

SOCIAL FACTOR VARIATIONS OF OWABI HYOUGEN ‘APOLOGY’ IN JAPANESE LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses variations of *owabi hyougen* ‘apology’ in Japanese Language based on users' social factors. There are two research questions: how are the forms of apology utterances in Japanese Language and what factors are underlying those utterances. This descriptive-qualitative research uses data of utterances containing apology taken from natural conversations of Japanese native speakers through listening, tapping, and recording. The collected data are then analyzed based on forms of utterance and users' social factors. The research results show that the forms of apology in Japanese Language are based on levels of politeness respectively ranging from the lowest to the highest: *warui/gomen*, *sumanai/suimasen*, *sumimasen/gomenasai*, *shitsureidesukedo*, *moushiwake arimasen/moushiwakegozaimasen*. The underlying social factors are age, position/status, and closeness.

Key Words: *Owabi Hyougen*, Honorific Language, Social factor, Utterance, Politeness

Introduction

In sociolinguistics, language is closely related to social and situational factors. The social factors are shown by the language users' social factors, including social status in the society, education level, age, sex, and social relationship. The situational factors are associated with "who speaks, what language, to whom, and when". Based on these factors, a speaker must have an ability to determine a language used to create a good communication. Not only focusing on grammatical structures, the diction (words selection) within an utterance due to the social and situational factors greatly influences a communication process. Sociolinguistics, in this case, provides a great benefit for human social interaction when using a communication device called language.

One of language appropriateness determinations to create a good communication is shown by the appropriateness in determining expressions of apology. In Indonesian language, there are many expressions of apology either directly or indirectly expressed. The longer the expression, it may be concluded, the more polite the expression is. In addition, it may also be concluded that the greater a person makes a mistake, the longer his expression of apology is. The following expressions may be different both in terms of politeness and meaning. One determining the expression of apology is to whom it is addressed.

- 1) Sorry, *aku datang telat*. (Sorry, I'm (coming) late)
- 2) *Maaf, aku datang terlambat*. (Sorry, I am (coming) late)
- 3) *Mohon maaf, saya datang terlambat*. (I am so sorry. I am (coming) late)
- 4) *Mohon maaf yang sebesar besarnya, saya datang terlambat*. (I am really so sorry. I am (coming) late)

The above data of Indonesian expressions of apology if translated into English Expression means the same, that is, ‘sorry, I am late’. Expression of apology number 1) is addressed to a speaking partner at the same level, such as in social position (a classmate), or

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having a very close relationship (the speakers are in different ages but they have already known each other very well). The marker used is an adopted word of "sorry" (English) followed by the word "aku" (a non formal Indonesian term for "I") and an adjective of "telat" (a non formal Indonesian term for "late"). Expression of apology number 2) is considered more polite as the word "maaf" (a formal Indonesian term for "sorry") followed by an adjective of "terlambat" (a formal Indonesian term for "late"). This expression may also be addressed to a speaking partner at the same level. However, using the word "aku" is not appropriate when it is addressed to a speaking partner who has a higher status, such as a university student to a lecturer although the word "maaf" tends to be neutral which may be used in formal or non-formal situations. Expression of apology number 3) is much more polite than the first and the second one as a marker of "mohon maaf" (a more formal and more polite Indonesian term for "sorry") is followed by a personal pronoun of "saya" (a formal Indonesian term for "I"). This expression of apology is addressed to a speaking partner who has a higher position due to the social factors than the speaker. Expression of apology number 4) has the highest level of apology of the previous ones as the expression of "mohon maaf yang sebesar-besarnya" (a more formal and much more polite Indonesian term for "sorry") not only demonstrates formality but also a longer expression of apology than the previous ones (number 1-3).

From the above examples, it can be concluded that in addition to the appropriateness in determining a language expression, the speaker's level of apology is also demonstrated by the length of expression of apology which is in accordance with that in Japanese. The expressions of apology in Japanese called "owabi hyougen" including the expressions of *Gomen*, *waruikedo*, *suman*, *gomennasai*, *sumimasen*, *moushiwakearimasen/moushiwakegozaimasen* mean apology with different levels of formality and politeness. This study discusses *owabi hyougen* in Japanese. How social factors underlie *owabi hyougen* in Japanese is a research problem analyzed in this study.

