogino et al 1990, 1991; Yu, 1996; Ikeda, 2000; Usami & Lee, 2003).

However, previous research has focused on language styles at the sentence level and on surveying the usage of politeness markers such as respectful, humble and polite forms, and it is not an overstatement to say that there has been almost no research carried out from a pragmatic viewpoint based on data of natural conversation collected under controlled conditions, particularly for the Korean language.

### 1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to analyze the functions of “utterances without politeness markers (NM)”, such as incomplete utterance and backchannels from the viewpoint of “discourse politeness (Usami 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002)”, and to make clear the similarities and differences.

In this study, the respectful, humble and polite forms that have been the focus of study are regarded as “politeness markers”, and study of the functions of “utterances without politeness markers” in discourse, which have been neglected in previous research, will provide deeper insight into the general usage of honorific language systems.

### 1.2 Definition of “utterance without markers of politeness” in this study

In this study, “utterances without politeness markers” is defined as the utterances without markers as follows, and is analyzed from two viewpoints –the “sentence-final speech levels” and

the "speech levels in total utterances".

At the "sentence-final speech levels", in Japanese, "politeness markers" refer to the polite forms/ non-polite forms of "です", "ます"/ "だ", "である", and in Korean, they refer to the polite forms/ non-polite forms of "합니다[hapnita]", "해요[hayyo]"/ "한다[hanta]", "해[hay]".

At the "speech levels in total utterances", in Japanese, they refer to the polite forms/ non-polite forms of "です", "ます"/ "だ", "である", and the respectful, humble forms, as well as the "お/ご" prefixes indicating respect and politeness. In Korean, they refer to the polite forms/ non-polite forms of "합니다[hapnita]", "해요[hayyo]"/ "한다[hanta]", "해[hay]" and honorific prefixes such as "시[si]". Utterances without such markers are defined as "utterances without politeness markers".

## 2. Method of study

### 2.1 Experimental design

$$W_x = D(S, H) + P(H, S) + R_x$$

Wx: the weightiness of FTax    S : Speaker    : Hearer

D: the social distance of S and H  
P: the relative power of S and H  
Rx: the absolute ranking of imposition in the particular culture

Figure 1 Formula of the computing the weightiness of FTax of Brown & Levinson(1987)

According to Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory formula shown in Figure1, when social distance D and ranking of imposition R are constant, conversations carried out with respect to those most senior to oneself will have the highest "degree of FT". Consequently, the operating frequency of "polite form" is predicted to be the highest. This research is based on Usami's (1999,2002) practical experiment that was carried out in order to verify the prediction mentioned above.

Table1 Experimental design

Interlocutor	Social variables in Brown & Levinson's formula		
	Power	Distance	Risk of imposition
	Age and Social Status	Newly acquainted	Getting to know each other conversation
Older Female	+	=	=
Older Male	+	=	=
Same-age Female	=	=	=
Same-age Male	=	=	=
Younger Female	-	=	=
Younger Male	-	=	=

### 2.2 Subjects

In this study, a linguistic social psychological approach is taken in order to capture the dynamism of language use in an actual interaction. The base subjects are 35 year-old male and female university graduates who have social experience.

To analyze how a speaker (who will be called a "base") manipulates language usage according to the "power relationship" lying behind age differences of interlocutors, the interlocutors' ages were varied. As shown in Table2, a base subject was asked to have conversations with six different interlocutors - "older", "same age" and "younger" subjects of both the same and different sex. Furthermore, in this study, in order to keep the subjects' social distance constant, a base subject is required to converse only with those they are meeting for the first time. The number of bases is a total of eight people (two females and two males for both Japanese and Korean) having a total number of 48 conversations.

