Special issue of *East Asian Pragmatics* Linguistic impoliteness in a polite society: Ideology and practice in Japanese spoken and written discourse Introduction

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We are pleased to publish this collection of articles on impoliteness in Japanese society in *East Asian Pragmatics*. This special issue explores ideologies and practices of linguistic impoliteness in spoken and written discourse in Japan, where politeness is given particular cultural significance.

While linguistic politeness across diverse cultures and languages, including Japanese, has been investigated extensively since Brown and Levinson first offered their politeness theory in 1987, research on linguistic impoliteness has trailed behind. Nevertheless, in western scholarship, it has been the focus of a fair amount of research since the 1996 publication of a seminal paper by Culpeper (e.g., Bousfield & Locher, 2008; Culpeper, 1996, 2005, 2011; Culpeper, Bousfield, & Wichmann, 2003). Scholars have examined linguistic impoliteness, and mock impoliteness (e.g., Culpeper, 2005; Taylor, 2015), in a wide range of social contexts such as workplaces (e.g., Mullany, 2008; Schnurr, Marra, & Holmes, 2008), political discourse (García-Pastor, 2008), army recruit training (Bousfield, 2008; Culpeper, 1996, 2011), and call centres (Archer & Jagodziński, 2015), among others. Most of this work, however, looks at English-speaking contexts.

In the Japanese pragmatics and sociolinguistics literature, studies on impoliteness are still scarce (but see Nishimura, 2019). As a marginalised topic in Japanese society, impoliteness is also to some extent marginalised in Japanese

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sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and related fields. For the most part, when Japanese research does mention impoliteness, it is in politeness studies and in relation to the non-use of honorifics, and even then, its existence may only be implied. This paucity of impoliteness research in Japanese may be attributed to the dominant societal ideology that strongly emphasises politeness. It is also the case, of course, that it is more difficult to collect naturally occurring data containing impolite acts than that containing polite acts. In short, we still do not know much about linguistic impoliteness in Japanese society, but in order to talk about it, we must also discuss honorifics and politeness.

Because a dominant Japanese language ideology considers honorifics (*keigo*) to be linguistic markers of politeness, many linguistic politeness studies in Japanese have focused on them, particularly the addressee honorifics (see Ide, 2006). As Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith (2016, p. 125) observed:

Honorifics are often also regarded as evidence for a cultural emphasis on an innate, always already present, Japanese politeness; indeed, *keigo* forms are so strongly associated with the enactment of linguistic politeness that other ways of being linguistically polite – using positive instead of negative phrasing, etc. – have been seriously neglected.

The Japanese word for ‘honorifics’, *keigo*, means ‘respect word(s)’. The addressee honorifics, which are widely used and contrasted with their plain form non-honorific counterparts, are called *teineitai*, meaning ‘polite form’. This terminology reflects and reinforces the dominant ideology that honorific usage *is* polite. The prominent role honorifics play in Japanese language and society has been the basis of important challenges to Brown and Levinson’s (1987) face-saving view of politeness. For example, Ide (2006) asserted that Brown and Levinson’s theory fails to explain the Japanese context because it treats honorifics as merely one of the negative politeness strategies. In her view, honorifics are central to the pragmatics of the Japanese language because speakers of Japanese are constantly faced with the choice between the honorific and non-honorific forms when they speak. Ide proposed that the choice is made according to *wakimae* ‘discernment’ rather than being shaped by ‘politeness strategies’.

The language ideology that equates honorifics with politeness assumes one-to-one mapping between honorific forms and politeness. Not only lay people but also some scholars advocate this view. Recent studies on honorifics from the indexical point of view, however, challenge this ideology and contend that honorifics are not always polite because the meaning of a linguistic form does not entirely reside in the form but partly comes from the context of its use (e.g., Cook, 2006, 2008; Dunn, 2005; Geyer, 2013; Okamoto, 2011). For example, Cook (2008) demonstrated that the addressee honorifics have a field of potential social meanings (“an indexical field”; Eckert, 2008); their use can, for instance, indicate

the person in charge, a knowledgeable party, a presenter, lower status, and polite acts, among other meanings. Studies of honorifics from the indexical perspective have greatly contributed to our understanding of the dynamic and fluid functions of honorifics and their tenuous relation to politeness. They also suggest the need to explore the non-use of honorifics from the indexical perspective. For example, not every instance of the plain form is considered to be not polite or impolite; mutual plain-form use among close friends or family members is informal rather than impolite. As Haugh (2018) recently pointed out, linguistic politeness can be achieved without any honorifics in Japanese. Moreover, certain styles can index impoliteness regardless of the use or non-use of honorifics (Suzuki, this issue). As we know, the context in which a linguistic form occurs plays an important role in the semiotic process, which is why the indexical perspective is important in linguistic (im)politeness research. All articles in this special issue take the indexical view, treating honorifics and non-honorifics as indices that have a field of potential social meanings.

