Communciation Patterns and Japanese Traits
Through Language Expressions

ABSTRACT

As one of the countries in the world emphasizing on speech levels in their language, Japan has a unique langue. In spite the fact that the usage of keigo is not as rigid as it was during pre-war era *keigo*, the highest speech levels in Japanese, is still practiced nowadays. Yet perfect *keigo* is often disturbed in everyday conversation. Therefore, in speaking, the Japanese speakers will normaly try to adjust their language with both the present hearer and absent hearer. This situation often causes misunderstanding with other people who do not understand Japanese's language character. Most foreign people assume that the Japanese speakers are reluctant to express directly what their inner wish and true intentino. In fact they actually try to avoid speech expression or words that they assume would have been causing impoliteness toward the hearer. Most expressions in language are influenced by people's ways of thinking, doing, and their habits. *Keigo* expressions therefore serve as reflections of Japanese people character.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language as a communication tool cannot be separated from human traits. Language is a reflection of the personal, family and nation traits. In other words, language is a key to unlock the characteristics of community groups. Language is also a result of the basic of culture. With language, the culture of a nation can be accumulated. That is, the tradition, culture and heritage can be revealed through the language through writing engraved on the inscriptions or written on palm leaves (Yudoseputro, 1992: 3). Therefore for analysis for language needs to be conducted in order to know how language is spoken, compiled, written, and used by its speakers. In relation to the speakers, every nation in the world has specific ways of expressing language. One of them is Japanese language speaker.

Many people consider Japanese people to have introvert tendency and difficult to communicate with (Kawasaki, 1987: 6). Another look at Japanese speakers mentions that

Japanese people tend not to reveal their intentions directly, for example, at the time of expression or refusal for an invitation or request from a friend to talk. However, such views can be modified if we understand the intention of the Japanese people, namely to avoid a conflict with other parties (Okuyama, 1980: 141). It was based on evidence that the number of how many times Japanese speakers say Yes "*hai*" and No "*iie*" in one day can be counted by one hand fingers (Kindaichi: 1993: 79) In his article titled *Keigo no Tadashi Tsukaikata*, Okuyama said that the language for cursing, which in Japanese is called *bago*, is used for very few in number (1980: 145).

The Japanese is also one of the nations in the world who are very concerned about the level of speech in the language. Level of spoken Japanese is called *keigo*. The use of unsuitable *keigo* could cause social harmony to be disturbed (Morita, 1997: 1). Thus, in speaking Japanese people try to adjust their language, either with present speaker or non-present speaker. Others misunderstood the meaning because they do not understand the nature of the Japanese people.

Based on these considerations, I am presenting an observation of the Japanese people of all ages and how they use their Japanese language in this paper.

II. SEVERAL JAPANESE UNIQUE SPEECH ACTS

I try to uncover how Japanese speakers expressed their language in time to address the speaker. It is not uncommon for the other person who is not Japanese speakers and do not understand the mindset of Japanese people, to find the conversation confusing. This difference was due to abnormalities cultural background between the two nations.

2.1 Speaker More Concerned of Hearer

During speaking in general, we need interlocutors and based on the conversation our consideration usually based on the interlocutors, thus affecting our speech act. In this case the status of the hearer, whether he/she is older or younger, has a high social status, low or mediocre, male or female, adult or a kid, people who have been long known or just met for the first time, or appears to be in bad mood or sad, becomes consideration to generate different effect on the expression and the content of the conversation.

In general humans are responsive and have the ability to quickly decide their most appropriate choice of words to suit the situation of the interlocutor. This situation will be encountered by everyone at all times without being able to be planned in advance. Of course, reaction for different people and situation will be different, depending on the customs of the people of their speakers. Then we can say that considering that changes in attitudes and expressions of the language are depending on the speaker is a universal human nature. In the Japanese language, known expression or respect is involved in a fairly complicated language not known in the speakers of Indonesian language. In Japan the use of respectful language is more stringent in the days before the war, with the example of the language used by the family Tenno as a special and respectful language that should not be used by people outside the neighborhood. With that said, anyone who use the language in vain will receive heavy sanctions if, said to be insulting to the descendants of gods.

