

Politeness and Discourse Particles

PLIN0020 Advanced Semantic Theory

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Presentation on 12 Dec

- ▶ 10 min each, alphabetical order
- ▶ Prepare slides or handouts
- ▶ Minimal requirement: state the puzzle with data
- ▶ If possible, discuss theoretical implications with appropriate references
- ▶ Course evaluation on 5 December.

Politeness

Politeness Across Languages

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- ▶ Eye-contact, smile
- ▶ How to accept an invitation
- ▶ How to toast, how to offer a gift
- ▶ Saying *Thank you*, *Please*, etc.

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We'll focus on linguistic aspects.

That said, certain linguistic markers of politeness are perhaps grammaticalisations of behavioral politeness (e.g. *Will/Would you ...?*)

Polite Pronouns

Many languages encode politeness in 2nd person pronouns: *tu-vous* in French, *tú-usted/vosotros-ustedes* in Spanish, etc.

Languages/cultures differ exactly when the formal pronouns ought to be used, e.g. whether they are used among family members, but this probably should be explained in terms of behavioral politeness, rather than in terms of the ‘meaning’ of the expressions.

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What is the semantics of polite pronouns, then?

More Complex Paradigms

Languages like Japanese have a lot of 2nd person pronouns (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_pronouns#List_of_Japanese_personal_pronouns)

It also has a lot of 1st person pronouns, differing in formality/politeness.

But precise descriptions are often very difficult, uses change/are invented.

E.g. *boku* is usually used by small boys, has specific connotations when used by teenagers and adults, but has recently been used by female speakers, especially on the internet.

uchi is a dialectal female 1st person pronoun, but has been often used by teenage girls in Tokyo Japanese since the early 2000s.

See Christofaki (2018) for more theoretical discussion.

Politeness Affixes

Many languages use diminutives to express intimacy, e.g. Dutch *-tje*, Greek *-aki*, Mandarin Chinese *xiao-*, etc.

When it appears on a proper name, the emotion expressed is towards the referent (it also signals that the current conversation is informal). Also *Look at the cat-DIM*, e.g.

But it can be towards the addressee, especially in questions, imperatives and hortatives, e.g. *Let's read a book-DIM*.

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Japanese and Korean use honorific affixes on nouns.

- ▶ *go-byooki* 'HON-disease': honorification towards the possessor
- ▶ *go-ryooshin* 'HON-parent': honorification towards the possessor or towards the referent

Shifting with Russian infinitival diminutive?

Infinitival verbs in Russian can bear a diminutive suffix.

- (1) пойдёшь спат-**еньки**
let's to.sleep-DIM
'Let's go sleep'

Affection towards Hearer

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let's to.sleep-DIM

‘Let’s go sleep’

Affection towards Hearer

- (2) я хочу спат-**еньки**
I want to.sleep-DIM

‘I want to sleep’

Affection towards sleeping?

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let's to.sleep-DIM
'Let's go sleep' Affection towards Hearer
- (2) я хочу спат-**еньки**
I want to.sleep-DIM
'I want to sleep' Affection towards sleeping?
- (3) он хочет спат-**еньки**
he wants to.sleep-DIM
'He wants to sleep' Affection towards 'he'

Honorific Verbs: Polite

Japanese and Korean have many verbal honorific markers.

Mas- in Japanese signals that Speaker is being polite towards Hearer.

(4) ame-ga fut-tei-ru
rain-NOM fall-PROG-PRES
'It's raining'

(5) ame-ga fut-tei-**mas**-u
rain-NOM fall-PROG-POL-PRES
'It's raining' Speaker is polite with Hearer

The 'plain' form (4) is often interpreted as not polite.

Honorific Verbs (cont.)

Another kind of honorific affix marks honorification towards the subject of the verb.

- (6) sensee-ga mat-tei-mas-u
teacher-NOM wait-PROG-POL-PRES
'The teacher is waiting'
- (7) sensee-ga o-mach-**ininat**-tei-mas-u
teacher-NOM HON-wait-HON-PROG-POL-PRES
'The teacher is waiting' Speaker respects the teacher

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teacher-NOM HON-wait-HON-PROG-POL-PRES
'The teacher is waiting' Speaker respects the teacher

There's an affix that marks honorification towards a non-subject.

- (8) gakusee-ga sensee-o o-mach-**ishi**-tei-mas-u.
student-NOM teacher-ACC HON-wait-HON-PROG-POL-PRES
'Students are waiting for the teacher'
Speaker respects the teacher

Honorific Verbs: Notes

In some cases the honorific form is suppletive, e.g.