Table2 Combination of pairings for a base subject

Participants	Base Subjects → Two Japanese Females Two Japanese Males Two Korean Females Two Korean Males	Interlocutors					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
		OF	OM	SF	SM	YF	YM
age	35	45	45	35	35	25	25

OF: Older Female    OM: Older Male  
SF: Same-age Female    SM: Same-age Male  
YF: Younger Female    YM: Younger Male

### 2.3 Procedures

Following Usami's research(1999,2002), bases for both Japanese and Korean were asked to carry out conversations with six different partners – “older”, “same age” and “younger” subjects of both the same and different sex for about 15 minutes each, in the absence of the researcher. Conversation topics were not provided, and subjects were instructed to converse naturally. In order to confirm the validity of each conversation, a follow-up 5-step evaluation questionnaire survey was conducted after each conversation to investigate perception of the speaker's age, awareness of the fact that the conversation was being recorded, whether the conversation was carried out naturally, and so on.

### 2.4 Method of Analysis

The first 10 minutes in each of the 48 conversations obtained through the abovementioned method were transcribed, based on the “Revised Edition: Basic Transcription System for Japanese: BTSJ” (Usami, 2003) (total: 8hours). The transcribed data were coded according to the items of analysis.

### 2.5 Items of Analysis

Each utterance is regarded as a unit of analysis, and all utterances were coded from the viewpoint of “speech levels”. All utterances were coded from 2 viewpoints –the “sentence-final speech levels” (whether the “sentence-final speech levels” were polite forms, non-polite forms, or neither of the two forms; in other words, utterances without politeness markers) and the “speech levels in total utterances”(whether respectful, humble forms, and so on were included in the “total utterances”).

Example 1: Coding of speech levels

Language	Example	Sentence-final speech levels	Speech levels in total utterances
Japanese	いらっしゃった? Have/Has (You/he/she) come?	N	S
	いらっしゃいました? Have/Has (You/he/she) come?	P	S
Korean	오셨어 (오시었어)? (いらっしゃた?) Have/Has (You/he/she) come?	N	S

	오셨어요 (오시었어요)? (いらっしゃいました?) Have/Has (You/he/she) come?	P	S
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As shown in example1, at the “sentence-final speech levels”, both 「いらっしゃた?」 in Japanese and 「오셨어?」 in Korean are non-polite forms(N), while at the “speech levels of total utterances”, they are super-polite forms(S). Through coding speech levels from the 2 viewpoints mentioned above, we may better understand the general features of speech levels.

#### 2.5.1 Speech Levels

i. Sentence-final speech levels: the sentence-final speech levels are classified into the following three items.

P : Polite-form (Polite form: “です/ます”forms, “합니 다[hapnita]/해요[hayyo]” forms)

N : Non-polite form (Non-polite form: “다/である”forms, “해[hay]” forms)

NM : No politeness-marker (Utterances without politeness markers: Utterances other than the abovementioned polite and non-polite forms. Incomplete utterances and backchannels, etc.)

ii. Speech levels in total utterances: the speech levels in total utterances are classified into the following four items.

S :Super-polite form (In the case of Japanese, utterances that include the respectful and humble forms, as well as the prefixes such as 「お[o]」 / 「ご[g]」. In the case of Korean, utterances that include the respectful and humble forms, as well as the respectful prefixes such as 「시[si]」)

P : Polite-form (Utterances that include the polite form)

N : Non-polite form (Utterances that include the non-polite form)

NM : No politeness-marker (Utterances without politeness markers: Utterances other than the abovementioned super-polite, polite and non-polite forms.)

Next, the examples of the actual coding in Japanese and Korean will be shown in example2 and example3. With regards to NM representing “utterances without politeness markers”, the object of this study, there are two types of NM. One type is NM that do not have politeness markers despite being able to have politeness markers at the end of the sentence, as in the examples of lines No. 5 and 7 in example2 and lines No. 6 and 24 in example3. The other type is NM that do not have politeness markers originally at the end of the sentence, as in the example of lines No. 6 and 9 in example2 and lines No. 7 and 27 in example3.

In this study, to make clear the functions of NM, those that do not have politeness markers despite being able to have politeness markers at the end of the sentence are coded SB, representing

substantive utterances, and NM that do not have politeness markers originally at the end of the sentence are coded BA, representing backchannels.

