On a Sociolinguistic Approach to Language*

— in search of the relationship between language and culture

Harumi Nakamura

0. Introduction

Language has been defined as a highly structured and purely human instrument of communication. Many modern linguists have tried to clarify the human intellectual capacity or language competence and have made a thorough description of the phonological, syntactic and semantic aspects of language. Structuralists, under the influence of philosophical empiricism and psychological behaviorism, made a great contribution to the speech analysis on its surface level, and particularly to the field of language teaching and learning. Transformationalists, in general, have been deeply concerned with a cognitive approach to language (description) and have attempted to formulate and elucidate the intricate networks of the human brains. They have revised the inadequacies of the traditional grammar and structural linguistics, to the extent of linguistic revolution which was launched by the appearance of Noam Chomsky and others.

Language is also accounted for by other disciplines. Philosophers may particularly be interested in its semantic components and the relationship between language and logic. Psychologists may be curious about a mental phenomenon of language. Sapir and some other sociologists and anthropologists regarded language as a symbolic guide to culture, as an index to culture patterns and a bearer of culture. They claimed that language was reflected by society, man, behavior, thought, that is, culture as a whole. They have explored language in its social context and used the social system to decode the highly condensed utterances of everyday speech.

In this paper I am particularly interested in non-linguistic elements involved in the Japanese interpersonal communication. My main discussion will be directed to some inter-relationships between language and social structures and behavior by establishing some assumptive “culturemes.” For present purposes let us assume that the two terms “culture” and “social structure and behavior” are conceptually equiva-

*This is a revised version of “Some Views on Language and Culture,” which I presented at the International Christian University Linguistic Institute in Tokyo in August, 1975.

1 Langacker (1967), Chapter One.

2 Hymes (1964).

3 Young & Nakajima.
I. Relationships Between Language and Culture

The possible relationships between language and culture have been elaborately pointed out by many (socio)linguists and anthropologists. Boas claims that the language may affect particular characteristics of a culture, but the general state of a culture has the long-run determining effect on its language. Bernstein also explains that language behavior (speech, performance) can reflect social structure; that is, language behavior can define or condition social behavior (social interaction) and social structure, and that social structure can determine language behavior. Thus language structure and behavior can be inseparable from social structure and behavior. As Grimshaw points out, it is no exaggeration to say that "speech behavior is social behavior."

Take Whorf's classic example for instance. Snow is perceived as one sensation by most peoples, but to an Eskimo five different kinds of particulars of snow are brought to the level of consciousness; falling snow, snow on the ground, snow packed hard like ice, slushy snow and wind-driven flying snow, to which different vocabulary are given. In English, pronouns are inalienable ingredients to make a sentence grammatical, but not in the case of Japanese. If Japanese keeps them in actual utterances, the sentences will become unacceptable, or ambiguous, or even ungrammatical.

Example 1. (English) My father brushes his teeth when he wants to.
(Japanese) (Watashi-no) chichi-wa (kare-ga) (kare-no) ha-O migakitai toki, (ha-O) migaku.

Those pronouns in the parentheses are not necessary at all to make a grammatical sentence; they are dimmed and are not received by the nervous system of Japanese. The same is true with determiners, singularity and plurality markers among many others. The Japanese speech levels and styles, the details of which will be taken up later, indicate clearly that the Japanese are very conscious of the differentiations of sex, age, social statuses, etc. The Japanese make certain clear-cut distinctions between male and female speech. Feminine Japanese is often characterized by pronouns ("watashi" instead of "boku"), sentence final particles (as in "Hidoi wa" = 'You're awful', "Hoshii no" = 'I do want —', "Ii tenki da koto" = 'What fine weather!', "Takai n desu mono" = 'It's very expensive', etc.), interjections (such as "'ara,

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4 Hymes (1964).
5 In Fishman (1971).
"maa" = 'Oh dear'), inflectional style (women use more formal forms than men), more extensive use of polite style and by intonation.

