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**PROCEDURE HONORIFIC MODIFICATION LAYER  
AND THE JAPANESE COMMUNICATION  
ENVIRONMENT<sup>1</sup>**

**1. Communication environment**

The notion of ‘Japanese communication environment’ refers primarily to the communication space in which the Japanese language is used by its competent speakers, who not only know the rules of grammar, but also share certain patterns of communication activity. In this approach, the environment is a multi-layered concept. It contains both certain *datum* and *novum*. In order to function within an environment an individual, apart from possessing the linguistic competence, must also be able to predict which, according to Hymes, speech situations<sup>2</sup> can occur in a given setting and what results they may bring. Hence, rather than a ‘fluent speaker’, a ‘competent actor’ functioning in a given

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<sup>1</sup> The Speech given at the 11<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the EAJS, European Association for 25 Japanese Studies in Vienna, August-September 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Hymes 1974: 51.

environment will be mentioned below.

As a fundamental feature of a native speaker of a language (who is not necessarily a linguist) one can mention the ability to control and maintain expected and unmarked values of certain environment parameters. This is achieved on the basis of individual and social experience. What is relevant on the basic level of communication is not whether a certain behavior is 'polite' but if it is expected and properly recognized by the participants. It is this property of the environment that will be emphasized below under the label of procedure.

## 2. What is the honorific modification?

At the previous EAJS conference<sup>3</sup> I presented the layered model of honorific modification (HM) designed to meet two basic needs:

1. to function as a code and an environment-independent model that would not rely on such common-sense based but hardly measurable and abstract factors as 'respect' or 'politeness' and

2. to cover the whole spectrum of HM with the emphasis put not only on grammar but also on communication fundamentals that are crucial for the effective description of the HM phenomenon.

In the layered model of HM the activities of higher layers are supported by lower layers. The informative layer (higher layer) functions above the honorific layer (lower layer). The honorific layer consists of the protocol sub-layer (higher sub-layer) which is responsible for the surface modification of a message and the procedure sub-layer (lower sub-layer).

The layered model of HM is not restricted only to the surface modification. On the surface layer we may notice, for example, that a referent is addressed by *sensei* 'professor; Sir' which is usually interpreted in the protocol-related terms as an 'exalting' or 'polite' form. It is difficult, however, to examine the speaker's choices concerning more elaborate and profound characteristics of the message on the procedure layer, that is, what action was attempted, why was it attempted at all, what verbal behavior accompanied and followed the action and what the possible reaction might be. It is even more difficult if one

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<sup>3</sup> Jabłoński 2003a.

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examines messages not explicitly 'polite' or 'impolite' that still may be interpreted as 'adequate' or 'inadequate' in a given context, despite the obvious lack of corresponding protocol markers.

### **3. What is the procedure sub-layer?**

The term 'procedure' is borrowed directly from Austin.<sup>4</sup> The procedure sub-layer manages repetitive actions of the speaker and the hearer serving to control the basic parameters of a communicational situation. These primarily include the initial recognition of a situation and its possible development. The phatic efforts of the speaker and the hearer, that is, informing the partner that the communication channel is open and ready to transmit data and that the data has been transmitted correctly may, but does not have to, follow this stage of exchange. It may be required that the partners present to each other the overt information concerning their identity. It may also be necessary to initiate, control and terminate sequential patterns of behavior ranging from greetings and farewells to entities of a liturgical character. Once the exchange is initiated, it should be maintained and terminated in an expected and bilaterally accepted manner. Although some patterns of procedural behavior may be recognized as 'saying something' (speech act) their main function is indeed 'doing something' (social act)<sup>5</sup>.

### **4. Why describe the procedure layer?**

It is, in fact, an inherent property of the layered model that the activities of lower layers should be transparent from the point of view of the higher layers. As long as the final result of the communication act is satisfactory, the activities of lower layers are not an issue.

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<sup>4</sup> See. Austin 1962: 14.

<sup>5</sup> See a very interesting passage on kissing as a social act in Geis 1995: 14-15.

A more complicated situation emerges when a problem occurs in the lower layer activities. It may be required that the lower layer activities are thoroughly examined. Provided the participants are familiar with the environment requirements, the process should be relatively easy to perform and the expected parameters of exchange will be restored quickly. This, however, may be a very obscure process in a multi-cultural environment.