In one of the conversations that appears in Haugh's (2018) study, a female participant thanks a male participant for lending his car to her family, without using honorifics. This example suggests that politeness can be expressed either referentially, nonreferentially, or by combining the two. Honorifics are considered nonreferential indices (Silverstein, 1976), as they do not affect the referential content of an utterance. What is problematic is when co-occurring referential and nonreferential expressions are in conflict, which can happen in either of two combinations: (a) referentially face-enhancing expression + [–honorific] and (b) referentially face-attacking expression + [+honorific]. Whether or not (a) is polite depends on the context in which it is used. Even though such an utterance expresses politeness referentially, it may sound impolite if it is uttered in a formal situation. In contrast, it can be polite when used in an informal context (e.g., Haugh, 2018). Its interpretation also depends on the language ideologies of the speakers, which can differ even within the same interaction (see Okamoto, 2011; Geyer, this issue). As for the case of (b), Brown and Levinson (1987) treat honorifics that co-occur with an FTA (face-threatening act) as a negative politeness strategy, meaning that the honorifics mitigate the FTA. In (b), the honorifics reduce the face threat, but the face-attacking referential content remains. The question is whether or not (b) is interpreted as impolite because of that face-attacking referential content. From the indexical perspective, honorifics do not necessarily index politeness; the role of the honorifics in (b) could be to display some characteristic of the speaker, such as a good upbringing, refinement, or professionalism. This problem has not been discussed much in the literature of (im)politeness in the West due to the lack of honorifics in English. However, it is an important problem when studying linguistic (im)politeness in languages

with elaborate systems of honorifics such as Japanese and Korean, because speakers of these languages constantly need to make choices between honorific and non-honorific forms. This means that speakers of honorific languages have a wide variety of options for linguistically displaying (im)politeness. In a language such as Japanese, which signals politeness/impoliteness referentially and nonreferentially (e.g., through the presence or absence of honorifics), how does referential impoliteness interact with nonreferential impoliteness? Cook's article in this issue addresses precisely this question.

Against the backdrop of the high cultural value assigned to being polite, what kinds of acts count as linguistic (im)politeness in Japanese society? Some research has examined how politely certain speech acts, such as requests, refusals, and disagreements, are performed in Japanese, often in comparison with similar acts in English (e.g., Beebe & Takahashi, 1989; Fukushima, 2000; Kinjo, 1987; Kumatoridani, 1999). These studies collected data through discourse completion tests (DCT) in order to control sociolinguistic variables. The findings of studies using DCTs, however, do not necessarily reflect what the participants actually do but instead reveal their emic understandings. Thus, these studies have illuminated the similarities and differences of emic understandings of polite speech acts between native speakers of Japanese and English. Metapragmatic analysis of lay people's emic understandings is a productive method of learning how a given group of society sees (im)politeness, because it reveals cultural understandings and evaluations of "first order (im)politeness" or "(im)politeness1" (Watts, Ide, & Ehlich, 2005). Some studies have further used metapragmatic interviews to investigate cultural concepts related to politeness, such as attentiveness, empathy, and anticipatory inference, finding that their participants consider these concepts to be related to politeness and important components of Japanese culture (Fukushima, 2016; Fukushima & Haugh, 2014). By analysing metapragmatic discourse on websites concerning culturally specific notions such as a new copular form *su*, double honorifics, and *tameguchi* 'equalese, slang talk', three articles in this issue clarify the emic understandings of Japanese people regarding linguistic (im)politeness. As discussed in more detail below, these articles demonstrate how language ideologies are maintained and transformed (Okamoto, this issue; Geyer, this issue) as well as how they are utilised to raise speakers' social standing (Nakamura, this issue) in a society where linguistic politeness has an especially high cultural value.

Further investigations into how linguistic impoliteness works in Japanese society should raise new theoretical questions. For instance, where do impolite acts occur in Japanese society and what kinds of acts are judged to be impolite? In a society where politeness is of foremost importance, what is the role of impoliteness and what does an impolite act accomplish? And in a language such as Japa-

nese, which can signal politeness/impoliteness referentially and nonreferentially, how does referential impoliteness interact with nonreferential impoliteness? Further, how do societal and media discourses about impoliteness construct language ideologies that serve to legitimise, maintain, and transform the cultural value of politeness? This special issue addresses some of these questions.