In Indonesian language, the word *makan* or *eat* in the English language does not change even if it is used for a respected person, or for animals, for example. But the equivalent of this word, namely *taberu* in Japanese changes when it is used in a variety of

respectful, be it *agaru* or *meshiagaru*, and completely changed the original word. When it was time to meet other person who is older or has a high social status, person who is not overly familiar, as a modest form of the word *eat* when you address yourself, the word becomes *itadaku*. Such is one example of the peculiarities in Japanese language.

Furthermore, I will review the other peculiarities of the Japanese language, with views of the parties themselves and the listener.

It is said that in general Japanese people tend to not say explicitly and directly whatever he wanted to originally say. At the time of speaking they always put themselves after the other person, and trying to avoid utterances that are offensive or marginalizing interlocutors. For example, when a person invited to banquets at the home of his boss, then boss who invited him was offered a drink by saying:

(1a)*"Tokorode, kimi wa nani o nomu?"*

"*Ngomong-ngomong, kamu mau minum apa*?"

"By the way what do you want to drink?"

The answer would most possible be:

(1b) "*Ano…, biiru **demo***"

"*Hemm, bir…tapi*"

"Hmm, beer… but"

The word ***demo*** will be confusing for someone who is not a speaker of Japanese language because there is no equivalent for the same phrase in Indonesian or even English. But this is oneof the characteristics of Japanese language. The meaning in the response is that the word ***demo*** signifies that "I like beer, but if you don't have beer, I would be fine with anything you are having." The choice is entirely given to the interlocutors. This is how

considerate to think about the possibility if their boss does not have beer that they are asking. So the word **demo** could only be understood by Japanese speaker or by other language speaker who has adequate understanding of how Japanese shows their consideration in speaking.

Another illustration is as follow. During boarding a plane, usually the flight attendance will offer the new boarded passangers by saying:

(2) *"Tea or coffee?"*

For Japanse speakers it is not easy to decide which one from the two choices is the good as the answer of data (2), since Japanese language does not usually have direct and straightforward expression. In Japanese the answer is usually:

(3a) `*Ocha wa ikaga desuka*`

"Bagaimana kalau minum teh…".

"How about tea…"

Or another answer will be:

(3b) `*Sou ne…nani ni shiyoukanaa….? Koohii ni shiyoukanaa…?*`

"Hmmm….minum apa, ya? Bagaimana ya, kalau kopi…?".

"Hmmm… what should I drink? How about if it's coffee…?

This is an answer whose meaning is hard to decipher. Yet this is also conducted because of consideration for the interlocutors.

Japanese speakers are not used to say *"hai"* for "yes" or *"iie"* for "No" explicitly. It is very seldom for them to say *"hai"* or *"iie"* to approve of something or to decline something. As an example, a wife asks her husband when he was about to go to work in the morning.

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(4a) `*Komban shokuji agarimasu ka?*`

    "Malam ini mau makan (di rumah)?"

    "Are you going to eat (at home) tonight?

Usually the husband will answer with

    (4b) `*Un, maa…ne…*`

    "Hmmm…, bagaimana ya…?"

    "Hmmm… how is it going to be…?"

The meaning of the answer "*maa..ne*` whether it is "yes" or "no" is very ambiguous. But the wife does not request a clear answer from the very beginning. She understands that the meaning of the answer is for the husband to be still in consideration of the situation of the later evening.

As previously described, Japanese language almost has no explicit expressions. Then to understand the intention of the speaker, we should also pay close attention to their facial expression of attitude during talking or when answering questions.

2.2 Maintaining Harmony with Interlocutors

Language is a tool to convey what one feels and thinks to the hearer or other people. Many times, due to incorrect delivery or unmatched meaning, misunderstanding often create conflict between the interlocutors. In many languages in the world we can find words used during alteration or swearing interlocutors. This kind of language in Japanese is called `*bago*`. Yet swear words or so-called `bago` in Japanese language are very few in number, and may not be up to 10 words in total. This fact could be used as one of the supporting evidences that Japanese people tend to avoid conflict during conversation.