Moreover, in SB, representing substantive utterances, there are utterances that are said definitely, as in the example of line No. 5 in example2 and line No. 6 in example3, as well as utterances which are said indefinitely, as in the example of line No. 7 in example2 and line No. 24 in example3. In this study, in order to clarify the functions with regards to sentence-final types, the utterances which are said definitely are coded C, representing complete utterances and the utterances which are said indefinitely are coded I representing incomplete utterances.

Example 2 : Actual coding in Japanese

Line No	Utterance No.	Completion of Utterance	Speaker	Contents of Utterance	total utterances	sentence-final	Utterance Types of NM	Sentence-Final Type of NM
4	4	*	JBM01	「JBM01 姓」です。 My name is 「JBM1 surname」.	P	P		
5	5	*	JYM01	「JBM01 姓」さん、<はい> (< > )。 Mr. 「JBM1 surname」, I see.	P	NM	SB	C
6	6	*	JBM01	<はい> (< > )。 Yes.	NM	NM	BA	
7	7	*	JBM01	どのような、ご職業で... What kind of job...? (what's your job?)	S	NM	SB	I
8	8	*	JYM01	ええと、会社員をやっています。 Uhm, I am working in a company.	P	P		
9	9	*	JBM01	<はー> (< > )。 Hmum.	NM	NM	BA	

Example 3 : Actual coding in Korean

Line No	Utterance No.	Completion of Utterance	Speaker	Contents of Utterance	total utterances	sentence-final	Utterance Types of NM	Sentence-Final Type of NM
4	4	*	KBM01	이름이 어떻게 되세요? 名前は何とおっしゃるんですか? What's your name?	S	P		
5	5	*	KSF02	예, 「KSF2 전체 이름」라고 합니다.. ええ、「KBF2フルネーム」といいます。 Yes, my name is 「KBF2 full name」.	P	P		
6	6	*	KBM01	「KSF2 전체 이름」. 「KBF2フルネーム」. 「KBF2 full name」.	NM	NM	SB	C
7	7	*	KSF02	예.. ええ。 Yes.	NM	NM	BA	

24	22	*	KOF02	성함이...? お名前は...? Your name...? (What's your name?)	S	NM	SB	I
25	23	*	KBM01	저는 「KBF02 전체 이름」 이구요. わたくしは 「KBF02フルネーム」 です。 My name is 「KBF2 full name」.	S	P		
26	24	*	KOF02	상당히 이름이 어렵네요. 相当名前が難しいですね。 What a difficult name!	P	P		
27	25	*	KBM01	해해<...>.. へへ<笑い>.. Haha<laughter>.	NM	NM	BA	

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Basic data of this study

First, the number of utterances, which forms the basic data of this study, is shown in table3.

Table3 Basic data

data Language	total number of utterances	number of utterances of bases	Percentage of the number of utterances of bases
Japanese	4520	2164	48%
Korean	5380	2560	48%
Sum	9900	4724	48%

As shown in table 3, in both Japanese and Korean, the number of utterances of bases forms about 50% of the total number of utterances. From this, we can see that this conversation is not one-sided conversation but a balanced one.

#### 3.2 Sentence-final speech levels

Figure 2 shows the average percentage of "sentence-final speech levels" in Japanese and Korean.

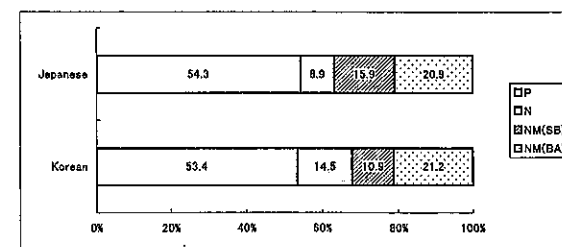


Figure2 Average percentage of sentence-final speech levels

For both Japanese and Korean, the percentage of polite form (P) is the highest at about 50% at "sentence-final speech levels". Considering this result from the viewpoint of discourse politeness, it can be seen that the unmarked speech level in a conversation between 2 persons, with social experience, meeting for the first time for Japanese and Korean is the polite form. The percentage of utterances without politeness markers (NM) comes next, and is relatively higher for Japanese as compared to Korean. At the same time, the percentage of substantive utterances in NM(SB) is relatively higher for Japanese as compared to Korean.

