



Teaching Japanese Honorifics More Effectively

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Abstract

*This paper discusses the pedagogy of teaching honorifics inspired by the author's dissertation research on the following three aspects: the definition of honorifics, utilizing materials, and adjustments in the assessment. Firstly, rather than viewing Japanese honorifics solely as relics of a feudalistic society, recent studies highlight a dynamic understanding of honorifics, framing them as indicators of interpersonal distance. Secondly, teachers can use existing materials in textbooks like *Genki* and *Tobira* to demonstrate diverse usages of honorifics. Teachers can also use animation clips as innovative teaching materials to illustrate honorifics to direct students' attention to how honorifics help one discern speakers and their recipients. Especially for the intermediate-low level, instead of requiring students to immediately master various usages, exposing them to multiple usages of honorifics and raising their awareness of the multifunctionality of honorifics is more important. Lastly, using Bloom's Taxonomy, the author stresses the importance of memorization as a foundation for understanding and analyzing honorific usage in context. Rather than aiming for perfect mastery, intermediate-low students should focus on memorizing the forms. With this goal in mind, adjustments include allowing pauses (i.e., less fluent usages) and not penalizing students for culture-related aspects. In conclusion, this paper discusses how to teach honorifics to intermediate-low learners, emphasizing contextual understanding, exposure through various materials, and flexible assessment strategies to support student learning.*

Keywords: *Language pedagogy, Japanese honorifics*

1. Introduction

Japanese honorifics are perceived as complicated and difficult to acquire not only by non-native speakers but also by native speakers. Honorifics are essentially a type of social deixis that index the relationship between interlocutors [1]. For instance, *hana-da* and *hana-desu* in Japanese both mean "It's a flower" in English, but the former ending indicates a closer social relationship, typically between speaker and addressee, compared to the latter. The latter ending (the Polite Form) is sometimes mapped to pragmatic functions such as politeness and formality. Nonetheless, real-life usages of honorifics do not always exhibit a clear one-on-one mapping between forms and functions. For Japanese in particular, there are also multiple sets of forms to memorize, adding to the difficulty of teaching honorifics. This paper discusses how the author's dissertation research [2] on Japanese honorifics influenced teaching pedagogy in three aspects: the definition of honorifics, utilization of textbooks and interactions in animations, and adjustments in assessments. Therefore, the paper will be structured to elaborate on these three topics, instead of the traditional structure used by most experimental studies. In addition, due to the page limit, the paper will inevitably omit extensive discussions on theory but focus more on application.

Despite blooming research studies on the diverse usages of Japanese honorifics [3-6], works on teaching honorifics are rarer. A few Japanese scholars have investigated the pedagogy of honorifics [7, 8]. However, their research focuses more on drilling normative usages. In contrast, Matsumoto and Okamoto and Matsumoto et al.'s articles remind instructors that Japanese is not monolithic [9, 10]. Instead, real-life language uses are more diverse than what is portrayed in textbooks. In addition, Mori emphasizes the importance of maximizing students' exposure to real-life norms and complexities [11]. The paper discusses what classroom teachers can do to make a difference in students' learning experience of Japanese honorifics. Specifically, the paper argues that teachers can better explain what honorifics are and their functions so that students are not misinformed that honorifics are solely for hierarchical relationships. From the author's teaching experience, it is recommended that instructors highlight existing usages in textbooks so that students can be aware of the diverse usages of honorifics at the intermediate-low level. Lastly, some adjustments in assessments that facilitate students' learning of honorifics are shared.



