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Centre of Language and Literature
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BROWN AND LEVINSON ONLINE

On the implications of politeness strategies and the Japanese desu/masu-form in a massively multiplayer online game

Author: Jens Larsson
Supervisor: Lars Larm

Abstract

Politeness in Japanese has been the subject of many linguistic inquiries. Overarching these is Brown and Levinson's (1987) influential but also criticized (c.f. Matsumoto, 1988; Ide, 1992) theory on politeness as a cross-linguistic factor. By looking into the *desu/masu*-form and how it contrasts the so called plain form in Japanese, I will show that some of the criticism is misplaced, partly due to how we define the vague term 'politeness'. My data comes from the contemporary environment of an online game by using the output of its Japanese chat channels. I will relate my findings to earlier research on speech level style-shifts in Japanese (see Ikuta, 1983; Wetzel, 1988; Cook, 1996b, 1998, 2008; Maynard, 1991, 1993). These show that the normative meaning of honorific expressions can have added pragmatic meaning as strategic implicatures outside of their normative nature. This lends credit to Brown and Levinson's theory for Japanese. Agreeing with Usami (2002) that honorifics need to be better accounted for in their theory, I will argue that it is important to distinguish between normative and non-normative use of honorific expressions. The deviations from normative use is where the implicature is created together with any added, non-normative pragmatic meaning.

Abbreviations

GLOSS	Meaning
ATTR	Attributive
CIT	Citation (particle)
CONJ	Conjecture
CONTR	Contracted form
COP	Copula
EMPH	Emphatic
GEN	Particle marking possessive
HON	Referent honorific form
HORT	Hortative
NEG	Negation
NPAST	Non-past
OBJ	Particle marking direct object
POL	Addressee honorific form/'polite' (*desu*/*masu*-form)
Q	Question particle/Interrogative
SUB	Particle marking subject
TENT	Tentative
TOP	Particle marking topic

GENERAL	Meaning
CMC	Computer Mediated Communication
FTA	*Face Threatening Act*, see Brown and Levinson (1987)
MMO/MMOG	Massively Multiplayer Online Game
TRP	Transition Relevance Place, see Yule (1996); Levinson (1983)

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction and overview

A few years ago I was interviewed by Japanese friends who worked at small, local publication. The interview was conducted in Japanese. The atmosphere was relaxed so lower (*read:* friendly) speech levels were dominant. However, whenever there was a question directly related to the interview, I was addressed in a higher (*read:* formal) speech level. This contrast let me instantly know, with a simple shift in speech level, that we were 'on record' in regards to the interview, rather than chatting along as friends.

The speech levels in question were the so called *desu/masu*-form (higher) and the plain form (lower). Shifting between them for any reason is called a speech level shift, or more commonly, a style-shift. As a consequence of an earlier study of the *desu/masu*-form and style-shifts within interviews in Japanese magazines (see Larsson, 2008), I have encountered great skepticism towards the treatment of politeness in Japanese. Japanese scholars in particular (e.g. Matsumoto 1988, Ide 1992), criticize Brown and Levinson's (1987) influential politeness theory for not considering the constraints language and society can put on a native speaker. In this thesis I will use the *desu/masu*-form and the plain form, found in conversations from the contemporary environment that is a game played over the internet with thousands of simultaneous users, to show why their criticism is misplaced and why we need to reconsider Brown and Levinson's theory for Japanese as well.

I expected to find mostly lower speech levels but found the Japanese community within the game to make use of higher speech levels as well. This does, in my opinion, reinforce earlier studies (see Ikuta, 1983; Wetzel, 1988; Cook, 1996b, 1998, 2008; Maynard, 1991, 1993) on so called style-shifts in Japanese in that the speaker's knowledge of polite forms is relevant to any added, further contextualized pragmatic meaning and function the different linguistic forms can have. I will argue that deviations from normative use is reason enough to reconsider Brown and Levinson's framework (1987) for Japanese. The speaker can intentionally or unintentionally use one form over the other and by doing so attach other pragmatic meanings to the normative forms and expressions. This behavior not only exemplifies Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies but also speaks against Ide's claim that group centric behavior is always prioritized in Japanese.

Ikuta (1983) and Usami (2002) both emphasize the importance of discourse analysis, rather than the sentence level analysis Matsumoto and Ide adopted for their research. I agree with them both in this respect and will use their studies to show that we need to distinguish between normative and actual use of polite linguistic expressions.

In this chapter I will present the environment and my results. In *chapter 2* I will describe Brown and Levinson's theory and the criticism they have received from Japanese linguists. This is followed by a description of the *desu/masu*-form and the plain form in *chapter 3*, and how they work in speech level shifts as well as an introduction to the concept in *chapter 4*. In *chapter 5*, I will briefly deal with computer mediated communication and how it relates to the environment my data is taken from. *Chapter 6* is dedicated to my own data and examples of Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies found therein. The thesis is concluded with a discussion of my results in *chapter 7*.

1.2 A note on 'Western languages'

The term 'Western languages' is an often used term by Brown and Levinson's criticizers. Its usage and meaning within the field seems closer to 'some Germanic languages', which I find irresponsible. In Ide's case, her data can only account for English. The debate on the diversity within linguistic politeness has been fueled by the assumption that we should treat some East Asian languages differently, yet we fail to acknowledge this diversity within a supposed group of 'Western languages' that we use for comparison.

In regards to honorifics, even closely related languages, such as German and Swedish, handle polite expressions quite differently. For example, referent honorific expressions are still present in German; the second person pronoun *Du* 'you' often becomes the third person plural *Sie* when referring to a person of higher social status. Swedish, on the other hand, no longer differentiates between social status as far as personal pronouns go[1].

1.3 Purpose

The idea is to find out to what extent the *desu/masu*-form is used within the chat environment. I predict that there exists a level of intimacy between the

[1]The gradual reform took place during the late 1960's and early 1970's. Several factors lead up to this change, including language change in a major Swedish newspaper. Also, an official within the The National Board of Health and Welfare at the time, Bror Rexed, used the 'direct' second person singular 'du', rather than the plural version 'Ni' in official matters, which helped in speeding up the process.

players, since the social context is already (virtually) confined; merely entering the game is to join an environment with an in-group mentality[2]. Therefore, plain form should be closer to what can be considered a normative speech level. Utterances are also often truncated in different ways, making it difficult to judge speech level, I have treated these as a lower speech style if the context does not hint otherwise.

I will look for signs of in-/out-group behavior signaled by the use and non-use of the *masu*-form. I predict that frequent commenters in general will use a lower speech level as more established users, whereas newcomers will in general use a higher speech level. Other factors I look out for is whether the use of *masu*-form triggers a higher speech level with the rest of the commenters or not, i.e. is speech level maintained to a 'sufficient' degree or simply ignored? Further, are there any signs of style shifts within unchanged contexts? If yes, do any of them seem to have a purpose?

1.4 The environment

The source of my data is a so called 'Massively Multiplayer Online' game[3] (MMOG), called EVE®Online. The game itself is a virtual 'sandbox'[4] set in a fictional future version of our own universe. The majority of the user activity is carried out with other users as the main competition and/or targets, be it hunting down other players to relieve them of the virtual belongings, making virtual money on the open market or finding unexploited trade routes.

In regards to gender and possible effects on language usage, it is not uncommon for men to play – but not necessarily 'role play' – as women and vice versa. This makes it very difficult to draw any conclusions without knowing the specific user in question.

There are concepts specific and unique to this environment, such as game mechanics, which in turn creates a unique and highly contextualized vocabulary. This shared knowledge creates the sense of being a member of a group. There are also further sub-groups within the population, akin to user created 'virtual closed gate societies', that could be thought of as one's close friends. However, these sub-groups are usually not open to everyone. As such, I could not easily use them for my research.

[2]This is also from my own experience of these environments and the casual jargon attached to them.

[3]The term MMOG refers to the fact that there are many participants at once, interacting within the same virtual environment. It is not uncommon that several thousand participants are online at any given moment. However, this does not mean that the users are all participating in the same event as these are often vast, world like environments usually divided into smaller areas.

[4]Refers to a setting where the user is relatively free in choice of what activity to participate in.

1.4.1 The chat environment

The mechanics of the chat environment in question are relatively simple. There are several chat instances available, often referred to as 'channels'. One can usually only view content from one channel at a time, though participating in several at once, switching between them, is no problem. The main chat window is split up in layers, similar to how most modern web browsers keep content separated in sub-windows ('tabs') within the main application window. Some channels are user created and and can be closed to an invitation-only group (see my note on sub-groups above). Many are open to anyone playing the game, however. The channels are divided into subject, usually relating to game specific content, but also into language, of which Japanese is one of those available.

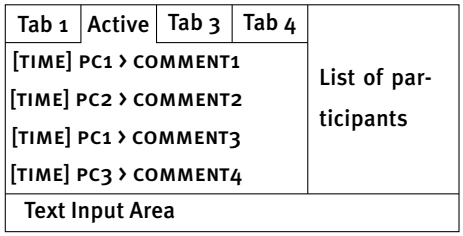

Figure 1: Layout of the chat window

The physical appearance of the user chat interface is a window divided into sections as shown in *figure 1*. The upper part contains all the comments back to the point where one entered the chat channel in question, while the lower part is dedicated to text input. A time stamp for each comment is also displayed ([TIME] in *figure 1*), which can help a user greatly when assessing whether the topic has changed or not.

The output is basically a timeline of what looks like a never ending conversation. Of course, this is not the case. Users might enter and leave the chat channel at any given time, as well as frequently and suddenly change the topic. There can be topics within topics, several topics might be discussed at once — such as comments on a previous topic suddenly appearing after a topic change — and so forth. While this is not all that different from a discussion taking place between interlocutors who are in each others' physical vicinity, it can be a problem to discern what comment belongs to what topic. Luckily, finding out isn't limited to the interlocutor's memory of what has been said (or asking another user what the current topic is) however, since one can easily navigate back to what was previously said in the comment list.

The names of the participants are almost always some kind of nickname chosen for any one reason and not the user's real name.

1.5 Methodology

The chat data consists of chat logs from conversations in Japanese[5] that took place between 2008-04-26 and 2009-09-05. These are simple text files of varying length that are saved to a user's computer, starting from the point when he/she joined a specific chat channel within the game environment and ending when the user exits the game[6]. I have been given permission to use these for my study by the company that produced the game[7].

The preparation of the data consisted of finding instances of the grammatical forms that mark a higher speech level than predicted, i.e. the *desu/masu*-form. These are then evaluated to be either an upshift (a shift from a lower to a higher speech level) or the norm for the conversation at hand by assessing the normative speech style on discourse level. If there is indeed an upshift, the point of where it occurred as well as the current context has been considered. I refer to *chapter 4* for a more detailed explanation on style-shifts.

Since I expected the majority of the commenters to use the lower plain form (which an initial search confirmed), the search terms could be narrowed down to any utterance containing some form of a higher speech level (see *chapter 3* for the morphology involved). No super polite forms, such as *de gozaimasu* for the copula, were found. Some of the comments can not be taken into consideration for several reasons. Mostly, it is due to the being so called spam comments[8].

The search is set up so that a comment with any of the terms I have chosen will produce a hit. The search can then be narrowed down to specific users and their use and non-use of the polite forms in question.

[5] These consisted of 438 text files, consisting of 23 181 comments divided over 768 users.

[6] A new text file is automatically created each time one enters a chat channel.

[7] For better or worse, the company in question, CCP (http://www.ccpgames.com), have the rights to the users' comments. Consequently, one only needs permission from one source, rather than from each user respectively. This is the norm for all online environments of this kind to avoid legal issues.

[8] These are literally to be viewed as garbage, since they by definition do not relate to the current topic or are repeated excessively, to the extent of prohibiting discussion. There are comments advertising the selling of virtual money for real money. The selling of virtual goods for real money is usually strictly forbidden, though exceptions do exist. The term 'spam' has its origin in a Monty Python skit where it is repeatedly used in reference to the canned meat product of the same name.

1.6 Results

In general, due to how speech levels are handled by the players, I find that Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies work relatively well. However, it is also evident in my data that for a language, such as Japanese, that has a complex honorific system with grammatical consequences that are rooted in social conventions, a 'universal' politeness theory has to account for this in some way. While I object to Ide's (1992) stance, some middle ground needs to be found. Linguistically, my data shows signs both of group conscious and individualistic behavior (see *chapter 2* for more on this).

The tables below show a summary of the results. For a description of the different grammatical forms mentioned see *chapter 3*. The general concept of contracted forms is also explained in *section 5.6*. Note that the average numbers below do not take into account if one user has commented more than another. Also, '*desu/masu*-form' refers to all grammatical forms that can be marked for politeness via the use of this form, including verbals, copula and adjectives. Although, the term *'desu/masu'* also includes tentatives and hortatives, I have noted them separately in *figure 3* as the difference in morphology (or, rather, the lack thereof) calls for a separate search string (see *chapters 3* and *6*).

OVERVIEW	
Total number of comments	23 181
Total number of speakers	786
Comments/speaker (average)	29,5
desu/masu-form/speaker (average)	8,5

Figure 2: General statistics.

POLITE FORMS, NON-CONTRACTED		
	Total	Separate
desu and *masu*[a]	6676	
desu/masu-form/speaker (average)	8,5	
desu[b]		3550
masu (verbals)		2856
Tentatives		207
Hortatives		63
	Total:	6676

Figure 3: Polite forms in regards to the *desu/masu*-style.

[a]An overarching search yielded this total number to ensure the different categories were properly accounted for in the following separate searches.

[b]Includes all forms that attach to the polite copula marker: nominals, nominal and true adjectives in complementary position, conjecturals and semi-polite forms.

In general, the speech level is relatively low; the plain form is dominant. In total, sentences that contained either the *desu* or *masu*-form made up 28,8% of my data, which goes well with my prediction that the speech level would in general lean towards the use of a lower style, but that it would still be influenced by outer cultural factors.

