

Japanese politeness in the work of Fujio Minami¹ (南不二男)

Barbara Pizziconi

bp3@soas.ac.uk

0. Introduction

This paper originates in a re-examination of the Japanese literature on Linguistic Politeness, at a time when an exhaustive and final answer to the question of what Politeness really is seems as elusive as it has ever been.

Japanese works on Japanese linguistics remain virtually unknown to the non-Japanese-speaking public², a fact motivated more by the lack of translations than intrinsic scholarly value. While the idea of discussing Linguistic Politeness without reference to one of the languages in which its structure and use are most sophisticated rightly sounds implausible, it is a fact that a good century of Japanese writings on the topic remain accessible only to the Japanese speaking public. Interestingly, the contribution of two Japanese linguists to the general debate on Politeness - I am referring here to Sachiko Ide's (1989) and Yoshiko Matsumoto's (1988, 1989, 1993) works³ - has been instrumental in the re-appraisal of the practically absolute dominion of the field by Brown and Levinson's theoretical framework (see Pizziconi, 2003). Had such contributions not been delivered in English, they would hardly have achieved the same impact on the global arena. Such widely known Japanese scholarship in English, however, has clearly not developed in a vacuum. Data from Japanese language have contributed enormously to the whole debate on politeness, and Japanese scholarship has been able to provide fertile avenues of investigation. Widening our perspective on the Japanese approaches to the study of Politeness is the first reason for a translation of Fujio Minami's work.

The second reason has to do with Minami's own particular view of Honorifics, i.e. attempting to conceive Honorifics in a more subtle, and in essence more 'flexible' way than had been proposed before. Previous classifications had left major traditional categories and the widely accepted but cumbersome notions of Deference, Humility, Courtesy, etc. substantially unmodified, and differed only in terms of minor taxonomic variations. His original conception is qualitatively different. Minami's starting point is that all types of honorifics always involve an *evaluation* and a *judgment*. On this basis he re-analyses all the traditional categories. He also reformulates the classic notions of

¹ I wish to sincerely thank Prof. Fujio Minami for authorising the translation of his work, and for providing precious and generous suggestions on many difficult terms in the translation. I hope my final choices do not do too much injustice to the original. I must also thank my mentor Prof. Tomio Kubota for offering advice, and enthusiastically supporting the choice of this work by Minami, which he defined a '*chiisana taicho*': a 'little great work', with reference to the pocket size of this major scholarly contribution. I rushed Dr. David Bennett and Dr. Nicolas Tranter into a final reading, and want to thank them here for kindly accepting my S.O.S. at very, very short notice. By claiming the last word on the final version I take of course responsibility for any resulting inaccuracies.

² The *Japanese publications in foreign languages: 1945-1990* (1990) lists three translations into English and one into German, and only one more, published in 1999, has emerged from my own investigation.

³ All names - whether Japanese or western - appear with family name last. Japanese names are romanised and original characters are provided for some, in order to facilitate retrieval of Japanese sources. Japanese characters are provided besides the transliteration for some otherwise ambiguous neologisms and homophones.

‘polite’ and ‘impolite’ into a set of more abstract and more general concepts such as high vs. low, weak vs. strong, elegant vs. vulgar, etc., which convey honorific meanings by combining in various fashions rather than as direct, unequivocal, indexical monolithic meanings. I believe that this idea gives Minami’s analysis an edge over many other reputable works, as it allows a more fine-grained description of honorific meanings, as well as perhaps a potentially more reliable basis for cross-linguistic comparison. This would by no means be a minor achievement, at a time when the once convenient tool of a couple of universal aspects of ‘face’ has definitely lost popularity, and the search for common traits is not so fashionable anymore.

A couple of brief paragraphs are clearly not adequate to outline even a cursory overview of the history of Japanese studies on linguistic politeness, but the following sections aim mostly to provide a contextualisation of Minami’s work. I will first discuss various Japanese native definitions of politeness and then mention a few scholars whose writings Minami was probably familiar with or who may have constituted direct influences on his work. In the last section, I will describe the nature of this particular publication and provide practical information on the translation.

