

The Use of Sonkeigo by Indonesian Internship Students in the Work Environment of a Gas Station in Hiroshima, Japan: A Sociolinguistic Study.

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis penggunaan sonkeigo dalam lingkup pekerjaan di sebuah perusahaan SPBU di Hiroshima, Jepang, dan kesulitan yang dihadapi oleh pembelajar bahasa Jepang terkait penggunaan sonkeigo. Metode yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Teori yang digunakan adalah teori Fishman (1972). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui tindak tutur sonkeigo dalam interaksi kerja nyata antara mahasiswa magang di Jepang dan penutur asli, serta menganalisis kesulitan realistik dan sosial yang dihadapi oleh mahasiswa tersebut dalam menerapkan sonkeigo secara profesional di sebuah perusahaan SPBU. Berdasarkan hasil tersebut, penggunaan sonkeigo dalam dinas dapat diidentifikasi melalui beberapa ciri kebahasaan, yaitu penambahan kata kerja "reru" dan "rareru" untuk menunjukkan rasa hormat, penggunaan pola kalimat "ni.. narimasu" untuk mengungkapkan rasa hormat, dan penggunaan bentuk kata kerja sonkeigo khusus seperti "kudasaru", "nasaru", dan "irassyaru" yang menunjukkan tingkat rasa hormat yang lebih tinggi. Prefiks dan sufiks honorifik juga digunakan. Dalam penggunaan sonkeigo di lingkungan kerja perusahaan SPBU, pembelajar bahasa Jepang menghadapi beberapa kesulitan, yaitu kurangnya kebiasaan dan pengalaman dalam menggunakan sonkeigo, perbedaan kemampuan bahasa Jepang dan latar belakang budaya, ketergantungan pada staf senior penutur asli, dan kesulitan dalam menentukan penggunaan sonkeigo dengan bentuk bahasa lain.

Kata Kunci: *Sonkeigo, Sociolinguistik, SPBU, Komunikasi Profesional.*

Abstract

This study analyzes the use of sonkeigo in the scope of work at a gas station company in Hiroshima, Japan and the difficulties faced by Japanese language learners regarding the use of sonkeigo. The method used is descriptive qualitative with interviews, observations and documentation. The theory used is Fishman's theory (1972). This study aims to determine sonkeigo speech acts in real-world interactions between students who have interned in Japan and native speakers, and to analyze the realistic and social difficulties faced by these students in applying sonkeigo in a professional in a gas station company. Based on the results. The use of sonkeigo in service can be identified through several linguistic characteristics, namely the addition of the verbs "reru" and "rareru" to show respect, the use of the sentence pattern "ni.. narimasu" to express respect, and the use of special sonkeigo verb forms such as "kudasaru", "nasaru", and "irassyaru" which indicate a higher level of respect. And honorific prefixes and suffixes are also used. In the use of sonkeigo in the scope of work of gas station companies, Japanese language learners face several difficulties, lack of habit and experience in using sonkeigo, differences in Japanese language ability and cultural background, dependence on senior native speaker staff, and difficulty in determining the use of sonkeigo with other language forms.

Keywords: *Sonkeigo, Sociolinguistik, Gas Station, Professional Communication*

1. Introduction

Different with Indonesian, Japanese has the concepts of “uchi soto” (内の外) and “keigo” (敬語). These concepts form an essential part of Japanese culture and grammar, emphasizing social relationships and status between the speaker and the interlocutor. These concepts create differences in communication styles compared to Indonesian. In this context, Kawamoto, (2017) explains that the use of sonkeigo not only functions as a form of politeness but also reflects the social hierarchy present in everyday interactions.

This concept is a traditional one in Japanese society that divides patterns of interaction into two sides. The term *uchi* indicates the position of being an insider or part of a group. In contrast, the concept of *soto* refers to the position of being an outsider or not part of a group. This concept serves as a strategy for communication when interacting with Japanese society (Adi Arta, 2024).

