

Tracking Many Faces of Change: Osaka Japanese Honorifics

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1. Introduction

Research on Japanese honorification has long been a hallmark of studies in Japanese sociolinguistics, with scholars from Japan, as well as outside it and a variety of methodologies applied to answer similar sets of questions: who uses what, and, in some instances, why. In recent decades especially, changes in the use of honorification are becoming of particular interest, with more egalitarian values visible in the Japanese society, and numerous changes that affect both local communities and society at large. Majority of research on honorification focuses on the issue of addressee or referent of a given utterance, or the context of its use; that is to what extent we can determine external factors that govern the use of these features, and whether or not there are visible changes in these. In this paper, we will investigate the largely under explored features of honorification: frequency of their use across generations, other honorific features they correlate with, and their function in discourse. To do this we will use empirical data as the basis of analysis, taking as an example local honorific features found in Osaka Japanese. Analyzing local honorification will allow us to consider both the local and the global pressures affecting the use of these forms, and focusing on the form and function will let us observe the more subtle facets of change.

2. Osaka Japanese honorification

Japanese honorification marked on the predicate can generally be divided into two: addressee honorification (AH) and referent honorification (RH). AH are those honorifics that mark respect for the addressee of the utterance, while RH are those features which are meant to express some kind of respect towards the referent, who may, but does not have to, be the addressee. OJ honorification consists primarily of a set of referent honorific suffixes. The forms available to OJ speakers are listed in Table 1.

Standard Japanese	Osaka Japanese
V+(ra)reru <i>ikareru</i>	V+haru <i>ikiharu</i>
o+V+ni naru <i>oide ni naru</i>	V+yaru <i>ikiyaru</i>
Special verbs <i>irassharu</i>	V+yoru <i>ikiyoru</i>

Table 1. Referent honorific features available to OJ speakers.

Previous research has repeatedly shown that out of all the options available (as presented above) V+haru construction is the most popular one, used most frequently by OJ speakers. This is supported by our data, and therefore the main focus in this discussion will be on this construction.

All referent honorific constructions can be used to refer to a second- or third person referent, and they can be used with or without addressee honorification (*desu/masu*). While it has been suggested that referent honorification and addressee honorification are independent and work along different axes, some empirical research has shown that the two should rather be considered as interdependent features (Okamoto 1998; Yamaji 2008, 2010). We will explore these relationships for speakers of OJ – to do this we will investigate whether RH in the speech of OJ users is used primarily with or without AH (we refer to this as form), and whether it is used to refer to a second- or a third-person referent (we refer to this as function).

3. Data and methods

Data for the analysis come from a corpus of spontaneous recorded conversations between 2-4 speakers of OJ. The sample is composed of 43 speakers, stratified by age and gender: 23 women and 20 men. The corpus consists of over 38 hours of recordings. All of the recordings were done in an informal setting, where the participants had met the researcher before and had been familiar with one another. The topics range from daily life to unusual events, jobs and children.

Age and gender were considered as important criteria in the analysis, as both have been raised as influential for the use of honorification in previous research on both standard (see e.g. Ide 1990; Shibatani 1990; Okamoto 1997; Yamaji 2007) and OJ honorification

(SturtzSreetharan 2008; Maeda 1980; Horii 1995). In addition, stratification for age cohorts allows us to analyze the possible ongoing change in the use of honorification, in accordance with apparent time hypothesis.

For the distributional analysis all those contexts were taken into account where the referent honorific suffix could have occurred, that is finite verbs in active voice, whose referent is clearly identifiable and other than oneself. In addition, baby references and utterances containing the verb *oru* 'be' were also excluded from the final analysis. While it has been suggested that the use of OJ honorification with family members is possible (e.g. Hirayama 1997), all the speakers in the sample agreed it would not be appropriate with babies. There were a total of 17 baby references in the whole corpus, none of them marked with referent honorification. The verb *oru* 'be' was excluded, as in SJ it is a humble form of the verb 'be' (and as such it would be ungrammatical to suffix it with a referent honorific), and while it is not so in OJ, this makes the status of this verb ambiguous, and it is impossible to determine whether the use of referent honorification with *oru* would be grammatically acceptable. There were a total of 444 referent honorific tokens in 2380 utterances.

We will now analyze the distribution of all referent honorifics present in the corpus across age and gender cohorts, and then move on to focus on V+haru construction, focusing on its frequency, form and function.

4. Frequency

As we have shown in Table 1, there are six possible options of referent honorification for OJ users: SJ constructions o+V+ni naru, V+(ra)reru and a set of so-called special verbs, and OJ constructions V+haru, V+yaru and V+yoru¹. There were no occurrences of o+V+ni naru in the whole corpus. Figure 1 shows the distribution of all referent honorifics in percentages (out of all possible contexts).

