

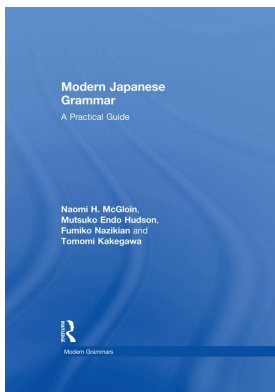
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29

Honorifics (*keego*)

29.1 General remarks on Japanese honorifics

Consciously or not, the speaker decides not only what to say, but how to say it in any language. In Japanese, there is a linguistic system called **keego** (honorifics) to be used when speaking politely and deferentially. Consisting of special vocabulary and constructions, honorifics are classified into three major types: *exalting words* (**sonkeego**), *humbling words* (**kenjoogo**), and *polite words* (**teeneego**).

Exalting words are used to refer to the actions, states, and belongings of someone to whom the speaker is expected to show respect, such as his/her superior at work, teachers, and older people. *Humbling words* refer to the actions, states, and belongings of the speaker (and family members). To show one's respect toward the referent (who may be, and often is, the addressee), one can either raise the referent's status by using *exalting verbs* to describe his/her actions (e.g. 'you/esteemed person honorably do(es) . . .') or lower one's own status by using *humbling verbs* for one's own actions (e.g. 'I humbly do . . .'). Basically, *exalting words* are used for one's out-group members who are regarded worthy of respect, and *humbling words* for one's in-group members. The term 'social superior' is used hereafter to refer to a person higher in rank than the speaker in terms of age and/or status.

Neutral verb:	友達は来ます。 Tomodachi wa kimasu. My friend will come.
Exalting verb:	課長は <u>いらっしゃいます</u> 。 Kachoo wa irasshaimasu. The section chief will (honorably) <u>come</u> .
Humbling verb:	私は <u>参ります</u> 。 Watashi wa mairimasu. I will (humbly) <u>come</u> .

29.2 Polite words

Polite words mostly consist of two types. One type refers to the sentence endings **desu** (with nouns and adjectives) and **masu** (with verbs). They show the psychological and social distance the speaker feels toward the person to whom he/she is speaking. No matter how close the relationship, however, he/she is expected to speak in the **desu/masu** style to his/her social superior. One would use **desu/masu** to one's equal until one feels close to him/her.

Plain endings

今日は金曜日だ。
Kyoo wa kin'yoobi da.

とても寒い。
Totemo samui.

雪が降っている。
Yuki ga futte iru.

Polite endings

今日は金曜日です。
Kyoo wa kin'yoobi desu.

とても寒いです。
Totemo samui desu.

雪が降っています。
Yuki ga futte imasu.

It is Friday today.

It is very cold.

It is snowing.

The other type of *polite words* is the prefixes **o-** and **go-** (like saying 'honorable such-and-such'), attached to nouns describing a social superior's actions and belongings. **o-** can also be attached to certain adjectives describing a social superior's state.

お車	o-kuruma	'car'	お話	o-hanashi	'talk'
お若い	o-wakai	'young'	お暇	o-hima	'free time'
ご住所	go-juusho	'address'	ご研究	go-kenkyuu	'research'

Generally, **o-** is attached to Japanese native words, and **go-** to words of Chinese origin. Many Chinese-origin words, however, routinely take **o-**, especially everyday words that have been in Japanese for a long time. In principle, neither **o-** nor **go-** is to be attached to loan words from the West. Some loan words that are part of everyday vocabulary do appear with **o-**, though the practice is often frowned upon.

お天気	o-tenki	'weather'	お電話	o-denwa	'telephone'
おビール	o-biiru	'beer'	おタバコ	o-tabako	'cigarette, smoking'

29.3 Exalting words

Some nouns are categorized as exalting words, including those that appear with the prefix **o-** referring to an object belonging to the addressee and/or esteemed referent.