Thought without language is impossible. The world view of a person or community is often shaped by the language used. "Kubi" ('neck') plays an important role in the Japanese phrase "Kubi o furu" (lit. 'swing one's neck'), but 'head' in English as in its English equivalent 'shake one's head'. "Kubi" obviously may be a crucial joint of head (thought) and body (action). If, under the influence of Buddhism, spirit, emotion, wisdom and body merge into "hara", or 'belly', then it is no wonder why Japanese has quite a few phrases composed of "hara", such as "hara-kiri" (commit suicide, lit. 'cut one's belly', instead of 'blow one's brains out' — but there is difference in tools), "hara o kimeru" (make up one's mind) and so forth.

It is interesting enough to see that people are sometimes misled by a blind reliance on words. "Ao" is blue, and "Midori" green. There is no doubt about that, but "ao-ba" is 'blue leaves' and the traffic signal "ao singo" is 'blue signal'. "Kuroi hitomi" literally means 'black eyes', which is a sentimental phrase in a song, but to Americans the Japanese have brown eyes. Are the Japanese color-blind? Definitely not. This is only to expose the relationship between language and culture as a whole.

However, we admit the view that language is fundamental, and certain aspects of language structure are completely independent of social variables, and are operated only by linguistic rules. In other words these language elements are not overtly affected or influenced by social structure and social interaction. This fact is emphasized by Labov and others.6 For example, the formal "yes-no" answer patterns to a negative question have different grammatical or logical forms between English and Japanese. Consider the following.

Example 2.

| Irimasen ka. → (lit.) Don't you want (it)? |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (a) Hai, irimasen. ←→ (a) Yes, I do. |
| (b) Iie, irimasu. ←→ (b) No, I don't. |

The Japanese "hai" corresponds to the English 'yes' and "iie" to 'no' respectively, but they represent quite the opposite referential meanings. The English 'yes' is logically supported by its parallel affirmative construction 'I do' and 'no' by its negative counterpart 'I don't'. In other words, 'yes' refers to a positive attitude, and 'no' occurs concomitantly with a negative proposition. However, in Japanese "hai" logically implies the questioner's assumption revealed in the question and the answerer just reconfirms the questioner's negative proposition by copying it ("irimasen" in this case) after "hai." "Iie" obviously denies the questioner's negative

6ibid.
proposition and is thus followed by the correction pattern (the affirmative "irimasu" here). Accordingly, "hai" and "iie" involve the logical control over the questioner's negative proposition, while 'yes' and 'no' match with their cooccurrent grammatical forms within the speaker's judgment. Needless to say, the Japanese (a) is equivalent to the English (b), and the Japanese (b) to the English (a). However, if the above observation works within the domain of logic, (providing that logic is part of culture), then this Japanese example may not be a felicitous one in pure linguistics proper.

II. Characteristics of Japanese Psycho-Cultural Communication

As mentioned earlier, our discussion will be centered on the actual use of language with its psycho-sociological implications. I am particularly concerned with personal psychology and social variables, such as social rank, social class, social status, social situations and human relationships, as well as age and sex. We will consider the total communication aspects of social interaction. First, let us consider the following examples which actually occur in the Japanese community.

(1)  
   a. Watashi wa Nakamura desu.  
   b. Watashi, Nakamura desu.  
   c. Watashi, Nakamura desu ga ...  
   d. Nakamura desu ga ...

The four sentences in (1) are all good sentences used in actual communication, and may have the identical linguistic meaning which conveys to the listener that the speaker is Mr. Nakamura. However, they all transmit different psycho-cultural effects or reaction to the listener. (1)-a is a complete, unabbreviated sentence, but it reveals the speaker's forcing and self-assertive attitude toward the listener and may offend the opponent by its aggressive implication. (1)-b lacks a topic marker or relational "wa", but sounds more natural and modest than (1)-a. In this case, the pure linguistic interpretation of deletion may not provide an adequate explanation. (1)-c is still better for the communicative purpose than the former two, by just adding the softener marker "ga" at the end of the utterance. The avoidance of the first and second person pronouns is characteristic of Japanese heteronomous or non-self-assertive attitude. This is revealed in (1)-d, which is the most polite form in telephone conversation. The replacement of "desu" by "de gozaimasu" changes the degree of politeness, but still the above exposition remains valid.