- ▶ *ku-ru* ‘come-PRES’
- ▶ *irassya-ru* ‘come.HON-PRES’ (subject-oriented)
- ▶ *ukaga-u* ‘come.HON-PRES’ (non-subject-oriented)

There's a debate about whether honorific verbal marking is syntactic agreement (on par with person/gender/number agreement). Boeckx & Niinuma (2004) say yes, and Kim & Sells (2007) say no.

Expressive Dimension

Potts (2005, 2007) and Potts & Kawahara (2004) claim that the kind of meaning expressed by honorifics is independent from the literal meaning of the sentence.

It doesn't interact with negation, conditionals, questions, etc.

- (9) sensee-ga **o-mach-ininat**-tei-na-i
teacher-NOM HON-wait-HON-PROG-NEG-PRES
'The teacher is not waiting' Speaker respects the teacher

This doesn't mean: It's not true that [the teacher is waiting and I respect the teacher].

- (10) sensee-wa **o-mach-ininat**-tei-mas-u-ka?
teacher-NOM HON-wait-HON-PROG-POL-PRES-Q
'Is the teacher waiting?' Speaker respects the teacher

This cannot mean 'Are both of the following true: The teacher is waiting and I respect the teacher?'

Potts's Characterization

Potts argues that honorifics are *expressives*, items that express the speaker's emotion, independently of the meaning of the rest of the sentence.

Potts's (2007) characterization of expressives

- ▶ **Non-displaceability:** Expressives take widest scope and predicate something of the utterance situation.
- ▶ **Independence:** Expressive content belongs to an independent dimension of meaning
- ▶ **Perspective dependence:** Expressive content is evaluated from a perspective, typically the speaker's
- ▶ **Descriptive ineffability:** No satisfactory paraphrase of expressive content with nonexpressive terms
- ▶ **Repeatability:** Repeating an expressive item leads to strengthening the emotive content

Independence?

I don't think Potts convincingly argues against the presuppositional analysis of honorifics.

In particular, Potts seems to assume that quantification is impossible with honorifics, due to Independence (see Potts & Kawahara 2004). But:

(11) otokonohito-ga nanninka sotode
men-NOM some outside

o-mach-*ininat*-tei-mas-u

HON-wait-HON-PROG-POL-PRES

'Some men are waiting outside'

Speaker respects the men

The honorific inference and presuppositions (e.g. factive presupposition of *know*) behave similarly.

More on Expressives

Potts developed a formal framework for talking about various similar linguistic items, slurs like *Jap*, epithets like *bastard*, and expressives like *fucking*.

Languages have ways to mark *anti-honorifics* as well.

Potts & Kawahara (2004) talk about cases like (12) in Japanese.

- (12) Sam-ga warai-**yagat**-ta
 Sam-NOM laugh-ANTI-HON-PAST
 ‘Sam laughed.’ The speaker views Sam negatively

But it sounds to me that the attitude expressed is towards the event, rather than towards the speaker.

Potential Essay Topics

- ▶ Formal/Polite 2nd person pronouns and pronominal features (cf. Wang 2019)
- ▶ Verbal honorifics as agreement (or not)
- ▶ Honorifics (pronouns, verbs) as expressives (or not)
- ▶ Diminutives as expressives (or not)
- ▶ Interpretation of diminutives in different grammatical contexts (cf. diminutives with infinitivals in Russian)
- ▶ Social politeness and linguistic behavior (see References)

References

Boeckx & Niinuma (2004) Conditions on agreement in Japanese. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*.

Christofaki (2018) *Projected Self*. Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge.

Kim & Sells (2007) Korean honorification: A kind of expressive meaning. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics*.

Van Olmen (2017) Politeness in Language. Oxford Bibliography in Linguistics

Contains a short summery of the literature with a detailed list of key publications, including survey articles. Good place to start.

Potts (2005) *The Logic of Conventional Implicature*. OUP.

Potts (2007) The expressive dimension. *Theoretical Linguistics*.

Potts & Kawahara (2004) Japanese honorifics as emotive definite descriptions. *Proceedings of SALT 14*.

Wang (2019) Possible and impossible honorifics without [HON].

Discourse Particles

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Small expressions such as *right*, *ok*, *y'know*, *like*, *man* and Canadian *eh* are often called *discourse particles*.

There are studies about semantics/pragmatics (as well as sociolinguistics) of these expressions.

According to Siegel (2002), *like* shows lack of confidence in what one is about to say, or uncertainty about how to put it.

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McCready (2008) argues that there are two uses of *man*:

- (13) a. This coffee is strong, man.
b. Man, this coffee is strong.