Neutral

Exalting

著書	choshu	'book'	貴著	kicho	'your (honorable) book'
会社	kaisha	'company'	貴社	kisha	'your (honorable) company'
人	hito	'person'	方	kata	'esteemed person'
手紙	tegami	'letter'	お手紙	o-tegami	'your (honorable) letter'

There are a number of special ('suppletive') verbs that express exaltative meaning (see 29.8). They are all frequently used words such as 'to be,' 'to come,' 'to go,' 'to do,' 'to eat,' and 'to see.' Other verbs can be turned into exalting verbs in one of the two productive constructions, **V-(r)areru** and **o-/go-V ni naru**; e.g. **kak-areru**, **o-kaki ni naru** 'write (exalting).' The subject of an exalting verb is someone other than the speaker, usually his/her social superior, who often coincides with the addressee.

	Neutral	Special	verb-(r)areru	o-/go-V (stem) ni naru
do	su-ru	nasaru	s-areru	—
come	ku-ru	irassharu	ko-rareru	—
see	mi-ru	go-ran ni naru	mi-rareru	—
teach	oshie-ru	—	oshie-rareru	o-oshie ni naru
call	yob-u	—	yob-areru	o-yobi ni naru
use	riyoo su-ru	—	riyoo s-areru	go-riyoo ni naru
be	de a-ru	de irassharu	de or-areru	—

こちらは森さんのお母様でいらっしゃいます。

Kochira wa Mori-san no okaasama de irasshaimasu.

This is Mr/Ms Mori's mother.

先生、明日のパーティにいらっしゃいます (or 来られます) か。

Sensee, ashita no paatii ni irasshaimasu (or koraremasu) ka.

Are you coming to the party tomorrow, Professor?

課長はタクシーをお呼びになりました (or 呼ばれました) 。

Kachoo wa takushii o o-yobi ni narimashita (or yobaremashita).

The section chief called a taxi.

The **-(r)areru** variety sounds more impersonal and less polite than do the special verbs and **o-verb ni naru**. It is identical to the passive form (e.g. **kak-areru** 'be written'), and has been gaining in popularity recently over **o-V ni naru** forms, especially among young people, although it can be inappropriate sometimes. For example, **Shachoo wa tabe-rare-mashita ka** meaning 'Did the company president eat?' can potentially sound as though it were in the passive, 'Was the company president eaten?'. In such cases, it is safe to use the special verb **meshiagari-mashita ka** 'Did he/she eat?'

Common abbreviations of **o-/go-verb ni naru** include the request form **o-/go-verb kudasai**, instead of **o-/go-verb ni natte kudasai** 'please do . . .', and **o-/go-verb desu**, to refer to someone's current state or action in progress.

どうぞおかけ下さい。(← どうぞおかけになって下さい。)

Doozo o-kake kudasai. (← **Doozo o-kake ni natte kudasai**)

Please sit.

社長は只今お出かけです。(← お出かけになっています。)

Shachoo wa tadaima o-dekake desu. (← **Shachoo wa tadaima o-dekake ni natte imasu.**)

The company president is out (of the office) now.

クーポンをご利用ですか。(← ご利用になっていますか。)

Kuupon o go-riyoo desu ka. (← **Kuupon o go-riyoo ni natte imasu ka.**)

Are you using coupons?

29.4

Humbling words

Some nouns are categorized as humbling words.

	Neutral		Humbling	
著作	chosaku	'book'	拙著	setcho 'my (bad) book'
会社	kaisha	'company'	弊社	heesha 'my (modest) company'
人	hito	'person'	者	mono 'person (in my in-group)'

Like exalting verbs, there are special ('suppletive') humbling forms for certain verbs (see 29.8). Other verbs can express humility when used in the construction **o-/go-V suru**; e.g. **o-kaki suru** 'write,' **go-setsumee suru** 'explain.' The construction implies that the action is done to or for the benefit of the social superior. Most of the special humbling words imply this. The subject of a humbling verb is always the speaker himself/herself ('I') or his/her family member.

	Neutral	Special	o-/go-V suru
do	su-ru	itasu	—
come	ku-ru	mairu	—
see	mi-ru	haiken suru	—
teach	oshie-ru	—	o-oshie suru
guide	annai su-ru	—	go-annai suru

修理は私が致します。

Shuuri wa watakushi ga itashimasu.

I will fix it.

タクシーをお呼びしましょうか。

Takushii o o-yobi shimashoo ka.

Shall I call a taxi for you?

ここでお待ちします。

Koko de omachi shimasu.

I will wait for you here.

ちょっとご相談したいことがありますて...

Chotto go-soodan shitai koto ga arimashite...

