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ABSTRACT

Every language has a number of expressions that defy translation into another language. One of the Japanese phrases that belongs to this category would be “*yoroshiku onegaishimasu*,” which is a formulaic greeting used in various situations and which literally means “please favor me.” This paper investigates the Japanese politeness orientation by attempting to answer the question of why *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* is considered polite despite it being a direct form of request. Naturally occurring conversation transcribed in a journal is analyzed to examine the link between the literal meaning and the functions of *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*. As a result, Japanese cultural specific ‘face’ is illuminated, which is directed at creating harmony in Japan’s vertical society with its discerned norms such as age and social distance.

1 . INTRODUCTION

The reason why I became interested in this topic is that when I was teaching Japanese to foreigners using a popular textbook, *Japanese for Busy People*, I found that the book introduced the greeting formula, “*douzo yoroshiku onegaishimasu*,” in self-introduction situations and gave as its English translation, “I’m glad to meet

you,” and a literal translation, “please favor me.” I was very surprised to find the huge difference between the English translation and its literal meaning. Since then I have been interested in why Japanese people use the ambiguous request form *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* in many different situations. This paper investigates the formulaic greeting, *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* (its literal meaning: I request your good wishes) by employing examples heard and transcribed in a diary.

As a result, Japanese politeness orientation derived from Japanese cultural ‘face,’ which directs towards interdependent social relationships to create harmony, was revealed.

2. RELATED STUDIES

In daily communication, greetings are one example of the many politeness strategies that individuals utilize to foster and maintain social relationships. Lakoff (1989, p.102) defines politeness as “a means of minimizing the risk of confrontation in discourse.” Fraser and Nolen (1981, p.96) state that “to be polite is to abide by the rules of the relationship. The speaker becomes impolite in cases where he violates one or more of the contractual terms.” According to Brown (1980, p.114), “What politeness essentially consists in is a special way of treating people, saying and doing things in such a way as to take into account the other person’s feelings.” What is common to these varying definitions is the idea of appropriate language use associated with smooth communication. This smooth communication is achieved “on the one hand through the speaker’s use of intentional strategies to allow his utterances to be received favorably by the addressee and on the other by the speaker’s expression of the expected and prescribed norms of speech” (Ide, 1998, p.371). Although these concepts of politeness may be applicable to any culture, when any speech act is examined, the relevant culture has

to be considered, since a language is a part of the culture in which it is used. If there is any distinctiveness to Japanese politeness, it must be derived from cultural distinctiveness.

Coulmas (1981) described Japanese culture as debt-sensitive and investigated thanking and apology cross-culturally. He discussed the ethics of indebtedness as a notion connecting the acts of apology and gratitude in Japanese, since the act of thanking, which implies the indebtedness of the recipient of the benefit, resembles apologies, where speakers similarly recognize their indebtedness to the interlocutor.

Brown and Levinson (1987) assume that “all competent adult members of society have face : the public self-image that everyone wants to claim for himself, consisting of two related aspects : ”

- (a) negative face : the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, right to non-distraction – i. e. freedom of action and freedom from imposition and
- (b) positive face : the positive consistent self-image or ‘personality’ (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated by and approved of) claimed by interactants.

They also say that any acts that threaten face are impolite. If one does such an act, negative politeness strategies are required to redress the threat.

Matsumoto (1993) refers to *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* to suggest that the negative politeness strategies claimed by Brown and Levinson are not necessarily applicable to Japanese politeness norms. She claims that the concept of negative face in Japan is different from that of Brown and Levinson. The Japanese do not have the notion of negative face as the desire to be unimpeded in one’s action. Instead of the desire to be impeded, the relation to other members of the group in society is important in Japan.

3. DISCUSSION

Brown and Levinson claim that any acts which intrinsically threaten face (face-threatening acts, FTAs) are impolite; an act such as making a request, for example, threatens the hearer's negative face and is thus considered to be impolite. Therefore, when one performs FTAs, negative politeness strategies are required to redress the threat. One negative politeness strategy, for example, means that "Please write a story for i-News!" is expected to be "Are you interested in writing a story for i-News?" or "Would you like to write a story for i-News?" Asking a favor this way gives the hearer room to say "I'm sorry I'm busy" and is thus polite. This is one example of the use of a negative politeness strategy to minimize the imposition in order to respect the addressee's negative face: the addressee's or addresser's desire to have his freedom of action and freedom from imposition.