As is clear from this apparent time picture there is an overall decrease both in the use of honorification in general (that is, frequency of use of honorifics), as well as the diversity of forms. The only exception to this are younger men, who are going against the general trend and seem to be picking up the use of local variant V+haru, using it not only more frequently than their female peers, but also more frequently than men in the older and middle age groups.

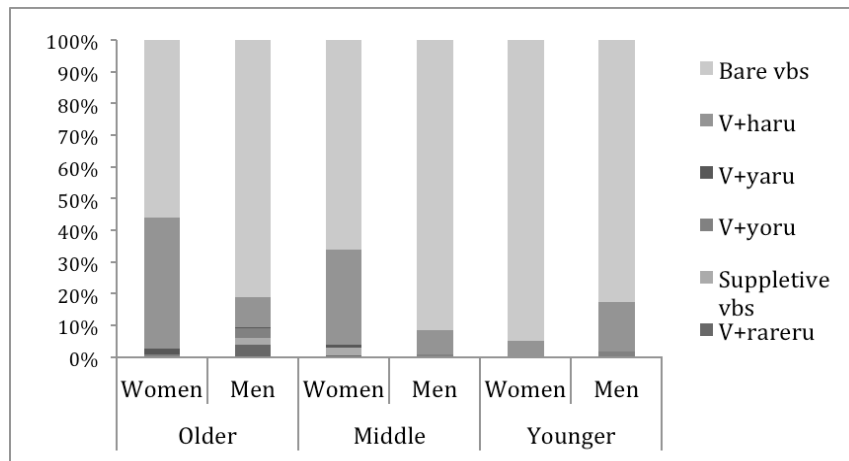


Figure 1. Relative distribution of referent honorifics across age and gender.

The overall drop in the use of referent honorifics in informal interactions does not lend itself to a straightforward analysis – that is, it is impossible to tell with certainty whether we are observing an ongoing change on the level of community, or an age-grading pattern. Recent changes in the society as a whole (ongoing democratization and introduction of more egalitarian values, and therefore possibly less need to use honorifics in such informal contexts), as well as reported changes in the function of honorification as such (cf. Inoue 1999, 2012) would suggest, however, that the distribution can be at least partly attributed to a change in progress, where younger generations of speakers do not feel the need to use honorifics to such an extent as their older relatives and neighbors, especially in informal interactions. The decrease in diversity of forms seems also to be showing that perhaps SJ forms, now absent from informal interactions, are reserved only for more formal contexts among the youngest speakers.

To be able to analyze the interesting trend observed in the younger generation, we need to take into consideration the socio-historical background of this age cohort, as well as their attitudes and perceptions of both the local dialect and the V+haru construction in particular. The form, being well above the level of conscious awareness, is readily commented on and often presented as an example of local stereotype in metapragmatic discourse, also among younger speakers.

We need to bear in mind that younger generation's experience of their own local variety is different than that of their older peers – OJ has become a popular and valued commodity, not only locally. The increasing presence in the media of comedians coming from Osaka, preceded by the association of Osaka with merchants and their humor (e.g. Inoue 2006), has led to the variety being seen as indexing funniness, and it is not uncommon to hear

an opinion in other parts of Japan that people from Osaka are funny. At the same time, it has also been suggested that the V+haru construction indexes a kind of local femininity, one that is traditionally associated with Osaka, a so-called *Osaka no obachan* ‘Osaka auntie’ (e.g. SturtzSreetharan 2008; Strycharz 2011, 2012). The use of a traditional form to index traditionally local identity might therefore be the driving force for the younger women to actively avoid its use. Women in the younger generation, including those with strong local networks, are much more open to outside influences, and their networks, compared to the older women, are much more open and diffuse. Increasing mobility, especially visible in this age cohort, might influence the desired image young people are choosing to project for themselves, and thus it is not surprising that the younger women may not want to associate to a great degree with the ‘old’ and ‘traditional’. The two opposing trends observed among the younger generation might then be partly motivated by these opposing ideologies present simultaneously and attached to both the OJ as a variety, and specifically V+haru construction. On the one hand, younger men seem to be understanding this form as indexing larger concepts associated with OJ in general, such as being ‘cool’ and ‘funny’, and on the other younger women purposefully avoid its use not to align with the traditional local image of an Osaka woman (cf. Strycharz 2012).

Let us now focus on the form of referent honorifics across age cohorts – whether they are used with or without AH, and functions – whether they are used to refer to a second- or a third-person referent.

5. Form

Previous research on the use of V+haru construction has shown that in informal interactions among women in Osaka it was used categorically without AH (SturtzSreetharan 2008). This is not supported by the data in our corpus – on the contrary, there seems to be an ongoing change with respect to the preferred form of V+haru construction. Figure 2 shows the distribution of V+haru+AH (the use *with* addressee honorification) across age and gender groups.