It is on the basis of the procedure layer parameters that communicational situations are constructed. Not all parameters may be relevant in a given environment, even though their values may be measured. The 'emic' approach to parameters usually prevails over their 'etic' values<sup>6</sup>. Should an inappropriate value be chosen, an infelicity will inevitably emerge, impeding the progress of the procedure and preventing it from completing. According to the layered model of HM, the lower the layer at which the infelicity occurs, the more severe the consequences. There is no communication without the procedure layer.

## **5. Roles, role-related implications and ranks**

Identity is a piece of information unique for a given referent. Some piece of this information is measurable and recognizable objectively (etically), in terms of the physical layer parameters (sex, age etc.). Other parameters may not be so evident and are often recognized emically, due to the definition of a procedure valid in a given environment. This is what is probably meant by Brown and Gilman who point out that 'Not every personal attribute counts in determining whether two people are solidary enough'<sup>7</sup>.

A referent may be assigned certain procedural roles. One may insist to map the roles to ranks in a vertical hierarchy. It is good to emphasize here that while in the classical theory of honorifics identifying vertical ranks is crucial for choosing proper honorific forms (a referent is addressed 'with respect' as 'possessing a higher rank'), in the layered model it

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<sup>6</sup> Pike 1990: 28.

<sup>7</sup> See Brown and Gilman 1960.

is the procedural roles that enable us to define who is entitled to do (and say) what in a given situation. Since some hierarchy must inevitably be accepted as a consequence of measurable parameters that are relevant emically, the ranks are always present in the background of the interaction. However, mapping the ranks into the levels of speech does not have to be automatic. To put it shortly, since the ranks are of a static character, they 'are already there'. Without role assignment it is not possible to proceed with the interaction because certain marks are typical for a procedural frame. Once the rank of a referent becomes clear, it is possible to concentrate on the flow of procedure.

Certain aspects related to the rank notion may change dynamically and not refer solely to the procedure. It is because the relative rank may depend on various factors in different environments and speech situations. In Japan the information concerning the data on the referent's age, sex and affiliation as well as the recognition of the situation as 'official' or 'unofficial' may be strictly observed and have direct influence on the protocol level HM in a given setting, while in Poland more attention will be attached to the fact whether one recognizes a communication partner positively (likes them or not), quite indifferently to the fact whether the situation is 'official'. Still, it is mainly the rank that enables the participants of interaction to recognize 'who can do what' in a given situation.

Accordingly, different environments require different degrees of social rank internalization. Much more may be concluded and anticipated solely from the fact of a referent being a housewife or a regular company worker in Japan than in other countries. Rank structure within a homogeneous organization may be very strictly related to other parameters of an individual such as age, sex and education.

## **6. An example procedure**

The procedure of commercial exchange of goods and services (CE) requires two parties: the customer (C) and the provider of service (PoS). The parties' goals must be convergent: PoS possesses goods or is able to deliver services (G) and C wants to get G in

exchange for a payment (P). What ‘really happens’ and may be verified physically for CE is the exchange of G for P. There may exist different, though not necessarily equally predictive, ways of getting G than through implementing CE, to name here only finding G by accident, receiving G as a present or an award, inheriting G, stealing G or creating a G on one’s own. They may require to initiate different procedures than CE in the course of which the participants will no longer act as C and PoS, although from the purely physical point of view C will finally obtain G. Such acts proceed differently from CE. Their secondary consequences also differ.

The CE procedure, as any other procedure, has to be properly initiated and terminated. The parties should know exactly when and how the procedure is initiated in order to proceed; they also need to know how and when and, last but not least, with what result the procedure is terminated.

It is not unthinkable that both parties can have some G that the other party wants to get, so the roles of C and PoS may overlap. In the most typical version of the CE, however, the roles and often also the places of exchange are fixed. There are typical places where certain referents act by default as Cs and others as PoSes. The precise definition of such places as well as the details of the CE procedure may differ; however, these differences may be considered secondary.