Syntactically, the *yoroshiku* in *yoroshiku onegai-shimasu* is an adverb that means 'in a good, approved, desirable, and convenient way.' *Onegai shimasu* consists of "o" (a prefix of politeness), "negai" (originally, a noun denoting wish, hope, and the like), "shi", which is an inflectional form of the general verb "suru" (do), and "masu," an auxiliary verb of politeness. This phrase can be translated, "I make a request of you to take care of (someone/something) in an approved way." This literal meaning indicates that *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* is a speech act of request without a negative politeness strategy. Then, why is *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* considered to be polite in Japanese? One reason is thought to be the content of the request. Although *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* is a speech act of request, the request is inherently vague and the way it is paraphrased or understood is very much context dependent. Jorden (1987) explains that it is used for a general request for consideration, assistance, and helpful service for oneself or a member of one's in-group. Mizutani and Mizutani (1977) say that *onegaishimasu* can stand

for many different verbs depending on the situation : for example, one says it to mean “please take care of this” when calling a clerk at a store or a waiter at a restaurant, when submitting papers such as application forms at a government office or bank, or when concluding a business discussion. They do not usually use the particular verbs such as to take an order, to sign, to accept or to pay, instead they just say *onegaishimasu*. *Yoroshiku onegaishimasu* is frequently used in various contexts and implies one’s respect, politeness, and good will.

As far as *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* is concerned, Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness, which says that a direct request is impolite, does not seem to be applicable. Matsumoto (1988) attributes this contradiction to the notion of face claimed by Brown and Levinson which is based on self-interested human beings concerned about freedom from intervention and their self-image. In fact, they do not take into account the cultural variation of face.

The Japanese notion of face is not based on the self-interested image claimed by Brown and Levinson but based on “the public-self image” (Mao, 1994) oriented towards interdependent social relationships. In Japanese society, the acknowledgement of interdependence is anthropologically encouraged, because Japan was originally an agricultural society, where people domiciled together in dense communities and helped each other to harvest rice. Also, since Confucianism was introduced to Japanese society, seniors are to be respected by juniors. Juniors should show respect to seniors, while seniors, in return, feel responsibility to take care of juniors. Therefore, it is an honor to be asked to take care of someone in that it indicates that one is regarded as holding a higher position in the society. In this sense, deferent imposition can enhance the good self-image (that is, the face) of the addressee. Enhancing the addressee’s face could be viewed as a positive strategy (Matsumoto, 1988).

The notion of face is derived from culture and society. Each culture and

society may be expected to have a different face. Since politeness constitutes face-caring (Brown and Levinson, 1987), different cultures or societies may be expected to have a different politeness orientation. Nakane (1967) describes Japanese social structure as vertical, where people are related hierarchically in certain social groupings, rather than relations between persons having the same social class as in Western societies. “Japanese face will be directed at harmonizing with discerned norms more than preserving self-interested face, and it may be accomplished by the mutual action of the interlocutors, rather than individually” (Ohashi, 2003).

One of the Japanese discerned norms as a member of a vertical society is age and social status, which is a major factor in Japanese deference. The following cases from my journal show how social distances affect Japanese speakers’ choices of gratitude expressions. Regarding Japanese culture, it should be noted that age difference can be automatically translated into a difference of social status because of the prevailing Confucianism. The Situations (1), (2), and (3) (Kamimura, 2007) below represent how a difference of age affects a Japanese gratitude agent’s expression of gratitude in the situation of people filling glasses at a wedding reception. At a Japanese wedding reception, there is a custom that guests visit other tables to fill the glasses of other guests while greeting them :

Situation (1): J-A, who is the bridegroom’s uncle, offers beer to J-B, who is a friend and colleague of the bridegroom. [gratitude from a younger person to an older person]

J-A : *Maa, douzo.* (Well, here you go.)