1. The understanding of ‘politeness’ in Japanese language studies

A consciousness of the richness of honorific expressions in the Japanese language on the part of Japanese writers and intellectuals is as old as the earliest written texts we possess. The classical works of the 8th century, such as the anthology *Man’yooshu* and the chronicle *Nihongi* or the court ladies’ diaries of the 11th century, illustrate users’ and observers’ awareness of the peculiarity of such linguistic forms and the social implications of their use (Lewin, 1967:107). The Edo period (1603-1868) saw the appearance of the first systematic accounts (from both Japanese and foreign scholars⁴) but the definitive labelling of this linguistic phenomenon as ‘*keigo*’, and the corresponding ‘honorifics’, are attested only in the last decade of the 19th century⁵. One of the fathers of Japanese linguistics, Motoki Tokieda (時枝誠記), (in his 1940 work: *Kokugogakushi* [A History of National Language Studies]) equated the history of *keigo* studies to a history of the unfolding of *keigo* consciousness, or a history of self-awareness (Nishida, 1987:204). No doubt this awareness received the strongest thrust at the time of Japan’s enthusiastic encounter with foreign languages following the re-opening of the country in 1868. However, the encounter with foreign languages and cultures led to numerous but often simplistic comparisons from which *keigo* studies did not necessarily benefit: very few publications dealt explicitly with the question of *keigo* in other

⁴ The Portuguese missionary Ioao Rodriguez wrote extensively and systematically about *keigo* in his *Arte de Lingoa de Iapam*, published in Nagasaki between 1604 and 1608. However, due to the Tokugawa regime’s intolerance of Christian missionaries and the closure of the country, his work had a strong influence on other foreign missionaries and scholars long before it reached the Japanese scholars, some three centuries later, in the early Showa period (1926-1989) (Nishida, 1987:224).

⁵ According to Lewin (1967), the first English work which employs the term ‘honorific’ systematically is B. H. Chamberlain’s ‘Handbook of Colloquial Japanese’ (1888) and the first record of the term *keigo* is Fumihiko Ootsuki (大槻文彦)’s grammatical introduction to the dictionary *Genkai* (1891). Toshiki Tsujimura (辻村敏樹) (1977:89) however, records the use of the compound in Yoshikage Inoue (井上淑)’s *Katsugo Shinron* of 1863, although he admits it may have been read differently (*uyamai kotoba*). He maintains that a clear reading of *keigo* appears in Tanaka Yoshikado (田中義廉)’s *Shoogaku Nihon Bunten* of 1874 and at least 2 more works in the same and the following year.

languages; most took for granted that there was no such thing to begin with. In any case, the adoption of an accepted terminology is probably both an index of an enhanced awareness of the peculiarities of this linguistic category and a factor which contributed to the appearance of *keigo* as an independent item of linguistic enquiry. A monograph of Yoshio Yamada (山田孝雄) in 1924 is thought to mark the beginning of such era (see Lewin:110).

The term *keigo* (敬語) is the Sino-Japanese reading of a two-character compound formed by *kei-*, meaning ‘respect’ or ‘deference’, and *-go*, meaning ‘language’. The term, like the English term ‘politeness’, is rather deceptive in its suggesting a mere relation with notions of respect, or politeness. This representation made a ‘scientific’ understanding of the nature of the phenomenon rather more arduous than it would have been, had it not evoked a moral dimension. Early categorisations of *keigo* were limited to a simple distinction of devices for expressing deference and devices for expressing humility, an obvious consequence of a narrow view of *keigo* as the ‘language of respect’. However, even while maintaining the restrictive label of *keigo*, already before the war, some scholars had proposed a more comprehensive view. Kanae Sakuma (佐久間鼎) (1888-1970) recognised the necessity to consider ‘ugly language’ (*kitanai kotoba*) in order to explain the existence of a ‘fine, beautiful language’ (*utsukushii rippana kotoba*). Motoki Tokieda (1900-1967) defined the discrimination between deference (*son*, 尊) and contempt (*hi*, 卑) as two sides of the “conceptual representation of the subject matter” (*sozai no gainenteki haaku*) (Kindaichi et al. 1988). With the postulation of a system of oppositions for the expression of modal meanings, i.e. the inclusion of impoliteness in the study of honorifics, a scientific approach can finally be established. (Incidentally, the study of impoliteness only hit the international academic arena roughly half a century later, with Culpeper’s 1996 paper: ‘anatomy of impoliteness’. A few other scholars had incorporated this side of the distinction in their theoretical definitions but failed to maintain it consistently in their investigations, as discussed by Eelen 2001:87).