- (14) Man this coffee is strong.

Prosodically integrated *man* like (14) is only possible with a gradable predicate.

- (15)??Man it's 42 degrees today.

Zimmermann's (2011) analysis

Discourse particles in Japanese and German are well discussed in the semantic literature (Hartmann 1998, Zimmermann 2011, McCready 2012).

(16) Max ist *ja/doch/wohl* auf See.

Max ist at sea

'Max is at sea'

(Zimmermann 2011:2013)

ja: The speaker takes the hearer to be aware of this fact.

doch: The speaker takes the hearer not to be aware of it.

wohl: The speaker is uncertain about the truth of the sentence.

Particles in Chinese and Japanese

(17) Hòngjián zài bàngōngshì (*ba/ma*)

Hongjian at office (PRT)

‘Hongjian is at the office’

(Li 2006: 32)

ba: speaker uncertainty

ma: speaker certainty

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(18) yuki-ga fut-tei-ru (*yo/zo/ne/wa/ze*)

snow-NOM fall-PROG-PRES (PRT)

‘It’s snowing’

See Davis (2009), McCready (2012), McCready & Davis (forthcoming) for descriptions and analyses.

Baised Polar Questions

Polar (or *yes/no*) questions can be formed in different ways.

- (19)
- a. Is it raining?
 - b. Is it not raining?
 - c. Isn't it raining?
 - d. It's raining, isn't it?
 - e. It's raining, right?
 - f. It's raining?
 - g. Is it raining, or not?

The information these questions are asking for is essentially the same, but they seem to encode different kinds of **biases** towards one of the answers.

Outer vs. Inner Negation

Negative polar questions are have two readings (Ladd 1981).

(20) Kathleen and Jeff have just come from Chicago to visit Bob in Ithaca.

B: You guys must be starving. You want to go get something to eat?

K: Yeah, **isn't there a vegetarian restaurant around here**—Moosewood, or something like that?

B: Gee, you've heard of Moosewood all the way out in Chicago, huh?

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B: Gee, you've heard of Moosewood all the way out in Chicago, huh?

(21) Bob is visiting Kathleen and Jeff in Chicago.

B: I'd like to take you guys out to dinner while I'm here.

K: I guess, but there's not really any place to go in Hyde Park.

B: Oh, really, **isn't there a vegetarian restaurant around here?**

K: No, about all we can get is hamburgers and souvlaki.

Outer vs. Inner Negation (cont)

- (22) Isn't there a vegetarian restaurant around here
- a. Outer Negation: Speaker thinks probably yes
 - b. Inner negation: Speaker thinks probably no (but hopes yes)

Outer vs. Inner Negation (cont)

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Positive Polarity Items force the outer reading, and
Negative Polarity Items force the inner reading.

(23) Isn't there **any** vegetarian restaurant around here?

- (24) a. Aren't you left-handed **too**?
- b. Aren't you left-handed **either**?

Question Particles

In Sudo (2013) I described the biases that different question particles give rise to in Japanese.

(25) ima ame futteru ~~Ø~~/**no/desho/yone/kke** ?

now rain is.falling PRT

‘Is it raining?’

(26) ima ame futte-**nai** ~~Ø~~/**no/desho/yone/kke** ?

now rain is.falling-NEG PRT

‘Isn’t it raining?’

Evidential vs. Epistemic Bias

I claimed that there are two qualitatively different types of bias:

- ▶ **Evidential bias:** Bias stemming from evidence available in the conversational background, accessible to everyone in the conversation
- ▶ **Epistemic bias:** Bias stemming from the speaker's beliefs, expectations, desires, etc. Inaccessible to other discourse participants

E.g. An outer-negation polar question in English expresses Speaker's positive epistemic bias and is incompatible with positive evidence in the context.

(27) Aren't you left-handed too?

Potential Essay Topics

Uses of discourse particles in different speech acts (assertions/statments, questions, imperatives, hortatives, permission granting, etc.)

Ways of marking biased questions (negation, particles, etc.), possible implications on how to describe biases (Is Sudo's system enough? Does it need to be refined?)

References

Davis (2009) Decisions, dynamics, and the Japanese particle *yo*. *Journal of Semantics*, 26.

Hartmann (1998) Particles. In *Concise Encyclopedia of Pragmatics*.

McCready (2012) Formal approaches to particle meaning. *Language and Linguistic Compass*, 6/12.

McCready & Davis (forthcoming) Sentence-final particles in Japanese. Forthcoming in *The Handbook of Japanese Semantics and Pragmatics*.

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