8 See Burling (1973) for more detailed discussion.
Japanese society provides a lot of cultural mechanisms that are both unique and interesting. Yoshikawa\textsuperscript{9} points out that in Japanese society it is better to keep harmony with the group than to assert righteousness or sincerity. The Japanese characteristically avoid anything to offend others directly. Thus the Japanese observe quite a few indirect, or even vague, refusal patterns meaning 'no' or "iie".\textsuperscript{10} This denial "iie" is governed by psycho-cultural implications and unconsciously avoided. In order not to be cast out from the group the Japanese have a tendency to avoid any open confrontation with his superior.

Let us consider our so-called situation-oriented, total and affective communication aspects that emphasize characteristic Japanese feelings and attitudes and a tacit or intuitive understanding. We are now getting into our proposed culturemes, expecting existence of harmonious telepathy between the reader and the author. The proposed culturemes under discussion are groupism, hierarchy and heteronomy\textsuperscript{11} among others.

### III. Groupism and Hierarchy

*Groupism*: The "Group-character" hypothesis concedes that Japan is one of the most group-conscious nations in the world. Japanese of all ages have a powerful urge toward group formation. Thus the following expressions are often given very proudly.

\begin{itemize}
  \item[(2)] a. \textit{A-Kaisha no W desu.} (I am Mr. W of A Company.)
  \item b. \textit{Shusshin wa X-Daigaku desu.} (I graduated from X University.)
  \item c. \textit{W-Daigaku no Y desu.} (I am Prof. Y of W University.)
\end{itemize}

"Japanese, like others, have numerous self-images. They perceive themselves as farmers, as students, or in other occupational roles; as members of a particular family, interest group, or class; as Tokyoites, as Asians and as Japanese."\textsuperscript{12} "The social groups a Japanese belongs to contribute significantly to his composite self-image. He forms ideas of what he is or should become by analogy with what his fellow members are in the nature of the group itself. In this connection his ethnic or national group is very important. For the Japanese, ethnic identity has been exceptionally clear and unambiguous."\textsuperscript{13} Consider the following.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[9] See Note 7.
\item[10] It has been discovered that the Japanese use approximately 16 suppletive expressions for "iie", a direct denial linguistic form. In addition to negation, "iie" functions as a polite response to the expressions of gratitude, apology, compliment, etc.
\item[13] ibid., p. 358.
\end{footnotes}
(3) a. Where are you from?  
(4) a. Okuni wa doko desu ka. (lit. Where is your home town/country?)  
   b. Shusshin wa doko desu ka. (lit. Where is your native place?)  
   c. Dochira no kata desu ka. (lit. Which region are you a native of?)  
   d. Umare wa doko desu ka. (lit. Where is your birthplace?)

(3) is almost equivalent to (4), but with a little different cultural implications. Japanese may ask such questions as (4) more often than Americans in the sense of the ethnic identity. To an American, a home town is a place where he is living now, or has long lived. Thus a proper response of a mobile American to (3) would be “I was born in X, brought up in Y and most my school days I used to live in Z. Now I live in W.”

The group is the basic unit of Japanese social organization. The group membership affects the entire social situation, and its effect is greatly felt in language. Japanese groupism can be considered in terms of the intimate groups (such as family members, close mates, etc.), the formal groups (such as company colleagues, professional association members, etc.), and the out-groups (“yosomono”, outsiders or strangers, or any other third person). The degree of ingroupness varies among intimate and formal groups, depending on the speakers’ views toward closeness.