The study of honorifics rises to a more comprehensive plane when the underlying interpersonal and evaluative dimension – as opposed to the technicalities of the grammatical coding – gets highlighted. Early signs of a modern notion of *Taiguu* (lit.: “treatment, manner of entertainment”), i.e. a subject’s expressive choice of linguistic forms which reflect his/her regard for determined objects and people, and his/her assessment of the relation with an addressee, appear in the Meiji period [1968-1912]. *Taiguu* naturally includes impoliteness, otherwise known as ‘negative *keigo*’, or derogatory expressions, rightly considered the deferential language’s opposite pole along the common axis of the evaluative attitude⁶. The fortune of the term *Taiguu* however, when compared to that of *keigo*, was short-lived. This is attributed by many to the propagandistic efforts of pre-war Japanese nationalists. The construction of a Japanese identity demanded emphasis on specifically Japanese ethical virtues: a sense of respect and modesty were seen as characteristic traits. A term like *keigo* (“the language of respect”) was seen as proving the point much better than the blandly value-neutral *Taiguu*

⁶ The pioneering use of the term is attributed to Masami Okada’s (岡田正美) *Taiguuhoo* [A grammar of Treatment Expressions, or Mode of Treatment] in an article which appeared in 1900 on *Gengogakuzasshi* 11/5-6 [The Linguistic Journal] (Tsuji-mura 1992: 132). Soon after that, Daisaburoo Matsushita’s use of *Taiguu* in the publication *Nihon zokugo bunten* [A Grammar of Japanese slang] in 1901 by *Seinosha* (? 誠之社), further contributed to the popularisation of the term.

(Tsujimura 1992:134, and Kindaichi et al 1988:610). *Taiguu* was to be revived after the war by Shizuo Mizutani (水谷静夫)⁷ and others (Tsujimura 1992:137), but it has remained specialist terminology, an explanation of which invariably calls for the term *keigo*.

The Council for the National Language (*Kokugo shingikai*) has so far produced two official programmatic, if not normative, documents regarding Japanese Honorifics. The first was issued in 1952, the second in 1998. Both documents refer to Honorifics as *Keigo*, a choice explained as the need to reflect laymen's consciousness and everyday discourse. The primary intent of the first was to prompt a simplification of a formally excessively cumbersome system and an invitation to use *keigo* to mark horizontal rather than vertical relations, which would reflect the new democratic orientation of the country⁸. The second, naturally reflecting the intervening nearly five decades of *keigo* studies, is mostly concerned with the need to conceive of *keigo* in more general terms (indeed as interactional behaviour, or *taiguu koodoo*) and as a situationally-based, complex system for the management of smooth interpersonal relations (Bunkachoo 1998:4). While emphasising the view of *keigo* as tool for the management of social relations, the latter document also insists that maintaining the whole traditional formal taxonomy (Humble, Deferential forms etc.) is of paramount importance for the preservation of the national language and culture (Bunkachoo 1998:5). It emphasises that "expressing consideration by means of appropriate expressions of politeness is a custom ingrained in the Japanese culture"⁹. Such emphasis on the traditional categorisation and normative uses on the part of professional linguists may seem odd, or plainly conservative. However, this example underscores the dilemma facing any discourse on politeness. While a scientific categorisation must be socially neutral and objective, "in practical classifications, such as in calling someone (im)polite, one is involved in immediate social action; one draws a social distinction based on value, one subjects the other's behaviour to (social) evaluation, one approves or condemns" (Eelen 2001:37). The importance of a social sensitivity of the normative discourse on politeness, or one's metalinguistic beliefs in processes of socialisation and hence in the formation of a cultural identity, are rather unquestionable.

The Council for the National Language's document does not lament the loss of 'good manners', as many popular publications often have done. It does however mention the profound social transformations likely to have an effect on the use of *keigo*: extensive urbanisation (with its loss of community-based activities), gender equality, devaluation of the generation gap, information technology and the media, and the impact of business culture and business encounters. Interestingly, it also mentions the massive population of foreign learners of Japanese and their impact on the whole Japanese society.

The understanding of the myriad of factors affecting *keigo* highlights the pervasiveness of such tool for the achievement of social stakes and its rather 'politic' nature (Watts, 1992).

⁷ *Taiguu Hyoogen no Kiso* [Foundations of Treatment Expressions] (1955), private press edition.

⁸ The document is reproduced in Bunkachoo 1974: 83, appendix 2, Nishida 1987:407, and also Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyujo 1990:138.