2. The Definition of Japanese Honorifics

For long, the notoriously complicated system of Japanese honorifics has been considered to cement social inequality and to be based on a hierarchical society. In a workshop on honorifics that the author offered to nine intermediate- / advanced-level students at a private research university in the U.S., students demonstrated their stereotypes through a word-cloud activity that asked them to freely describe their first impression upon seeing the word “honorifics.” The submitted words by students can be categorized into three main categories: 1) perceived essence of honorifics: class, hierarchy, pyramid-shaped, social stratification, and respect; 2) evaluation of honorifics: troublesome, unnecessary, difficult, scary, and inconsistent; and 3) effects of using honorifics: tension, good at Japanese, and educated. Impressions such as “honorifics are hierarchy-based” and “honorifics are difficult” reflect that there is a large room for improvement: instructors can do a much better job introducing honorifics to students to facilitate their learning. This misunderstanding probably comes from the one-on-one mapping between honorifics and politeness, a misunderstanding that honorifics are always used towards those who warrant social respect to be polite. However, research shows that category labels such as “Polite Forms” may not be as suggestive of their functions in contexts. Therefore, teachers need to understand the nature of honorifics first so that they do not reinforce the one-on-one mapping to students.

Japanese honorifics (*keigo* in Japanese) are essentially a type of social deixis that index distance between interlocutors [1], and they point to a larger distance compared to non-honorifics. Here, distance refers to the interpersonal relationship among participants in the speech event (typically speaker and addressee) or participants in the described event (referents), which can be hierarchical and/or psychological. That is, honorifics are not only for elevating an addressee or a third party that warrants respect but also for distancing an addressee or a third party, i.e., psychological estrangement. At its core, being a type of deixis means that honorifics have built-in pragmatic meaning to point to a distance.

There are several frameworks to categorize honorifics, and in this paper, the categorization of Referent Honorifics and Addressee Honorifics is adopted. Referent Honorifics (RH) distance the speaker away from the referent person and exalts the subject or the non-subject [3, 12, 13]. On the other hand, Addressee Honorifics (AH) mark the relative status of the interlocutors and express deference to the addressee [12, 14]. RH and AH can be combined or used separately.

The terminology of RH and AH is preferred because they describe to whom honorifics are used, in contrast to the more widely accepted categorization of honorifics in Japan. According to Guidelines of honorific expressions: Report published by Subdivision on the Japanese Language at the Council for Cultural Affairs in 2007, honorifics in Modern Japanese can be divided into five categories, which are Respect Forms, Humble Forms I, Humble Forms I, Humble Forms II (also known as “Extra-Modest Forms” in Genki [15]), Polite Forms, and Beautification Forms [16]. Almost all books on honorifics that are published domestically in Japan [17-19] and textbooks for foreigners [15, 20] adopt terminologies from this five-category framework. Nevertheless, a prominent weakness of this framework, as Harada points out, is that the terminologies are based on semantics [21]. The semantics-based labels such as “respect” and “humble” can be misleading in terms of how honorifics are used in context.

When first introducing honorifics to students, however, instructors can start from the canonical mapping between forms and functions [1]. Because students who learn Japanese as a foreign language usually do not have opportunities to use honorifics outside the classroom, teachers can take advantage of the teacher-student relationship to demonstrate how honorifics are used canonically. In this way, students can immediately apply honorifics to the conversation, allowing instructors to identify problems and address them on the spot. Another advantage of starting from the most common teacher-student relationship to practice normative usage introduced in textbooks is that this reduces cognitive load and does not overwhelm students.

3. Utilizing Materials to Illustrate Diverse Usages of Honorifics

3.1 Existing Materials in Textbooks

The author's dissertation reviewed mainstream Japanese textbooks used in Higher Education in the United States [2], including *Genki* [15], *Tobira* [22], and *Quartet* [20]. Several common issues are found with these textbooks. For instance, one of the commonalities among these textbooks is that they often treat honorifics as a discrete module, where students receive intensive information and drill on honorifics. Given the low frequency of RH, introducing honorifics that belong to the lexical category in



batch can efficiently expose students to the basics of honorifics. However, a weakness of this approach is that students may perceive honorifics as an independent, difficult feature. If students treat honorifics as an independent concept, they will be less likely to categorize the Polite-Form marker *desu/masu* that they started using from Day 1 as honorifics. Moreover, students may get the wrong impression that there would be a definite time point when they abruptly switch from honorifics to non-honorifics to show intimacy [2].