The individual is defined by the whole, by his membership and by his position. His social relations are defined by his relation to the whole. The forms used by two individuals in conversation express the precise social relationship of the two individuals as viewed by the speaker. Thus a Japanese addresses a member of the same group in one way, and a member of another group in another way. One individual’s relation to another is a function of the relative status of the individual within a group or the relative status of his group within the group hierarchy in society. (5) represents the typical ways of talking based on groupism.

(5) a. Ways of talking within the ingroup (friends, colleagues, coworkers, etc.)
      ‘Will you explain it to me?’
   2. Chotto setsumei shite kudasai. ‘Explain it to me, please.’
   3. Chotto setsumei shite hoshii n desu ga.  
      ‘I want you to explain it to me.’
   b. Ways of talking to or among the outgroup (stranger, foreigners, etc.)
   1. Chotto setsumei shite kudasaimasen ka.  
      ‘Would you please explain it to me?’
   2. ”
   3. Chotto setsumei shite itadakemasen ka.
c. Ways of talking among the intimate group (family members, close mates, etc.)
   a. Chotto setsumei shite! ‘Explain it, (will you?)’
   b. Chotto setsumei shite choodai.
   c. " "

Basically different groups use different speech styles. Obviously the Japanese use a familiar or plain style among the peer members (a), full forms or formal forms to and among the out-group members (b), and contracted or abbreviated forms among the intimate group (c). It should be noted that the intonations are also different.

Japanese morality is often explained by the concept “group heritage,” which is the dominant factor in the traditional Japanese context. It means that a tradition is given and accepted as socially inherited. In such a society the ego is not developed. The ego is merely part of the established tradition.

**Hierarchy**: Groups within the entire society and individuals in each group are organized hierarchically in Japan. This means that the Japanese society reveals a vertical rather than horizontal pattern of institutionalized social relations. This hierarchical system shows superior-inferior human relations and different speech levels and styles. As shown in (5), a polite style is used toward one’s superiors and a plain one toward one’s peers or inferiors. Hierarchy and groupism are closely interrelated in language usage.

**Hierarchical Groupism**: The following three greeting formats in (6) are governed by hierarchical groupism.¹⁴

(6) a. Ohayoo. ‘Good Morning.’
   b. Ohayoo gozaimasu. ‘Good Morning.’
   c. Kon’nichi wa. ‘Hello.’
   d. Kon’ban wa. ‘Good Evening.’

What attracts our attention is that these greetings function to establish the hierarchical human relationships and are used as a tool of social integration. However, in the United States, they serve as the natural initiators of actual conversation. The Japanese greetings manifest further implications of putting the speakers under their particular social relation and acknowledging that social relation.

The different linguistic forms of the greeting are often accounted for by hierarchy and group-consciousness. For example, “ohayoo” (6–a) is used among one’s

¹⁴ Here I am not concerned with the situation in which they are used to arouse attention when calling at someone’s home or store.
peers and ingroup members. It is also addressed to the younger people and those of inferior statuses. Its full form "Ohayoo gozaimasu" (6-b) is a formal and honorific style to be addressed to one's superiors and out-group members. Sometimes the greeting may be eliminated completely depending on the closeness of friendship, relationship or association. Generally speaking, however, an appropriate greeting is required within a group and its absence would result in a kind of violation of the Japanese group courtesy. Therefore the greeting format is a gauge of the intensity of one's feelings of ingroupness in social relations.

Generally speaking the Japanese use one type of speech style toward their superiors, another toward their inferiors, still a different one toward their peers. They also differentiate their usage by group-classifying those persons involved in their speech. This differentiation is called hierarchical groupism. The Japanese Giving-Receiving verbs and speech styles are based on this hierarchical groupism.

(7) 1. a. Tomodachi wa ≤ boku ni hon o KUREMASHITA.
   (haha, otooto)
   ‘My friend/mother/brother gave me a book.’
   b. Sensei wa > boku ni hon o KUDASAIMASHITA.
   ‘My teacher gave me a book.’
   c. Tomodachi wa ≤ boku ni eigo o oshiete KUREMASHITA.
   ‘My friend taught me English.’
   d. Sensei ga > boku ni eigo o oshiete KUDASAIMASHITA.
   ‘My teacher taught me English.’