The concept of "uchi soto" forms the basis of social relationships in Japan, where people tend to distinguish between the "inner" group (*uchi*) and the "outer" group (*soto*). *Uchi* (内) includes individuals with close relationships, such as family, close friends, and colleagues within the same team or company. In the context of *uchi*, the language used is typically more informal and familiar. On the other hand, *Soto* (外) encompasses those outside one's social circle or individuals with a higher hierarchical relationship, such as strangers, clients, or superiors. When interacting with the *soto* group, the language becomes more formal and respectful.

Oishi in (Sudjianto, 2004:199) states that sonkeigo is a form of honorific language used to express respect towards a person or something by elevating the status or rank of the person or object being discussed. Similarly, (Kurniawan isnan, 2025) notes that the Japanese language has a unique linguistic system where words can change forms depending on the level of politeness and respect towards the interlocutor. For example, the verb “to eat” can be expressed in various forms such as 食べる (*futsūgo*) and 召し上がる (*sonkeigo*). *Sonkeigo* (尊敬語) is one of the three categories of *keigo* (敬語), or honorific language, in Japanese, which is a form of linguistic variation closely tied to social context and hierarchy in Japanese society William Labov, (1972). *Sonkeigo* is specifically used to show respect towards others by elevating their status in conversation. It is an essential aspect of daily communication in Japan, particularly in professional, formal settings, and when interacting with individuals of higher status or older age. This reflects the cultural values of Japan, which highly regard hierarchy and etiquette in social interactions. The transformation of word forms not only affects grammatical meaning but also conveys nuances of politeness and respect in communication.

Sonkeigo reflects Japanese cultural values that emphasize hierarchy, politeness, and respect. According to Sapir, (1921) further developed by Benjamin Lee Whorf, the relationship between language and society is explained by focusing on how language influences thought, culture, and individual identity. In line with Sapir's theory, the use of *sonkeigo* not only conveys verbal respect but also shapes the way Japanese people think about social relationships and status. In Japanese society, relationships between individuals are often determined by age, position, and social status. Therefore, using *sonkeigo* correctly is an important way to show respect and understand one's place within the social structure.

The use of respectful language, specifically *sonkeigo* in Japan, is undeniably an important aspect of communication, particularly in workplace settings such as gas stations. In the Japanese work environment, the use of *sonkeigo* (敬語) or polite language is crucial for

maintaining professional relationships and demonstrating respect towards superiors, colleagues, or clients. Mastering *sonkeigo* is a vital skill for effective communication in Japan. For example, when a *Buchou* (department manager) speaks to a *Sachou* (company president), it reflects an awareness of the existing social hierarchy. *Sonkeigo* is a critical aspect of the Japanese language that requires deep understanding, especially for learners aiming to succeed in the Japanese work environment (Hardianti Novi, 2019).

Previous research indicates that foreigners often face challenges in understanding and applying *sonkeigo*, which can affect their interactions with native speakers. Misuse or misunderstanding of *sonkeigo* can lead to negative impressions in social interactions. The use of respectful language, particularly when interacting with elders or individuals in higher positions, is extremely important. Using the appropriate language can help build better relationships and avoid misunderstandings (Abdillah Aria, 2021).

Although the use of the *masu* form is generally considered adequate in workplace contexts, employing *sonkeigo* (honorific language), especially in service-oriented or formal interaction situations, is essential to demonstrate appropriate respect towards the interlocutor. This is crucial for maintaining positive social relationships and fostering a harmonious work environment in Japanese professional settings. This issue is particularly prevalent among foreign learners of the Japanese language. Learners often face communication barriers when speaking spontaneously, largely due to limited knowledge of specialized vocabulary, polite language forms, and regional dialects. Cultural differences in the workplace further complicate effective communication (Zahra Annisa & Karnawati, 2024). Learners unfamiliar with Japanese honorific language will struggle to grasp the nuances and meanings of sentences. The use of Japanese honorific language requires a deep understanding of context and subtlety, which may leave beginner learners feeling confused.