Despite this weakness, the author did find many places of mixed usage of honorifics and non-honorifics in textbooks in modules that do not specifically target honorifics. Instructors can take advantage of these instances to quickly remind students of the diverse usages of honorifics while going over the conversation. Example 1 (from *Genki* [15], Lesson 21, Conversation 3, p.207) and Example 2 (Tobira [22], Lesson 5, Conversation 2 Line 39-51, p.111) illustrate this point.

Example 1

Ōya: Jon-san, rusu no aida ni keisatsu kara denwa ga arimashita <AH> yo. Hannin ga tsukamatta node, keisatsu ni kite hoshii sō desu <AH>.

Landlord: Jon, while you were away, the police called. The culprit has been caught, and they want you to come to the station.

Jon: Arigatō gozaimasu <AH>. Yokatta <plain>.

Jon: Thank you. I'm glad.

Ōya: Sorekara, kagi o atarashiku shimashita <AH> kara, dōzo. Hontō ni taihen deshita <AH> ne.

Landlord: And here's the new key. It was really tough, wasn't it?

Jon: Ē. Demo, sono okage de, ii koto mo arimashita <AH>. Minna iroiro na mono o kuretari, ogotte kuretari shita n desu <AH>.

Jon: Yes, but thanks to that, some good things happened too. Everyone gave me things and treated me to meals.

Ōya: Jon-san wa, ii tomodachi ga takusan ite, shiawase desu ne <AH>.

Landlord: Jon, you have a lot of good friends. You're really lucky.

Example 2

Tomu: Sushi wa, Nihon de wa takai n desu <AH> ka?

Tom: Is sushi expensive in Japan?

Michiko: Mae wa chotto takakatta n desu <AH> ga, kaiten-zushi ga dekite kara, yasukute oishii sushi ga taberareru yō ni narimashita <AH>.

Michiko: It used to be a bit expensive, but since conveyor belt sushi places opened, you can now eat affordable and delicious sushi.

Tomu: E, kaiten-zushi tte?

Tom: Huh? Conveyor belt sushi?

Michiko: Sushi ga notta o-sara ga beruto konbea ni notte nagarete kuru n desu <AH>. Sore de, jibun no sukina sushi ga me no mae ni kitara, sore o totte taberu n desu <AH>. Kaiten tte iu no wa, nani ka ga mawaru to iu imi nan desu <AH> yo.

Michiko: Sushi plates move on a conveyor belt. When you see the sushi you like in front of you, you take it and eat it. "Kaiten" means "something rotates."

Tomu: Hē, haiteku de omoshirosō desu <AH> ne. Tabe ni itte mitai nā <plain>. Amerika ni wa kaiten-zushi wa nai no ka nā <plain>.

Tom: Wow, it sounds high-tech and interesting. I want to try it. I wonder if they have conveyor belt sushi in America.

Michiko: Kono aida, terebi de Karifornia ya Nyū Yōku no kaiten-zushi resutoran o shōkai shiteimashita <AH> yo.

Michiko: The other day, I saw on TV that they introduced conveyor belt sushi restaurants in California and New York.

Tomu: Hontō desu <AH> ka. Ja, sushi mo mōsugu Amerika no fāsuto fūdo ni naru kamoshiremasen <AH> ne.

Tom: Really? Then sushi might soon become American fast food as well.

In Example 1, Jon used "yokatta 'I'm glad'" in plain form whereas the entire conversation with his landlord was conducted in AH. Although Lesson 21 does not focus on honorifics, instructors can remind students of this seemingly strange form and ask students why Jon did not use AH, so that students can realize that for spontaneous personal reactions / exclamations that do not have an addressee, speakers can use plain forms because the psychological distance is zero. Similarly in Example 2, Tom's utterance of "I want to try it. I wonder if they have conveyor belt sushi in America" is



also more directed to himself than to the addressee, Michiko. The *nā* as a sentence-final particle also suggests that Tom is talking to himself. Therefore, instructors can simply flag these usages and have students ponder why the speaker switches to non-honorific expressions in the middle of a conversation. This mini exercise can be done in under one minute and will not significantly affect the flow of the class, and yet it can gradually raise students' awareness of how diverse the usages of honorifics are in real-life conversations.