⁹ *Tekisetsuna Keii Hyoogen ni yotte samazamana hairyo wo arawasu koto wa nihon no bunka ni nezashita kan'yoo to natte iru*, p. 7.

2. The work of Fujio Minami in context

It was mentioned above that in the early 20th century there begins to emerge a modern, comprehensive view of politeness as a kind of (social) behaviour and as the total of positive as well as negative attitudes towards, and evaluation of, objects and interlocutors.

The legacy of Motoki Tokieda to the study of politeness cannot be stressed enough. To him we owe the observation that the use of *keigo* says as much about the esteem in which a speaker holds addressees and referents as it does about his/her own personality and erudition. (Ooishi 1974:13). This recalls Erving Goffman's considerations on deference and demeanour: "An act through which the individual gives or withholds deference to others typically provides means by which he expresses the fact that he is a well or badly demeaned individual" (Goffman 1967:81, from a work of 1956). Again to Tokieda's 1941 work: *Kokugo Genron* [A Study of the National Language], we owe the emphasis on the function of *keigo* as a tool for the 'discrimination' or 'discernment' (*shikibetsu*, or *benbetsu*) of social meanings (Tsuji-mura 1992:3). His 'theory of language process' led him to state rather provocatively, and controversially, that what had thus far been rated as the kernel of linguistic politeness, i.e. the two categories of *Sonkeigo* and *Kenjoogo* (Deferential and Humble, or Referent Honorifics) involved no deferent intention at all. Instead he believed that these categories indicated merely a speaker's recognition of etiquette (*girei*) or a reflection of the speakers' education (*kyooyoo*), and if a speaker's direct expression of affect was to be found it would be exclusively in the category of *Teineigo* (Addressee Honorifics)¹⁰ (Morino 1973:104). Whatever the persuasion of the various commentators on what is clearly a very intriguing proposal, his take on politeness radically departs from the otherwise rather common view of *keigo* as "a manifestation of the virtues of deference and capacity to yield" (*sonkei suijoo* [推譲] *no bitoku no araware*) (as pointed out by Tsujimura 1992:3), or as the attitude which reflects the unique co-operative structure of human relationships in Japanese society (Yoichi Fujiwara [藤原与一] 1974: 239-40).

Tokieda is acutely aware of the dangers of drawing unmediated conclusions on Japanese culture and thought from the Japanese language (see on this Karatani 1995). Post-war linguistic scholarship, while steadily moving away from such propagandistic views, has proposed a variety of rationales for the use of *keigo* which often exposes the difficulty of abandoning traditional analyses.

Takeshi Shibata's (柴田武) sociolinguistic work during the 50s was pioneering in that it represented the first attempt at a coherent ethnolinguistic project, and the introduction of various experimental methods (Kunihiro et al. 1998:11 and 103 on honorifics surveys). Not surprisingly, Shibata is one of the scholars who early on strongly advocated a broader view of Honorifics, from the notion of 'negative *keigo*' as a complement of the *keigo* for deferential purposes, to the notion of *keigo* as etiquette. Shibata crucially distinguishes between basic forms in morphological terms (where *-da* is the basic form of *-desu*, *-degozaimasu*, etc.) and in sociolinguistic terms (where, at least in the standard Tokyo dialect, the basic form is *-desu* and the other forms convey special pragmatic effects). His strong interest in the pragmatic usage of honorifics is reflected

¹⁰ This distinction follows from the more general distinction between *shi* and *ji*, or 'words' with a signifying semantic content and 'linking elements', or 'objective' and 'subjective' expressions (as Karatani 1995:21 defines them).

also in the choice to eliminate honorifics for the imperial family from his investigation, on the ground that they are selected on the basis of ‘social class’ rather than ‘social or psychological distance’, i.e. they do not offer the speaker any choice (Kunihiro et al, 1998:93 ff).

Hatsutaroo Ooishi (大石初太郎) (1974) underlines power differences (by pointing out, among other things, gender-related differential use) and the mercantile extensive use of *keigo* in business discourse. In this and subsequent works he also discusses *keigo* as reverence (*agame*), formality, distance, dignity, decency, irony, contempt, and finally endearment (see Tomio Kubota’s discussion of the latter in *Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyujo*: 1990:94 ff.). Although it is easy to detect a strong moral take in his writings, it should nonetheless be noticed that he also talks of *wakimae*, or ‘discernment’, a term which has now acquired global currency thanks to its utilisation by Sachiko Ide (1989) in her critique of Brown and Levinson.