Research methodology

This research discusses social situations based on scale of social distance, social status, and formality upon the use of *owabi hyougen* in Japanese language. This is a descriptive-qualitative research study. Through this approach, a comprehensive and clear overview on social situations upon the use of *owabi hyougen* is in depth studied in the form of narrative. Data in the form of expressions of apology are obtained from natural conversations between native Japanese speakers. Data are collected by tapping and recording the Japanese natural conversations. The collected data are then classified based on the user's social situations.

Literature Reviews

This is considered as a sociolinguistic research as the study of language is associated with the background of the users. Holmes (2001) reveals that sociolinguistics is the study of relationship between language and society. The use of someone's language may not be seen individually but its function as a means for interaction in the society may be examined. The study of language in sociolinguistics is able to show the structures of a society. When communicating, communicators (speakers, writers, listeners, readers) should pay attention (background (the relationship between communicators and locations where a communication takes place)) the use of language as a communication device is based on setting factors and human relationships (Kayaba, 2009: 77). In this case, Hymes (1973), more specifically reveals eight components in the speaking events formulated in the form of SPEAKING acronym; setting and scene, Participants, Ends, Act Sequences, Key, Instrumentalities, Norm of interaction and interpretation, and Genres. Meanwhile, Rusminto (2010) says that there are some social aspects in communication, including aspects of social distance, social status, and formality.

According to Matsuura (2005: 315), Japanese people are very much careful in choosing the right words in making an apology. He says that *Owabi hyougen* has a variety of forms:

warui, *Gomen* / *gomennasai*, *sumimasen*, *moushiwakearimasen/moushiwakegozaimasen*. The forms of *owabi hyougen* have different levels of politeness.

- 5) ごめん、遅れちゃった。
Gomen, okurechatta
 Sorry, late (a verbal form of regret)
 ‘Sorry, I’m late’.
- 6) 遅くなって、すみません。
Osokunatte, sumimasen
Late sorry
 ‘Sorry for being late’.

The word *gomen* and *sumimasen* when translated into English is ‘sorry’. Those two forms of apology are different when seen from politeness point of view. The word *sumimasen* is more polite/ courteous when compared with the word *gomen*. If associated with the Hymes’ theory, the form of *gomen* is intended to a speaking partner who has a close relationship, for example a friendship, while *sumimasen* is a form of apology which is more polite than *gomen* and may be addressed to a speaking partner who has a higher position than the speaker, for example a student to the teacher.

Owabi hyougen variations as shown in expressions of apology above show that a language user has a variety of language use which is adjusted to its functions and situations without ignoring the applicable basic principles of the related language (Suwito, 1985: 29). In this case, Holmes (2001: 223) affirms on language variations that “language varies according to its uses as well as its user, according to where it is used and to whom, as well as according to who is using it.”

Discussion

As discussed above that this research uses data of conversations containing expressions of apology. Due to the anonymity of respondents, the researchers change the respondent names with the speaker and the speaking partner. Data are then analyzed by showing the participants’ relationships.

The relationship between the speaker and the speaking partner:
 friends at the same age and very close.

- 7) 話して : はっ、なん だよ おまえ。
hanashite haa, nan da yo omae
 The speaker *ha, what’s wrong (copula) you*
 ‘What’s wrong with you?’.
- 相手 : わるいけど、お父ちゃんとの約束だねえ。
aite waruikedo, otouchan to no yakusoku dane
 The speaking partner *sorry dad with (Particle) promise (copula)*
 ‘Sorry, I have an appointment with my dad’.

The above expressions of apology are from the speaking partner addressed to the speaker who has a relationship with a level of very close intimacy. Level of intimacy is shown upon the use

of the word *omae*, non-formal forms of personal pronouns of the second person when the speaker mentions the speaking partner. Thus, expressions of apology from the speaking partner to the speaker use non-formal forms with a very poor level of politeness. The most appropriate *owabi hyougen* expression in this context is *waruikedo*..

The relationship between the speaker and the speaking partner is friends at the same office. The speaker apologizing is younger and at junior level.