J-B : *Ah! Sumimasen. Kochira-ga saki-ni o-tsugi-shinai-to ikemasen-noni. Kyoushuku-desu. Arigatou-gozaimasu.* (Oh, I’m sorry. I should have filled your glass first. I am terribly sorry. Thank you very

much. I'm sorry.)

Situation (2): B offers beer to C, B's friend. [between two speakers of similar ages]

J-B: *Hai*. (Here.)

J-C: *Oh*. (Yep.)

Situation (3): B offers beer to D, B's boss. [gratitude from an older person of a higher status to a younger person of a lower status]

J-B: *Buchou, douzo*. (Manager, please.)

J-D: *Iya, arigatou*. (Well, thank you.)

It should be noted that the Japanese used different gratitude expressions according to the relative social status difference: In Situation (1), a younger person shows gratitude to an older person by using one interjection and four expressions. In Situation (2), between two speakers of similar ages, the gratitude agent acknowledged the favor without expressing gratitude, and in Situation (3), an older person shows gratitude to a younger person by using one interjection and one gratitude expression. These three situations suggest that not only the number of gratitude expressions but also the kinds used are affected by the social distance created by the relative ages of the gratitude agent and the causal agent. In Situation (3), an older gratitude agent used a simple gratitude expression, *arigatou* to a younger causal agent, while in Situation (1), a younger gratitude agent used an apology expression, *sumimasen* as well as *arigatou-gozaimasu* to an older causal agent. Apology expressions are considered more polite in expressing thanks than gratitude expressions in Japanese because of the debt-sensitive nature of the culture. Between equals, in Situation (2), the gratitude agent did not even thank the causal

agent. Since *oh* which was spoken by J-C in Situation (2) is not a gratitude expression, it can be said that expressing gratitude is not always considered necessary between equals. The situations above clearly show Japanese sensitivity or consciousness of difference in age and social distance through the choice of different expressions.

As for the expression, *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*, it can be said that this speech act of request is a device of politeness to create social distance between the interlocutors by placing the speaker in the lower position and the addressee in the higher position. It is considered to be an honor to be asked to take care of someone in that it indicates that one is regarded as holding a higher position in society.

Nancy Sakamoto (1982) describes the Japanese notion of face using the terms – ‘an inferior’ and ‘a superior.’ They say that, in many cases, Americans and Japanese are acting according to very different “polite fictions,” and one of the most fundamental of American polite fictions is that ‘you and I are equals.’ The corresponding Japanese polite fiction, however, is that ‘you are my superior.’ To take the inferior position is polite in Japanese, but it is not in English. Although “it is polite in both cultures to deny your own superiority, they come into conflict whenever the Japanese corollary fiction that ‘I am your inferior’ is emphasized.” Here is an example to support this argument. I gave the following compliment to 10 Japanese who can speak English very well and wrote down their spontaneous responses in my diary :

Q : *Eigo-ga sugoku o-jouzu desu-ne !* (You are a very good English speaker !)

Typical Answer : *Tondemonai ! Anata-koso !* (Not, at all ! You are better than me !)

Their responses were exactly what I had expected and in line with the Sakamoto and

Naotsuka's above statement: None of them accepted my compliment but instead rejected it, typically saying, *tondemonai!* (not at all!) or *ie, ie!* (no, no!), and seven out of the ten people added *anata koso* (it's you who are better than me). Rejecting a compliment is polite and accepting it is arrogant in Japanese, where one should emphasize one's inferiority.

Actually, Japanese tend to praise others or degrade themselves in comparison with each other. They often say, for example, *anata-no-hou-ga, ryouri-ga jouzu-desu* (you are a better cook than I am), or *watashi-no-hou-ga, ryouri-ga heta-desu* (I am a worse cook than you), even if it is not true. Meanwhile, in English, although people also compare to decide which is better or worse, the speaker usually does not pretend to be an inferior to the hearer with an intention to be polite. Sakamoto (1982) even says that people should not be compared to decide who is better or worse: "you are a very good cook" is safer to say than "you are a better cook than I am" in America. In American polite fiction, it is polite to treat people equally and individually. This example shows that Japanese people have a tendency to elevate others in order to place themselves in an inferior position.