Looking at the average post count per user (29,5) makes little sense as the most frequent commenter in my data makes up for almost 1% of all the comments, whereas 572 commenters (72,3% of the users in my data) have 10 or less comments to their name. 306 users (38,9%) have commented only once during the collection period.

I also hoped to find some correlation between the total number of comments from a user and the frequency of the *desu/masu*-form, such as a to favor plain forms but there seems to be no evidence of that. Graphs showing a percentage of respective user compared their total comment count can be found in the appendix on page 55, and 56 for a closer view. While the ratio is too inconsistent it can at least be said that all of the commenters in my data did at some time use the *desu/masu*-form, which furthers my argument that we still need to consider normative use before evaluating actual use in order to attach pragmatic meaning. *Figure 4* and 5 below show occurrences of *desu/masu*-forms relative to the number of comments for users ranging from around 40 to 600 comments in total. Note that in the tables in this section *desu/masu* occurrences covers all occurrences, including several instances in the same line/comment. In *figure 4* and 5 below, this has been taken into consideration and adjusted for so that it should represent 'any comment

with a *desu/masu*-form' rather than counting every *desu/masu* in a sentence throughout the data.

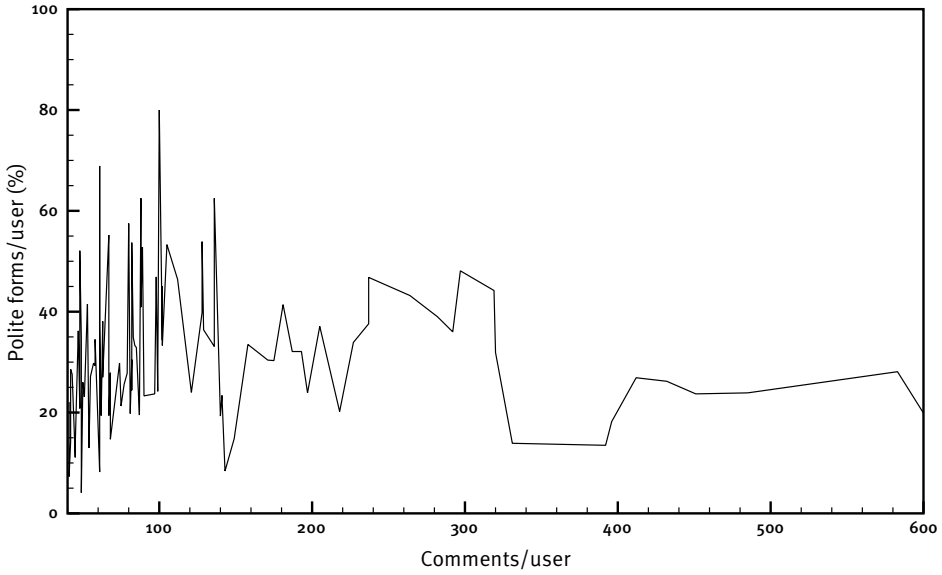

Figure 4: Users ranging between 40-600 comments.

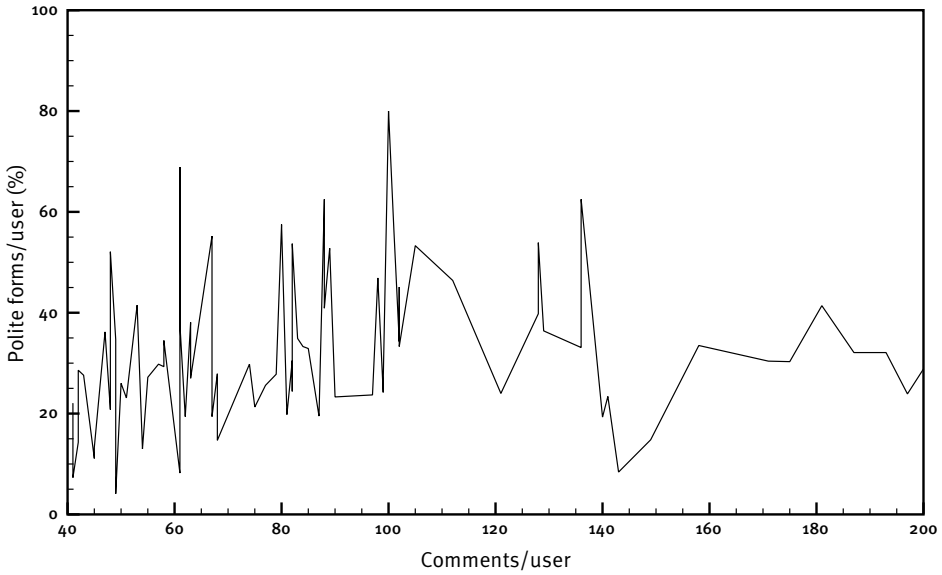

Figure 5: Close up of *figure 4*, showing users ranging between 40-200 comments.

I have included larger versions of these diagrams in the appendix.

Due to Endo Hudson's (2008) findings I have also looked into the frequency of the supposedly softer '*-nai desu*' form (see *chapter 3* and *section 3.3*) and compared to the more proper and formal '*-masen*' ending. Endo Hudson reports around a 2:1 ratio, *masen* being dominant. Incidentally, I find the very same 2:1 ratio for these forms, though that should be seen as purely coincidental.

SEMI-POLITE FORMS	
Proper neg. *masu*-forms (*-masen*)	380
Semi-pol. neg. (*-nai desu*[a])	183
Semi pol. affirmative (V-*desu*)	15
CONTRACTED FORMS	
Neg. semi-pol. 1 (ないっす *-naissu*)	22
Neg. semi-pol. 2 (ないす *-naisu*)	10
Affirmative (っす *-ssu*[b])	67

Figure 6: Semi-polite forms in regards to the *desu/masu*-style.

[a]Not including true adjectives, e.g. affirmative *takai* 'tall' becoming *taka*kunai desu, which is its proper conjugation.

[b]Includes true/nominal adjectives, copula constructions, conjecturals. No affirmative verbal constructions were found, e.g. *iku-ssu* for *iku* 'go'.

The interplay between the higher *desu/masu*-form and the lower plain form found in my data give further strength to earlier studies of style-shifts in Japanese. Generally, the *desu/masu*-form is often used as what Brown and Levinson would denote a negative politeness strategy (see *section 2.1*), whereas the plain form is an in group marker and is therefore closer to being a positive politeness strategy. Non-normative use of these forms (i.e. deviating from what can be thought of as an expected speech level based on social conventions) give further evidence of Brown and Levinson's being relevant for Japanese. However, normative use (conforming to the expected speech level) shows that we somehow need to account for honorifics as well. My data shows significant use of these normative forms and comes from an environment that is at the time of writing as contemporary as they get.

Style-shifts and normative use of polite forms in Japanese are evidence both for and against Brown and Levinson's theory for Japanese. However, I am of the opinion that, rather than object to their theory as a whole, we need to consider the linguistic constraints social conventions put on the speaker

of a language. Honorifics can create an implicature on top of any implicature found within the propositional content. Normatively, this could be to acknowledge an interlocutor's social status. Regarding implicatures stemming from non-normative use, I refer to *chapters 4* and *6*.

1.6.1 Problems

While assessing the average speech level of a frequent commenter might work well statistically, those commenting very seldom are a problem in this respect. I have no data that shows whether those on the lower end truly do not participate in the chat channel often or whether they simply did not play during the period but are, in fact, frequent commenters when they do. It could also be that they are mostly discussing in other, possibly closed channels, most of the time. However, the data collection was done over a period of more than 17 months so it is reasonable to argue that frequent players on hiatus should not belong in the group with 10 comments or less to any significant extent. Then again, those who participate in closed channels might. There is also a possibility that some players have registered alternative characters for any one reason so that a player (or rather, his character/avatar) who comes off as new might, in fact, be very knowledgeable and experienced.

There is also one important note to make concerning what is even an 'utterance' in a chat environment like this. There are not only one word sentences, but also frequent use of 'e-moji' as a 'one word comment'. In English these can be smileys, exclamation marks, whereas some East and South-East Asian languages have developed a quite complex system mimicking a wide range of nuanced facial expressions. For example, the following 'utterance' by the user A is part of the statistics:

(1) A: @o@;

Excerpt from my chat-transcript, taken from EVE®Online.

Presumably, it represents a face showing despair, panic or perhaps surprise depending on the context. How does one attach any sort of speech level to (1)? It becomes a problem when trying to statistically correlate the number of comments per user to their average respective speech level in regards to the *desu/masu*-form. It can on occasion help with judging context but on the whole it becomes a quite subjective and not very meaningful task.

I the next chapter I will present Brown and Levinson's theory and some of the criticism they have received.

2 POLITENESS IN THE TRACKS OF BROWN AND LEVINSON

By far, the most influential theory within the field of linguistic politeness is Brown and Levinson's theory (1987) of politeness as a universal, cross-linguistic factor. The claim that their theory is universal has been met by heavy criticism, mainly by Japanese scholars. In this chapter I will give a short introduction to their theory and present the criticism from Japanese linguists. More importantly, I will also give reasons as to why we should rethink some of the criticism.

I want note that I am far from addressing all of the criticisms nor do I claim that Brown and Levinson's framework is flawless in any way (nor is Brown and Levinson making that claim). I simply encourage the thought that some of Brown and Levinson's ideas might work well even for Japanese. Therefore I have chosen to direct my effort at criticism from that particular linguistic area.

2.1 The foundations of the framework

In essence, Brown and Levinson's theory describes politeness as a strategical device to maintain one's public self image and to fulfill one's 'needs' and 'wants'.

Let us consider requests, as they are perhaps the most transparent examples of the strategic nature of the framework. In order to make a vocal request that can accomplish one's 'need' it is important to convey this in such a way that one does not impose on the listener (from whom the speaker makes said request) to such a degree that he/she becomes unwilling to comply. That is, the speaker will use different strategies, such as polite expressions, to maximize the possibility of a positive outcome and to lessen the risk of any repercussions. As for requests, these strategies can be to simply ask directly ('Can you make me a sandwich?'), being indirect (saying 'I'm allergic to smoke' to convey 'Do not smoke here.'), by ordering ('Wash my car!') and so on (Brown and Levinson, 1987:68). They argue that, in this sense, politeness is universal and cross-linguistic.

There are a few important concepts that make up the basis of the theory. One of these are implicatures (see Grice, 1991; Levinson, 1983). That is, an utterance can have implicit meaning attached to it, rather than explicit meaning – again, consider 'I'm allergic to smoke' as an implicit way to convey the

explicit 'Do not smoke here'.

The second important concept Brown and Levinson base their theory on is that of *speech acts* (see Searle, 1969). The concept supposes that '*... the uttering of a sentence is, or is part of, an action within the framework of social institutions and conventions*' (Huang, 2007:93) or in much simpler terms that what we say is in itself also part of our actions. Most of the universal politeness theory circles around *locutionary speech acts*. That is, by 'saying' the speaker himself/herself can 'do' (e.g. 'I hereby declare you man and wife.') or 'make someone feel compelled to do' (or think) whatever it is the speaker hoped for (e.g. 'Make me a cup of coffee, will you?').

Moreover, Brown and Levinson have adopted the notion of 'face'[9], as in 'losing ones face', as an analogy for the risk of failure or possible repercussions an utterance – any utterance – might have. Any member of society is said to have a 'negative face' and a 'positive face'. Negative face symbolizes one's want for freedom from imposing on others, whereas the positive face is one's want to be desirable by others (Brown and Levinson, 1987:68). This gives rise to different strategies the speaker can adopt, in order to maintain – and cooperate to maintain – face in various contexts.

'Positive politeness' strategies are those that serve to maintain the interlocutor's positive face and include attending to the hearer ('John! Just the man I wanted to see!'), seeking agreement ('Isn't this the best hamburger ever?') and joking ('Yes, we missed Halley's comet but no worries, we'll have another shot in 75 years.'). Usami (2002:14) notes that most of these are *function-oriented* and use in-group identity markers. This has a bearing on the possible functions and consequences of style-shifts, which I will present in more detail in *chapter 4*.

'Negative politeness' strategies seek to fulfill the needs of the interlocutor's 'negative face'. These strategies are closer to how normative polite expressions work. These include to be conventionally indirect ('It's cold in here', i.e.: 'Close the window'), to give deference (such as the use of normative polite expressions – '*Could* you *kindly* leave the area?' – and honorific affixes – 'Yes, Sir!') and to apologize ('I am sorry for breaking the window.').

[9]They claim their notion is based on Goffman's (1967) original definition but his has been disputed (see Watts, 2003:117-141). Ironically, it seems Goffman's description might have suited Japanese better since it *'is founded in and derived from relationships with the social group and the public'* Park (2008a), rather than the individualistic approach Brown and Levinson have been criticized for.

2.1.1 Face threatening acts

To order the king of England during the middle ages to 'Make me a sandwich!' might have the consequence of quite literally losing ones face (or head, rather), whereas making the exact same request to someone intimate after a week without food in the desert will probably succeed with no repercussions at all.

Both of these supposedly threatens ones face (as in risking losing it) to various degrees. Losing ones face can in practice boil down to anything that can be seen as some sort of repercussion, such as being scolded or coldly neglected after having asked for said sandwich. Brown and Levinson have fittingly called the concept of risk taking that comes with speech acts and their strategies a 'face threatening act' (FTA). Some utterances, depending on context, might be a greater threat to ones face than others and will need a strategy that sufficiently mitigates this threat. For example, there is probably little risk in complementing the listener on his/her choice of furniture. However, as context changes the opposite could also be true, calling for a need of change in strategy. Perhaps the speaker complemented on the new dining group of someone who knows of the speaker's absolute dislike for the included chairs.