On the other hand, Yutaka Miyaji (宮地裕) in 1971 talks of *keigo* as ‘*shakoo no kotoba*’, or language for social interaction. Fumio Inoue (井上史雄) in 1972 (see on both Ooishi, 1974: 15) notes that even Referent Honorifics, i.e. Deferential and Humble forms, are in fact strongly regulated first and foremost by considerations about the addressee (the *hic et nunc* of the interaction), providing an early suggestion of the strategic, rather than indexical, function of honorifics (on this distinction see Pizziconi, 2003). Miyaji also introduces (*Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyujo* 1992:21) a term that Minami will borrow: *Teichoogo*. This distinguishes referential from purely indexical honorifics of the addressee¹¹ – a distinction which again underscores the strategic use of referential honorifics.

Shiro Hayashi (林四郎) (1973) in a volume dedicated to the study of *keigo* as a part of human behaviour (*koodoo no naka no keigo*) attempts to draw parallelisms between verbal and non-verbal polite behaviour, and how they are reflected in perceptions based on the five senses and ideational meanings.

Toshiki Tsujimura (辻村敏樹) (1977), following Yoshio Yamada, distinguishes between absolute and relative uses of *keigo* envisaging in the latter a special category for benefactive constructions, but incorporates this view with Tokieda’s interest in meaning producing a categorisation with great pedagogic potential (*Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyujo* 1990:20). His most long-lasting and popularised legacy is perhaps the creation of the term *Bikago* for those instances of ‘embellishment’ of the linguistic content which are not directly oriented to the addressee (though previously included in the Addressee Honorifics) but achieve expressive effects via a speaker’s ‘care’ towards the linguistic form itself.

Seiju Sugito (杉戸清樹) (1983), utilises Minami’s framework and the notion of *koryoo* (consideration [顧慮]) – which he sees as *kikubari* (attention, care) – to discuss a speaker’s choice of appropriate expressions (see Kubota’s discussion in *Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyujo*: 1990:61ff.).

It is not possible to include, in this succinct overview, the work of all the scholars who have contributed to the debate on *keigo* so far. Let us conclude by mentioning the contribution to the discussion of honorifics made by two foreign scholars contemporary

¹¹ *Teineigo* terms, which are purely indexical, include *-desu*, *-masu*, *-degozaimasu*. *Teichoogo* terms, which have a propositional content, include structures such as *o-itashi-*, *go-mooshiage-* (which generally attach to *Teineigo* forms), prefixes such as *sho-*, *gu-*, etc.

to Minami. This is easily accounted for, as the nearly unique reference on the topic until the early 70s was Samuel Martin (1964), a seminal paper on Japanese and Korean for English-speaking audiences, which therefore would not have contributed much to Minami's approach (it is however quoted in his book). J.V. Neustupn's work in both English and Japanese is probably the wealthiest contribution of a non-native specialist to the debate on *keigo*. While both scholars demonstrate a very sophisticated eye for the subtleties of Honorific usage, they do not depart from the traditional taxonomies and classification.

Needless to say, traditional taxonomies are not necessarily bad taxonomies. However, these classifications do have several drawbacks: they crystallise conceptualisations of the honorifics' social functions and cultural meanings and hence become potentially inadequate as taxonomies as time goes by; they are rather unsuitable to the description of fine expressive nuances; and they can be very inadequate for pedagogical purposes (see the problem of terminology in Kokurutsu Kokugo Kenkyujo 1990, and Pizziconi 1997).

Minami's approach does not particularly lend itself to pedagogical models of Japanese politeness. Descriptive tables of fine distinctions in the 'features of the treatment' (of linguistic and human objects), or features of a speaker's evaluative attitude, do not necessarily aid learning and still require previous knowledge of the phenomena under discussion. However they do aid the description of potential pragmatic nuances of Honorifics in the narrow sense, more general honorific devices, and non-verbal behaviour as well. Moreover, they permit a comparison of these diverse domains, based on the object and manner of evaluation in the various components involved in the choice of one or the other of a set of expressions. No doubt Tokieda's legacy is responsible for such a broad understanding of the phenomenon of *keigo*, ranging from dedicated devices with rather straightforward indexical meanings, through the interpersonal potential of interjections, conjunctions, and discourse to non-verbal communicative behaviour. Minami's contribution is the attempt to systematise such broad conception. His attention to the *evaluative* aspect of honorific usage, as well as the notion of simple semantic features that combine in different ways to generate a multiplicity of interactional hues are lines of thought worth pursuing to improve the way we conceptualise politeness in any language (see for example Eelen 2001 on the question of the *argumentativity* of politeness).