3.2 Using Animation Clips

As aforementioned, mainstream Japanese textbooks used in higher education in the United States adopt a semantics-based categorization of honorifics, which can be misleading in their usage. If textbooks cannot be changed immediately (maybe due to district requirements, et cetera), instructors can utilize video clips to demonstrate or to have students notice various usages of honorifics. This is supported by Schmidt's "noticing theory" [23], which suggests that the crucial role of language instruction is to guide students' attention to often-ignored language phenomena and to facilitate their noticing and understanding.

In the workshop on honorifics for the author's dissertation research where the participants are intermediate- / advanced-level learners, participants were asked to watch video clips of authentic conversations and were provided transcripts with usages of honorifics highlighted. Participants then had an opportunity to discuss what they observed from the usages of honorifics and why they think the speakers made those choices. However, for intermediate-low-level learners, discussing the usage of honorifics extensively in Japanese may not be a feasible option. Instead, the author deliberately chose short animation clips as innovative teaching materials to illustrate honorifics that most students have already watched. Providing that students already have some knowledge about the content and the context, their attention could easily be directed to the usage of honorifics. Some may argue that usages of honorifics in animations reflect an ideological understanding of honorifics, which may be different from real-life usages. However, the author argues that these ideologized usages are in fact "purer" and thus easier for learners of lower proficiency to pick up. Thus, animation clips as innovative teaching materials to illustrate honorifics can fulfill the purpose of introducing diverse usages of honorifics to intermediate-low learners.

Example 3 is a conversation between peers from the animation *Death Note*, Episode 10.

Example 3

Raito: Kono kissaten wa boku no okiniiri de <non-hon.> ne. Kono seki ni suwareba hito ni kaiwa o kikareru koto mo nai <plain>.

Raito: This café is my favorite. If you sit here, no one can overhear your conversations.

L: *li tokoro o oshiete itadakimashita <RH + AH>.*

L: Thank you for sharing such a good place.

Raito: Koko nara sono suwarikata mo sonna ni kini suru koto mo nai <plain> shi ne.

Raito: Here, you don't have to worry about your sitting posture either.

L: *Watashi wa kono suwarikata de nai to dame nan desu <AH>. Ippanteki na suwarikata o suru to suiriryoku ga 40-pāsento heru n desu <AH>. De, watashi ni tanomitai koto tte?*

L: I need to sit like this. If I sit normally, my deduction ability drops by 40%. So, what did you want to ask me?

Raito: Aa, sore wa boku ga Kira janai to wakatta toki de ii <plain> yo. Ryūga no hō kara suki ni hanashite kure <plain>.

Raito: Oh, you can tell me after you figure out that I'm not Kira. Speak as you like, Ryuga.

L: *Dewa shitsurei to wa omoimasu <AH> ga, Yagami-kun no suiriryoku o tesuto shite mite mo ii deshou <AH> ka?*

L: If you don't mind, can I test your deduction ability, Yagami-kun?

Raito: Aa, ii <plain> yo. Omoshirosō da <plain>.

Raito: Sure, that sounds interesting.

L: *Dewa mazu kochira o goran ni natte <RH> mite kudasai <AH>. Kono san-mai wa Kira ga keimusho-nai no hanzaisha o ayatsutte shinu mae ni kakasete to omowareru bunshō no shashin desu <AH>. Kore ni tsuite Yagami-kun no iken o kikase te kudasai <AH>.*

L: Then, take a look at this. These three photos are of writings that Kira had the criminals write before their deaths in prison. What do you think about them, Yagami-kun?