The CE procedure is a very common object of study, to mention here only the famous work of Schank and Abelson<sup>8</sup> in which the analysis of the restaurant script leads to numerous conclusions regarding the properties of scripts as such. We are not interested here, however, in describing the scripts in detail or arguing how the stories are understood on the basis of scripts. Our objective is very modest. We assume that the scripts are present in the background of linguistic activity of the referents and that they have to be maintained in order to make the social interaction possible. What we would like to show here is that the linguistic behavior of the referents in the course of interaction may on its major part serve to maintain the script. Some researchers would probably like to describe such behavior as ‘polite’ but I am rather of the opinion that the ‘politeness’ as such is a

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<sup>8</sup> See. Schank&Abelson 1977.

secondary property of an interaction already in progress. It is possible to argue whether a specific linguistic unit is polite or not only provided the interaction is not interrupted. Certain units of behavior serve to maintain the congruence of the procedure. They may be described as ‘polite’ but this does not explain why they are used at all. A deeper insight into the procedural properties of an exchange pattern may lead us to the conclusion that the procedural coherence of the exchange may gain priority over the factor of ‘politeness’ or ‘respect’.

## 7. The CE procedure in Japanese environment

### a. Initialization

In the Japanese communication environment the important procedural phrase for initiating the CE procedure is *Irasshaimase* or its slightly less sophisticated variant *Irasshai*. The initial phrase may be used in almost all contexts of CE with only some specific situations excluded<sup>9</sup>.

The phrase may be used only by the party being assigned the role of PoS. The use of the initial does not automatically initiate the CE procedure. It seems more appropriate to describe *Irasshaimase* as a soliciting phrase used to mark the presence of PoS in the place where the G may be obtained and leaving the possibility to initiate the CE interaction utterly in the hands of C. Note that, while PoS role is perfectly defined and his use of the phrase may be considered as a kind of declaration: “I am here and ready to serve you, Sir”,

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<sup>9</sup> In some situations the CE cannot be initiated by *Irasshaimase*. This is especially true in cases when PoS possesses certain expert knowledge or skills and is recognized as of a higher status than that of C. In such cases the PoS is addressed *sensei* ‘professor; Sir’, the form commonly described as ‘polite’ and reflecting the vertical distance between C and PoS. However, *irasshaimase* is also not used by the staff in Japanese means of transportation (railway, buses) and places such as second-hand bookstores or small kiosks, although the PoS in such places are not considered as high-ranked or addressed by *sensei*.

it is the choice of the partner whether they decide to respond and act as C or neglect it, with no obligation to respond on the C part. Any partner who responds to the phrase will consequently be treated as C.

The more direct introduction to an interaction based on the CE pattern may be the phrase *Nani ka osagashi deshō ka.* of a literal meaning: ‘Are you looking for something?’ directed to a potential C who seems to be searching for a G. If a C is looking at a specific G, the PoS may also approach directly and start immediately with an explanation concerning the G. In each case the informative behavior of the PoS must be preceded by *Irasshaimase* and the C may ignore it without a word from his part. The Cs wandering around the store and not showing interest to any specific G may be addressed by an indirect *Irasshaimase* but almost never approached directly. The observable active attitude of PoS and the passive attitude of C constitute an important procedural condition of the CE in Japanese environment.

The C may also approach the PoS directly and ask a question concerning a certain article. Even this question, however, will very likely be preceded by *Irasshaimase* from the part of PoS. The only case when the C may not hear the initial phrase directly spoken by the PoS will be in a cheap and crowded store with a very busy personnel. Still, even in such case the phrase will be played from a tape recorder or written on the store door.

It should be noticed here, that while it is true that from the point of view of Japanese grammar *Irasshaimase* is an imperative and ‘polite’ form of the suppletive exalting verb *irassharu* meaning ‘coming’, ‘going’ or ‘being’, it does not seem very instructive to describe it as ‘polite’ or ‘exalting’, since its primary function is not to order the customer to enter the store but to initiate the procedure of CE. *Irasshaimase* is a procedural marker reserved for the individuals who intend to act as PoS in the course of a possible CE. From the C’s point of view, *Irasshaimase* is a landmark, a pointer to a CE procedure. As such, it should be easily recognizable and invariable. Whether it is ‘polite’ or not is a matter of secondary importance. This property of *Irasshaimase* and *Irasshai* is noted also by the classic sources on Japanese *keigo* but it cannot be explained thoroughly due to the traditional limitations of HM descriptions that remain solely protocol-oriented. For

example, Tsujimura's dictionary (1991) at the entry for *Irasshai* notes: '...[it's use] is related to courtesy and does not contain [the meaning of] respect'<sup>10</sup>. Since the dictionary does not contain the entry for 「儀礼」 'courtesy', the explanation rather obfuscates than clarifies the function of the initializing phrase.