To clarify some of the most important different factors that can contribute to the 'weightiness' of an FTA, Brown and Levinson suggest the following formula:

(2) $W = P(H,S) + D(S,H) + R$

Brown and Levinson (1987:76)

Where W is the total weight of the FTA, P is the power the hearer has over the speaker, D their social distance and R degree of imposition. It should be noted that Brown and Levinson do not intend for this formula to be used in an absolute sense, but rather in a comparative sense to work out how different social factors can impact the weightiness of doing a specific FTA (see Brown and Levinson 1987:287, note 18). They also mention that both the P and D parameters are in broad terms since they might already exist as culture specific correlates. This is what we need to consider for Japanese (and other languages with honorifics). Usami also takes note of this and argues that we need to account for '*the constraints of honorific use as a grammar that encodes socio-cultural values*' Usami (2002:226-227).

What we can use this formula for then, is to, for example, observe how one factor can sometimes greatly outweigh the other two. In order to mitigate the

FTA efficiently, this factor should therefore be considered to have a higher priority. When it comes to degree of imposition (*R*), there seems to be some confusion as to what it implies. Watts (2003:93), for example, criticizes this factor for being dependent of the *D* and *P* factors. Since Brown and Levinson have already mentioned the cultural correlations of *P* and *D*[10], I would argue that *R* is there simply to acknowledge that there are culturally rooted factors that could have an impact on the outcome of doing an FTA on their own. For example, some cultures find it offending to ask for age, whereas some do not – regardless of social distance or power[11]. Unfortunately, Usami (2002), to whom I owe many of my arguments in the next section, brings up the formula but does not give any detailed thoughts on the *R* parameter.

For an example of how the formula can be applied, ponder the following: a medieval king of England would expect his people to do his bidding with no repercussions to a much greater extent than a politician of today can ever hope for. The king might directly impose on his people greatly and still risk little in terms of repercussions (save for a nation wide uproar), whereas the politician might quickly lose both face, trust and the next election if a strategy fails. The king has a great leeway due to his power, *P*, over the hearer, which lessens the impact of the FTA. A politician in a democratic society has no direct power over his/her people – rather, it is the people who has power over the politician. To compensate, the politician might try to show that he/she understands the needs of his/her 'fellow countrymen' to lessen the social distance whenever there is a tax increase ahead (i.e compensate for the weight of *P* by manipulating the *D* value), thereby lessening the weightiness of the FTA that any such decision might incur.

2.2 Meeting the criticism

Any language is influenced by social norms and taboos – this is not exclusive to Japanese. That is, what might be a taboo in one culture could be perfectly fine in another and any native speaker has to conform to social customs and conventions to some extent. Brown and Levinson do not deny this in any way. When meeting some of the criticism Brown and Levinson has received, the problem, again, comes down to what one means by 'politeness'. I will take help from Usami (2002) to show the importance of a clear meta-language,

[10]There might be a stronger or weaker underlying hierarchical structure that is reflected in language and social norms, for example. Sweden/Swedish shows a weaker formal hierarchy than does Japan/Japanese.

[11]*P* and *D* might or might not help with compensating for an FTA dealing with a particular taboo.

and why the lack of it is cause to some of the misplaced criticism.

2.2.1 Ide on group conscious behavior

The old concept of *uchi* 'in-group' and *soto* 'out-group' is deeply rooted in Japanese society [12]. *Uchi* can refer to 'home'[13] or 'inside', while *soto* means 'outside'. To quickly address the heart of the matter and its historical prominence, consider the following very brief excerpts, borrowed from *Kogojiten* (2001) a dictionary of classical Japanese. The crude translations are my own.

> **Uchi** *oku no i* ['the emotions within'], *kokoro no naka* ['the inside of one's heart'], *ie no naka* ['inside one's home]
>
> **Kogojiten (2001:182, search term: うち/内 'uchi')**

> **Soto** *tanin* ['other people'], *yoso* ['what is outside', 'other'], *ie no soto* [outside one's home]
>
> **Kogojiten (2001:747, search term: そと/外 'soto')**

Within society this refers to how one is a representative to a larger group when taking any action, such as talking to another person. Japanese honorifics, *keigo*, is the linguistic response to this concept of group consciousness. It is a framework of linguistic forms that code whether a speaker belongs to the same group as the listener or not; '*I do not talk about me and mine (*uchi*)in the same way that I talk about those who are* not *me or mine (*soto*)*' (Wetzel, 2004:4).

In regards to 'group' Ide (1992) goes as far as suggesting that Japanese does not have the volitional component that she claims must exist for Brown and Levinson's theory to be true. She argues that a native Japanese speaker must in every situation assess the social context and choose linguistic forms accordingly. She creates the dichotomy of *discernment*[14], where she places Japanese, and *volition*, which would then include English among others[15]. She means that a native Japanese speaker is not free to pick and choose words but is forced, linguistically, to choose a form appropriate for the social context

[12]The concept of creating a social boundary between 'me' and 'others' is of course not exclusive to Japanese.

[13]Home is the more general meaning of the word and the one usually referred to in daily conversation.

[14]Derived from the Japanese term *wakimae* 'discernment', 'understanding' (Kenkyuusha's New Extensive Japanese-English Dictionary, 5th Ed., 2003, 2004). In Japanese it is used as a concept, not unlike Ide's explanation, to account for how one should adapt language to social context.

[15]Unfortunately she uses the term 'Western languages'. I have addressed the problem and the irony of this in *section 1.2*

at hand. While she has a point, her arguments do not tell the whole story. What she describes is essentially *normative* use, not necessarily *actual* use. The problem is that she shows this via the result from a questionnaire, where the test participants judged the politeness level of different utterances in regards to formality and friendliness. The danger in drawing any general conclusions based on such results, is that one can not know what it reflects. Do the participants judge by what they think is the 'appropriate' (i.e normative) choice, or do they judge based on how they would have acted when faced with a real situation? In other words, Ide's study does not show actual use of polite forms, only how they are perceived in a normative scenario[16]. Consequently, it shows only that the linguistic constraint in honorifics needs to be better accounted for in Brown and Levinson's framework, but otherwise does little to disprove their theory for Japanese.

If one wishes to use questionnaires in this way, it could perhaps be an interesting (and necessary) experiment to record the participants a few weeks later and see how their actual use of polite expressions correlates to their written answers.

2.2.2 *Matsumoto on the propositional content*

Matsumoto (1988) tries to reason that for an utterance in Japanese that can not be seen as an FTA, speech level still has to be considered. This supposedly has the consequence that the strategic element of Brown and Levinson's theory becomes irrelevant. She uses the following examples as part of her argumentation:

(3) a. *Kyou wa doyoubi da*
today TOP Saturday COP

b. *Kyou wa doyoubi desu*
today TOP Saturday COP.*polite*

c. *Kyou wa doyoubi de gozaimasu*
today TOP Saturday COP.*super polite*
Today is Saturday

Matsumoto (1988)

Matumoto assumes that these utterances can not be an FTA. Despite this, a native speaker of Japanese will still have to consider speech level. In this case

[16] In Chomsky's terminology we are looking at *competence* when the proof lies in the participants' *performance*.

the politeness forms are encoded in the copula: the non-polite *da* and the polite and super-polite forms *desu* and *de gozaimasu*, respectively. Therefore, she argues, Brown and Levinson's theory does not account for the honorifics in Japanese; since there is no FTA the underlying concept of using conversational strategies to maintain ones face does not apply. The problem, as Usami (2002:21) explains, is that Matumoto mistakes an FTA to be restricted to the propositional content (in this case the proposition that 'today is Saturday').

Of course, within Brown and Levinson's framework, *any* kind of propositional content can and should be considered a possible FTA, it is all down to context[17]. However, that is besides my point in this case. Instead, let us consider the *social* context. Using Brown and Levinson's FTA formula as a general pointer, any situation where the hearer has a high social status[18] (i.e. in a scenario where *P* is significant), the speaker will have to consider polite forms in order to *mitigate threat* as with any FTA[19]. That is, while Matsumoto's claim that polite expressions will have to be considered on top of the propositional content is true, the use and non-use of polite forms in Japanese contribute to the weight of an FTA on their own.

2.2.3 The crux of the matter

Relatively early on, Harada (1976) notes that while Japanese honorifics are heavily influenced by social context, in practice we can not assume a 1:1 mapping between social context and linguistic forms. Perhaps we should see this 1:1 mapping as a framework for 'normative use', rather than a rule set that is always obeyed. Then we can actually look at its usage and possible intent in natural conversations. There are three points I want to emphasize:

1. It is a fact that there are two mutually exclusive speech registers in Japanese: the *plain form* (lower) and the so called *desu/masu*-form (higher).
2. For **1.** to have any relevance, there must exist triggers, such as difference in social status, that influences the choice of these linguistic forms. I.e. using one form over the other might have consequences.
3. **2.** means there have to exist normative speech levels (within some margin) that can be *assessed by the speaker*.

[17] Perhaps the speaker utters (3a/b/c) on a Sunday in order to deceive the listener.

[18] Social status can of course shift and is not absolute or necessarily related to social hierarchy.

[19] The same line of reasoning goes for social distance (i.e. *D* being significant) where normative use would suggest using a more polite form, at least initially.

If there would be no truth to **2.** and **3.**, the different polite forms in Japanese would perhaps serve as ritualistic forms but have little impact on society as a whole. However, as previous research shows (c.f. Cook, 1996b, 1998, 2006; Maynard, 1991, 1993; Ikuta, 1983; Endo Hudson, 2008; Geyer, 2008), speech level does indeed have an impact on how a listener (or a reader) interprets an utterance (see *chapter 4*). Consequently, **2.** and **3.** must be true. The *desu/masu*-form shows this most clearly, since a speaker can not escape choosing either a lower (plain) or higher (*desu/masu*) speech style, as we shall see in *chapter 3*.

With this in mind, let us return briefly to Ide. In her criticism Ide (1992) also points out that the Japanese society is group centric, rather than the individualistic view Brown and Levinson portrays. That is, a native speaker acts as a group representative when assessing how to address the listener. In a way, the dichotomy of *volition* and *discernment* Ide creates, points to the problem with her conclusion and why she mistakes the 'politeness' Brown and Levinson describes for something else: a culturally rooted normative framework. Ide's notion of *volition* is not mutually exclusive to *discernment*. Rather, *volition* must depend on *discernment*, which we can see in the case of style-shifts. For any *volitional* speech act to have any effect, any speaker of a language will have to assess (i.e. *discern*) the context to some degree. Actually, we can even observe positive politeness strategies based on knowledge of negative politeness strategies, in this case Japanese honorifics, as Ikuta (1983) was among the first to discuss (see *section 4.5*).

Also, this concept can not be exclusive to Japanese. If this was the case, I would not, as a native speaker of Swedish, be able to show surprise when being addressed with the (presumably extinct) honorific second person plural pronoun *Ni* 'you' as opposed to the second person *singular* pronoun *du*[20] 'you', neither could a private in the military sub-culture encode hierarchy by addressing superiors with Sir/M'am or with rank.

Perhaps more importantly, it is difficult to bind the intention or reason behind a sudden change in speech level in Japanese to any group consciousness, rather than the individual. I will describe this phenomenon, commonly called a *style-shift*, further in *chapter 4* and why this shows Ide has not considered the whole picture in her criticism.

[20] I have in fact encountered this behavior with younger sales personnel using *Ni* rather than *du*, though have no further data showing if this is on the rise or a coincidence.

2.3 Pragmatic politeness and discourse politeness

If we instead choose to look at Brown and Levinson's framework as to what the use and non-use of polite forms can *imply* in Japanese – the function of their use and non-use, it becomes easier to integrate some of their ideas into Japanese honorifics. Usami (2002) explains Brown and Levinson's stance in the following way:

> *[Brown and Levinson's] focus is on the function of linguistic expressions rather than dealing only with the politeness of linguistic expressions per se.*
> **Usami (2002:21)**

This is, basically, saying that we have a problem with our meta-language. The consequence is that some of the criticism is based on a different definition of the unfortunate and vague term 'politeness' than what Brown and Levinson had in mind[21]. By instead distinguishing linguistic forms from their actual use, Usami goes on to separate polite expressions into what she calls *pragmatic politeness* and *discourse politeness* (actual use and non-use of polite expressions throughout the flow of a conversation).

Pragmatic politeness is explained as the normative framework of polite expressions, though Usami herself does not say this explicitly. It is defined as '*functions of language manipulation that work to maintain smooth human relationships*' (Usami, 2002:4). This is where any 'true' 1:1 mapping between social context and linguistic forms exists. As she also notes that this is 'sentence level analysis' without taking the discourse or the conversation flow into consideration, I can only conclude that she describes a normative framework that conforms to the interlocutors' shared knowledge of social conventions.

Discourse politeness is to what end pragmatic politeness (in my case the use and non-use of polite expressions) is used within a larger context. Usami defines this as '*the dynamic whole of functions of various elements in both linguistic forms and discourse level phenomena that play part within the pragmatic politeness of a discourse*' Usami (2002:4). In other words this is actual use in a larger context, taking into consideration how a conversation develops. It will therefore include normative use, but also the use and non-use of polite forms that deviates from the normative use for any reason.

She does however conclude (2002:226) that her own study shows that, for Brown and Levinson's theory to better account for Japanese (or any language with honorifics), we can not exclude the importance of the constraints social conventions can put on (normative) language use. At first, it might seem that

[21] For those interested in looking into the many problems surrounding the term 'politeness', I suggest taking a look at Watt's (2003) extensive review.

she repeats Ide's criticism, but it is important to understand that she claims this within the context of her own work that deals with the use and non-use of polite expressions at discourse level, and not the sentence level, normative use, that Ide's study is closer to. She does not reject Brown and Levinson's framework, merely saying that we need to consider honorifics when dealing with their theory.

This also leads her to another criticism of Brown and Levinson's theory, namely the claim that their strategies are not explored in larger discourse (Usami, 2002:226) and that the flow of a conversation is not sufficiently taken into account.