'There is something I'd like to ask you about.'

o-/go-V suru is inappropriate when one's action has no bearing on the social superior. In such a case, neutral forms suffice; e.g. **Kinoo wa hon o yomimashita** 'I read a book yesterday.' To express humility while avoiding an implication of benefit for the social superior, one can use verb-(s)**asete itadaku**; e.g. **Hon o yomasete itadakimashita** 'I read the book (since you/social superior graciously let me).' Verb-(s)**aseru** is a causative form 'make/let someone do...,' and **itadaku** is a special humbling verb meaning 'to receive a favor or object for which the speaker is thankful.' As such, the construction implies that someone granted permission.

ここで待たせていただきます。

Koko de matasete itadakimasu.

'(With your permission) I will wait here.'

子供は部屋に入らせていただきました。

Kodomo wa heya ni hairasete itadakimashita.

'My child was allowed to enter the room.'

29.5 Hyperpolite words

Humbling verbs have two usages. One implies that the speaker's action involves the social superior; e.g. 'Shall I (humbly) call a taxi for you?' Words in such usage are called *humbling words I* (**kenjoogo I**). There is no such implication in the other usage, called *humbling words II* (**kenjoogo II**) or *hyperpolite words* (**teechoogo**). The speaker uses humbling verbs simply to sound polite.

山田弘の母でございます。

Yamada Hiroshi no haha de gozaimasu.

I am Hiroshi Yamada's mother.

昨日は買い物に参りました。

Kinoo wa kaimono ni mairimashita.

I went shopping yesterday.

Some special verbs have distinct forms for humbling and hyperpolite meanings; e.g. **moosu** 'say' vs. **mooshi-ageru** 'say (to social superior),' **zonjiru** 'know' vs. **zonji-ageru** 'know (social superior).' Verb-(s)**asete itadaku** is often used as a hyperpolite expression when no permission is relevant.

それについては何も存じません。

Sore ni tsuite wa nani mo zonjimasen.

I don't know anything about that.

近くに住まわせていただいています。

Chikaku ni sumaw-asete itadaite imasu.

I live near here.

29.6

Beautifying words

Beautifying words (**bikago**) are basically nouns with the prefixes **o-** and **go-**; e.g. **o-sake** ‘sake,’ **o-sooji** ‘cleaning,’ **go-shuugi** ‘congratulatory gift.’ Unlike the other categories of honorifics, beautifying words are not necessarily used to be polite or to express respect toward the addressee (or social superior referent). Neither do they lower the status of the speaker or raise that of the addressee (or social superior referent). Another feature of the beautification words is that **o-** and **go-** are attached even to items that belong to the speaker. The user believes that the utterance sounds ‘nice, elegant and refined’ with such prefixes. The **o-** and **go-** attached to Western loan words, cited in 29.2, are one type of such examples.

お金	o-kane	‘money’	お顔	o-kao	‘face’
お帽子	o-booshi	‘(my) hat’	お友達	o-tomodachi	‘(my) friend’
おビール	o-biiru	‘beer’	おタバコ	o-tabako	‘cigarette, smoking’

Another type of beautifying words are those that cannot occur without **o-** or **go-**.

おなか	o-naka	‘stomach (Lit. middle)’	お日様	o-hi-sama	‘sun’
ご飯	go-han	‘cooked rice, meal’	ご馳走	go-chisoo	‘feast’

29.7

Honorific usage

As in any language, honorific usage varies greatly from speaker to speaker. With many more forms and rules than those that have been presented above, Japanese honorifics are complicated and difficult even for native speakers. Honorifics are not only used by someone lower in status to someone higher in status, but also in the reverse situation and between equals. The amount and types of honorifics shift all the time within the same conversation and with the same participants, depending on their estimation of how politely to talk at the time, the topic, bystanders, and so on. Traditionally, the ability to use honorifics is regarded as a mark of education, maturity, and status in Japanese society. Those wishing to project such an identity would use honorifics, though to a varying degree, talking to their bosses, colleagues, subordinates, customers, teachers, etc. in formal situations.