Previous research on the variety of respectful language, specifically *sonkeigo*, has been conducted by several researchers, such as (Yuniarsih et al., 2022) with the title “The Use of Keigo in Japanese for Business.” The study concluded that communicating in business requires the use of politeness strategies as proposed in Leech’s theory. Additionally, research by (Wulandari et al., 2019) indicated that the use of *sonkeigo* can be influenced by the living environment. (Yusuf Nabil, 2019) also studied the honorific language of *sonkeigo* and found that speakers use respectful and honorific language to elevate their interlocutors.

However, most previous research has discussed *keigo* in general, so this study focuses on *sonkeigo* in the context of direct fieldwork, particularly in non-office work environments such as gas stations in Japan. By focusing on gas stations, this research can provide new insights for Japanese language learners about the importance of understanding social and cultural contexts in language use, especially in service situations.

This research has several reasons that strengthen the choice of a gas station as the research location. First, a gas station is a place that allows direct interaction with customers, enabling the study of *sonkeigo* usage in a more natural context. Additionally, the clear hierarchical structure between employees and customers at a gas station allows for the examination of *sonkeigo* usage in a more formal setting.

Based on the state of the art conducted by the researcher to identify the research gap as the foundation for the novelty of this study, the focus lies on the sociolinguistic analysis of the honorific language *sonkeigo*. This research has two sub-foci: first, to describe the forms of *sonkeigo* speech used by staff in work interactions at a gas station environment in

Hiroshima; second, to identify and analyze the difficulties experienced by Indonesian internship students in appropriately applying *sonkeigo* in a professional work setting. Thus, this research not only explains the forms of speech but also contributes new insights into understanding the gap between linguistic competence and socio-cultural competence of Japanese language learners in professional domains such as at a gas station.

The aim of this research is to understand the use of *sonkeigo* by Japanese language learners in social interactions at a gas station, as well as to identify the difficulties they face in using *sonkeigo* within the scope of work at a gas station company in Hiroshima, Japan, from a sociolinguistic perspective. Therefore, this research can provide a new contribution to understanding the gap between linguistic competence and socio-cultural competence of Japanese language learners in professional settings such as at a gas station.

2. Method

Qualitative is a method that discusses the design applied in research as well as its fundamental objectives. This section also addresses the research sample, as well as the procedures for data collection and recording in a comprehensive manner (John W. Creswell, 2016). The descriptive method is a research method used to describe the characteristics of a population or phenomenon being studied (Sugiyono, 2017). The approach used is a descriptive qualitative approach. The qualitative method is employed to delve into the research design, which aims to describe the forms of *sonkeigo* (honorific speech) in the context of the work environment at a gas station company in Hiroshima, Japan. In this research, the researcher will collect data through observation and interviews, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the use of *sonkeigo* in the workplace. Additionally, this research will also analyze the difficulties faced by Japanese language learners in comprehending and appropriately using polite speech. Through a qualitative approach, the researcher explores the experiences and challenges encountered by learners, providing a more comprehensive insight into the dynamics of *sonkeigo* usage in daily professional interactions.

The research will be conducted from September 2024 to April 2025. This study has two main focuses: first, to describe the forms of *sonkeigo* used by staff in work interactions within the gas station environment in Hiroshima; second, to identify and analyze the difficulties experienced by Indonesian internship students in appropriately applying *sonkeigo* in that work environment, using Fishman's theory (1972). The main sociolinguistic issue is how a person chooses the appropriate language to use in specific social situations, including who they are speaking to, when, and how. This research also aims to examine how the choice of honorific language (*sonkeigo*) is influenced by social factors such as the speaker's status, interpersonal relationships, and professional context. The primary sociolinguistic problem is how an individual selects the right language to use in particular social situations, including who they are speaking to, when, and how, as well as addressing the difficulties faced by Japanese language learners who have worked in Japan, using sociolinguistic theory that studies how language is used in social contexts, combining theories and methods from sociology and linguistics (Sudarta Arta et al., 2024).