Figure3 shows the percentage of "sentence-final speech levels" with different interlocutors in Japanese and Korean, and Figure4 shows the percentage of "sentence-final speech levels" with different interlocutors (except NM) in Japanese and Korean.

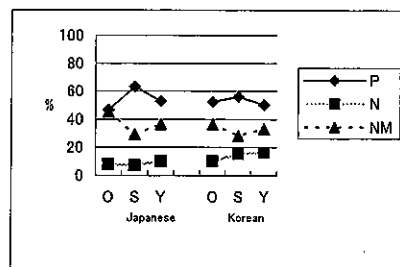


Figure3 Percentage of sentence-final speech levels with different interlocutors

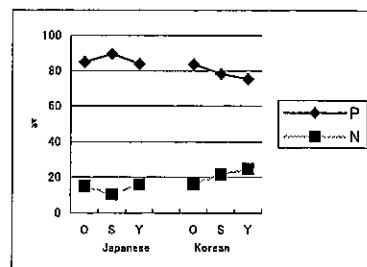


Figure4 Percentage of sentence-final speech levels with different interlocutors (Except NM)

If we look at the "sentence-final speech levels" with different interlocutors as shown in Figure 3, in Japanese and Korean, the percentage of "utterances without politeness markers (NM)" is high in conversation with interlocutors of a different age. This result implies that "utterances without politeness markers (NM)" in both Japanese and Korean have the function of making language use for reflecting hierarchical relations of age ambiguous. For polite form (P), the percentage is high in conversation with interlocutors of the same-age. In Japanese, compared with Korean, with interlocutors of a different age, NM is used widely. However, with interlocutors of the same age, polite form (P), which is unmarked speech level in conversation between new acquaintances, is used mostly because there is no necessity to make hierarchical relations of age ambiguous.

When applied to Brown and Levinson's(1987) politeness theory, we expect to see more polite

linguistic forms being used with older people, with all other factors being constant. However, the percentage of polite form (P) is highest in conversations with interlocutors of the same age.

In order to examine the functions of NM more explicitly, if we look at the "sentence-final speech levels (except NM)" in Figure 4, we can see that for both Japanese and Korean, the proportion of polite form (P) with regards to the older interlocutors increases relatively. Particularly for Korean as compared to Japanese, polite form (P) is used in proportion to the age of interlocutors, and the usage of polite form (P) clearly reflects hierarchical relations of age of interlocutors.

These results imply that for both Japanese and Korean, "utterances without politeness markers (NM)" in "sentence-final speech levels" have the function of making language use for reflecting hierarchical relations of age ambiguous.

### 3.3 "Speech level in total utterances" of substantive utterances, where "sentence-final speech levels" are NM

In this chapter, "speech levels in total utterances" of substantive utterances, where "sentence-final speech levels" are NM, the manner of appearance of "utterances without politeness markers (NM)" in discourse and its functions are explored. The average percentage of "speech levels in total utterance" of substantive utterances, where "sentence-final speech levels" are NM, is shown in Figure5.

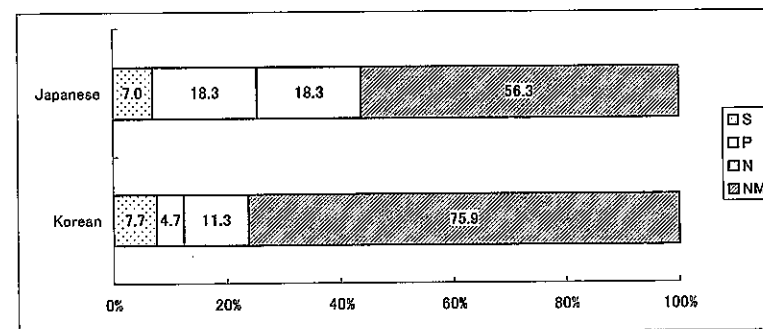


Figure5 Average percentage of speech levels in total utterance of substantial utterances, where sentence-final speech levels are NM

In both Japanese and Korean, in cases where "sentence-final speech levels" are NM, the proportion of NM at the "speech levels in total utterances" is the highest. However, in Japanese, compared with Korean, there are more politeness markers such as polite form (P), and Non-polite form (N), at the "speech levels in total utterances".