2.4 Summary

I am of the same opinion as Usami (2002) in that we need to distinguish between the polite expressions as linguistic forms from their actual usage. Some of the criticism from Japanese scholars (e.g. Ide 1992) stems from mistaking normative use for actual use. In Matsumoto's (1988) case, truth conditional semantics seems to get in the way of her pragmatic analysis, leading her to claim that an FTA is somehow restricted to the propositional content. Ironically, rather than refuting Brown and Levinson's claims, Matsumoto shows that we need to consider the use and non-use of honorifics as being the possible cause for an FTA, not their own.

If there is 'appropriate use' of polite expressions it follows that there are possible repercussions for 'improper' use. In order to assess what is appropriate and improper use, we need a normative framework as a *basis*. This framework in itself does not reflect practice and Ide's claims seemingly do not go past normative use as studies of deviations from normative use suggest (e.g. Ikuta, 1983; Maynard, 1991; Cook, 1996b; Usami, 2002; Geyer, 2008). These deviations, or sudden *style-shifts*, also question her claim that we always have to judge an utterance by a native Japanese speaker from a group perspective. I will describe these further in *chapter 4*.

Usami (2002) establishes a more practical view and argues that we have to study polite expressions on a discourse level. Her studies relate to Brown and Levinson's ideas and show that some of them seem to work well for Japanese. She does note that their theory fails to completely account for honorific expressions. I take this to mean that the use and non-use of polite forms are in themselves, normatively, FTA mitigators. This is in turn the counter-criticism to Matsumoto's claims, who seemingly does not realize this in her study.

3 THE DESU/MASU-FORM

In Japanese, there is a complex honorific system, *keigo* 'words/expressions of respect', that indexes differences in social status. As Minami notes (1987:31), *keigo*, is not a phenomenon exclusive to Japanese. Korean, for example, has an honorific language similar to that in Japanese, with different speech levels, honorific verbs and so forth.

I will give a brief overview of the different categories of *keigo*, but I will exclusively deal with the so called *desu/masu*-form in my study. In this section my focus will therefore be on the *desu/masu*-form and the so called plain form that it contrasts.

3.1 A brief overview of Japanese honorifics

There are different views on how keigo should be classified, though the one I present here is the least controversial. There are some categorizations that unfortunately stray from normative use. For example, Miyaji (1971) and Kumai (1986) both add 'beautifying expressions' and 'hyper polite expressions' to the mix, although these two categories make use of the existing addressee and referent honorific expressions from the other two branches. As they are essentially non-normative categories, I feel that these are better studied similar to style-shifts. We need to establish a normative framework before we can study actual usage of these expressions and any added pragmatic effect. For a more in-depth view of the development of Japanese honorifics and its history, I recommend reading Wetzel's (2004) extensive review on the subject, which includes full translations of official writings from the Japanese language council regarding use of polite expressions[22].

Currently, the three most important categories are *sonkeigo* 'respectful language' and *kenjougo* 'humble language', which belong to *referent honorifics*, and *teineigo* 'polite language' which belongs to *addressee honorifics* (see Martin, 2004; Harada, 1976).

[22] ***Kore kara no keigo*** **'Keigo from now on' (Wetzel, 2004:117-122,123-128), and** ***Gendai ni okeru keigo hyougen no arikata*** **'Guidelines for expressions of respect in the modern age' (Wetzel, 2004:129-143,144-156).**

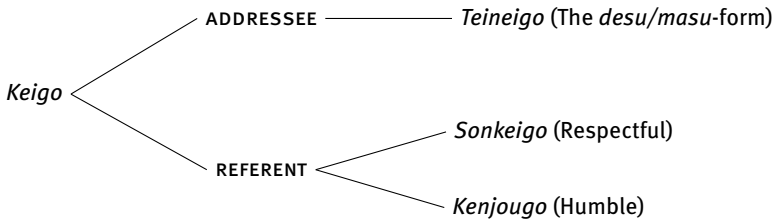

Figure 7: An overview of Japanese honorifics.

As seen in *figure 7* the *desu/masu*-form is also called *teineigo* 'polite language' in Japanese. What distinguishes the *desu/masu*-form from the other two categories is that it is mutually exclusive to, and contrasted by, the so called *plain form*. This has the effect that a speaker of Japanese must choose between two distinct speech levels in any given utterance. There is no true neutral clause final ending in regards to social status and context in Japanese. This fact is part of Ide's and Usami's criticism of Brown and Levinson's theory, though Usami agrees with Brown and Levinson in general.

The plain-form is usually referred to as informal or 'linguistically not marked for politeness' and used between peers. It is contrasted by the *desu/masu*-form that conveys respect towards the addressee and therefore 'linguistically marked for politeness', why it has a more formal tone. Oishi notes that

> *When* desu, masu *or* gozaimasu *is attached to the end of a sentence, the sentence becomes an expression that conveys respect for the listener. [The* desu/masu-*forms] do not possess any kind of descriptive content*[23]*. Consequently, we can say that it is [the* desu/masu-*form] that performs the task of directly conveying respect for the listener.*
>
> **Oishi (1975:93-94)**, my translation[24].

That is, the descriptive content is not modified in any way by attaching the *desu/masu*-form. Its only task as an addressee honorific form is that of a pragmatic marker for politeness, conveyed directly to the listener.

The referent honorific expressions have no 'built in' addressee honorific component. Rather than being clause endings, these are honorific variations of content words and expressions. It can sometimes become a daunting task to unravel how the different forms and expressions relate. For example, if the the listener is both the referent and the addressee and there is a refer-

[23] In fact, Levinson (1983) shows that honorific forms in general do not interact with the truth conditions of the propositional content. He goes on to note that "*[e]xactly the same, and additional, arguments can be shown to hold for the complex honorifics of 'exotic' languages*" (Levinson, 1983:96). I will assume that this includes *keigo*.

[24] See the appendix p.57 for the original quote.

ent honorific verb in the main clause, it would be very odd not to use the *desu/masu* form as well. That is, to maintain speech level harmony, a referent honorific expression directed towards the listener should also be followed by the *desu/masu* form. Compare the following sentences (assumed to be directed to the teacher in question):

(4) a. *Sensei* *wa* *eki* *ni* *irasshai-masu* *ka?*
teacher-HON TOP station DIR go-HON-POL Q

\# b. *Sensei* *wa* *eki* *ni* *irassharu* *no-ka?*
teacher-HON TOP station DIR go-HON EMPH-Q

c. *Sensei* *wa* *eki* *ni* *iki-masu* *ka?*
teacher-HON TOP station DIR go-POL Q

d. *Sensei* *wa* *eki* *ni* *iku* *no-ka?*
teacher-HON TOP station DIR go EMPH-Q
Are you (the teacher) going to the train station?

In (4) all sentences have the same propositional content, which is not affected in any way by the use and non-use of the *desu/masu*-form. The first example, (4a), maintains speech level harmony in that we find both referent honorific (*irassaru* 'go') and addressee honorific expressions (the *masu*-eding). In (#4b) the speaker would come off as somewhat odd, since he/she chooses to refer to the teacher's actions with a referent honorific verb while not maintaining the same respect for the addressee, who is the very same teacher *referred* to. In (4c) the *masu*-form works only as simple respect marker towards the addressee with no referent honorific expression (*iku* 'go' has no referent honorific function). On its own, it can for example affect (and be affected by) social distance, as we shall wee in *section 4.5*. In (4d) we find the so called *plain form*[25], which can express that the speaker is somehow on equal terms with the teacher or that there are other factors in play, such as showing surprise or even intentionally downplaying the teacher's social status for any reason.

One important difference between referent honorific expressions and addressee honorific expressions is that referent honorifics can refer to the listener *or* a third party (i.e. anyone), whereas addressee honorifics can *only*

[25]Note that 'plain form' should not be confused with the lexical form, which incidentally is the same. Use of the term 'plain form' is merely to convey that we are discussing speech levels, rather than a given word's lexical meaning.

refer to an interlocutor that it somehow present at the moment of the utterance, such as a physically present listener or, indeed, the reader of a text.

On that note, let us compare (4a) and (4b) in a different social context. Let us say that the teacher, who is still the referent, is not present and that the speaker directs the question to a close friend instead.

(5) a. *Sensei* *wa* *eki* *ni* *irasshai-masu* *ka?*
teacher-HON SUB station DIR go-HON-POL Q

b. *Sensei* *wa* *eki* *ni* *irassharu* *no-ka?*
teacher-HON SUB station DIR go-HON EMPH-Q
[To my friend:] Is the teacher going to the train station?

In (5a) the addressee honorific verb *irassharu* 'go' still uses the teacher as the referent, whereas the addressee honorific *masu*-form does not. To make it clear how the different honorifics are related and to whom they are directed in the more normative (5b), I have borrowed and edited a figure from Miyaji (1971:264), shown in *figure 8*.

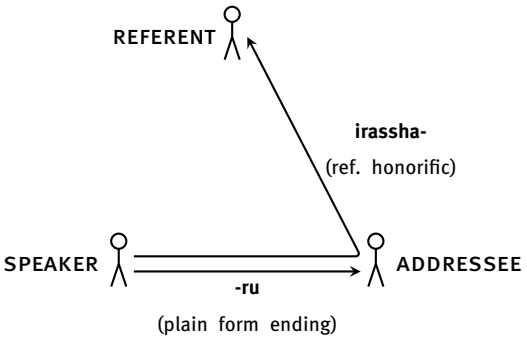

Figure 8: The referent honorific verb *irassharu* 'go' in the context of example (5b)

Briefly remembering Brown and Levinson's FTA formula from *section 2.1.1* (p.13), we can assume that any possible difference in social status (i.e the power *P* the hearer has over the speaker) to be a non-issue, since their social closeness (i.e the impact of *D*) will mitigate that factor. They can be considered to be equals. If I am the speaker, the *masu*-form in (5a) now deviates from normative use and would only serve to puzzle my friend as to why I am suddenly sounding so formal. In Brown and Levinson's terms the FTA actually becomes weightier, since we can attribute social distance to the use and non-use of the *masu*-form, among other things. By using the *masu*-form, I could come off as distancing myself from my friend. Consequently, (5b) can

be regarded normative in this context. The use and non-use of polite forms would be directed to the 'correct' respective receiver in regards to normative use, as shown in *figure* 8.

3.2 Morphology of the *desu/masu*-forms

The term *desu/masu*-form implies that we are only dealing with verbals and copula constructions, since *desu* is the formal copula marker and *-masu* the formal verb ending. However, the tentative *darou/deshou* 'isn't it the case that', the hortative verb ending *-you/-mashou* 'let us...' and adjectives are also affected. It is clause final and substitutes the so called plain-form with the purpose of directly showing the listener respect. The plain form can in general be said to convey informality and is normatively used between peers. For the verb *kaku* 'write' the choice is between (6a) and (6b):

(6) a. *Hon o kak**u**.*
book OBJ write-*plain*

b. *Hon o kaki**masu**.*
book OBJ write-POL
[He/She/they/I will] write a book.

Staying with the verb *kaku*, we get the following for the tentative *deshou* and the hortative *mashou*:

(7) a. *Hon o kaku **darou**.*
book OBJ write-plain TENT

b. *Hon o kaku **deshou**.*
book OBJ write-plain TENT.POL
Isn't it the case that [he/she/they/I will] write a book?

and

(8) a. *Hon o kak**ou**.*
book OBJ write-HORT.*plain*

b. *Hon o kaki**mashou**.*
book OBJ write-HORT.POL
Let[26] [us] write a book!

[26]Not to be confused with the *causative* 'let'. For *kaku* 'write' we get *kakaseru/kakasemasu*, i.e. 'to let [somebody] write' in its causative form.

Adjectives are divided into true adjectives (*i*-adjectives) and nominal adjectives (*na*-adjectives). Both adopt the copula marker when marked for politeness. There is a slight difference in their morphology depending on whether they are in their attributive or predicative form. Although the attributive form has no influence on sentence final forms such as *desu/masu*, I have included them in the copula constructions in (9) for reference. For the copula and the true adjective *takai* 'high/tall' we get:

(9) a. *Are* *wa* *taka-i* *biru* ***da.***
that TOP tall-NPAST.ATTR building COP.*plain*

b. *Are* *wa* *taka-i* *biru* ***desu.***
that TOP tall-NPAST.ATTR building COP.POL
That [over there] is a tall building.

(10) a. *Ano* *biru* *wa* ***taka-i.***
that building TOP tall-NPAST.*plain*

* b. *Ano* *biru* *wa* ***taka-i*** *da.*
that building TOP tall-NPAST COP.*plain*

c. *Ano* *biru* *wa* *taka-i* ***desu.***
that building TOP tall-NPAST COP.POL
That building [over there] is tall.

True adjectives in complementary position do not take the copula marker in plain form, e.g. (*10b). One could consequently conclude that the copula marker *desu* in (10c) is there only to mark for politeness (see Okutsu, 1978)[27].

For the nominal adjective *nigiyakana* 'lively' we get:

(11) a. *Nigiyaka-na* *inu*
healthy-COP.NPAST.ATTR dog
[A] lively dog

Note in (12a) that unlike *takai*, a nominal adjective in its predicative form is always followed by the copula marker, regardless of speech level.

(12) a. *Ano* *inu* *wa* *nigiyaka* ***da.***
that dog TOP lively COP.*plain*

[27] For a slightly different take, see Narahara (2002:143-146)

b. *Ano inu wa nigiyaka* ***desu***.
that dog TOP lively COP.POL
That dog [over there] is lively.

For noun phrases, subordinate clauses precedes the noun it modifies, as shown in (13). In modern Japanese, these relative clauses always end in the plain form and do not take the *desu/masu*-form[28].

(13) a. *Watashi ga tsuku**tta** tempura*
I OBJ made-ATTR.*plain* tempura
The tempura that I made

* b. *Watashi ga tsukuri**mashita** tempura*
I OBJ made-ATTR.POL tempura

Below is an overview of the morphology of the *desu/masu*-form. Only those grammatical forms that are reflected in the plain and *desu/masu*-forms are represented. To construct a copula or tentative sentence from the table simply add the different forms directly after the noun, *inu* 'dog' in this case. Nominal adjectives are included in the copula below as they follow the copula's morphology.