The purely procedural properties of *Irasshaimase* are also reflected in the way how Japanese speakers react to new variants of initializing phrases that have recently been invented. It is a relatively new custom to add to *Irasshaimase* the phrases described as everyday greetings, such as *Ohayō gozaimasu* 'Good morning' or *Konnichi wa* 'Good afternoon'<sup>11</sup>. One may only speculate on the background of such change. The only sure thing is that the change has been initiated by the PoS party of the exchange. The result is, however, that in most cases the C feels puzzled because he cannot recognize the procedure as CE and does not know how to react<sup>12</sup>.

A very interesting procedural feature of this change may be that the C is normally forced to respond to a procedure of exchanging everyday greetings, while in the CE procedure no overt reaction of the C is required. This changes fundamental habits of C's behavior and has much more profound influence on the course of an exchange than it might have been judged simply by the addition of new quantitative elements of the exchange. The use of everyday greeting in the situation where a standard initialization of CE procedure is expected is interpreted as a violation of a reference frame. The procedural flow of the exchange is maintained thanks to the corrective action of the C who decides to ignore the error and proceed with the exchange. Note that such corrective actions require an additional effort of C which is not expected. In case of a machine the solution might not have been so easy.

## b. Protocol role definitions

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<sup>10</sup> 「...儀礼的なもので、敬意はあまり含まれない」 Tsujimura 1991: 41.

<sup>11</sup> Both are described by Tsujimura as 'greetings' 「あいさつのことば」, see *ibid*: 137 and 264 with no entry for 「あいさつ」 in the dictionary.

It has already been mentioned that on the level of ‘pure facts’ the PoS is an active part of the CE procedure. Should a problem emerge, it is the PoS’s duty to react and restore the expected interaction flow. The role of PoS is to provide services for C.

In terms of HM protocol layer the PoS may be viewed as having a lower HM rank than the C. This is reflected in many protocol HM oppositions. Due to the limited size of this article it will only be noted that HM protocol rules are adjusted to the procedural parameters of the exchange. The C is addressed as *oykakusama* ‘(dear) customer’, the title which is also treated as ‘expressing respect’<sup>13</sup> and his actions referred with the use of the exalting forms *sonkeigo* 尊敬語 and the modest forms *kenjōgo* 謙讓語. The scheme of favor exchange influencing the choice of Japanese giving and receiving verbs *jujuhyōgen* 授受表現 is also fixed. All the actions of C are obligatorily viewed as favors generously done to PoS. The C on his part may freely address the PoS with *sonkeigo* and interpret PoS’s actions as favors but this is not obligatory. Note that the protocol properties of the CE procedure mentioned above may be (and actually often are) interpreted as conveying ‘respect’ and ‘reverence’ but this emerges rather from the default properties of the role of a referent in a CE procedure than from a free choice of ‘a respect-oriented behavior’. Disregarding protocol requirements of the procedure would result rather in a major failure in the procedure flow than in interpreting referent’s behavior as ‘not showing enough respect’.

### c. The truth and beyond

‘The truth’ as such is measurable and verifiable in physical terms. The behavior on the procedure level, however, is conformed to the superior goal of the interaction. The setting with the PoS mostly responsible for maintaining the environment parameters encourages the use of a strategy to solve possible problems by assuring the C that he is ‘always right’.

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<sup>12</sup> The author is indebted for this remark to Prof. Hiroshi Kabaya, Waseda University who made it at the 待遇コミュニケーション研究会 symposium held on June 18th, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> See Tsujimura 1991: 75.

This may foster hiding or masking the values of certain physical parameters which may no longer be communicated to the C ‘as they are’. The ‘truth’ is a secondary factor in such setting. It is usually not enough, for example, to inform the C that the goods or services nominally offered by PoS are unavailable at the moment or available only in mediocre quality. The procedural parameters override a purely factual interpretation. Should the goods not be available, the most immediate solution for the PoS in the Japanese environment will be to enter a sub-procedure of apology, often with a detailed explanation of the situation. It is out of the scope of C’s interests to examine whether the unavailability of an item or service is indeed among the parameters that the PoS is directly able to control. The following message in Japanese and English appeared on the indicator at the Shimokitazawa station of the Odakyu line on April 29th, 2005:

お詫び。昨日ビニールがパンタグラフにからまりダイヤが大幅に乱れお客様  
にご迷惑をかけたことをお詫びいたします。

*Apology. Apology for yesterday’s delay due to accident.*

It should be noted that the Japanese part of the apology contains more information ‘measurable and verifiable in physical terms’ than its English counterpart. It mentions that the accident was caused by a piece of vinyl (probably a vinyl bag) stuck to the pantograph of a train. This illustrates both the effort of the PoS to provide the C with the largest amount of information and the cultural difference suppressing the information outside the scope of the C’s direct interest in an environment in which English is spoken. Even if one assumes that the author of the message was simply not able to translate it fully into English, the literal translation cannot function transparently in the English environment. The procedure level imposes its limitations also on the quantity of information<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> It may also be argued whether it would be possible at all in an English communication environment for a railway company to apologize for an accident that happened on the previous day. Such a behavior could have been interpreted as unexpected and require corrective actions (ignoring) from the hearer/reader of the message.

Paradoxically enough, despite the passive attitude of the C on the level of ‘pure facts’ mentioned above, the procedural scheme of CE activity defines the C as the active and acting party (the user) and the PoS as the passive and serving party (the tool) of the procedure. This is expressed also in the lexical components of the typical CE procedure. The PoS’s actions are focused on the C’s needs. It is the C who ‘demands’, ‘makes decisions’, ‘acquires’ goods and services offered by PoS and ‘enjoys’ them. PoS stays in the background. It may be overtly reflected by language expressions, as is the case with the Japanese verbs *tanoshimu* ‘enjoy’ or its *katakana* counterpart *enjoisuru* of the same meaning. Both verbs may only appear in the utterances of PoS and refer to the actions of C. It is possible to describe this property in terms of category of person and state that both verbs cannot be used in the first person utterances. It seems more convincing, however, to put this in procedural terms.

Quite apart from the purely procedural restrictions, the PoS usually knows more on the subject of CE (the G) and is able to provide PoS with the necessary information (which is also illustrated in the example with the apology above). This, however, is never explicitly mentioned in the course of the CE. The sole overt implication of this fact is that the PoS is obliged to provide the C with extensive information on the G. This includes redirecting the C to a more competent source of information, should the PoS not know something.

#### **d. Termination**

A CE procedure coming to its end should be properly terminated. Also in this case the responsibility lays almost solely on the part of the PoS. The typical verbal sign of CE procedure termination is the phrase *Arigatō gozaimashita!* ‘Thank you!’. Optional variants may include *Mata okoshi kudasaimase*. ‘Please visit us again’ or other terminating phrases. The C may react by *Dōmo* ‘Thanks’ or other phrase expressing thanks but he may also remain silent and leave the stage of exchange showing no interest to what happens further.

The proper termination of the procedure is an important way to mark that the

interaction terminated with no problem. The PoS will not be surprised if the C does not react but the lack of termination sequence from the part of PoS may be interpreted by C that something went wrong and require further explanation from the part of PoS which would inevitably require more effort and time.

## **8. Procedural (in)consistency**

It should be noted that all the requirements listed above do not apply directly to the evaluation of a behavior as 'polite', 'impolite', 'humble' or 'boastful'. What is most important on the procedure level of communication is the procedural consistency of actions. The main opposition line may hence be drawn between the 'expected' and the 'unexpected'. Should a partner react in an unexpected way, it may be interpreted as a different procedure being initiated on his part which must lead to communicational infelicity and possible corrective actions. Note that the procedure level, as the lower level of the HM, is more crucial for evaluating the exchange in terms of success or failure than the level of protocol. It may be possible to communicate even though the partner's behavior is not judged as 'polite' on the level of protocol. It is close to impossible to communicate, if, for example, the PoS informs C that he is not interested in what the C wants or desires, or if the C enters the procedure of convincing the PoS that it is him (C) who knows more than the PoS. Rather than 'impolite', this behavior should be defined as 'incompatible'. It is only in reference to the solid procedural basis that the protocol choices may be studied and evaluated.

## **9. Conclusion – honorifics and procedures**

Let us sum up briefly what was attempted to be proven above.

1. Honorifics should be studied as related to the general communication activity. The layered model serves this purpose.
2. It may be instructive to study procedures as conceptual entities assuring the lower

level behavior consistency. It is not useful to study the protocol level of HM without reference to procedures.

3. The procedure entities and the mechanisms of their recognition may and do indeed vary across the environments, quite apart from the HM on the protocol layer.

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