Raito: Omoshiroi <plain>ne.

Raito: Interesting.



Rather than having students dictating honorific expressions, the author asked students to only pay attention to the ending of the sentences. In the transcription above, honorific expressions / plain forms (non-honorific expressions) are marked by underlines. Here, both L and Raito are freshmen at the same university. They hang out in a café after a tennis game. However, L constantly uses AH (sometimes together with RH) to Raito, resulting in asymmetrical sentence endings. From this excerpt, students can understand that using honorifics does not always indicate hierarchical differences. A possible interpretation here, considering that L almost always used AH no matter to whom he talks, is to estrange himself from others to create a mysterious image. In addition, the indiscriminate usage of AH establishes L's real character as a professional detective. On the other hand, Raito uses non-honorific forms as most university students would do. As can be known from later episodes, Raito probably deliberately sticks to plain forms to perform the character of a normal university student to hide his superpower—the ability to kill anyone using a death note. By using animation clips to illustrate honorifics that most students have watched, teachers can make students aware of the charm of honorifics. Instructors can also highlight how easily the audience can understand who / which character is talking to whom / which character exactly because of the honorifics they use. In this way, students can actively receive more input from the language materials they interact with. As pointed out by Bardovi-Harlig, “[w]ithout input, acquisition cannot take place” [24]. Many scholars [5, 10, 11] also support the argument that exposing students to diverse expressions is a necessary condition for students to notice non-normative usages.

4. Adjustment in Assessments

4.1 Focusing on the Basics in the Introduction Stage

It is worth noticing that because honorifics (especially RH) are less frequently used in students' daily lives, it can take a long time until students fully master the forms. Therefore, although instructors should eventually train students to use honorifics to express themselves at higher proficiency levels [16], for intermediate-low level learners, the main goal for assessment should be the memorization of the forms and categories (see Figure 1). As Culpeper and Hardaker point out, “consequences of even relatively low-level hurtful words can be serious” [25], which is especially true for Japanese honorifics. Of course, if a student conjugates *nasaru* ‘do <Respect>’ to *nasarimasu* ‘do <Respect. Polite>’ instead of *nasaimasu* ‘do <Respect. Polite>,’ listeners probably would not perceive them as impolite. However, if a student uses Humble Forms when they should have used Respect Forms, they might need to bear the consequences of giving impressions such as untutored [4]. The importance of basics is also argued by Bella, Sifianou, and Tzanne, who point out that “What is important to keep in mind is that L2 users are bearers of different lingua-cultural systems who need, on the one hand, familiarization with the basics before proceeding with the particularities of the target language and, on the other, assistance in enriching their available resources” [26].

The importance of grasping forms is also supported by Bloom's taxonomy [27], as shown in Figure 1. Bloom's taxonomy demonstrates the importance of memorizing forms, which is the foundation for higher-level cognitive tasks. In other words, using honorifics, analyzing honorifics, and evaluating honorifics all require students to remember the forms first.

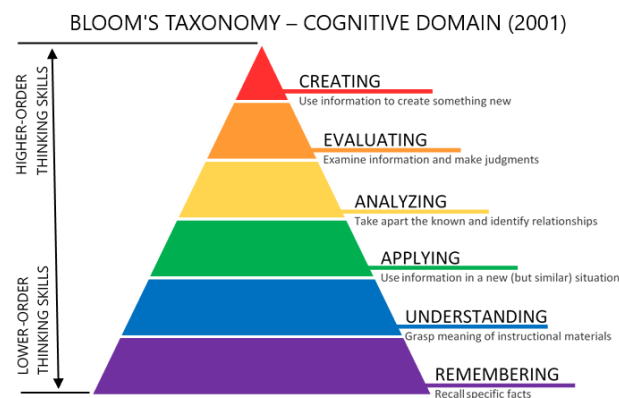


Fig. 1 Bloom's taxonomy (Image URL: <https://citt.ufl.edu/media/cittufledu/images/Blooms-Taxonomy.png> (accessed on 06/22/2022).)