Brown and Levinson (1987) categorized Japan as a debt-sensitive society. From the viewpoint of Japanese debt-sensitiveness, the addresser and addressee of *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* can be called the debtor and creditor respectively. Ohashi (2003) says that whenever Japanese interact with each other, their debt-credit equilibriums are involved. "Emphasizing the speaker's debt is polite because it implies that such debt is to be repaid" (Ohashi, 2003). It can be said that *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*, which literally means "please take care of me" is a device to position the speaker as a debtor who has to be taken care of, and the hearer as a creditor who will kindly take care of the speaker. Thus, "*yoroshiku onegaishimasu* can be described as a debt-conscious choice that symbolically restores the debt-credit equilibrium in advance" (Ohashi, 2003), hoping for future long term interaction

between the speaker and hearer.

4 . DATA ANALYSIS

Yoroshiku onegaishimasu does not really have a literal translation. The closest might be “I request your good wishes” but the expression is inherently vague and the way it is paraphrased or understood is very much context dependent.

Data on the use of *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* in various contexts including email messages, TV talk shows, and naturally occurring conversation have been transcribed in my journal. I found that *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* was not only used as a request speech formula but also as a greeting, an attention-getter, and an opening and closing interaction device. In the following sections, each example model data is analyzed from the viewpoint of various Japanese cultural specific faces or discerned norms which were mentioned in the previous section, DISCUSSION.

4.1 Greeting

Andrew Suenobu (2007) says, “It is a polite enough expression that you can use it with pretty much anyone you meet. If you use this expression, you will definitely make a good impression. It shows class.” *Yoroshiku onegaishimasu* is customarily employed when meeting people for the first time, or joining a group. It can be translated as “nice to meet you” in English. However, *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*, which literally means, “please take care of me well,” sounds very different from “nice to meet you.” The reason why the two speech acts in Japanese and English sound very different from each other is thought to be that the addressers’ focuses are different depending on the culture: The focus of the addresser of “nice to meet you” in English is his own feeling based on his **self-interested image**, regarding the first meeting as a pleasing-to-speaker event.

Meanwhile, that of the addresser of *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* in Japanese is the interpersonal relationship between the interlocutors based on the **public image**.

In the following situations (1) to (5), a person named Suzuki Masako meets a person for the first time. The first line gives the situation of the addressee, the second line is her self-introduction in Japanese, the third line interprets it English based on **Japanese public image of self**.

- (1) Introducing yourself in front of new school class :

Watashi-wa Suzuki Masako-desu. Yoroshiku onegaishimasu.

(My name is Masako Suzuki. **Please be my friend.**)

(2004年10月1日 読売新聞)

- (2) Meeting a tea ceremony teacher for the first time :

Suzuki Masako-to moushi-masu. Douzo yoroshiku onegai-itashi-masu.

(I humbly say my name, Masako Suzuki. **I'll do my best, so I humbly ask you to give me good teaching.**)

- (3) Greeting a colleague on the first day at a new work place :

Suzuki-to moushi-masu. Yoroshiku onegai-itashi-masu.

(I humbly say my name, Suzuki. **Please accept me and support me.**)

(2004年10月1日 読売新聞)

- (4) Arriving at her host family's house for the first time :

Masako-desu. Yoroshiku onegaishimasu.

(I'm Masako. **I am sorry to trouble you but please take care of me.**)

- (5) Greeting a new business partner :

Suzuki-de gozai-masu. Nanitozo yoroshiku onegai-itashi-masu.

(I say very humbly my name, *Suzuki*. **Please help me to take care of our business.**)

The differences between the paraphrases of *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* and those of “nice to meet you” towards the same addressee are noticeable. The paraphrases of “nice to meet you” are speaker-focused, which shows their happy feeling as the first meeting is a pleasing-to-speaker event.

Meanwhile, those of *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* are always humble requests that put the addresser in the lower position. Although *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* itself generates social distance between the interlocutors, actual social distances between them prompt the addresser to use polite forms of verbs and adverbs as intensifiers to *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*. Here is a series of ways to say the same thing at very casual to extremely formal levels :

yoroshiku

yoroshiku onegai-shimasu (most common)

dozo yoroshiku onegai-shimasu

dozo yoroshiku onegai-itashimasu

dozo yoroshiku onegai-moushiagemasu

The examples (1) to (5) are intensified as follows :

- (1) Since classmates are the same age, no polite forms of verbs and no honorifics are used.
- (2) Because there is a big social difference between a teacher and a student, *moushi-masu*, which is a polite form of *iu* (say) is used, and *douzo* (please)

is added at the top of *yoroshiku onegai-itashi-masu*, and *itashimasu*, which is a polite form of *shimasu*, is employed.