In Japanese language many passive expression can be found. These expressions appear in the form of elevating the position of the speaker and the speaker established him/herself as an object. Let us consider the following data: A notice on a store's window display said:

(5) `*Shain ian ryokoo no tame, mikkakan kyuugyoo **sasete itadakimasu**`*

"Berhubung para karyawan pergi wisata, kami mohon izin libur selama tiga hari."

"Due to the holiday of our employees, we are requesting permission to have three days off.

The phrase `*sasete itadakimasu*` 'requesting permission to" is implying that without our consent the employees are not going to have days off.

Below is another data in passive form expression.

(6a) `*Tori no koe ga **kikoemasu**`*

"*Terdengar* kicauan burung"

"Bird chirps heard"

(7a) `*Fujisan ga **miemasu**`*

"*Terlihat* gunung Fuji"

"Mount Fuji seen"

Expression in data (6) and (7) are more often said by Japanese speakers rather than, for example:

(6b) `*Watashi wa tori no koe o **kikimasu**`*

"Saya *mendengar* kicauan burung"

"I heard birds chirp."

(7b) '*Watashi wa Fujisan o **mimasu***'

  "Saya *melihat* gunung Fuji"

 "I saw Mount Fuji"

In Indonesian both these forms of expression has the same usage tendency, while in Japanese, the first data is usually how Japanese speak of their intention in a conversation.

  Also as another example, In Japanese, for greeting such as:

 (8a) `*Gobyoki wa ikaga desuka*`

  "*Bagaimana dengan kesehatan Anda?*"

 "How's your health?"

is usually answered with:

 (8a) `***Okagesamade*** hotondo naorimashita`

  "*Berkat Tuhan (Alhamdulillah), sudah membaik*"

 "By God's blessing, it is better now."

The phrase "***okagesamade***" and `By God's blessing (*Alhamdulillah*)` both appears because of religion influence both in Indonesia and Japan. But the phrase `***okagesamade***` in Japanaase is not only related to the God's blessing but also the kindness and the help of the speakers.

2.3. Mentioning Personal Pronoun

According Orimori in his Nihongoshi (1997: 9), the level of speaking in Japanese was caused by the existence of feudalism in the country, which then also affected the tightness of personal pronouns use. The use of personal pronoun does not fit in the

association and lead to disturbing the maintained harmony. Choosing a personal pronoun when speaking is very dependent on participants of the speech act.

2.3.1 How To Address First Person

The time when we are dealing with a speaker we should be calling them with the term they used to refer to themselves. In Indonesian language what is most commonly used is '*Saya*'. In English just a single letter "I" is used to to address oneself; similar way is used in several other mainland Europe languages. But in Japan the way to call oneself or the suse of first personal pronoun is significant. Forms of personal pronouns in Japanese, among others: *atashi, watashi, asshi, ore, boku, jibun, oira, temae, washi, sessha, warawa.* The use of these pronouns depends on who becomes the speaker and on gender rather than speakers. For example, women speakers of Japanese generally use personal pronouns *atashi, atakushi,* and *atai*. The first personal pronoun that is specifically used by men is more diverse, for example, *boku*, *ore, jibun, washi, ware,* etc. In addition, one's habits in the environment also affect the use of these personal pronouns. For example, speakers commonly use *boku* to call himself will feel uneasy when encountering others who greeted him with *ore*. For example, let us see this data:

(9) `*Sensei no kaban, **ore** ga mochimashoo*`

"Biar *saya* yang membawakan tas ibu/bapak guru"

"Let it be *I* the one who brings your bag, teacher."

2.3.2   How To Mention Second Person Pronoun

The second person *anata* is used in textbooks is Japanese. But in reality greeting with *anata* as second person perounoun is not polite, especially when used to someone who is older, or to people who are not so familiar. The book `Korekara no Keigo` is a book that contains the results of the national language discussion Japan in Showa 27 (1952), determined that` *anata*` is used by his wife at the time to call her husband. But in an event titled "*Shinkon-san Irasshai*" *'Welcome to New Bride',* a private television in Japan lately, when the interviewer asked the wife:

(10)`*Goshujin no koto nan to yobimasuka*`

"Anda memanggil apa kepada suami?"