2. a. Boku wa ≥ otooto ni hon o YARIMASHITA.
   ‘I gave a book to my brother.’
   b. Boku wa < sensei ni hon o AGEMASHITA.
   ‘I gave a book to my teacher.’
   c. Boku wa ≥ otooto ni eigo o oshiete YARIMASHITA.
   ‘I taught English to my brother.’
   d. Boku wa < sensei ni eigo o oshiete AGEMASHITA.
   ‘I taught English to my teacher.’

3. a. Boku wa ≥ tomodachi kara hon o MORAIMASHITA.
   ‘I got a book from my friend.’
   b. Boku wa < sensei kara hon o ITADAKIMASHITA.
   ‘I got a book from my teacher.’
   c. Boku wa ≥ tomodachi ni eigo o oshiete MORAIMASHITA.
   ‘I had my friend teach me English.’
   d. Boku wa < sensei ni eigo o oshiete ITADAKIMASHITA.
   ‘I had my teacher teach me English.’

The degrees of distance between the speaker and the hearer are illustrated by the form
A \leq B. A = B indicates that A is equal to B or A and B are peers. A > B means that A is superior to or of a higher social status than B, and A < B vice versa. A = B is interpreted as "A and B are either equal or A is superior to B." Japanese has six giving-receiving verbs. As mentioned earlier, their choices are decided by the hierarchical groupism in the speaker-hearer (even the third person involved) relations. Their usages are simplified as follows.

(8) a. (Inward direction; the receiver is the speaker or his ingroup members)
   \{If the giver \leq the receiver, then use KURERU.
   \quad If the giver > the receiver, then use KUDASARU.
   
   b. (Outward direction; the receiver is other than the speaker or his outgroup members)
   \{If the giver \geq the receiver, then use YARU.
   \quad If the giver < the receiver, then use AGERU.
   
   c. (Receiving Situation)
   \{If the receiver \geq the giver, then use MORARU.
   \quad If the receiver < the giver, then use ITADAKU.

Japanese speech levels and styles, or speech gradations and social relations, are complex and confusing to the learners of Japanese. There are four discernible gradations, of which I am going to concentrate on Polite Speech Styles (2 and 3).

Speech Styles\(^{15}\)  
POLITE  
1. Plain or Familiar  
   tabe-ru  
2. Honorific or Deferential  
   meshiagar-u  
3. Humble  
   itadak-u  
4. Neutral or Elegant  
   
Example (to eat)

The formal distinguishing characteristics of these styles are to be found in nouns, personal pronouns, main verbs and verb phrases, copulas, existential verbs, affixes, etc. Some of the examples are shown in (9).

(9) English  
   (home, or you)  
   (reply)  
   (family)  
   Plain  
   uchi  
   henji  
   kazoku  
   Honorific  
   o-taku  
   o-henji  
   go-kazoku  
   Humble  

\(^{15}\)These are the most common and the most simplified classification of the Japanese speech styles. Some scholars, of course, have different classifications.
Most of the above examples are suppletive polite forms. But many verbs and verb phrases are subject to various transformations depending upon the degrees of politeness. For example, yomu (to read) → yomareru < o-yomi ni nareru < o-yomi ni naru < o-yomi nasaru < o-yomi ni narakuru, and o-yomi suru < o-yomi itasu, or yonde itadaku < o-yomi nega-aw < o-yomi itadaku, and even yomasete moraw < yomasete itadaku, and so forth.

Thus if you observe the sentences with the above details, without any subject or reference to the speaker, you can easily identify the sex, age, and social status of the character, by the speech forms used in the context of the situation. Notice the examples of (10).

(10) A: Donata ka phi, shachoo no tokoro e o-hanashi ni ikarematsu ka. (Is anyone going to go to talk to the Company President?)