This research is a descriptive qualitative study that aims to elaborate on *sonkeigo* utterances in detail based on the data obtained. The methods used to collect data include interviews, observations, and documentation (Moleong, 2017) involving internship students from UHAMKA and UMY who have worked at a gas station company in Hiroshima, Japan. Furthermore, in analyzing the data, the Miles and Huberman technique is employed, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

3. Result

1. The Use of Sonkeigo by Japanese Language Learners in Social Interactions within the Context of a Gas Station Company.

This research employs Fishman’s theory (1972) in the context of the Japanese language. In social interactions, sonkeigo (respectful language) is used to express respect and politeness. Based on the analysis results, the use of sonkeigo in the workplace at a gas station company in Hiroshima, Japan, exhibits several prominent characteristics. These include the addition of verbs such as “reru” and “rareru,” the use of the sentence pattern “ni... narimasu,” the use of specific sonkeigo verb forms like “kudasaru,” “nasaru,” and “irassyaru,” as well as the use of honorific prefixes and/or suffixes.

This study not only evaluates the appropriateness of sonkeigo usage in accordance with Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) but also focuses on identifying how sonkeigo is utilized in the context of customer service at a gas station company. It provides valuable insights into the use of language in real-life situations and helps to understand how internship students apply their knowledge of the Japanese language in a service-oriented context.

Table Analysis of the Use of Sonkeigo by Japanese Language Learners in Social Interactions within the Context of a Gas Station Company.

NO	SITUATIONS	SONKEIGO SENTENCES	CHARACTERISTICS OF SONKEIGO	INFORMATION
1	Welcome Customers	いらっしゃいませ、こちらへどうぞ。	Use of the <i>masu</i> suffix	Greeting Sentence
2	Ask About refueling	燃料はどうされますか？	<i>Sonkeigo</i> form ... <i>~rareru</i>	Sentence asking the customer what fuel to fill the vehicle with
3	When Asking To Clean The Outside Car Windows	すみませんが、外の窓拭かれますか？	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Polite opening sentence to ask for something. ● <i>Sonkeigo</i> form <i>~rareru</i> 	Interrogative sentence to ask if the outside of the window is clean
4	Asking For Clean The Inside Car Windows	車内 タワーご利用になりますか？	Grammar <i>o/go...~ni naru</i>	Interrogative sentences are used to ask if someone is willing to clean the inside of the window

5	Situation Asking To Wait	少々お待ちください。	<i>sonkeigo o pattern + masu form verb + kudasai</i>	Kalimat yang dipakai untuk meminta pelanggan untuk menunggu, digunakan ketika proses pengisian, dan sebagainya.
6	When Payment	燃料満タン入りました。お支払方法はどうかございますか？	Sentence pattern <i>sonkeigo ~nasaru</i>	Sentences used to ask customers to wait, used during the filling process, and so on
7	Completed Refueling	いつもご利用ありがとうございます。	Using the honorific prefix "go"	The sentence used when refueling is complete and the customer is ready to leave
8	Situations When Calling A Customer	すみません、こちらのお客様はあげるだけです。お願いします。	Using the honorific suffix "sama"	Sentences used when asking staff for help when experiencing difficulties
9	Situations When Calling A Staff	すみません、山田さんちょっとボンネットロックをチェックしていただきませんか？	Using the honorific suffix "san"	Sentences when calling staff

2. Difficulties Faced by Japanese Language Learners Regarding the Use of Sonkeigo in the Workplace of a Gas Station Company

Based on interviews and observations conducted by the author in the context of sonkeigo use, the challenges encountered reflect the complexity of linguistic interactions faced by individuals in everyday communication situations. These difficulties align with the sociolinguistic theories of Labov and Sapir. According to Sapir (1921), the language we use influences how we think and interact with the world. Meanwhile, William Labov (1972) emphasized the importance of understanding language variation in social contexts. Labov stated that social factors play a significant role in language use, in addition to grammatical rules.