[28]In classical Japanese there were different forms for relative verb clauses and sentence final forms in the main clause, see Komai (1991:19). Korean, which as a grammar that is eerily similar to that of Japanese, still distinguishes between attributive and sentence final forms.

Grammatical meaning		*desu/masu*-form	plain-form	meaning
COPULA (*inu* 'dog')				
Affirmative	*inu*	***desu***	*da*	[it/that] is a dog
Negative		*ja/de-wa ari**masen***	*ja nai*	[it/that is] not a dog
Past		***deshita***	*datta*	[it/that was] a dog
Past-Neg.		-ja/de wa ari**masen deshita**	*-ja nakatta*	[it/that] was not a dog
ADJECTIVES (*takai* 'tall')				
Affirmative	*takai*	***desu***	–	[he/she/it] is tall
Negative	*takaku*	*ari-**masen***	*nai*	[he/she/it] is not tall
Past	*takakatta*	***desu***	–	[he/she/it] was tall
Past-Neg.	*takaku*	*ari-**masen-deshita***	*-nakatta*	[he/she/they/it] was not tall
VERBALS (eat)				
Affirmative	*tabe*	***-masu***	*-ru*	[he/she/it] will eat
Negative		***-masen***	*-nai*	[he/she/it] will/shall not eat
Past		***-mashita***	*-ta*	[he/she/it] ate
Past-Neg.		***-masen-deshita***	*-nakatta*	[he/she/they/it] did not eat
HORTATIVE (eat)	tabe	***-mashou***	*-you*	let [us] eat
TENTATIVE (dog)	*inu*	***deshou***	*darou*	[that/it] is dog, isn't it?

Figure 9: An overview of the morphology of the *desu/masu*-forms.

There are also sentence final verb forms that can not precede the *masu*-form, such as the *imperative* and *gerund* (when used as a softer *imperative*) forms. Since they are not relevant for my study I have chosen not to further describe these.

3.3 Semi-polite forms

Endo Hudson (2008) have studied so called semi-polite forms and their purpose. These are usually negative plain forms (though, a few, isolated examples in my data show use of affirmatives as well) which have the polite copula marker attached. Consider the verb *iku* 'go' below.

(14) *ikanai* ***desu***
go-NEG COP.POL
[I/he/she/they will] not go

The *nai desu* construction is not completely illogical as the true adjectives follow this pattern, as shown in (10c). As I feel its supposed purposes have more in common to style-shifts, I refer to *section 3.3* for a better description.

3.4 Scope

The *desu/masu*-form (and the plain form) has *wide scope*; it modifies the speech level of the entire descriptive content of a sentence or an utterance. This makes the *desu/masu*-form a very good candidate for style-shifting, since it is possibly the simplest way of switching between a higher and a lower speech level. Due to how some particles work, such as *ga* when used as the conjunctive 'but', the speaker will have to consider speech level harmony in some cases:

(15) a. *Ano inu wa kowa-sou* ***desu*** *ga, hontou*
that dog TOP.*contrastive* scary-CONJ COP.POL but reality
wa yasashi-i ***desu***.
TOP-*contrastive* friendly-NPAST COP.POL
That dogs seems scary but is actually friendly.

\# b. *Ano inu wa kowa-sou* ***da*** *ga, hontou*
that dog TOP.*contrastive* scary-CONJ COP.*plain* but reality
wa yasashi-i ***desu***.
TOP.*contrastive* friendly-NPAST COP.POL

Since the conjunctive *ga* connects two syntactically independent clauses, both have to be marked for politeness. In (#15b) the speech level harmony throughout the sentence is not maintained and it is therefore illformed.

4 STYLE-SHIFTS

In this section I will explain the concept of a style-shift and present earlier studies of this phenomenon. I will also relate to Brown and Levinson's theory and explain why style-shifts, in regards to the use and non-use of the *desu/masu*-form, show that their framework is viable for Japanese.

In my data there are relatively few sudden style-shifts. Instead, speech level shifts seem to be susceptible to topic changes and are usually maintained throughout a discussion. However, the concept of style-shifts, sudden or not, is still important for my study as it is the basis for added, non-normative pragmatic meanings of the *desu/masu*-forms and the plain forms.

Throughout this section I will borrow a few terms from Usami (2002). An 'upshift' is when the speaker switches from a lower to a higher speech level (in my case switching from plain to *desu/masu*-form). A 'downshift' is the reverse, a change from a higher speech style to a lower (in my case a switch from *desu/masu*-form to plain form) (Usami, 2002:58).

4.1 What is a style-shift?

A style-shift, such as a speech level shift, could be attributed to any change in speaker's attitude that is reflected in changes in language usage. Normatively, a speaker changes speech level depending on the current social context in order to conform to social conventions. Next, there are those shifts that occur within an unchanged context. In my study I have encountered both of these.

The mechanics of the shift can be related to prosody (e.g. raising ones voice), choice of wording (e.g. sudden use of derogatory forms in a formal context) and so forth. If I during a calm discussion on ice cream suddenly exclaimed 'Damn!' for no apparent reason, the rest of the interlocutors would no doubt wonder why. There could, however, be a reason for the sudden shift, such as suddenly noticing I am late for an appointment.

Languages with honorific expressions, i.e. linguistically encoded polite forms, can be especially sensitive to style-shifts, due to how some of them integrate with the language structure. Since a style-shift within an unchanged context in regards to speech level can have pragmatic meaning beyond its normative pragmatic meaning, we have to consider the necessity of a speech level that is somehow normative for the current context in order for the shift to be interpretable. By definition, a style-shift of this kind cannot be the cur-

rent speech level. It has to contrast the normative and expected speech level in order to have any effect at all, intentional or unintentional. Consider the following diagram:

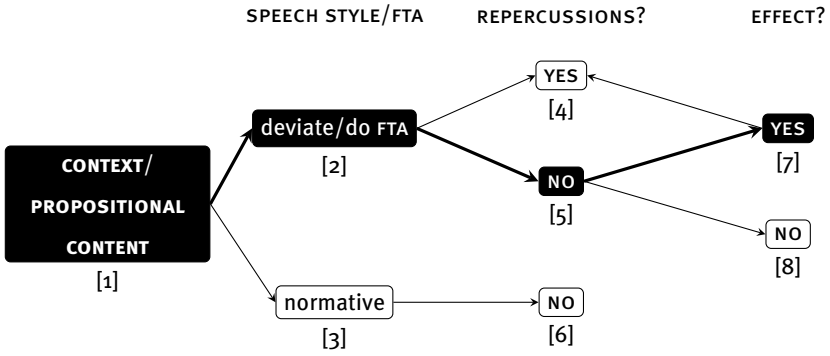

Figure 10: A simple FTA flowchart

In the diagram we see a simple process and outcome of an utterance in regards to speech level and FTA. In a given social context the speaker might for any reason do an FTA [2], or somehow not conform to the current normative speech level. In doing so, the speaker might [4] or might not [5] suffer repercussions. The intention can be ignored or lost on the listener [8], whereas a positive outcome of the style-shift [7], could mean that the listener correctly interprets the speaker's intention or reason for doing the speech level FTA. This could of course be true for [4] as well – hence the arrow from [7] back to [4], though the interpreted *intention* behind FTA would then supposedly have not gone well with the listener, rather than the *act of doing* the FTA. Note that 'normative' in [3] is to be understood as a speech level that is the least likely to be the cause of an FTA for the current context.

In the case of a conscious and intentional style-shift, a positive outcome could for example be an interviewee becoming more receptive and friendly to a lower speech style (Ikuta, 1983) (see *section 4.5*). In writing it has been used as a stylistic tool to imply a sudden a change in a character's personality or attitude in a novel (Maynard, 1991).

If there were no normative speech levels triggered by relative difference in social status and/or in/out group relation (i.e if the concept of social deixis did not apply to Japanese) we should not expect *changes* in speech level to cause an FTA in cases where the social context stays the same. The only possible outcome of *figure 10* would then look like *figure 11* below.

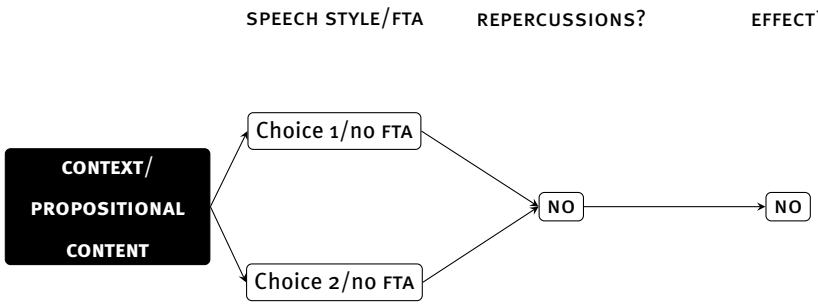

Figure 11: The case of no normative speech levels

Of course this becomes a circle argument since we can not expect speech level style-shifts in regards to forms to have developed without the concept of honorifics in this particular case. So while it makes little sense to assume a one-to-one mapping of speech level and social status for every single utterance and context, we might find occurrences where a given speech level in itself is more/less likely to trigger an FTA. Using this a speaker can intentionally switch up/down in hope to get a specific reaction in the vein of Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies.

4.2 The problematic nature of politeness and style-shifts

Using the terminology and concepts Paul Grice (1991) introduced with his cooperative principle (CP), we could think of a style-shift as 'flouting' of the normative speech level; a style-shift in itself does not necessarily break any hard rules *per se*, but might sometimes be inadvisable. That being said, Brown and Levinson note in the foreword of the revised 1987 edition of their theory that

> *Grice's [cooperative principle] [...] is of quite different status from that of politeness principles. The CP defines an 'unmarked' or socially neutral [...] presumptive framework for communication; the essential assumption is 'no deviation from rational efficiency without a reason'. Politeness principles are, however, just such principled reasons for deviation.*
>
> **Brown and Levinson 1987:5**

However, in the case of Japanese and the studies of speech level style shifts, it is clear that there is a collective shared knowledge of normative speech levels depending on social contexts. In fact, for a language with honorifics and normative speech levels it is not the polite expressions on their own that are the source of deviation from any sort of CP, which seems to be the problem in the quote above, but rather their possible 'improper' use, such as a sudden style-shift in regards to speech level. If Brown and Levinson's FTA have 'emic

correlates' in the *P* and *D* parameters (Brown and Levinson 1987:76) we need to account for these. In Japanese, the use and non-use of grammaticalized forms such as the *desu/masu*-forms are a crucial contribution to FTA weightiness. Consequently, their use and non-use have implications for the CP. There have been suggestions for modifying the original maxims for politeness with moderate success. The most ambitious of these are Leech's (1983) politeness maxims, which have been criticized for being difficult to apply in regards to how one should prioritize his maxims and also that they are of an ad-hoc nature (Usami, 2002; Watts, 2003). Later on, Leech (2005) reflects on both his own theory of politeness and that of Brown and Levinson. Here, he summarizes two important points. First, Leech sides with Brown and Levinson in regards to some of the universality of politeness in that *"there is no absolute divide between East and West in politeness"* (Leech, 2005:3-4). Secondly, he states that in his opinion a theory of politeness has the consequence of also being a theory of impoliteness (Leech, 2005:18). I am in agreement with Leech on both points, though 'impoliteness' will only be covered by non-normative use of polite expressions within this thesis.

Going back to some of the criticism Brown and Levinson met in *section 2.2*, I argued for that Ide (1992) only studied normative use. Among her criticizers, Cook (2008) argues for the direct opposite of Ide's proposal. She states that '*the social meanings of the* masu*-form are not tied to the linguistic form but are emergent in interaction mediated by the ideology of a particular context*' (Cook, 2008:16). The problem being that while Ide's research does not necessarily account for actual use, Cook argument depends on the existence of the normative framework she wants to do away with. Without it, style-shifts on their own would not – could not – be conversational implicatures. Since there would be no way to relate to any normative pragmatic meaning attached to the polite forms, a sudden change from *masu*-form to plain form would have no implications, as shown in the somewhat obvious *figure 11*.

4.3 Speech level and context

As a background to why the existence of normative speech levels are important, I would like to give a short example of how different contexts might affect how one perceives speech level. Consider the following dialog as if it were taking place during a formal board meeting at a large company. (16) is an edited, fictional, version by me, based on the original, borrowed from Watts (2003:2).

(16) R: suppose you say to me <CLEARS THROAT>
B: <SMILES>
R: beg your pardon
B: pardon me, yes
R: supposing you say to me...

While *B*'s smiling at *R* clearing his throat could probably be interpreted in a number of ways, the short dialogue does not seem to introduce anything overly face threatening to either part. *B*'s smiles and accepts *R*'s excuse, which mitigates the possible FTA of *R* clearing his throat (consider that to be a mild FTA for the sake of the argument). Let us instead consider the original dialogue within the same context:

(17) R: suppose you say to me <LOW BURP>
B: <LAUGHS>
R: beg your pardon
B: <LAUGHING> pardon me, yes
R: supposing you say to me...

Watts (2003:2)

In this case, because of the formal context, there is a significantly higher risk of doing an FTA. *R* suddenly burps during the meeting, which, for all we know could be at delicate moment, and is in turn getting laughed at by *B*. *B* and *R* could both come off as taking too lightly on the meeting. Therefore they are both doing an FTA, either to each other or to the rest of the participants of the meeting.

Now consider the original dialogue (17) in its original context: a father (*B*) and his 41 year old son (*R*) having a conversation while drinking home made barley wine in a relaxed atmosphere. Suddenly, the threshold for doing an FTA becomes considerably higher. The social distance between the interlocutors (and the 'spiritual' context) will most certainly mitigate all but the gravest FTA.