B: Watashi phi, mairimatsu. Kachoo-san mo irashaimasu ka. (I will go. Are you also going, or coming along, Mr. Section Chief?)

In 10-A, the speaker has used the polite expressions (dare < donata, hanashi < o-hanashi, and iku < ikareru). Thus this utterance has been addressed to his formal or professional group members, including his colleagues, inferiors and superiors. If “irassharu” is used instead of “ikareru,” then it is addressed only to his superiors. In 10-B, since the speaker has used “mairu,” a humble form of “iku”, he is inferior to the speaker of 10-A. Because “kachoo-san” is superior to him, he has chosen “irassharu.” The final solution of the characters involved in this conversation is illustrated as follows.

Shachoo > Kachoo > speaker of 10-A > speaker of 10-B

The speaker of 10-B may be an ordinary employee. If the listeners were all peer
members of theirs or close mates, then the speakers would use the plain or familiar expressions. The subjective relational of 10-A is grammatically non-existent, but that of 10-B is deleted to avoid a forcing and aggressive attitude toward others. The choice of humble or honorific forms is very important in understanding the human relationships in social communication. Observe (11).

(11) Wrong: *Omachi shite iru aida ni dekimasu kara.*
    Right: *Omachi ni natte iru aida ni dekimasu kara.*
    (lit. It will be ready while you are waiting.)

Since "*o-machi suru*" is a humble form referring to the action of the speaker, "*o-machi ni naru*" has to be chosen as a deferential form to be addressed to the listener. Some more examples of this kind are

(12) Wrong: *Koko de o-ori itashimasu ka.* (Are you getting off here?)
    Right: *Koko de o-ori ni narimasu ka/*nasaimasu ka.

Wrong: *Dekiru dake hayaku oshirase shite kudasaimasen ka.*
    Right: *Dekiru dake hayaku oshirase kudasaimasen ka.*
    (Will you please let me know as soon as possible?)

IV. Heteronomy

As mentioned earlier, the Japanese have a psycho-cultural attitude of keeping the harmony and the order of the group, and think of others and try to avoid hurting their feelings in interpersonal communications. "AMAE" also functions as a mode of communication. The heteronomy of Japanese human relations is evidenced by such Japanese attitudes of being other-directed, and is characterized by vague, humble, modest, moderate, reserved, softening, indirect, non-self-assertive, circumlocutory, non-abrupt, non-explicit, non-decisive, non-aggressive, non-absolute, less exclusive, non-definite expressions. The Japanese have tendency to avoid any suggestion of abruptness and lack of modesty. This may serve to minimize something that offends or inconveniences the listener. If such expressions reflect the national character, then it may be pointed out that the Japanese lack individualism and emancipation of the self.

Heteronomy is characterized by the speaker's tendency to inflate the hearer while suppressing the speaker himself. In other words, it is characterized by self-demotion, self-denial, modesty and humbleness in referring to the speaker while making polite reference to the second person. The second person is made a decision-maker.

14 To all Japanese idiomatic expressions I have given literal English equivalents; many of which being awkward or non-existent in English.
The second person's status is promoted by the first person. The traditional Japanese emphasize "HIKAEME", or moderation, modesty and self-restraint. Now let us observe the following sentences.

(13) a. Mizu o ippai kudasai. (Please give me a glass of water.)
    b. Mizu o ippai kudasaimasen ka. (Would you please give me a glass of water?)
    c. Mizu o ippai itadakemasen ka. (Could I have a glass of water?)

(13)-a is a direct expression of polite request, but in (13)-b and c, the communicative emphasis is placed on the hearer's feelings. The speaker is modest and deprecating himself. He uses the other-directed expression, which is the most polite and preferable in the Japanese interpersonal communication. The example (14) is a classical one which shows the clear distinction between the social attitude of the Japanese and that of the Americans. The Americans use the direct imperative, but the Japanese prefer the softening and harmonizing expressions. Compare the two.