Analysis Table of Difficulties Faced by Japanese Language Learners Regarding the Use of Sonkeigo in the Scope of Work of a Gas Station Company

NO	DATA	DIFFICULTY
1.	"The challenge of using <i>sonkeigo</i> is that it is a little difficult due to not being used to using <i>sonkeigo</i> ."	Difficulty in using <i>sonkeigo</i> correctly is caused by lack of habit and experience.
2.	"Actually, there are not many challenges in using it, but the feedback received is sometimes less understandable, especially for customers or native speakers who are elderly."	Challenges in the Stages of Understanding and using <i>sonkeigo</i> indicate differences in Japanese language abilities and cultural backgrounds of non-native speaking internship students.
3.	"When there is vocabulary or something I don't understand, I ask senior staff for help."	Dependence on senior staff.
4.	"During my internship at the gas station, I discovered that language usage varies depending on the situation and social context. Sometimes, I was confused about whether to use <i>sonkeigo</i> or <i>teineigo</i> , as native speakers themselves use a mix of languages. However, I realized that effective language use is crucial to ensuring smooth communication and good service. In customer service situations at the gas station, I had to adapt my language to the context and consider the customer's needs."	Difficulty in Determining the Use of <i>Sonkeigo</i> with Other Language Forms.

4. Discussion

1. The Use of *Sonkeigo* by Japanese Language Learners in Social Interactions at a Gas Station

In this discussion, the researcher will explain the use of *sonkeigo* that has been analyzed and classified from the following data sources:

Data 1: Situation when welcoming guests

Sonkeigo at a Gas Station:

いらっしゃいませ、こちらへどうぞ。

Analysis:

Upon entering a gas station, you will be warmly greeted by an attendant who

uses polite and respectful Japanese, with the phrase "いらっしゃいませ、こちらへどうぞ" which means "Welcome, please come this way." This sentence uses the form "いらっしゃいませ" which shows respect and politeness.

Data 2 Situations When Asking for Refueling

Sonkeigo On Gas Station Services:

燃料はどうされますか？

Analysis:

Then, the officer will ask "燃料はどうされますか？" or which means "What about fuel?" or "What do you need for fuel?". This sentence uses "どうされますか" which shows respect and politeness to the customer. Sonkeigo is the ~rareru form of the word "どうしますか" which means "how", so the speech in sonkeigo form becomes "どうされますか". The use of sonkeigo is a passive form of verb which is generally used to appear more polite.

Data 3 Situations When Asking to Clean the Outside of a Car Window

Sonkeigo at a Gas Station:

すみませんが、外の窓拭かれますか？

Analysis

When a gas station attendant asks a customer to clean their windshield, they can use the phrase "Excuse me, could you clean the outside of the windshield?", which means "Excuse me, could you clean the outside of the windshield?"

This sentence contains several sonkeigo elements that convey respect and politeness, such as:

- "What can I do for you?", which is a polite opening for a request.
- "What can I do for you?", which is the object to be cleaned.
- "拭かれますか" which is a form of sonkeigo that shows respect and politeness to customers. The use of the sonkeigo form ~rareru in the word "拭く" which means "to wipe", so that the utterance in sonkeigo form becomes "拭かれます". The use of sonkeigo is a passive verb form that is generally used to appear more polite.

Data 4 Situations When Asking to Clean the Inside of a Car Window

Sonkeigo at a Gas Station:

車内 タワーご利用になりますか？

Analysis

The grammatical expression "o/go ~ni naru" is a Japanese expression used to show respect and politeness to another person performing an action. This pattern is a form of keigo (polite language) that is more polite than the form "masu," which means to do. By using the pattern "o/go ~ni naru," the speaker shows respect and politeness to the person performing the action. This pattern is often used in formal or professional situations, such as when communicating with a superior, teacher, or someone older.