Momoko Nakamura takes up a newly emerging speech style involving *su*, a shortened form of the polite copula *desu*. While male students employ the style to enact multiple meanings including politeness in their local interactions, native speakers' evaluations of the style on a website predominantly claim that the style is impolite, reducing the style's multiple meanings observed in the students' conversation. In regimenting indexical meanings of the style, these commentaries utilise two approaches: to write responses seriously without *su* and humorously with *su*. By refuting the style's politeness, the website commentaries maintain the values of linguistic politeness and polite hegemonic Japanese masculinity. The article illustrates how mediatised discourse manages and polices ideologically important boundaries through indexical regimentation.

Shigeko Okamoto investigates native speakers' metapragmatic comments on Japanese honorifics expressed in blogs. After summarising the grammatical categories of honorific forms provided by governmental guidelines, Okamoto examines how non-linguists classify honorific forms according to these grammatical categories, how they evaluate specific usages of honorific forms, and what meanings they ascribe to these usages. The analysis finds wide diversity not only in the ways people classify honorific forms into grammatical categories, but also in their evaluations and interpretations of the forms, demonstrating that honorifics are not always polite. The findings offer additional evidence for indexicality by showing that the indexical meanings of Japanese honorifics are variable, multiple, and context-dependent.

Satoko Suzuki looks at the ways hypermasculine language, a speech style associated with tougher, more hard-edged masculinity, is employed in advertising. Suzuki's analysis of advertisements first finds that hypermasculine language is a linguistic resource that can conjure up diverse meanings including assertiveness and vulgarity, (hetero)sexual desirability, rapport among male speakers, warmth, and youth, and argues that these multiple meanings constitute the indexical field of the speech style. Second, creators of shock advertisements routinely commodify hypermasculine language as a marker of impoliteness, activating the meanings of aggression and rudeness above other meanings, and thus shifting the indexical field of the style. The article accounts for the way styles function as resources for impoliteness in the context of Japan, where linguistic politeness is so prominent.

Naomi Geyer turns her gaze toward how people discursively create and negotiate linguistic norms, by analysing evaluations of medical practitioners' use and

non-use of honorifics in online discussion boards. Geyer's analysis indicates that people's assessments of honorific (non-)use vary widely depending on multiple factors including interlocutors' age and social distance, the location and type of medical institution, their views of medical practice, and situational factors such as urgency. People often appreciate medical practitioners' non-use of honorifics when they are experiencing urgency, vulnerability, and/or anxiety. The discussion-board participants both shift and reinforce existing honorific norms for ordinary encounters, by extending their application to the special case of medical discourse. The study illustrates the dynamic negotiation process of linguistic appropriateness within the competing ideologies of honorifics.

Haruko M. Cook's study examines a case of institutional impoliteness where impoliteness is sanctioned. The company under study has two conflicting institutional demands: to train new employees to be polite professionals through the training philosophy of using impoliteness. The data show that when the referential content of the trainer's utterance is face-attacking, her utterance often co-occurs with honorifics. According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, such a use of honorifics is a negative politeness strategy that mitigates a face-threatening act to save the hearer's face. This detailed analysis of the trainer's speech finds, however, that her use of honorifics along with face-attacking referential expressions is a way of resolving the conflicting demands of the institution. The article contributes to (im)politeness research by distinguishing referential and nonreferential (im)politeness.

As far as we know, this special issue is the first published collection of articles on linguistic impoliteness in Japanese society. The contribution of this issue is twofold. First, it demonstrates where impoliteness is observed or valued in Japanese society: Impoliteness is utilised in new-employee orientation as a means of breaking down old identities, just like in army-recruit training in the West (Cook); impoliteness is commodified in shock advertisements (Suzuki); and *tameguchi* 'equalese, slang talk' is valued by some segments of the society (Geyer). Second, it demonstrates that in Japanese society, where a cultural emphasis on linguistic politeness is the norm, language ideologies are not monolithic but vary among speakers and social contexts. What is traditionally considered polite (e.g., honorifics) can be seen as impolite, while what is typically considered impolite (e.g., *tameguchi*) can be evaluated as polite (Okamoto, Geyer). Social context also affects how language ideologies are utilised (Nakamura).

As this special issue breaks new ground in linguistic impoliteness research in Japanese society, it only touches on some of the many issues to be explored in this field. Future research, we hope, will further expand and more deeply explore the questions we raise in this issue in order to better understand the complex and dynamic functions of linguistic impoliteness.

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