4.4 Style-shifts and the desu/masuform

As explained in *section 3.4* the *desu/masu*-form have characteristics that makes it a very good candidate for studying style-shifts. With no true neutral

speech level and the binary nature of the forms, the speaker can not escape its use or non-use. While there is a complex honorific system in Japanese, the most notable honorific form for contrasting speech styles is the *desu/masu*-form. As Martin notes below, one obstacle to overcome for the speaker is how one should relate to these forms:

> *It is open to question whether a speaker starts from some "basic" style (or form) and then upgrades or downgrades that so as to reach the level he wishes, or whether he freely enters the system at any point and then moves on from there.*
> **Martin (2004:1028)**

It is difficult to argue for an 'in-between' or socially true neutral form that we can call a 'basic' style in Japanese. The beauty of Martin's quote above, however, is that it seems to invite the concept of style-shifts and individual choice.

4.5 Style shifts as a politeness strategy

Both downshifts and upshifts can be used as politeness strategies within Brown and Levinson's framework. One strategy can be to manipulate the perceived social distance (e.g. manipulating *D* in the FTA formula to signal a change in attitude). Studies (Ikuta, 1983; Geyer, 2008) show that downshifting can indeed be used for conveying intimacy and also be used to express honest interest for the listener. This is what Brown and Levinson's strategy of 'attending to the hearer' suggests (see section 2.1).

In her study on speech levels in TV interviews, Ikuta (1983) finds both up and downshifting to be quite the useful strategy. One example is an interview between two women where the plain form has become dominant. That is, the interviewer has successfully downshifted earlier on. To prepare the interviewee for a personal question regarding marriage, the interviewer briefly switches up to the *desu/masu*-form to acknowledge that she is aware of the interviewee's social status and that a social boundary might be overstepped (i.e. doing a weighty FTA). By manipulating the social distance in both ways the interviewer successfully makes use of both negative and positive politeness strategies. Ikuta also emphasizes the importance of analysis on discourse level, which Usami (2002) later adopts for her notions of 'pragmatic politeness' and 'discourse politeness' (see *section 2.3*).

Geyer (2008) continues Ikuta's work on social distance and discourse analysis in her study of teachers' faculty meetings. The plain form again is shown to be an in-group marker that can mitigate FTAs in a formal context. She distinguishes between the plain form as a 'solidarity marker' and as a

'mitigator' for FTAs. However, there seems to be little difference between the two in her examples.

In (18) the plain form supposedly works as a 'solidarity marker'. The context is a faculty meeting where Akita, the head teacher, brings up the unruly behavior of some female students.

(18) Akita: *Yappa kouiu koto wa mazui to omotte**masu**, de...* [POL-**masu**]
After all, I think this kind of behavior is bad, and...

Maeda: *Onnanoko wa **tuyoi*** [**plain**]
Girls are strong aren't they?

Others: (laugh)

Akita: *Otoko wa yowai **desu** ne* [...] [POL-**desu**]
Men are weak, aren't they? [...]

Geyer 2008:47, excerpt

Geyer claims the plain form signals Maeda's comment to be unofficial, thus marking 'solidarity'.

However, as she goes on she claims that the plain form can also separately work as a 'mitigator'. Her example of this is another faculty meeting where Geyer means the plain form conveys 'non-compliance' (it is unfortunately a bit too long and also difficult to break up to be included here, see Geyer 2008:50-51). The context is another teacher faculty meeting where the teachers discuss their over crowded schedule. Their plan for a revision of the schedule has been rejected by the school's administrative committee. The formal proceedings of the meeting are handled in the *desu/masu*-form by all participants. At one point, one of the teachers starts complaining over the rejection of their proposed schedule revision and exclusively does so using the plain form.

Geyer means that the downshift to plain form in this case should be interpreted as the teacher telling his peers how he feels about the decision, emphasizing his unwillingness to comply, rather than bringing this up in an official manner in the *desu/masu*-form. I agree with her sentiment on the whole but I find that the plain form works as an FTA mitigator in all her examples. In (18) it emphasizes that the speaker is joking. In the schedule scenario above it emphasizes that the speaker is directly addressing his peers. Using the *desu/masu*-form would have come off as an official complaint, which

might have caused a weightier FTA as it would have to be reported to the committee that rejected their proposal.

While I do not see a clear difference between Geyer's distinctions above, her work as a whole reinforces the findings in Ikuta's study and emphasizes the need to distinguish between the normative pragmatic meaning of polite forms and their actual use and non-use.

4.6 Semi-polite forms

Endo Hudson (2008) studies more subtle differences in linguistic politeness. She looks into what can be regarded semi-polite forms in the form of negated verbs. As my data shows similar results (see *section 6*), I have included a short description of her work.

A sentence marked for politeness would commonly use the *-masen* ending (see *figure 9*, p.28). However, Endo Hudson means that there is a rise of 'semi-polite' forms in modern Japanese but very little research on the subject. Their primary purpose are supposedly to sound softer than the 'proper' *desu/masu*-forms, while still maintaining a level of formality or respect towards the listener. Consider the speech levels in the following examples of the verb *iku* 'go':

(19) a. *iku* [**plain**]
*b. *iku* ***desu*** [plain followed by POL-**desu** – *semi-polite*]
c. *iki**masu*** [POL-**masu** – polite]
go

and for the negative *nai*-form, we get:

(20) a. *ikanai* [**plain**]
b. *ikanai* ***desu*** [plain followed by POL-**desu** – semi-polite]
c. *iki**masen*** [**masu** – polite]
not-go

The negative *-nai* is effectively an adjective as far as its morphology goes (see the adjective *takai* 'tall' in *figure 9*). In that light, the adoption of the *-nai desu* form is not overly surprising. Hudson goes on to suggest that due to the uptake of the negative V-*desu* form (e.g. *ikanai desu*) we can suspect the affirmative V-*desu* (e.g. *iku desu*) to become significant as well, in which case

we need to consider how these semi-polite forms relates to the current *keigo* categorization (Endo Hudson, 2008:139).

As for pragmatic meaning Endo Hudson argues that the semi-polite form still signals 'out-group' because of its politeness marker in the copula. She also attributes a secondary function to the construction. The copula marker in the *nai desu*, she argues, has an assertive function as the affirmative copula. Because of this the speaker can supposedly come off as a 'know-it-all', conveying 'and that's how it is' Endo Hudson (2008:151).

In her study of the *nai desu* usage in novels she finds that in one modern novel (written in 1998) the ratio between the *masen* form and the *nai desu* form favors the 'proper' *masen* 2:1 (Endo Hudson, 2008:157). The use of the semi-polite form is still significant however, as novels from 1970's did not exhibit this and in general had very few style-shifts (Endo Hudson, 2008:152). She notes that due to the rise of semi-polite forms, we might have to consider them for future descriptions of *keigo*. For a somewhat peculiar find, though coincidental, I refer to *section 6* for an example of the possible assertive function of the semi-polite forms in my data and an eerily similar statistical result.

4.7 Summary

The reason for using the *desu/masu*-form to such an extent for studying style-shifts has its reasons. It is 1) a 'binary' form; the speaker has to choose between two distinct speech levels with no true neutral middle ground 2) It has *wide scope*, consequently affecting the whole propositional content in regards to speech level.

As the studies of Ikuta (1983), and Geyer (2008) show, we can find occurrences of both negative and positive politeness in natural conversation data. An intentional style-shift also has to be attributed more to the individual than to any group conscious behavior. This goes against Ide's (1992) claims that a Japanese speaker always speaks as a group representative and obeys the current social context by using the linguistic forms that reflect this.

In the next chapter I will briefly address Computer Mediated Communication in relation to my own study.

5 COMPUTER MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

The term Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) unfortunately implies that we are dealing exclusively with computers, when it should perhaps refer to any digital device we use for communication nowadays. The writing style and shorthand might differ in some cases between a text message written on a mobile phone compared to a post submitted to an internet forum, but in the end there is so much overlap and cross-influence that we might as well deal with these tools as one. When the need arises we can choose to further break them down into sub-categories depending on language usage.

The problem with earlier research on CMC is that in this field linguistic tendencies move on *very* quickly. When going past studying the general aspects and the mechanics of these environments, it suddenly becomes very difficult to judge to what extent a particular tendency will influence language behavior on the internet as a whole. Some earlier studies are not as much dated as having become common knowledge, such as the use of emotive characters to avoid coming off as too literal and thereby mitigate an FTA. These convey subtleties usually exclusive to body language – e.g. smilies, such as ':-)' or the more culture specific bowing/apologizing man 'm(_ _)m'.

There is a lot to be said on the behavioral aspects of internet usage but due to space and time constraints, I will only deal with areas that are necessary to explain the background of my study.

The mechanics of the chat environment in my study is representative of most chat environments in online games so I refer to *section 1.4* for a more detailed description.

5.1 Synchronous and asynchronous communication

The most obvious difference between speaking on the phone and sending a text message on your mobile is that of how time relates to the flow of the conversation and how the turn-taking plays out. A text message is an example of *asynchronous* communication. The whole message is sent pre-packaged and approved by the interlocutor and then read and interpreted in its entirety on the receiving end. Compare this to a *synchronous* conversation between two speaker's within physical vicinity of each other, where utterances are interpreted phoneme-by-phoneme to fit in patterns that suggest how to interpret the not yet uttererd part of the descriptive content (see Hård af Segerstad,

2002). The majority of text based CMC is asynchronous to a degree, including my study of a 'live' chat room. In the chat room the participants will not see a given message until it is submitted for display. The discussion is not 'online', in linguistic terms, in the sense that the interlocutors do not interpret and respond simultaneously.

5.2 Conversation and CMC

In pragmatics there are several concepts trying to explain the mechanics behind a conversation between two or more interlocutors and how it proceeds, often grouped together in the notion of 'turn-taking', referring to how the interlocutors literally take turns to talk (see Levinson, 1983:296). The main object is having control over the 'floor', which is a simple analogy for being in focus and having the power to direct the course of the conversation. This person would be the speaker at most times. When one interlocutor has finished his/her turn, the next might take the opportunity to comment. Sometimes an interlocutor sees the chance to comment due to a brief pause or a way of speaking that conveys that the current speaker is finished commenting. This is referred to as a Transition Relevance Place (TRP).

The notion of turn-taking is still relevant for the proceedings of a discussion in an internet chat as it manages to capture many of the key concepts. Although text based and asynchronous, chat rooms manage to mimic the proceedings of a discussion where the participants are all in physical vicinity of each other. This is especially true if there are a large number of people participating in the current discussion. If the user does not take the chance to comment when given the chance, he/she risks missing contributing altogether, since the timeframe is as relevant here as it is for any 'physical' conversation as the users comment in quick succession (see *section 1.4*). On this note, Park (2008b) discusses some technical problems that might disrupt the turn-taking in the form of possible time delays when sending a message. The message has to be typed and processed by a central server before popping up in the chat windows of the other participants. However, in my own experience this can mostly be considered a non-issue. Delays do occasionally happen, but in a normal situation messages are speedily typed in and the time it takes for a sent message to reach its destination is near instant. Park's study was however made in an environment that showed the participants' typing live, which in my opinion can be a contra-productive and frustrating affair[29].

[29]Correcting oneself verbally is usually a non-issue, while going back and forth in a written message to get it right while being watched, only serves to frustrate both speaker and listeners.

Making impact with a short and thoughtful comment helps in being remembered and in turn being commented on. In Japanese, a word written in roman characters (or the *katakana* alphabet, mostly used for loan words) can instantly code that there is a specific, explicit meaning attached, rather than a possible general meaning the word would have outside the confinement of the chat channel. Park (2008a) also finds similar strategies for English such as contractions of linguistic forms, unique typographical conventions and the use of emoticons to mimic smiling or winking faces – or in fact any facial expression conceivable. These emoticons can often serve an important purpose since one consequence of short, written messages is that they can sometimes come off as far more literal than the interlocutor intended for. The lack of gestures, facial expressions and prosody means some precaution is necessary in order not to do an unnecessary FTA. To partly mitigate this, the use of emoticons can help greatly (see Walther, 2001). I will give a few examples of this from my own data in *section 6*.

5.3 Linguistic politeness and CMC

I will use Park's (2008a; 2008b) work within the field of CMC and linguistic politeness as a background for how some of Brown and Levinson's proposed strategies can work within an online environment in 'virtual' groups. The study depicts online discussions in English between American K-12 students, who collaborate and share their ideas to solve math problems together under the supervision of a moderator.

There are a few important differences to my own study. The first is that the environment Park is observing is of the synchronous sort, while mine is asynchronous as I noted above. Also, in my case the subject is up to the participants – it does not have to be specific to the game. Park acknowledges that the results of his study might be constrained to a 'live' session and that the reason for participating (e.g. to work together to solve math problems) will probably create less friction and consequently fewer FTAs, than would other subjects such as religion and politics.

5.4 Positive politeness

Park (2008b) finds that positive politeness strategies were far more common than negative politeness strategies. Different forms of approval and seeking agreement are common. In (21) we can see how the participants seek common ground via expressing shared background knowledge or experiences,

while (22) shows some of the informal speech levels one can expect. I have added the meaning of a few shorthand expressions the example. (Mod = moderator)

(21) Mod: That's their job :-) Secondly, we used AOL's Instant Messenger because we know that a lot of people already have it. Do you think that was a good choice?

EAR: **HECK YEAH**

[...]

CIL: **If it hadn't been AIM, I couldn't have been here.**

Park 2008b:2203, Transcript 2, excerpt

(22) ORB: i don't like having to write up my solution

MEA: **m 2** [me too]

ILL: **m 3** [me as well, on top of MEA's agreement]

MEA: I do this for extra credit for school

ORB: **lol** [Laugh Out Loud, *emotive*]

Park 2008b:2203, Transcript 4, excerpt

Some of the expressions within these examples work as in-group identity markers and contribute to enhancing the interpersonal relationships between the users. The first example is the emotive ':-)', that the moderator uses in the first line. Also, in conjunction with short hand, an approval strategy can take very little effort on the commenter's part, as shown by 'm 2', followed by 'm 3', including the 'laughing approval' 'lol'[30].