(14) a. Drink a coke! b. Kokakooora nomoo/nomimashoo!

In Japanese, apologetic and gratitude expressions occur more frequently than in English. Notice (15).

(15) a. Doomo (Pardon me, or I'm sorry. Thank you.)
    b. Sumimasen (deshita) (I'm sorry. Thank you.)
    c. Osore irimasu (Excuse me. I am much obliged.)
    d. Mooshiwake gozaimasen. (I apologize ... Thank you.)
    e. Gomen nasai (Pardon me. Thank you.)
    f. Arigatoo (gozaimasu/-mashita) (Thank you very much.)
    g. Go-kuroo-sama (desu/deshita) (Thank you for your doing me a favor.)
    h. Okage-sama de. (Thank you.)

(15)-a, b, c, d, e are used both for apology and gratitude, and (15)-f, g, h for gratitude only. Such expressions are an indication of the characteristic Japanese tendency to show modesty in their speech. (15)-b can be interpreted in this case as "I'm sorry I wasn't home when you called me" or "I'm sorry because I caused you the trouble and the disappointment of your telephoning me when I was out." This expression is distinctively other-directed and is an example of Japanese heteronomy.

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17 Actually this may belong to a subjunctive mood. This is similar to "Have a good time," which doesn't sound as hard as "And don't misbehave!" or "Close the door behind you!" The latter two are pure imperative.
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(15)-h promotes the status of the listener and humbles the speaker. It also shows the heteronomous attitude like (15)-b.

The typical Japanese attitude of modesty and self-deprecation is revealed in the sentences of (16).

(16) Question: Oisogashii desu ka. (Are you busy?)
   a. *Iie, amari isogashiku arimasen.* (No, I'm not very busy.)
   b. *Maa chotto.* Nani ka ... (A little bit. What can I do for you?)

Stimulus: *Chotto waipaa o kowashita n desu ga ...* (Sorry, I broke the windshield wiper.)
   c. *Ii n desu yo.* (That's all right. Never mind! Don't worry!)
   d. *Doozo okamai naku.* (Don't bother!)
   e. *Sen'etsu desu ga ...* (With your permission, ...)
   f. *Sashide gamashii koto de wa gozaimasu ga ...* (Excuse me, but ... I may make uncalled-for remarks, but ...)
   g. *Moshi mina-san ga yoroshikattara ....* (If you agree/permit ...)
   h. *Dekireba ... to omotte orimasu.* (If possible, ...)

i. *Honto ni tsumaranai mono de gozaimasu ga ...* (A real trivial thing, but ...)
   j. *Fudeki de gozaimasu ga ...* (...poorly made/cooked, but ...)
   k. *Gochisoo wa dekinai kedo ...* (...can't treat you with a feast, ...)
   (I may not be as good a cook as you might think, but ...)
   l. *Anata no omou hodo oishiku wa arimasen ga ...* (I am afraid it doesn't taste as good as you might expect ...)
   m. *Okuchi ni aimasu ka doo ka ...* (...whether it suits your taste or not)
   n. *Gokitai ni soeru ka doo ka* (whether it may meet your expectations or not)
   o. *Nani mo gozaimasen ga ...* (...nothing worthy to serve you ...)
   p. *Iie, mada heta (na n) desu.* (No, I'm still poor at ...)
   q. *Hontoo ni itaranai musume de gozaimasu ga ...* (...a real naive/inexperienced girl ...)

(16)-a, b, c illustrate the habitual avoidance of any suggestion of self-importance. In (16)-d, the speaker does not really mean what is verbalized, but rather he is demonstrating his modest and reserved attitude. The sentences from (16)-j to (16)-o simply provide the speaker's humble and reserved attitude of non-self-boasting, or non-self-assertion. These are not statements that criticize someone's cooking ability. (16)-p, q are still other humble sentences; the speaker is humbling himself, or downgrading his ingroup members. It would be embarrassing or awkward (*tereru,
hazukashii) for the Japanese to say he is good at something and to accept the compliment. The Japanese disclaim any aggressive and boasting attitude. The Japanese humble attitude toward others is revealed by the modest, reserved and non-self-assertive expressions.