4.2 Assessment Samples

The author believes that instructors should keep pushing students to usage-centered exercises that prioritize communicative purposes. To balance the memorization and the usage of honorific forms, the author has designed communication-based tasks where students are likely to use honorifics. However, the author's assessment focuses more on the forms, which is the learning goal of the intermediate-low level. Below are two summative assessment tasks for modules that focus on honorifics, one writing task and one speaking task.

Writing task:

Write an email to ask for a recommendation letter for a program that you are interested in.

1. The addressee can be "[AUTHOR'S NAME]", any teacher you have in mind, or any pseudonym.
2. The program can be real or imaginary. Don't spend too much time researching programs ☐. You can also use "[EXCHANGE PROGRAMS AVAILABLE AT THE AUTHOR'S INSTITUTION]" if you want.
3. Don't force yourself to use honorifics everywhere. **ONLY WHEN NECESSARY!**
4. Pretend that you don't know the teacher very well, so you can start by stating who you are and your connection with the addressee (e.g., I've taken your XX class before.)
5. Please do give the reason why you are interested in the program, and/or what you think you can benefit from the program.
6. Rather than immediately seeking help from Google or ChatGPT, try to play around with your language repertoire. I know that this assignment is slightly challenging. It's OK to sound awkward or unnatural. That's why we are practicing! However, if you do need some help, you can always meet with me / [JAPANESE TA]/[JAPANESE TUTORS], and please put an asterisk next to the words that you found online.
7. No length requirement but be sure to provide all the information as instructed.

* In real life, it's always courteous to provide a **deadline** for your recommendation letter writers and give them **at least 14 days** to do it, even if you are doing this in English!

Rubrics:

- **Content (4 points):** Any misuses of honorifics? Will the addressee understand what you are asking them for? Have you provided enough information so that your addressee can write a letter for you without asking you for 10 more pieces of information? (The structure/organization of the email will not be graded since you are relatively inexperienced. I will provide some comments when grading your assignments if necessary.)
- **Task completion (3 points):** Please double-check the assignment description. You should all get full marks on this one.
- **Grammar accuracy (2 points):** This one has the lowest weight because I value your conveying yourselves more. However, I might be stricter on the grammar that we have already covered before, especially particles and conjugations.

The writing task is put into the context of the author's institution. Given that many of the students who are taking Japanese classes are considering study-abroad programs, having them practice requesting a recommendation letter is a natural option. The author specifically clarified that students need not use honorifics everywhere. Upon the introduction of honorifics, instructors often hear students use them everywhere. Although unnatural usages can be seen as a form of drill, at least in the module-final summative assessment, the author attempted to direct students' attention to more natural usages and intentionally reminded students that they do not have to use honorifics when unnecessary.

Considering that making errors, including overusing honorifics, is rather common for all learners, instructors should adopt a growth mindset and be patient with students [28]. Although mastering honorifics is not easy even for native speakers, instructors can always assist the learning process along the way. Another important point is not to grade culturally awkward usages (#6 in the instructions). For instance, students may write, "I believe that I am an ideal candidate for this program," whereas in Japanese, it is more natural to write, "I think I can make some contributions to this program." For intermediate-low students, it is important to be mindful not to assess students on cognitive domains that are not ready yet. In other words, if instructors would like to assess cultural aspects, they must make sure that they have scaffolded them properly in the class. Instructors may subconsciously want to give a lower grade to expressions that they find unnatural, but this can be unfair to students who do not share similar cultural norms.



Speaking task:

This is a role-play project, where you try to get a part-time job in Japan. *Keigo* (Honorifics) is one of the main assessment points for this assignment. Sign up at [LINK]. (The due date refers to the sign-up deadline.)

