

Politeness Norms and a Youth Vernacular

This study shows that people preserve the culturally important norms of linguistic politeness against an emerging vernacular style by narrowing the social meanings of the style in media. The case in point is the youth style involving *su*, the shortened form of the honorific copula *desu*. As the distinction between the honorific *desu/masu* and the plain *da* forms is one of the most important resources to comply with linguistic politeness, the style can be problematized as destabilizing the norms of linguistic politeness. Examining (1) the ways male college students employ the style, (2) lay people's evaluations of the style on a Q&A website, and (3) the ways TV ads adopt the style, I demonstrate that the style's multiple social meanings in local interactions are simplified in the mediated discourse. The analysis of students' usages reveals that they utilize the style to index multiple social meanings, to which taking a stance of polite solidarity is central. In contrast, the investigation of comments on a Q&A website shows that they deny the politeness of the style by assigning it extremely negative social meanings. The analysis of the style in TV ads indicates that they decrease the polite meaning of the style and highlight the solidarity meaning, expanding it to index a humorous, relaxed form of masculinity. The analyses imply that, when the style is recontextualized into media, its multiple meanings are regimented and the indexical regimentation serves to manage the culturally important boundaries between the polite/plain styles.



Emerita Professor Momoko Nakamura
(Kanto Gakuin University)