5.5 Negative politeness

As expected, the negative politeness strategies in Park's study, are more restricted to normative use of formal expressions. In (23) Park gives an example of how this.

(23) Mod: How was some of this different from solving problems on your own?

[Here follows excessive banter by the participants that is unrelated to the moderator's question]

[30]This behavior of approving of a comment or opinion with very simple means can be observed in internet forums as well, such as '+1' (i.e. 'add me to those in agreement of your opinion') or '^this' (an arrow pointing to the comment above followed by an approval similar to 'I agree with this').

Mod: **I am sorry could you please**, answer my question?

Park 2008b:2206, Transcript 7, excerpt

In order to mitigate the force of the interruption the moderator uses redressive action ('I am sorry could you please...') in the form of formal expressions. Even though the moderator was seemingly ignored, the imperative 'Answer my question' would come off as rude. In my own study there are no omnipresent moderators. These are instead contacted directly by a user, should the need arise.

5.6 Contractions

There is a constant flow of new short hand and contractions, such as *u* to mean 'you' (Park, 2008b:2204, Table 2) or *k* for 'okay' (Park, 2008b:2206). A few of these are shown in (22) above. The obvious reason for these is efficiency; to be able to quickly comment has a bearing on the turn-taking and control of the floor. In my own study I found contractions relating to the deferent form of the Japanese copula (see *section 6.5*).

In the next chapter I will present some of my findings in more detail, in relation to Brown and Levinson's strategies.

6 FINDINGS

In this section I will briefly describe the process of finding the relevant forms and present examples of the politeness strategies found in Brown and Levinson's framework.

6.1 General statistics and introduction

Although, plain form is predominant in my own data the *desu/masu*-form accounts for 28,9% in an environment I consider closer to in-group than out-group. The polite forms I look for are endings covered by the copula and verb morphology. They also cover adjectival endings, since the part that marks an utterance for politeness adopt either the polite verbal ending or copula form (see *section 3.2*). The tentative *darou/deshou* has no morphology but has wide scope and is sentence final; it can be marked for politeness but past tense and negation is encoded in the clause it modifies.

As there is a pattern in the morphology of the politeness markers in verbals, adjectives and the copula we can narrow the search slightly. As for modality *deshou* is often shortened to *desho* (short versus long vowel), and while it isn't the true polite form it is still more formal than using the true plain form *darou*. *Deshou* is also covered by the search term *desho*.

Due to the nature of the input methods used for Japanese[31], pressing enter too soon in order to post a comment often has the effect that the last vowel goes missing – *mashita* (ました) becoming *mashit* (ましt) and so on. Also the final consonant in *masen* (ません) sometimes escapes conversion to *kana*, i.e. (ませn) – noted as *maseN* in my study. The final set of search terms now becomes (in *kana*) *desu/deshita/masu/masen/mashita/mashou/desho/des/mas/maseN/mashit/deshit*.

Below is the morphology diagram from *section 3.2* (see *figure 9*, p.28) for easier reference. I have also included *kana*-representations, Japanese characters, to make it easier to relate to the explanation on how I picked the search terms.

[31] By far the most common way of input is to use romanization via a qwerty-keyboard, which is in turn converted to Japanese.

Grammatical meaning	*desu/masu*-form		plain-form	
	hiragana	romanized	*hiragana*	romanized
COPULA/NOM. ADJ.				
Affirmative	**です**	***desu***	だ	*da*
Negative	-じゃ/でわあり**ません**	*-ja/de-wa ari**masen***	-じゃない	*-ja nai*
Past	**でした**	***deshita***	だった	*datta*
Past-Neg.	-じゃ/でわあり**ませんでした**	*-ja/de wa ari**masen deshita***	-じゃなかった	*-ja nakatta*
TRUE ADJECTIVES				
Affirmative	**です**	***desu***	–	–
Negative	-あり**ません**	*-ari**masen***	-ない	*-nai*
Past	**です**	***desu***	–	–
Past-Neg.	-あり**ませんでした**	*-ari**masen deshita***	-なかった	*-nakatta*
VERBALS				
Affirmative	-**ます**	***-masu***	-う[a]	*-u*
Negative	-**ません**	***-masen***	-ない	*-nai*
Past	-**ました**	***-mashita***	-だ/た	*-(t)ta/-da*
Past-Neg.	-**ませんでした**	***-masen-deshita***	-なかった	*-nakatta*
Hortative	-**ましょう**	***-mashou***	-おう[b]	*-ou*
TENTATIVE	**でしょう**	***deshou***	-だろう	*darou*

Figure 12: The morphology of the *desu/masu*-forms, including *hiragana*.

[a]Note that for the *hiragana u*-ending (-う), the ending vowel is not a full representative since it will be bound within a character representing a syllable, e.g. -く *-ku*, for most verbals.

[b]The *hiragana* for the plain form hortative (i.e -おう *-ou*) is not a real representative due to the same reason verbals in the affirmative plain form are not, as stated above.

6.2 Negative politeness

Since the *desu/masu*-forms are in the minority, negative politeness strategies based on those forms tend to stand out. Within a topic that starts out in a higher speech level, the *desu/masu*-form is often maintained throughout, regardless of the speech level used before that particular topic. In my data, there are user created sub-groups with their own chat channels (and agendas). Members of these sub-groups sometimes join the open channels to find new members to join their cause. While advertising, the member of a sub-group does so as a representative for the sub-group he/she belongs to. My data shows that these advertisements follow the social conventions of the physical world. The *desu/masu*-form always shows some use, regardless of the sub-groups agenda. It could be a gang of outspoken space pirates adver-

tising, since they know there is strength in numbers and they now want help in their endeavor, stealing from other players[32]. It could be a more peaceful industrial sub-group, looking for those interested in manufacturing new space ships and equipment. It is all done using polite forms. As the examples below are quite long, I have only glossed the *desu/masu*-forms and a few polite and derogatory forms. The first example one comes from a seemingly gentle sub-group:

(24) *Kono tabi wildCat-sha de wa gyoumu kakujuu oyobi*

atarashii deai no tame, shinnyuushain wo

*boshuu-itashi**masu**. Kyoumi no aru **kata** wa [...]*
apply-HON-**POL** person-POL
*watashi made meeru o onegai-itashi**masu**.*
please-HON-**POL**

wildCat corporation is currently accepting applications for membership in order to expand its business as well as making new acquaintances. If you are interested [...], please leave me a message via [the in-game] mail [service].

Excerpt from my chat-transcript, taken from EVE®Online.

The overall tone in (24) is relatively formal, as both referent honorific expressions and the *desu/masu*-form is present. This shows that the conventions of the physical society do indeed bleed into the virtual version. Though, even space pirates show some courtesy:

(25) ***Ore** no mono wa **ore** no mono, **omae** no mono*
I-DER I-DER YOU-DER
*wa **ore** no mono, **aitsu** no mono mo **ore** no*
I-DER that guy-DER I-DER
*mono. Kaizoku corp mugen daikousha **desu**. Kyoumi*
COP.**POL**
*no aru **kata** wa [chat channel name] made [...]*
person-POL

My stuff is my stuff, your stuff is my stuff, that guy's stuff is my stuff as well. This is Pirate corp. Mugen Industries. Those who are interested, join [chat channel name] [...]

Excerpt from my chat-transcript, taken from EVE®Online.

[32]This is perfectly within the rules of the game.

In (25) the use of lower forms are probably intentional for added effect – such as the derogatory *ore* 'me', *omae* 'you', *aitsu* 'that guy' – but they seem to respect their possible recruits by using the polite copula marker *desu*. They also refer to their recruits with *kata*, which is the more polite form of 'person'. In a way, the FTA that stems from the derogatory forms creates a sense of positive politeness in that the sub-group present themselves as being 'a bunch of careless guys having some fun together', which is an interesting contrast to the more formal application request stemming from the use of the *desu*-form in the last part of the advertisement.

6.3 Positive politeness and the formality on/off switch

In the introduction I opened with an example of how speech level shifts can work to signal whether the interlocutors should treat the current topic as being 'on-record' or not. Geyer (2008) observes similar results for teachers' faculty meetings (see *section 4.5*). The characteristics of the *desu/masu*-form makes it an excellent candidate for this sort of implicature.

In the example below the interlocutors discuss payment methods for the game's subscription[33] with a new user. The user *B*, maintains the *desu/masu*-form as long as the topic is that of payment, but switches down to plain form as soon as this topic is done.

(26) A: *Kurejitto-harai no hito ga ooii to omoi**masu**.*
credit-payment GEN person SUB many CIT think
*Watashi mo **desu***
I too COP
I believe many pay with a credit card. I do as well

B: *Watashi mo kurejitto **desu** ne*
I too credit [card] COP EMPH
I also pay with a credit card

[15 lines removed, until the beginning of a new topic]

B: *Lv3 The Blockade o kuriea-dekiru ki ga shinai.*
Lv3 The Blockade OBJ clear-not-able-to feeling SUB not-do
I have a feeling I'm not able to clear Lv3 The Blockade (in-game reference)

Excerpt from my chat-transcript, taken from EVE®Online.

[33] As the infrastructure of these large online games cost a small fortune to maintain, monthly subscriptions are a common method to allow for play. Lately more direct payment methods have become popular, such as paying for in-game content and allow the user to otherwise play for free.

In (26), the more formal topic of greeting the newcomer and discussing ways of payment is signaled with the help of the *desu/masu*-form as a more normative use. When that discussion ends however, *B* directly shift down back to the plain form to signal that we are now back on track with less formal in-game topics. This is both an example of the formality 'on/off-switch' the *desu/masu*-form can work as, and the positive politeness strategy of down shifting to the plain form after the formalities have been cleared to signal it is now a discussion between peers.

6.4 Semi-polite forms

The assertive function of the copula enhancing the weight behind the speaker's knowledge via the *nai desu* form (see *section 4.6*) can be found within my data as well. In the following example, *A* has problems reaching his/her destination and asks for help with the game's controls. Words within '', e.g. 'this', was written in roman characters in the original transcript and is in this case a code switch in order refer to game specific commands. I have edited *B*'s last utterance slightly since it has another interesting feature I will show later.

(27) A: *aa nani ka detekimashita*
ah something appeared-POL
Ah, something appeared

B: *'worp* [sic] *to location'*

B: *'warp' ka*
warp Q
'warp', is it?

B: *tte **nai desu** ka*
CIT is-not-SEMI-POL Q
Isn't it there [in the list of commands] somewhere?

Excerpt from my chat-transcript, taken from EVE®Online.

Using the *nai desu* form *B* comes off as having previous experience. His/her answer becomes more assertive, conveying 'The command should be in the list, maybe try looking again?'. For another example of the assertive function of the *nai desu* form, ponder the following dialog, slightly edited for the same reason as in (27):

(28) A: *smaatobomu smaatobomu!*
smart bomb smart bomb!

B: *yopparate**masu*** *ne*
drunk-**POL** EMPH
You seem a bit drunk...

A: *minna* *fuki-tobasu* *zehi* *yahha-*
all blow off surely whoo
I'll release them all!

C: *sake-nomi unten* *tsuiraku* *no* *moto*
drunk driving crash GEN cause
Driving while drunk will only end in a crash.[34]

A: *nondei**nai desu*** *yo*
drinking-SEMI-POL EMPH
Hey, I'm not drinking

Excerpt from my chat-transcript, taken from EVE®Online.

In the last line of (28) it seems *A* emphasizes the fact that he/she is not drinking by adding the copula, thus making it semi-polite. The pragmatic 'and that's how it is' Endo Hudson argues for in these constructions seems to go well with the above scenario. It can make an utterance become more of the stative kind, rather than describing the action of 'not drinking' in this case.

Moreover, what is peculiar with Endo Hudson's results in *section 5.6* is that in my own data, I found the exact same 2:1 ratio for these forms. Out of slightly over 23 000 utterances, 380 used the *masen* ending, whereas the *nai desu*-form was accounted for 192 times. While the almost identical proportions are highly coincidental[35], it is still interesting that the majority in my data are in the 'properly polite' *masen*-ending, rather than the supposedly more friendly *nai desu*-form. Perhaps this is indeed a sign of its secondary assertive function as Endo Hudson suggests.

6.5 Contractions

In *section 5.6*, I briefly mentioned how word contractions and efficiency go hand in hand. In my data there are occurrences of the polite copula marker *desu* (です), in the form of *ssu* (っす) and sometimes just *su* (す). Both affirmative and negative construction can be seen, such as the semi-polite forms mentioned above. *B*'s last comment in (27) originally looks like this:

[34] Jokingly refers to the fact that all users are space ship pilots.

[35] Even more so when one considers that it is a product of the writer's stylistic choices in the novel Endo Hudson studies, compared to its actual 'live' use within my chat data. Put together, our studies do however suggest that there is a general understanding of the meaning of any implicatures conveyed by the semi-polite forms.

(29) *tte* ***naisu*** *ka*
CIT is-not-SEMI-POL-CONTR Q
Isn't it there [in the list of commands] somewhere?

Excerpt from my chat-transcript, taken from EVE®Online.

The same goes for the last comment in (28):

(30) A: *nondei**naissu*** *yo*
drinking-SEMI-POL-CONTR EMPH
Hey, I'm not drinking

Excerpt from my chat-transcript, taken from EVE®Online.

When *nai desu ka* is said quickly (and somewhat carelessly), the *de* in *desu* is assimilated. Since this environment greatly favors efficiency in order to keep control of the floor, this phonological phenomenon seems to come in handy. The user can maintain a slightly higher speech level, possibly benefit from the copulas assertive nature, and still be efficient (typing in long honorific expressions takes time). While there were only 7 occurrences of the semi-polite *nai desu* in its contracted *naisu* form, *naissu* – where the first syllable in *desu* is slightly more hinted in *ssu*[36], shows more usage with 23 occurrences.