- (3) There is social distance between a new employee and old employees, therefore *moushi-masu*, which is a polite form of *iu* (say) and *itashimasu*, which is a polite form of *shimasu* are employed.
- (4) Although there is a great age difference between the host and the teenager, there are no polite forms and honorifics. It is likely that the teenager is subconsciously acting childish to imply that she needs to be taken care of.
- (5) There is social distance between business partners, though the degree of the social distance depends on the responsibilities for them to share. *Gozai-masu* which is a very polite form of *desu*, *nanitozo* (no matter how difficult it is) which is a classic form of *douzo*, and *itashi-masu*, which is a polite form of *shimasu*, are employed.

Yoroshiku onegaishimasu is also customarily employed as a formal new year's spoken and written greeting :

“*Kyonen wa o-sewa-ni narimashita. Kotoshi-mo yoroshiku onegaishimasu.*”

Paraphrased by Japanese public-self image :

(Thank you very much for taking care of me during last year. **Please take care of me** this year, as well.)

Paraphrased by Western self-interested image :

I'm looking forward to your continued cooperation in this year.

(eigo-eikaiwa.com)

When looking at the translation based on the Japanese public-self image, the phrase, “take care,” is commonly used about last year and this year in the two sentences.

Regarding last year, even if the addresser was not especially favored or even seen by the addressee, s/he would customarily say, *osewa ni narimashita*. Taking care of someone is an action that a person in a higher position usually does. Requesting that the addressee take care of the addresser serves to show symbolically the addresser's respectful and polite intention to the addressee.

Yoroshiku onegaishimasu is customarily used at people's first meeting and on New Year's card. Wishing a long favorable relationship with the addressee, the speaker uses the greeting as an intentional strategy to show politeness by asking the addressee to take care of the addresser, which plays a role to put the speaker in a lower position as an inferior, or a debtor, or a person from a lower social status depending on the situation.

4.2 Opening-interaction device

I recorded ten opening parts from five different TV talk shows. Eight out of the ten TV shows started with the exchange of *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* between a host and a guest. The following example is from a popular TV talk show in Japan, "Tetsuko no Heya," on December 23, 2005.

Tetsuko (Host) : *Nihon-juu-ga machi-ni-matta Tamori-san desu. **Yoroshiku onegaishimasu.***

(This is a long-awaited guest, Mr. Tamori. **Please favor me.**)

Tamori (Guest) : ***Kochira koso yoroshiku onegaishimasu.***

(**Please take care of me, as well.**)

At the beginning of the show, the host and guest usually say *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* to each other after the host introduces the guest. This reciprocal exchange is a typical way of starting a talk show. One point to be made is that the

hosts and guests are not necessarily strangers to each other. In the case above, it is obvious that the two of them are acquainted since they are both famous in the TV business. Therefore, this exchange of *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* is not a part of a self introduction at a first meeting but a formal greeting to open the talk show. Another thing is that these TV shows are commercial events and both the hosts and guests benefit from the events (talk shows). They get paid by TV companies and have to cooperate to make their shows successful. In this case, *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* makes sense in its literal meaning. However, the nuance of this request expression is a little different depending on whether it is the host or guest who is using it. Since the hosts are responsible for making the shows successful, they need help or cooperation from their guests. Therefore, they say *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*, because they want the guest to tell interesting stories and cooperate to make the show successful. On the other hand, guests say, *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*, because they are not familiar with the situation and nervous and want help to fulfill their duty as a guest of the show. Their exchange of *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* expresses their mutual dependence.