"You call your husband what?"

Their answers are various, ranging from `*daaringgu*` *'darling',*` Ichiro-kun` (first name basis), `Suzuki-san` (surname basis),` *sensei*` (addressing respected person, teachers and doctors), etc. Thus the wives are now less willing to comply with the regulations, by calling `anata` to her husband.

Then in Japanese to call two unknown persona in greeting, father/mother or brothers/sisters usually use proper name, just as in Indonesian. When greeting other parties beside oneself, after the proper name in Japanese is used `~san`, which is a greeting that does not distinguish between the sexes also age. As with the greeting father/mother, brother/sister in Indonesian, greeting `~san` cannot stand alone, so it is usually used to follow proper names or positions on a particular profession, for example, to address oneself, `Tanaka-san` (Mr/Mrs/brother/sister named Tanaka) or for office, for example, `Shachou-san" (directors).

When greeting other person by using personal pronouns, in addition to maintaining an attitude, we also need to think about the social status and relationship intimacy.

2.3.3   How To Mention Third Person Pronoun

In Japanese spoken language when greeting men with third person pronoun the greeting used is `kare`, and for women` kanojo`, whereas in the formal variety to greet the third person is `ano hito` that respect diversity adalah`ano kata`.

Affixing suffix ~ra on `kare` (for male persona) into 'karera` is a form of plurality. Form of plurality for `kanojo` (greeting for third person women) and `ano hito` is used with addition of suffix ~tachi, into 'kanojotachi` and 'ano hitotachi`. `Ano kata` is affixed to the suffix` ~gata become 'anokatagata`. The plurality of the third person male and female, greeting used is `karera`, referring to the third person pronoun for men.

2.4.   Greeting in Family Environment

When greeting directly to a younger brother, the name used is usually not their surname. But when speaking to other people (outside the family), used greeting `otooto` is used to greet a brother, and` imooto` for a sister.

Greeting for older sister/brother does not use name, both surname or first name. Greeting for father is `otoosan`, for mother is `okaasan`, for older brother is `oniisan`, older sister `oneesan`. If one has more than one older siblings, to differentiate one from another, before the greeting `oniisan` and `oneesan`, together with their first names, for example `Ichiro oniisan` or `Yumiko oneesan`.

In Japanese greeting in the family is different with greeting when we are directly addressing other people outside the environment. For example, during a direct greeting to grandfather, we use `*ojiisan*` , but when we are talking about him with someone else without his presence, we use '*sofu*`, as we can see in the following data.

(10) *Sofu* to *chichi* wa dekakemashita.

"**Kakek** dan **ayah** sedang ke luar rumah."

"**Grandfather** and **father** are not home."

III. Conclusion

From the data above, I can come to a conclusion that Japanese language is one of the languages that will always maintain harmonious relations between oneself and the other person. The question arises: why do Japanese people have such a mindset? According Orimori in *Nihongoshi* (1997: 25), since Japanese people at the beginning of time was living under an isolation, on small islands, and thus required good cooperation with other nations by creating an expression of language as much as possible to avoid a conflict with the interlocutors.

Language as a tool to convey your thoughts and feelings to the listener and has close relationship with the user community languages. Whether an expression of a language is used or not sometimes depends on the personal habits of each of their speakers. But most of the phrase in the language is heavily influenced by the way of thinking, acting and habits of the language users. As well as respectful language standard `*keigo*` in place of humanity, as truly a reflection of Japanese society.

For foreigners who do not understand the nature of the Japanese people it would be confusing, therefore there is a saying, in a bit cynical sense, about `Japanese smile`, which means that in response of interlocutors Japanese people usually laugh, although they do not understand the meaning of the speaker. Yet beyond the smile, a willingness to not offend the other person remains present.

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