- (1) 部長A: これ、拝見してもよろしいですか。
Bucho A: **Kore, haiken shite mo yoroshii desu ka.**
 Department chief A: May I take a look at this? (with humbling verb)
- 部長B: ええ、どうぞご覧 (になって) ください。
Bucho B: **Ee, doozo goran (ni natte) kudasai.**
 Department chief B: Yes, please do take a look. (with exalting verb)
- (2) 教師A: あの方、ご存知ですか。
Kyooshi A: **Ano kata go-zonji desu ka.**
 Teacher A: Do you know that person? (with exalting verb)
- 教師B: ええ、存じ上げております。
Kyooshi B: **Ee, zonji-agete orimasu.**
 Teacher B: Yes, I know him/her. (with humbling verb)

The in-group/out-group membership of the speakers is particularly important, but the status is relative and changeable. The basic rule is that one uses exalting words to describe outsiders, and humbling words about insiders. When talking about Boss A with colleagues (and/or with Boss B), A is regarded as an outsider at that moment, and one would use an exalting word about his/her actions. When one talks with customers, however, A is regarded as an in-group member, and a humbling word would be appropriate. If one used an exalting expression instead, it would raise the status of A (insider), and lower the status of the addressee (outsider), which would be rude. If A’s spouse walks in, the boss is now considered an outsider (aligned with the spouse), and an exalting word would be appropriate.

- (3) To someone who works for the same company:

社長は今出かけていらっしゃいます or おでかけです。

Shachoo wa ima dekakete irasshaimasu or o-dekake desu.

He/she (company president) is out now. (with exalting verb)

- (4) To someone from another company:

社長は今出かけております。

Shachoo wa ima dekakete orimasu.

He/she (company president) is out now. (with humbling verb)

- (5) To the referent's spouse:

社長は今出かけていらっしゃいます or おでかけです。

Shachoo wa ima dekakete irasshaimasu or o-dekake desu.

He/she (company president) is out now. (with exalting verb)

A double use of honorific forms to describe one event is common. Stacking three honorific forms is possible, but not common. In fact, an excessive use of honorifics is considered rude and insulting, characterized as **ingin buree** (unctuous).

お待ちしております。

O-machi shite orimasu.I'll be waiting for you (humbling construction and humbling verb **oru**)

どんなことをお考えになっていらっしゃるんですか。

Donna koto o o-kangae ni natte irassharu n desu ka.What are you thinking about? (exalting construction and exalting verb **irassharu**)

When honorific verbs are used, other elements of the sentence are affected, and formal nouns, adverbs, etc. tend to be used.

	<i>Neutral words</i>		<i>Formal words</i>	
today	今日	kyoo	本日	honjitsu
from now on	これから	korekara	今後	kongo
meal	ご飯	gohan	食事	shokuji
a minute ago	さっき	sakki	先ほど	sakihodo

Politeness is conveyed not just by the vocabulary and constructions used, but also by various nonlinguistic elements such as the speaker's gentle demeanor, pleasant tone, and appropriate gestures. To become proficient in honorifics, it will be useful to watch how Japanese people interact with each other and in what type of situations they use honorifics, in real life or in TV dramas, from such a point of view.

29.8 Summary of special forms

<i>Regular verbs</i>		<i>Exalting (respectful) verbs</i>	<i>Humbling verbs</i>
行く iku 'go'	来る kuru 'come'	いらっしゃる irassharu	参る mairu
いる iru 'exist'		いらっしゃる irassharu	おる oru
言う iu 'say'		おっしゃる ossharu	申す、申し上げる moosu, mooshiageru
する suru 'do'		なさる nasaru	いたす itasu
食べる taberu 'eat'	飲む nomu 'drink'	召し上がる meshiagaru	いただく itadaku
見る miru 'see'		ご覧になる goran ni naru	拝見する haiken suru
訪ねる tazuneru 'visit'	聞く kiku 'ask'		伺う ukagau
寝る neru 'sleep'		お休みになる oyasumi ni naru	
もらう morau 'receive'			いただく itadaku
あげる ageru 'give'			さしあげる sashiageru
くれる kureru 'give (me)'		くださる kudasaru	
知っている shitte iru 'know'		ご存知だ go-zonji da	存じておる、 zonjite oru 存知あげる zonji ageru
会う au 'meet'			お目にかかる ome ni kakaru
Nだ N da 'be Noun'		Nでいらっしゃる N de irassharu	Nでございます N de gozaimasu