As in this situation, the response to *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* is usually expected to be *kochira-koso yoroshiku onegaishimasu* between interlocutors of the same social status, because the debt-credit equilibrium between speaker and hearer is upset by the speaker's polite speech act and has to be restored. When the exchange of *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* occurs between the addresser of the higher status and the addressee of the lower status, *ie ie!* (no, no!) or *tondemonai!* (not at all!) is commonly added on top of *kochira-koso yoroshiku onegaishimasu* to emphasize the speaker's lower rank. When the addressee perceives him/herself to be in the higher rank than the addresser, the addressee can say *hai* (yes) or just continue the conversation, without causing any loss of face on either side. For example, when a person gets sick and goes to see a doctor, the following conversation routinely

occurs :

Patient : *Yoroshiku onegaishimasu.*

Doctor : *Hai. Dou shimashita-ka ?*

(Yes. What's wrong with you ?)

4.3 Leave-taking device after making a request

Employing *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* is the most common polite way to finish off a mail or conversation after making a request. This is an email Ms. X (female, mid-30) received from the current organizer (female, older than Ms. X) of a bilingual magazine, 'i-News.' They are close friends.

(full name)-sama,

(Dear Ms. X,)

Itsumo osewa-ni natte-orimasu.

(Thank you very much for always taking care of me.)

Sumimasen-ga, tenpu-no kiji-wo yakushite-itadakemasen-deshou-ka.

(I am sorry to trouble you, but couldn't you possibly translate the attached article ?)

Gomuri-wo onegai-shite moushiwake-arimasen.

(I have no excuse to ask you this impossible request.)

Yoroshiku onegaishimasu.

The email starts by addressing the recipient, Ms. X, with *sama* which is the most formal way of addressing a receiver. From this form of address alone, Ms. X could infer that the following message would be a request, because the sender of the mail,

who is older than Ms. X, usually addresses her with *san* or *chan*. When reading the next line, *itsumo osewa-ni natte-orimasu* (thank you very much for always taking care of me), she may become sure her assumption was right because the sender uses a formal greeting. *Itsumo osewa-ni natte-orimasu* is a formal formulaic greeting among people who know each other, and is expected to be returned in the same way, *kochira-koso, osewa-ni natte-orimasu*. It can be said that *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* which is used at the first meeting and *osewa-ni natte-orimasu* which is employed from the second meeting, express the same concept of interdependent relationships in Japanese society, where people living in a vertical society take care of each other in an attempt to live together harmoniously. Using polite formal language like *itsumo osewa-ni natte-orimasu* in this email is a popular strategy of flattering others when one has a favor to ask of them. In this case, the sender wanted Ms. X to translate an English article into Japanese for the international magazine that they are publishing as a volunteer job. *Sumimasen-ga* (I am sorry to trouble you, but) at the beginning of the sentence and *itadakemasen-deshou-ka* (couldn't you possibly...?) at the end of it, as well as the next sentence, *gomuri-wo onegai-shite moushiwake-arimasen* (I have no excuse to ask you this impossible request) all serve to redress the imposition on the addressee caused by the addresser's request. Apologizing for making a request and using a (negative) question to formulate the request are popular negative politeness strategies in Japanese culture as well, except in the case of *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*.

This mail ends with *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* which can be translated as "I request your favor." In fact, employing *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* is the most common polite way to finish off a mail or conversation after making a request. *Yoroshiku onegaishimasu* may sound as though it is enforcing the request, however, it serves to compensate for the imposition caused by the request by suggesting that the speaker is a debtor who should pay back a creditor, and an inferior to be taken

care of by a superior.

Meanwhile, in English, ‘thanking you in advance’ is common as a closing. In Japanese, thanking is always done after a favor has been done ; thanking beforehand implies that the speaker is quite certain that the hearer will do the favor for the speaker. Giving thanks can be taken as arrogant because the act implies putting the speaker on the same or even higher ground than the hearer. I mentioned earlier in the supplemental data that speakers rarely thank others for compliments in Japanese, but it is common to do so in English. Likewise, ‘thanking you in advance’ after making a request or asking a favor sounds arrogant in Japanese where emphasizing one’s inferiority is polite.

4.4 Attention getter and signal to close the interaction

When people need someone’s help, they say *onegaishimasu* as well as *sumimasen*. *Onegaishimasu* is used to call a clerk at a store or a waiter at a restaurant. It is also used at a government office or bank when documents or money are handed to clerks. In such cases it could be translated as “please take care of this” and serves as an attention getter.