- 8) 話して : 休みの邪魔しちゃって、ごめんなさい。
hanashite yasumi no jamashichatte, gomennasai
 The speaker break time (particle) bothering sorry
 partner 'Sorry for bothering your break time'.

The *owabi hyougen* form of *gomennasai* is stated by the speaker as he regrets disturbing the speaking partner's break time. Since the speaker is younger than the speaking partner and junior at the office, then the apology expression of *gomennasai* is used as a form of politeness. *Gomennasai* when seen from the word formation comes from the word of *men*, which means sorry and is then given a prefix of *go-*. Prefix *go-* in Japanese is a marker of politeness, and ended with *-nasai* form. Therefore, *gomennasai* is understood as please forgive me.

The followings are examples of data using *owabi hyougen* of *sumimasen*.

The relationship between the speaker and the speaking partner is subordinate and superintendant. The subordinate makes a mistake for coming late in a meeting.

- 9) 話して : 遅くなって、すみません。
hanashite osokunatte, sumimasen
 The speaker late sorry
 'Sorry for coming late'.

相手 : そろそろ、始まるよ。
aite sorosoro, hajimasuyo
 The speaking soon start
 partner 'Let's start it immediately'.

In Japanese, *sumimasen* is not only used as *owabi hyougen* but also has the meaning of gratitude and permission. The data above show that expression of *sumimasen* is used to ask apology by the speaker as subordinate to the superintendant. Similarly to *gomennasai*, *sumimasen* is a polite apology. If associated with tenses, *sumimasen* may turn into *sumimasen deshita*. *Deshita* marker behind *sumimasen* shows past time. So, *sumimasen deshita* means please forgive the previous mistakes/which has been done. The following *owabi hyougen* has a higher level of politeness. Sometimes, the word *sumimasen* is used as the following examples.

The speaker is a committee member of speech contest. The relationship between the speaker and the speaking partner is friends. The conversation takes place during a meeting.

- 10) 話して : すいません、弁論大会 の ルールは まだ
Hanashite suimasen, benrontaikai no ruuru wa mada
 the speaker sorry speech contest (Particle) rule (Particle) not yet

書き 終わら ない ですけど。
Kaki owara nai desukedo.
 written completely not (Copula)

'maaf, rule speech contest belum selesai ditulis.'

(Sorry, the speech contest rules have not been completely written)

Owabi hyougen of suimasen is used in formal situations (in above example is a meeting situation). Although the members of meeting are friends, the use of *owabi hyougen* also considers location factor.

The speaker is a subordinate. The apology is addressed to head of the office since he is late in submitting the data report.

- 11) 話して : 申し訳ありません、また 1時間終わらせて
Hanashite moushiwakearimasen, mata ichijikan owarasete
 The speaker *maaf* (a form of honorific), *again one hour finish*
 いただけないでしょうか。
itadakenaideshouka
 receives (a form of honorific)

'I am really sorry. I wonder if I could have another hour to finish it'.

The use of *owabi hyougen of moushiwakearimasen* is a form of apology with the highest level of politeness. Based on the data above, the use of *moushiwakearimasen* is followed by an expression in the form of honorific language expressed by the subordinate to head of the office. In the form of over respectful (excessive respectful) form, the expression of *moushiwake gozaimasen* is sometimes used.

Conclusion

Owabi hyougen variations in Japanese language are highly determined by the participants' social factors when communicating. The *owabi hyougen* variations may be concluded through the following table.

<i>Owabi Hyougen</i>	Social Aspects		
	Social Distance	Social Status	Formality
<i>Waruikedo</i>	Very Close	Low	Non Formal
<i>Gomen/Gomennasai</i>	Quite Close	High	Formal
<i>Sumimasen</i>	Quite Close	High	Formal
<i>Suimasen</i>	Quite Close	High	Formal
<i>Moushiwake arimasen/ Moushiwake gozaimasen</i>	Very Far	High	Formal

Owabi hyougen variations are not limited to those analyzed in this study. There are more variations of *owabi hyougen* which show differences in use in the society. The further researches may analyze *owabi hyougen* with higher politeness. It is necessary for Japanese

language learners that they may practice the expressions of apology in accordance with the rules of its uses.

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