Data 5 Situations Asking to Wait

Sonkeigo at Gas Stations:

少々お待ちください。

Analysis

When filling up gas, the attendant will ask the customer to wait a moment. The sentence used is "少々お待ちください," which means "Please wait a moment." Sonkeigo is used with the pattern "o + masu-form verb + kudasai." The verb "待つ" means "to wait." When conjugated in the masu form, this verb becomes "待ちます." By using the sonkeigo pattern "o + masu-form verb + kudasai," the verb "待ちます" is changed to "お待ちください," which means "please wait." This sonkeigo form shows respect and politeness to the person you're speaking to.

- "少々" means "a moment" or "a little time."
- "お待ち" is the sonkeigo form of "to wait."
- "ください" is the sonkeigo form of "to wait."

Data 6 Situations When Payment

Sonkeigo On Gas Station Services:

燃料満タン入りました。お支払方法はどうかございますか？

Analysis

"お支払方法" is the sonkeigo form of "支払方法" (payment method), using the honorific prefix "お" to show respect. "どうかございますか" which is a sonkeigo form that shows respect and politeness, using the sentence pattern "なさる" which is a sonkeigo form of "する"(to do).

Data 7: Situation After Refueling

Sonkeigo at Gas Station Service:

いつもご利用ありがとうございます。

Analysis

Use the honorific prefix "to use" (to use), which is the sonkeigo form of "to use" (to use), shows respect and politeness to the customer. By using the honorific prefix "ご" in the word "to use," the gas station attendant shows respect and politeness to the customer. The prefix "ご" is used to show respect and politeness to others, and in this case, it is used to show respect to the customer.

Data 8: Situation Calling a Customer

Sonkeigo (Respectful Language) in Gas Station Service:

すみません、そちらのお客様はあげるだけです。お願いします。

Analysis

In Japanese, the use of “様” (sama) as a suffix in “お客様” (okyakusama) indicates a high level of respect and politeness toward the person being addressed. In the context of service, such as at a gas station, the use of “様” reflects a formal and polite relationship between the staff and the customer.

Data 9: Situation Calling a Staff Member

Sonkeigo (Respectful Language) in Gas Station Service:

すみません、山田さんちよつとボンネットロックをチェックしていただきませんか？

Analysis:

The use of “さん” (san) is employed when addressing a fellow staff member to show respect to the listener. By adding “さん” after the person’s name, the speaker

maintains a polite and courteous tone.

2. Difficulties Faced by Japanese Language Learners in Using Sonkeigo in the Context of a Gas Station Workplace

In this discussion, the researcher will explain the difficulties faced by Japanese language learners in using sonkeigo, which have been analyzed and classified from the following data sources:

1. Difficulty in Using Appropriate Sonkeigo Due to Lack of Habit and Experience

Data:

“The challenge of using sonkeigo is somewhat difficult because I am not accustomed to using it.”

The language we use influences the way we think and interact with the world (Sapir, 1921). In this context, the use of sonkeigo is not merely about grammar but also reflects Japanese cultural values that emphasize social hierarchy and respect. When someone is not accustomed to using sonkeigo, they may struggle to understand and apply these nuances in daily communication. This is due to the complexity of sentence structures and the varying levels of politeness in the Japanese language. This illustrates how challenges in using sonkeigo can be addressed by increasing habit and experience.

2. Challenges in Understanding and Using Sonkeigo Highlight Differences in Japanese Language Proficiency and Cultural Background of Non-Native Internship Students

Data:

“Actually, there aren’t many challenges in using it, but the responses received are sometimes difficult to understand, especially when the customer or native speaker is elderly.”

In the sociolinguistic context, as emphasized by William Labov (1972), understanding language variation in social contexts is crucial. The use of sonkeigo, as an aspect of the Japanese language, depends not only on linguistic rules but also on social context and the relationship between the speaker and the listener.