1. For the part-time job, choose among 1) a coffee shop; 2) a convenient store; 3) a library on campus. I will ask you in English what you chose at the beginning of the interview.
2. Pretend that you have already arranged a time with the employer via email, and now you are taking the in-person interview.
3. You need to prepare a short self-introduction as a starter.
4. Since this is only a mock job interview, please take as long as you need to figure out the correct honorific forms. I know that it's nerve-racking to recall them. I was in the same boat, too!
5. Date and time: [DATE AND TIME], 20 minutes per person. Don't worry! I will not use up all the 20 minutes.
6. If you need to do a mock mock interview □, please feel free to come to my office hour (or arrange one here [LINK]), meet with [JPANAEESE TA] or the tutors.
7. Resources that may be helpful: L13 Conversation 1 & 2 (*Genki* p.22); L13 activity sheet - job interview (see the attached file); L20 Grammar practice I-D (*Genki* p.192); L20 activity sheet - self-introduction (see attached file). Don't just rote-memorize them. Modify as needed.
8. The interview will be audio-recorded so that I can listen back to provide more detailed feedback. The audio file will be deleted immediately upon the release of your grade.

Rubrics:

- Content (4): Did you do a self-introduction? Did you answer all the questions by the employer? Did the conversation flow well (not necessarily have to be fluent if you want to take some time to figure out the honorifics)?
- Professional attitudes (2): No need to wear a suit, though~ Jeans/T-shirts won't result in any point deduction □. Some common formulaic phrases include: *ojyamashimasu* 'I'm entering (your office)' and *shitsureishimasu* 'I'm leaving (your office).'
- Grammar/vocabulary accuracy (3): This one weighs more this time because honorifics are involved. Did you accidentally use respect forms for yourself or humble forms / extra-modest forms for the employer? As always, I will be stricter on grammar/vocabulary that we have already covered, as well as misuses that will cause miscommunication/misunderstanding. You will NOT be penalized for trying new grammar/new vocabulary.

For the speaking task, the author also put it into a context that college students are likely to encounter if they study abroad in Japan. Some may argue that opening with a self-introduction is unnatural for a part-time job interview. The idea here was to assess students' mastery of AH forms (also known as Extra-Modest Forms in *Genki* [15]), and self-introduction is a good context for those forms. A main accommodation in this task is allowing students to take pauses to think of forms to ease the stress that students have to use honorific forms in a high-stakes conversation. In addition, despite a communication task, the rubrics for grading do not assess the naturalness of usage (the green layer of Bloom's Taxonomy, Figure 1) because that is not the teaching goal for intermediate-low students. As can be shown in the rubrics, more weight was put on the memorization of forms. Normally the "grammar/vocabulary accuracy" always has the lowest weight since summative assessments are more focused on communication, whereas for this task, the value of grammar/vocabulary accuracy was raised to match the assessment with the teaching goal. In addition, the author replaced the "task completion" criteria with "professional attitudes" to add some cultural aspects that students can easily achieve without excessive instructions.

5. Significance and Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper proposes a nuanced approach to teaching Japanese honorifics, particularly for intermediate-low learners, by incorporating flexible pedagogical methods that transcend traditional, hierarchical interpretations. This study highlights a broader, more contemporary understanding of Japanese language use by addressing the complex social functions of honorifics as dynamic markers of interpersonal distance rather than static symbols of social stratification. The integration of multimedia materials, such as animation clips, serves as an innovative method to enhance students' practical comprehension and enjoyment of honorifics in varied contexts beyond conventional textbook boundaries. Moreover, the paper introduces adaptive assessment strategies aligned with Bloom's Taxonomy, which focuses on memorization and foundational usage rather than on perfection, thus fostering a supportive learning environment that accommodates students' gradual



development of cultural competence. Overall, the significance of this work lies in its ability to bridge theoretical insights with pragmatic classroom applications, encouraging a flexible yet structured approach that empowers students to understand, appreciate, and ultimately master Japanese honorifics as part of a rich and evolving communicative practice.

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