3. This work of Fujio Minami

The work translated here, *Keigo*, was published in 1987. However, the theory it exposes was in fact already fully elaborated some 15 years before. Much of the material presented here had already appeared in the 1973 article on *keigo* as part of (human) behaviour, in the volume of the same title, and the 1974 article: "The Semantic Structure of Honorifics" in the *Keigo Course*. This book is therefore a compendium of Minami's previous work on *keigo*, aimed at the larger public. It appeared in a pocket-size Iwanami Shinsho edition, and has since then been a popular reading for Japanese and foreign linguistics students, as well as the general public.

Although, as pointed out earlier, some of the ideas discussed in this book were 'in the air' in the early 70s, Minami's view is important for its comprehensiveness. Minami highlights here the 'exploitability' of non-honorific devices for politeness purposes, to the

point of including the stylistic differences between *wago* (or Japanese native words) and *kango* (words of Sino-Japanese origin). While this clearly opens up the question of where ‘politeness’ ends and ‘style’ begins, this broadening of perspective is crucial for an understanding of *keigo* as something more than a deferent intention towards superiors, and consequently an exploration of other ‘honorific meanings’. Similarly, once other indirect or euphemistic expressions (*imawashi*) start to be taken into account, it becomes clear that *keigo* is not only a Japanese phenomenon (a view in fact much more difficult to entertain for a speaker of a language rich in sophisticated honorifics than for the speaker of a language without them). The book discusses all these themes.

The original work is composed of the following chapters:

1. Broad and narrow definitions of *Keigo*
2. *Keigo* in Japanese and in foreign languages
3. The structure of *Keigo*
4. Conditions for the use of *Keigo*
5. The function of *Keigo*
6. *Keigo* in action
7. The future of *Keigo*

Barbara Pizziconi has translated chapters 1 and 3, Noriko Inagaki chapters 4 and 5. The choice of these chapters is motivated by relevance and constrained by space.

A glossary and lists of abbreviations are provided in the first footnotes of the two translator’s respective sections.

The book begins by questioning the very notion of *keigo*, which – as pointed out earlier – is not necessarily self-explanatory even for Japanese native speakers. In fact, in terms of the distinction between folk and scholarly conceptions of Politeness (Watts et al 1992:3, Eileen 2001:42) while Minami’s interest is clearly directed to a ‘Politeness2’ he addresses an audience that probably only thinks of *keigo* in terms of ‘Politeness1’. This latter, common-sense notion of *keigo* is rooted in everyday experience and derived from a rather evident systematic patterning and taxonomy. Hence Minami’s first task is that of broadening the field, and he sets out to do this by discussing possible approaches and types of classification, and then providing numerous examples of the generalisability of politeness considerations, in both old and new categories. Two points must be noted about this section – corresponding to chapter 1 of the book. First of all, it must be kept in mind that Minami’s goal here is to redefine *keigo* and show its salience with as many examples as possible of instances arching over verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Despite the translator’s attempt to provide exhaustive glosses of the massive number of terms presented, these had to be economical and will still inevitably require some previous knowledge of the terms’ use. Secondly, the list is possibly liable to be criticised for its apparent casualness. Minami does not provide any criteria for his inventory, and the result is an overview in which, for example, lexical elements and sentence length, or also elements that are part of closed sets and those which are not, are all treated in the same way. In my view, the value of the inventory lies, rather, in its highlighting the underlying ‘discrimination’ (as inspired by Tokieda) or paradigmatic relations of meanings and devices, which can be strategically mobilised for politeness purposes.

In the following chapter (corresponding to chapter 3 in the book) he begins illustrating his own semantic classification and his fundamental notion of ‘consideration’ or ‘regard’. It is this intermediate level of the speaker mediation which gives this model an advantage over the others. No matter how sophisticated a classification, linking linguistic elements to social meanings directly and unequivocally tends to produce weak generalisations and massive numbers of counterexamples (a problem which is still blighting much of the global discussion on politeness). This is due to the multiple socio-pragmatic norms which regulate the use of honorifics in different speech communities and situational settings. Therefore it is the mediation provided by the speaker’s consideration (together with its variable objects) which allows a more flexible explanation of a speaker expressive choice and the variety of observed behaviours.