Non-native internship students may face challenges in understanding and using sonkeigo due to differences in their Japanese language proficiency and cultural background. Limited proficiency in Japanese can make it difficult for them to grasp the nuances of sonkeigo, while cultural differences can influence how they understand and use the language. These differences in language ability and cultural background can create communication gaps when internship students interact with customers or local staff. Unprepared communication can exacerbate this situation, as found by Wahidati (2021), who noted that Japanese language learners often struggle to convey their intentions effectively. In this context, social factors such as Japanese language proficiency and cultural background influence how language is used and understood. Therefore, understanding the challenges in comprehending and using sonkeigo can help improve the communication skills of internship students and

reduce communication gaps in interactions with customers or local staff.

3. Dependence on Senior Staff

Data:

“When there are vocabulary or situations I don’t understand, I ask for help from senior staff.”

Furthermore, reliance on senior staff to understand unfamiliar vocabulary or situations highlights the hierarchical nature of language use, where more experienced individuals are expected to provide assistance. This aligns with Labov’s perspective on how language variation can reflect social structures and power dynamics in interactions.

4. Challenges in Determining the Use of *Sonkeigo* with Other Language Forms

Data:

“During my internship at a gas station, I found that language usage varies depending on the situation and social context. Sometimes, I was confused about whether to use *sonkeigo* or *teineigo*, as native speakers themselves use mixed language. However, I realized that effective language use is crucial to ensure smooth communication and good service. In customer service situations at the gas station, I had to adjust my language according to the context of the situation and consider the needs of the customers.”

The biggest challenge in distinguishing when to use full *sonkeigo* and when *teineigo* is sufficient reflects the need to adapt language to the situational context and consider the dynamics of communication with customers. Observations show that native speakers use language flexibly, adjusting between *sonkeigo* and *teineigo* depending on the situation and the interlocutor.

This aligns with Labov’s theory of language variation, which emphasizes that language use is influenced by social and situational contexts. According to (William Labov, 1972), language is not only determined by grammatical rules but also by social factors such as status, roles, and the relationship between speakers and interlocutors. In the context of service at a gas station, understanding and applying language appropriately requires the ability to adapt language to social and situational contexts, as well as to consider the needs and preferences of customers. Thus, the use of *sonkeigo* and *teineigo* in customer service reflects the complex interaction between linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects, where understanding and applying language are heavily influenced by social context, individual experience, and communication dynamics.

5. Conclusion

Based on research conducted through the analysis of seven informants using Fishman’s theory, it has been revealed that the use of *sonkeigo* (honorific language) in the workplace at a gas station in Hiroshima, Japan, exhibits several prominent characteristics. The use of *sonkeigo* in customer service can be identified through specific linguistic features, such as the addition of the verb forms “*reru*” and “*rareru*” to express respect, the use of the sentence pattern “*ni... narimasu*” to convey politeness, and the use of special *sonkeigo* verb forms like “*kudasaru*,” “*nasaru*,” and “*irassyaru*,” which indicate a higher level of respect. Additionally, honorific prefixes and suffixes are employed to enhance the respectful tone in

communication. However, the effective use of *sonkeigo* requires a deep understanding of context and situation, necessitating further research to explore the nuances of its application in various scenarios. By doing so, service quality can be improved, fostering better customer interactions and demonstrating greater respect.

In the context of the gas station workplace, the use of *sonkeigo* presents several challenges for Japanese language learners. These include a lack of habit and experience in using *sonkeigo*, differences in Japanese language proficiency and cultural backgrounds, reliance on senior native speaker staff, and difficulties in determining when to use *sonkeigo* over other language forms. These challenges highlight the complexity of linguistic and sociolinguistic interactions in Japanese language use, where understanding and application are heavily influenced by social context, individual experience, and communication dynamics. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the use of *sonkeigo* is not solely governed by grammatical rules but also by social factors such as status, role, and the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor. Therefore, accurate understanding and application of the language require the ability to adapt language use to social and situational contexts, as well as consideration of customer needs and preferences.

In conclusion, the use of *sonkeigo* in customer service at the gas station necessitates a deep understanding of social and situational contexts, as well as the ability to tailor language use to meet customer needs. This can enhance the communication skills of Japanese language learners and reduce communication gaps in interactions with customers or local staff

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