A typical example of a brief exchange involving *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* occurred in front of a hotel in Tokyo between a bellboy and a hired driver. The bell boy was taking care of hotel guests getting in and out of taxis and hired cars. The hired driver and the bellboy may have known each other because of the nature of their work. As soon as the bellboy put a hotel guest’s baggage into the hired car’s trunk and closed the trunk, he said *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* to the driver :

Bellboy : *Yoroshiku onegaishimasu*

Driver : *Doomo. Yoroshiku.*

From the situational point of view, the bellboy's *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* caused the driver to start the car. The bellboy used *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* as a routine formula to signal that the baggage had been put in the trunk, and not as a speech act of request. This kind of event often happens at the front of the hotel and the bellboy and the hired driver seemed to have a shared understanding of how to deal with the situation. The driver first replied to the bellboy's *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* with *doomo* which is often used as a part of a thanking and apology speech formula (e. g. *doomo arigatou*, *doomo sumimasen*). Workers' employing polite languages have the effect of making their work look decent. Saying *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* is much more polite than saying *sumimashita* (all done), or *iidesu-yo* (it's OK for you to go). Especially in this case, a hotel guest was placed in the center of the situation, which led the two workers, the bellboy and the hired driver, to use the polite language in front of the customer. The driver responded to the bellboy's *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* with *yoroshiku* (a short form of *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*), which sounds like an expression to say good bye, implying future interactions with the bellboy. Since taxi companies usually have a contract with a certain hotel, the driver will come back to the hotel for business and see the bellboy again soon.

Since *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* by the bellboy simply gave the driver a cue for departing, implying that his job had been done and the car could now leave, *yoroshiku* in this case is considered to function as an attention getter or a signal.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Since *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* is frequently employed in various contexts, it should provide a good explanation of one peculiarity of Japanese politeness orientation.

Yoroshiku onegaishimasu literally means "I request your good wishes" which

indicates a speech act of request but the expression is inherently vague and the way it is paraphrased or understood is very much context dependent. Various functions of *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* have been observed in this paper. It is used as a greeting (Data 1), opening-interaction device (Data 2), leave-taking device after making a request (Data 3), attention getter and signal to close the interaction (Data 4). They all show the speaker's respect and politeness intention to the hearer.

Brown and Levinson (1987) say that any speech act of request is intrinsically threatening and impolite, and thus negative politeness strategies are necessary to reduce an imposition. However, although *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* is a direct form of request without negative strategies, it is considered polite in Japanese. That is, uttering *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* serves to recognize social distance by placing the addresser on a lower position and the addressee on a higher position, and the addresser's explicitly taking a lower rank to the addressee can redress a face threatening act in Japanese rather than minimizing imposition which is a common negative politeness strategy. Therefore, *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* can be viewed as a positive politeness strategy because it can adversely enhance the positive face of the addressee and not threaten his/her negative face.

This contradiction reveals that Japanese politeness orientation is somewhat different from Westerners', and can be attributed to the difference in the notions of Japanese and Western face (Matsumoto, 1993). The Western notion of face, Brown and Levinson claim, is based on self-interested human beings concerned about freedom from intervention and their self-image, while the Japanese notion of face is based on the public image of self oriented towards interdependent social relationships. Japanese notion of face is considered to have been fostered in their vertical society with Confucian and debt-sensitive culture. Japanese social structure is vertical and primary relations in Japanese society are between persons who are related hierarchically (e. g. the senior and the junior), rather than relations between

persons having the same status, which is common in Western societies (Nakane, 1969). In such a vertical and Confucian society like Japan, social distance is a major factor influencing the use of politeness strategies.

Asking the hearer to take care of the speaker means placing the speaker on lower ground and the hearer on higher ground with discerned norms such as being senior and a junior, a person from a lower social status and a person from higher social status, an inferior and a superior, or a debtor and creditor. Here the essence of Japanese politeness is revealed, in which politeness is generated by creating or realizing social distance. *Yoroshiku onegaishimasu* is a very good example to show the essence of Japanese politeness. How to show respect is very different between Japanese and Western cultures.

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