In the last paragraph of chapter 3 Minami discusses the features of the expressive devices that can convey interactionally sensitive meanings. These expressive devices are different from the ‘features of treatment’ (which refer to the speaker’s evaluative attitude), and refer rather to the symbolic images employed in honorification. Minami’s notion of ‘expressive devices’ bears in fact striking resemblance to the notion of metaphor, which studies in cognitive linguistics have brought to the fore in the last twenty years or so. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) submit: “metaphorical concepts can be extended beyond the range of ordinary literal ways of thinking and talking into the range of what is called figurative, poetic, colourful, or fanciful thought and language”. If we look at honorifics through Minami’s characterisation, then ‘honorific meanings’ seem to be just that, perhaps only in a slightly more restricted sense of representing uses of language whose primary objective is the management of interpersonal relationships, or face-work. Since metaphors lend them selves to be vehicles of interpretation, honorific meanings can be constructed by analogy relatively easily, as long as they have some experiential basis. Minami’s ‘devices’ are substantially types of metaphorical imagery mobilised to categorise interactional experience. Some of Minami’s ‘devices’ have a clear orientational nature – as he points out in chapter 3 – and their spatial basis is relatively intuitive: up/down, before/after, direct/indirect. Temporal qualities are indicated by immediate/hesitant, physical qualities by big/small, order/disorder, aesthetic qualities by elegance/vulgarity, excellence/subordination, ornamentation/non-ornamentation, and affective/cognitive qualities by consensus/dissent, attention/indifference. Though these qualifications sometimes refer to morpho-semantic devices (such as, for example, the application of the characters: [大] ‘big’, or [高] ‘high’) sometimes to prosodic devices, sometimes to non-verbal behaviour, it is easy to see the non-arbitrary nature of such (nonetheless culturally specific) associative conventions (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:14).

Space constraints do not allow any further elaboration on the link between honorification and cultural imagery in this context, but this is definitely an area on which Minami’s research seems to call for further investigation.

Chapter 4 deals with regulative norms, or external conditions which determine a speaker’s choice (or avoidance, of course) of honorifics, as well as internal conditions. This is a descriptive, not predictive, list, but it is valuable nonetheless as a reflection of a certain common sense or collective consciousness about *keigo* – e.g. that experience (or seniority) is an important discriminatory criterion in the domain of vertical relationships,

as many studies of Japanese society also point out¹², etc. The section on ‘internal conditions’ illustrates the various linguistic constraints on the use of honorifics from word morphology to discourse.

The final chapter translated here, Chapter 5, deals with the main functions of honorifics. The aforementioned categorisation of the many functions of *keigo* (and the crucial distinction between the not always corresponding deferent forms and deferent intentions) by Hatsutaroo Ooishi (大石初太郎) is presented, and briefly juxtaposed with more general paradigms of the functions of linguistic communication. This allows Minami to extrapolate six main functions of the *keigo*, through which he revisits verbal and non-verbal behaviour.

Finally, a note on the style: many of those not accustomed to the rhetorical style of Japanese linguistics may find the prose rather unconventional. The translators have attempted little literary intervention, a decision that in retrospect may not have promoted transparency for an audience unfamiliar with such texts. The Japanese audience would have been familiar with both the register - deliberately simple and informal - and the many examples referred to as supportive evidence. Compared to today’s mainstream scientific linguistic discourse, descriptions and categorizations may not aim at rigorous exhaustiveness, generalisations may seem casual. Yet the content of the book bears witness to Minami’s extraordinary power of observation. Even those who may find the form of this scientific work somewhat questionable will no doubt acknowledge his significant effort to reject the temptation of a romanticised view of Japanese and to attempt a fine-grained picture of *keigo* in all the intricacies of such an exuberant, complex and sophisticated instrument of social action.

¹² For Yoshino (1992:87; 100) such ‘age group consciousness’ is even one of the canons called upon in holistic theories on modern Japan to claim a unique identity. According to him, Japanese industrial society conceives of itself as an ‘extension’ of a pre-industrial, communal society because the old parent-child relationships are reproduced (or seen to be reproduced) in the workplace, where senior members take care of, and conversely command deference from, subordinates.

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