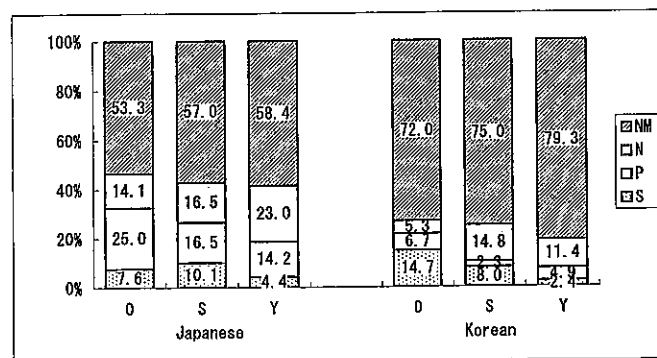


Figure6 Percentage of speech level in total utterances of substantive utterances, where sentence-final speech levels are NM with different interlocutors

If we look at the percentage of "speech levels in total utterances" of substantive utterances, where sentence-final speech levels are NM with different interlocutors in Figure 6, we can see clearly that there are more politeness markers such as polite form (P) and Non-polite form (N) at the "speech levels in total utterances" for Japanese than for Korean. In Japanese, the hierarchical relation of age of interlocutors is reflected in the usage of polite form (P) and Non-polite form (N), while in Korean, it is reflected in the use of Super-polite form (S).

The result indicates that even when there are no "politeness markers" in the "sentence-final speech levels", the hierarchical relation of age of interlocutors is reflected in the honorific language usage of polite forms (P), respectful forms and so on, in the "speech levels in total utterances". In particular, such tendencies are stronger in Japanese.

Average percentage of sentence-final types of substantive utterances, where "sentence-final speech levels" are NM, is shown in Figure 7.

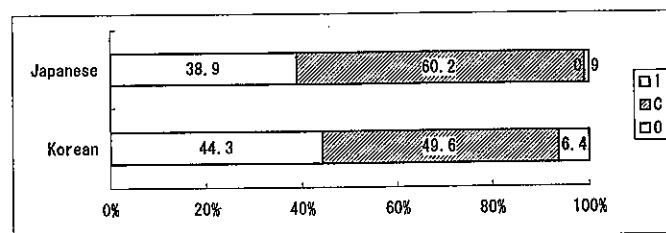


Figure7 Average percentage of sentence-final types of substantive utterances, where sentence-final speech levels are NM

If we look at the percentage of sentence-final types of substantive utterances, where "sentence-final speech levels" are NM in both Japanese and Korea in figure 7, it can be seen that the percentage of complete utterances, which are said definitely (C) is higher than that of incomplete utterances, which are said indefinitely (I).

The percentage of sentence-final types of substantive utterances, where "sentence-final speech levels" are NM with different interlocutors, is shown in Figure 8.

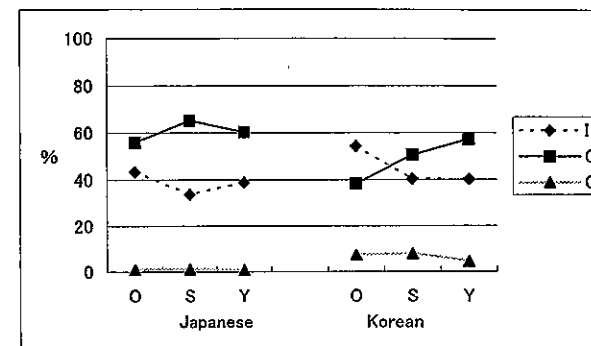


Figure8 Percentage of sentence-final types of substantive utterances, where sentence-final speech levels are NM with different interlocutors