As a final little side note, pictures (and the mimicking of gestures) are indeed the forefront of efficiency and do with little doubt say more than words (think of the 'o' as being a head and '\', '/' and '7' as waving arms and the meaning should become clear):

(31) A: *konbanwa-*
good evening

B: *wa*
good evening-CONTR

C: o7

D: \o

E: *bawan*
good evening-CONTR

[36]Think of the geminate consonant in the romanization as a brief pause.

F: o/

Excerpt from my chat-transcript, taken from EVE®Online.

In the next, and final, section I will discuss the implications of my findings in relation to earlier research.

7 DISCUSSION

I have shown that within a contemporary environment, that leans toward in-group, there are still occurrences of what Brown and Levinson refers to as negative politeness. The lower plain form is greatly favored, but almost 29% of all comments in my data make use of the *desu/masu*-form in some way. The way these forms are used reinforces the findings of earlier studies of style-shifts and allows for a better integration of Brown and Levinson's framework in Japanese.

The heart of Brown and Levinson's theory is *strategic* use of language. Japanese is no less strategic than English. The difference lies in how these strategies can be coded into linguistic forms in Japanese. A language with complex systems to index social status, becomes so integrated with these – not only socially, but also linguistically – that the speaker will have to relate to the current context in terms of how attitude, social relationship will contribute to the form of an utterance. In the case of Japanese there are seemingly two camps.

Ide (1992) is the main representative for the idea that the group conscious behavior of a speaker of Japanese will always be prioritized, forcing the speaker to choose form accordingly. This is also why, she claims, Brown and Levinson's theory can not account for Japanese; it is individualistic.

While I agree more with Cook's (1996b; 1998; 2008) studies, her stance seems to be to completely free the speaker from the constraints of normative honorific forms (e.g. Cook, 2008:16); he/she is free to use them at will, albeit for some purpose. She often bases her arguments in sociology so it is somewhat difficult to assess her stance towards Brown and Levinson. Without a normative framework it will however become difficult to attach any added pragmatic meaning in her case. The deviation from normative use is what creates these new meanings in the first place.

7.1 Negative politeness can still be strategic

Since the plain form is predominant in my data, it follows that a speech level shift should be expected to be an upshift, rather than a downshift, which my findings clearly show. This means that in terms of politeness strategies it is easier to identify negative politeness strategies because of how my study is constructed. Hudson's (2008) previous study on semi-polite forms corre-

sponded to my own findings. To this I added the occurrences of contracted polite forms. These stem from the need to be effective but still allowing the commenter to maintain some level of politeness, while also letting him/her make use of the assertive pragmatic meaning that Hudson argues is attached to the semi-polite forms.

While an upshift from plain form to *desu/masu*-form belongs in the corner of (at times normative) negative politeness strategies, it should still be considered a strategy. As evidenced in my data of the normative use in the advertisements by sub-groups, it is indeed strategic to show that one is temporarily speaking on behalf of a larger group, rather than as an individual, which we must take use of the plain form to infer.

Usami's (2002) notion of *pragmatic politeness* and *discourse politeness* together with Ikuta's (1983) earlier findings inspired me to conduct this study as I strongly agree with both of their conclusions and stance towards Japanese honorifics. Usami argues that while Brown and Levinson's framework have implications for Japanese as well it is necessary to account for '*the constraints of honorific use as a grammar that encodes socio-cultural values*' Usami (2002:226-227) which is what I believe the upshifts in my results show signs of.

7.2 On Brown and Levinson's weightiness of an FTA

While Brown and Levinson's formula for evaluating the weightiness of an FTA should not be taken too literally, it is useful for evaluating how various factors might have different weight depending on language and context (see *section 2.1.1* for an explanation of this formula and its purpose). The original formula is as follows:

(32) $W = P(H,S) + D(S,H) + R$

In the chat environment, cultural conventions are still colored by the Japanese society as evidenced by the use and non-use of the *desu/masu*-form, but there are also sub-cultural factors, directly related to the game that I argue can be the weightier factor of the two.

Within the chat environment, any power struggle is often related to experience and direct knowledge of the game's environment or its mechanics and related concepts, rather than having any connection to out-of-game social status. The players' real identities are usually not discussed at all. While there might be the occasional well known 'in-game celebrity' due to his or

hers actions taken within the game's environment, assessing weightiness of the *P* and *D* parameters is an impossible and often meaningless task. There are very few substantial repercussions for doing an FTA as long as one follow the rules set by the company that produced the game. What might sound rude is sometimes simply the jargon of the moment. Therefore, I suggest a slight modification to the formula in this case:

(33) $W = P(H,S) + D(S,H) + R(outer) + R(inner)$

I do not claim that (33) is unique to the environment I have been studying. I merely suggest that we need consider two cultural factors in this particular case. *R(outer)* are any cultural factors rooted in Japanese society. *R(inner)* would then be any sub-cultural factors, which might compensate for the weight of *R(outer)* in many cases. This can be related to jargon or a culturally taboo topic, for example. In general, it allows for doing a weightier FTA with less risk for repercussions due to the mitigation factor of R(inner). From my own experience this is true not only for Japanese, but for English and possibly other languages as well.

Another, better, way of explaining this is to say that Brown and Levinson's FTA formula as a whole, is both culture and language dependent. The confined virtual environment follows one set of rules and conventions, whereas the outer, physical society has its own. It is only natural that the virtual environment is colored by the physical environment as a normative rule set to challenge. Also, these cultural constraints are what we need to consider and account for, according to Usami (2002), rather than stubbornly abolish Brown and Levinson's theory as a whole. I agree. The *P* and *D* parameters must account for the existence of a normative speech level for a given language and culture. In doing so, a baseline from which deviations can be observed, is set. Consequently, deviating from normative speech levels in Japanese can be related to Brown and Levinson's strategic framework with greater success and the universality of the theory does not have to be rejected.

There are many interesting findings in my material that I did not have time or place to include in this study but I hope to return to the subject and my data in the future.

Appendix

Diagrams, *desu/masu*-forms in relation to comment frequency

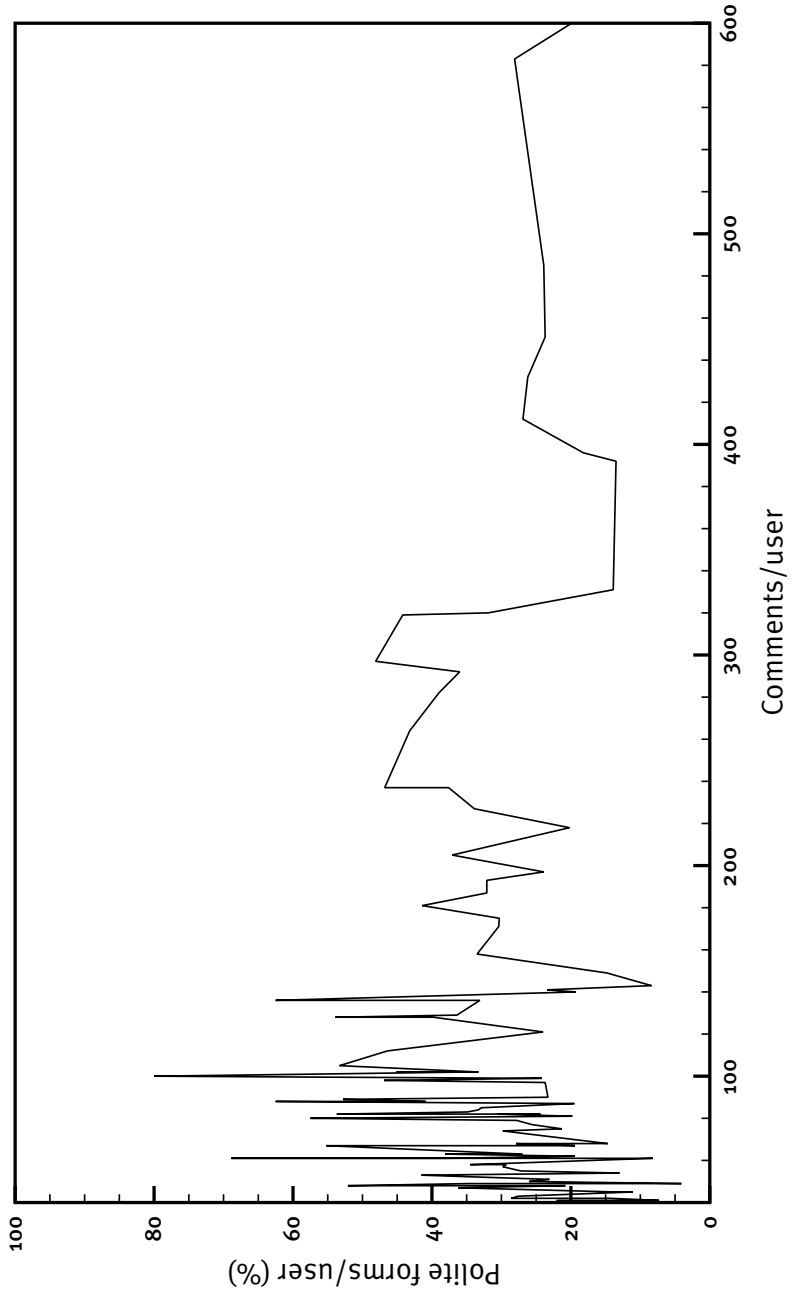

Figure 13: Users ranging between 40-600 comments.

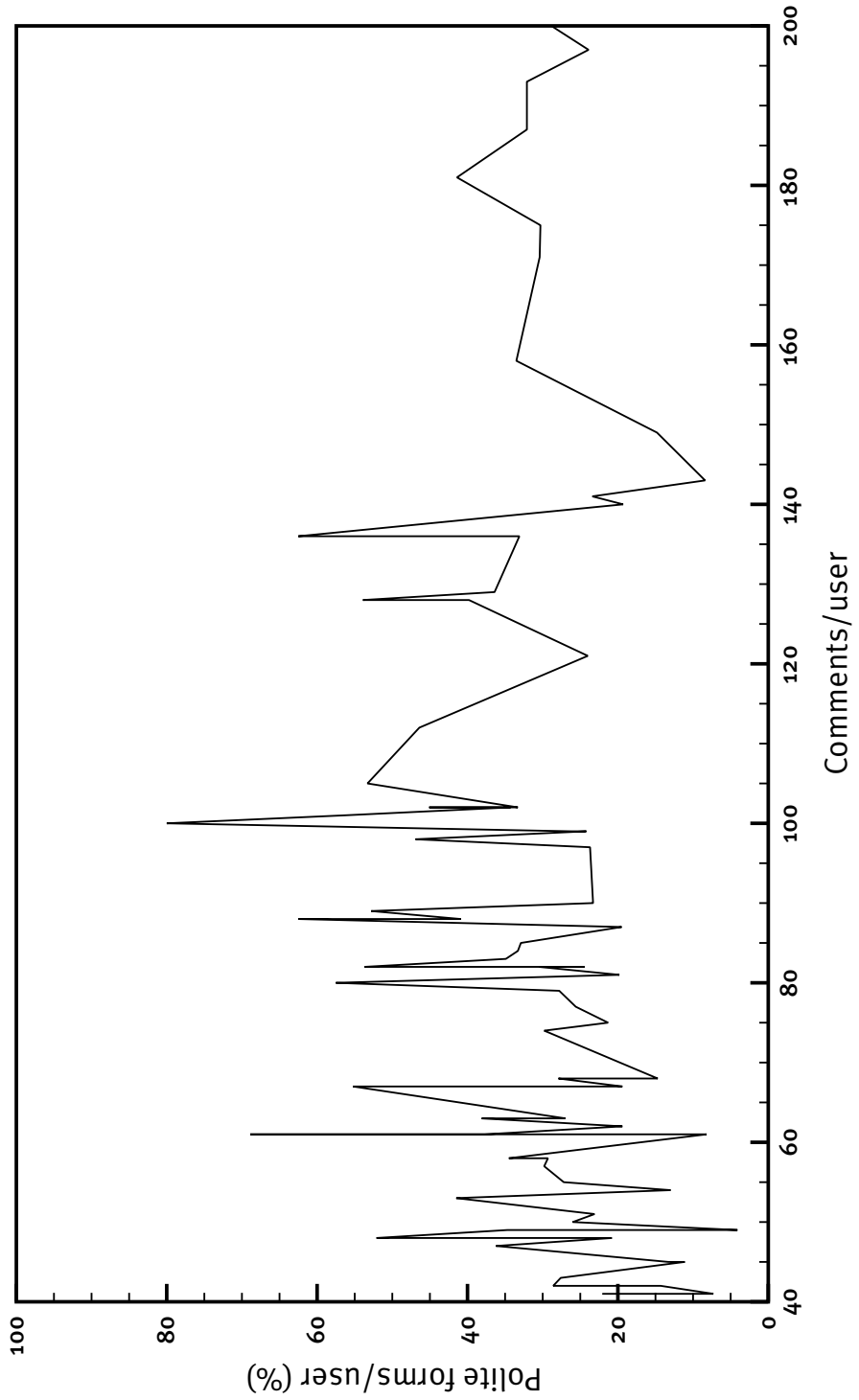

Figure 14: Close up of *figure 13*, showing users ranging between 40-200 comments.

Original quotes

p.22

「デス」「マス」「デゴザイマス」は文の末尾にこれをつけると文が聞手に敬意を表する表現になるもので、事柄を表すところはまったくない。だから、これらは直接に聞手に敬意を表するはたらきをもつものといえる。

Oishi (1975:93-94)

p.48

A: あー　何か出てきました
B: worp to location
B: warp か
B: ってないすか?

Excerpt from my chat-transcript, taken from EVE®Online.

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Language data

Chat logs from the Japanese chat channel within the online computer game EVE®Online, collected with the kind permission of its producer and rights holder CCP Games (URL: `http://www.ccpgames.com`) between 2008-04-26 – 2009-09-05.