(17) a. Sorosoro shitsurei shimasu. (It’s almost time for me to leave.)
    b. Sono hen de ... (Well ... at this time/place)
    c. Chotto ukagaimasu ga ... (Excuse me, may I ask ...)
    d. Isogashii n desu kedo ... (I'm busy now ...)
    e. Sore ni chotto yomitai hon ga arimasu kara ...
       (And there is a book I'd like to read ...)
    f. Mada shigoto-chuu da kara ... (I'm still working ...)

The sentences in (17) function as a signal to soften the tone and to avoid explicitness and abruptness. They are relatively meaningless in the context. They soften the direct and abrupt expressions. All of these phrases serve to minimize something which might offend or inconvenience the listener. They demonstrate a distinctive feature of the Japanese heteronomous attitude toward human relationships. (17)-b does not indicate any specific time or place. It doesn't bind the listener. It doesn't impose the speaker's suggestion on the listener, either.

Lastly let us consider the following euphemism.

(18) a. Kyoto to yuu tokoro (a place called Kyoto)
    b. Den'wa de shirasete kudasareba, tsugoo ga ii n desu ga.
       (It would be more convenient if you let me know by phone.)
    c. Dochira no Y ka ukagatte okanakute mo yoroshuu gozaimashoo ka.
       (May I ask which Y is speaking?)
    d. Choodo ohiru goro ni irashaimashita. (Came exactly around noon.)
    e. Ashita wa kitto hareru deshoo. (It may surely be fine tomorrow.)
    f. Are wa tashika Nichiyooobi datta to omoimasu.
       (I think it was obviously Sunday.)
    g. ...shite itadakenai/kudasaranai deshoo ka. (Would you mind ...?)
    h. Ikanai hoo ga ii n ja nai ka to omoimasu ga.
       (I suppose/suggest you shouldn't go.)
    i. Ano kata ja nai ka to omoimasu kedo. (I think that person is ...)
    j. Yoji ni naranakereba, wakarimasen. (I can't tell ... before four.)
    k. Ooi kamo shiremasen. (Many may show up.)

The sentences in (18) are all circumlocutory or periphrastic expressions. The italicized parts are indirect or polite markers. Some might function as emphatic and clearly descriptive. However, in most cases, one can make the expression less
definite, less direct and thus more polite by adding such markers or items. The Japanese prefer non-definite expressions, especially when revealing the speaker's wish or desire, to avoid definiteness and to add a softening effect to the abrupt or direct statement. The Japanese heteronomously avoid asserting their opinion on a matter. The direct equivalents of (18)-a, b, c are like

a'. Kyoto
b'. Den'wa de shirasete kudasai.
c'. Dochira no Y desu ka.

But these statements are too short and too direct to be polite enough for the courteous Japanese. The long, troublesome, and indirect ways of talking are more vague and polite to the Japanese. In (18)-d, "choodo" (=exactly) and "goro" (=approximately) are contradictory to each other. None the less they are consistently used for a favorable softening effect. "Goro" only reveals the speaker's reserved attitude toward the listener. This is true with (18)-e, f and others, as in "kitto" (=without fail) vs. "deshoo" (=probably), and "tashika" (=obviously) vs. "omow" (=guess). It seems that Japanese "omow" and English "think" have different sociolinguistic functions. Japanese "omoimasen" appears to be very self-assertive. Thus English "I don't think it's going to rain" is similar to Japanese "Ame wa furanai to omoimasu."

We have examined the traditional linguistic and cultural patterns existing in interpersonal communications in Japanese society. However, since the language and society are changing from generation to generation, the modern and future relationships between the language and culture in this particular community may change a great deal. Some of the more polite forms are already disappearing from ordinary usage. This phenomenon remains to be adequately explicated.

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