As shown in Figure8, for incomplete utterances (I), which are said indefinitely and indirectly and are expected to be most frequently used with older interlocutors, in Japanese, the percentage is the highest with regards to interlocutors of a different age, while in Korean, the percentage is proportionate to the age of conversation interlocutors. For complete utterances (C), which are said definitely and directly and are expected to be most frequently used with younger interlocutors, in Japanese, the percentage is the highest with interlocutors of the same-age, while in Korean, the percentage is inversely proportionate to the age of conversation interlocutors.

For Japanese, these results imply that as incomplete utterances (I) have the function of making hierarchical relations of age of interlocutors ambiguous, the percentage of such utterances is the highest with regards to interlocutors of a different age, while the percentage of complete utterances (C) is the highest with regards to interlocutors of the same-age, to whom there is no necessity of making hierarchical relations of age of interlocutors ambiguous. For Korean, these results imply that language use in Korean is influenced by hierarchical relations of age of conversation interlocutors.

#### 4. Major findings

In this study, the functions of "utterance without politeness markers(NM)" in the natural conversation between 2 people meeting for the first time was analyzed from the viewpoint of "discourse politeness", and both similarities and differences have been examined. The results are briefly summarized as follows.

1. The percentage of the base subjects'usage of "utterances without politeness markers (NM)" in both Japanese and Korean is higher in conversations with interlocutors of a different age (older and younger interlocutors). From this, we can deduce that NM performed the function of making the hierarchical relationship between speakers ambiguous.
2. In Japanese, the "sentence-final speech levels (polite forms and non-polite forms)" did not clearly show the hierarchical relationship between speakers. In contrast, in Korean, the "sentence-final speech levels (polite forms and non-polite forms)" are positively correlated with the age of interlocutors. These results reflect the tendency to preserve the normative use of honorifics in Korean.
3. In Japanese, the "speech levels in total utterances", where "sentence-final speech levels" are NM, are positively correlated with the age of interlocutors, whereas the "sentence-final speech levels" did not clearly show the age differences between interlocutors. These results imply that modern Japanese people have a tendency to not clearly show the hierarchical relationship between speakers with the linguistic forms in "sentence-final speech levels". However, the choice of "speech levels in total utterances" still reflects the hierarchical relationship between speakers.

This means that in spite of the fact that they do not wish to clearly show the hierarchical relationship between speakers, the choice of "speech levels in total utterances" still indirectly reflects their tendency to preserve the usage of honorifics. In contrast, in Korean, the "speech levels in total utterances", where "sentence-final speech levels" are NM, did not clearly show the hierarchical relationship between speakers, since the hierarchical relationship between speakers are explicitly expressed through the linguistic forms in "sentence-final speech levels".

4. In Japanese, the complete utterances (C) in sentence-final types of NM are most frequently used in conversations with same-age interlocutors, although it is expected that the complete utterances that have direct functions be most frequently used with younger interlocutors. The incomplete utterances (I) in sentence-final types of NM are more frequently used in conversations between different age speakers (older and younger interlocutors), although it is expected that the incomplete utterances that have indirect functions be most frequently used with older interlocutors. In contrast, in Korean, the complete utterances (C) in sentence-final types of NM are negatively correlated with the age of interlocutors, while the incomplete utterances (I) in sentence-final types of NM are

positively correlated with the age of interlocutors. These results imply that the use of sentence-final types of NM in Korean reflects the hierarchical relationship of age.

In brief, for Korean, there is a tendency to preserve the normative honorific usage of more polite forms towards older people, while for Japanese, there is a tendency not to show the hierarchical relations of age clearly with linguistic forms.

#### 5. Further study

The above results were obtained through the analysis of language action comprehensively at the discourse level, including the sentence level. In the future, I hope to be able to develop this study further as an empirical validation research for the "discourse politeness" theory.

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