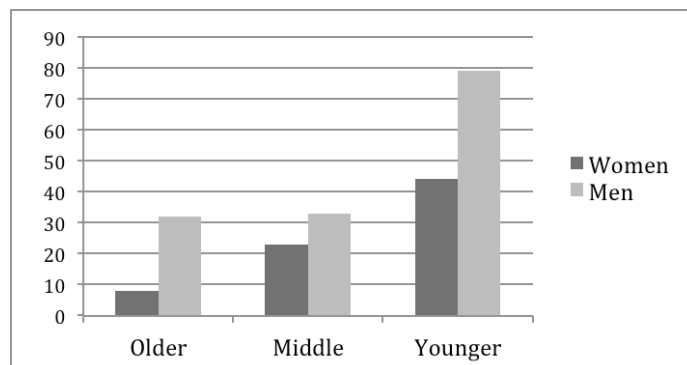


Figure 2. The use of V+haru with addressee honorification.

It is clear from this figure that not while indeed in the older generation the use of V+haru without AH was prevalent (although not categorical) we can observe an ongoing change with the preferred grammatical context for the younger generation being overwhelmingly V+haru+AH. Interestingly, for SJ referent honorific features found in the corpus, 31 out of 34 (91%) were used with AH. It is then possible that in the honorific system of OJ this is a subtle form of standardization. While the younger generations discontinue the use of SJ honorification in informal interactions, they transfer the pattern of use found in SJ constructions in the older generations onto local honorifics. This steady increase of the use of V+haru with addressee honorification is observed across all cohorts, and in both men and women, with men leading this change.

6. Function

With regards to the function of V+haru, the distribution is presented on Figure 3.

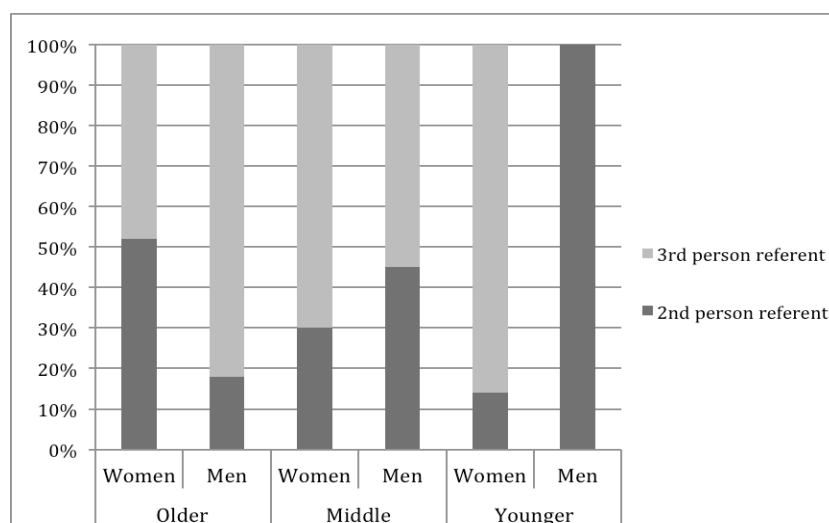


Figure 3. The distribution of V+haru used for second- and third-person referents, across age and gender.

Focusing again on the SJ honorifics present in the corpus, all 34 tokens were used towards a second-person referent. Previous research on V+haru has also shown this function as prevalent (SturtzSreetharan 2008). Our data, however, seems to be showing a more complex and nuanced picture – while men overall are progressively adopting this use of V+haru, with the youngest generation of men using it categorically for second-person referent, women are going in the opposite direction. Among men, it appears that again we are observing a trend where they are possibly transferring the preferred grammatical context of SJ honorifics in informal interactions onto local honorifics – all SJ forms in the corpus were used for a second-person referent. Men in the youngest generation are using the form exclusively that way. This spike might also be attributed to the fact that men seem to be using this form for identity construction purposes, creating a desired image of the self (authentically local, perhaps funny or comical) directly vis-à-vis the interlocutor – hence the addressee-oriented use of the form.

Women, on the other hand, are showing an opposing trend, with the increasing use of V+haru to refer to a third-person referent. This is also in line with some results from SturtzSreetharan’s study (2008), who has shown that the form is used by women to underline familiarity with the interlocutor using an honorific for the third-person referent. This quite prescriptive use of V+haru seems to be present also in our corpus, especially among women and yet again suggests that men and women in this community perceive the form differently, as is most apparent in the youngest generation of speakers.

7. Conclusion

In line with some previous research and anecdotal evidence, we have shown an ongoing change in the use of honorification in OJ. However, both the variation found across cohorts, and the observed changes are more nuanced and complex, and there is a growing need to further investigate numerous aspects of honorification that are actually undergoing changes – that is, not only the speaker/ addressee effect, but also other factors, such as the form and function of these constructions.

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Notes:

1. OJ construction V+yoru has been described as minus honorific, or anti-honorific. Its grammatical position, however, is identical to the other features, and its pragmatic scope is unclear. It is therefore included in the overall distributional analysis for transparency (for a further discussion of this construction see Strycharz 2012).