

The Concepts of “Politeness”: A Comparative Study in Chinese and Japanese Verbal Communication

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Abstract: Linguists use the term “politeness” in a variety of ways, for example as a means of minimizing or avoiding conflict, as the use of language to maintain smooth and harmonious interpersonal relations, as the use of socially appropriate behavior, and to refer to an evaluative judgment regarding social appropriateness. For example, in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) framework, politeness is regarded as the performance of redressive action to minimize face threat (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). But what do people think about politeness in different cultural contexts?

This study collected data for a comparative analysis of the concept of politeness in Chinese and Japanese verbal communication. It tries to clarify the features of the concept of politeness in Chinese and Japanese verbal communication from the standpoint of intercultural communication in modern Chinese society and Japanese society because they provide a fascinating look at differences in human relations in these neighboring cultures. A questionnaire on polite speech in verbal communication was given to 160 Chinese university students and 160 Japanese university students. The results were examined to find similarities and differences between the Chinese students and Japanese students regarding the concept of politeness. Cultural and linguistic differences in polite speech are also discussed. Furthermore, the results were analyzed from the standpoint of gender. The findings will help us understand cultural and linguistic differences in intercultural communication in order to avoid misunderstanding and achieve smooth communication.

Keywords: Politeness, cultural and linguistic differences, intercultural communication, psycholinguistics, pragmatic aspect of speech

1. Introduction

Politeness has become an important topic since Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness was first published in 1978, which has engendered energetic, continuous research in this area. In the past three decades, politeness phenomena have been widely observed by many researchers and scholars studying intercultural communication, sociolinguistics, psychology, psycholinguistics, applied linguistics, and pragmatics.

Kasper (1990) summarized the work of Lakoff (1973), Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), and Leech (1983) as follows: “Politeness is viewed as a rational, rule-governed, pragmatic aspect of speech that is rooted in the human need to maintain relationships and avoid conflicts.” (p.194) By being mutually supportive and avoiding threats to face, according to the standard argument, speakers maintain smooth relations and sustain successful communication. The underlying rational, motivation, and functional foundations of politeness are assumed to

be, to some extent, universal, and are assumed to influence, and be reflected in, various modes of speech in many different languages and cultures (Brown and Levinson, 1987). According to Brown (1980, p. 114), “What politeness essentially consists in is a special way of treating people, saying and doing things in such a way as to take into account the other person’s feelings.” Linguistic politeness, then, reflects cultural values. Correctly identifying polite behavior in a culture involves understanding the society’s values (Holmes, 1995). As discussed by Ide, Hill, Carnes, Ogino, and Kawasaki (1992, p. 282), “Concepts of politeness thus defined by researchers may be applicable to any possible culture. However, we cannot assume that the concept of ‘politeness’ is fully equivalent to the concepts of corresponding terms in other languages, since language itself is the door to a concept in people’s minds.” That is, the range of behaviors deemed polite in American or British society, for example, may be quite different from the behaviors described by the word “*teinei*” (politeness) in Japanese and the expression “*you limao*” (politeness) in Chinese.

There is a growing awareness that the term “politeness” needs to be defined more precisely and consistently if more fruitful cross-cultural research on politeness is to be pursued (c.f. Watts, Ide and Ehlich, 1992a). Using native-speaker judgments, Ide, Hill, Carnes, Ogino, and Kawasaki (1992) demonstrated that among groups of American English and Japanese speakers, the seemingly corresponding terms “polite” and *teineina* differ in their conceptual structure. According to their study, “for the American subjects, the adjectives ‘polite’ and ‘friendly’ correlate highly when applied to certain behaviors in specific situations. For Japanese subjects, however, *teineina* (polite) and *shitashigena* (friendly) fall into different dimensions when applied to the same cross-culturally equivalent situations.” (p.292-293)

Mao (1994) stated the relationship between Chinese face and politeness (*Limao*): “More specifically, to be polite, that is, *you Limao* (polite) in Chinese discourse is, in many respects, to know how to attend to each other’s *mianzi* and *lian* and to enact speech acts appropriate to and worthy of such an image. Otherwise stated, mainland Chinese speakers can be seen as being polite if they demonstrate with words their knowledge of *mianzi* and *lian* (Chinese face), such a demonstration tends to epitomize politeness in the eyes of their discourse partners.” (p. 463) In a word, the closest Chinese equivalent to the English word “politeness” is “*Limao*.”

What is the emic notion of politeness in Japan? English-Japanese dictionaries generally define the word using expressions such as “*reigitadashisa*”, “*teichousa*”, “*omoiyari*”, “*teineisa*” (language), “*teinei(sa)*”, and “*poraitonesu*” (politeness). According to Haugh (2007):

The emic notion of ‘politeness’ in Japanese can be approached, in the first instance, from the perspective of two key lexemes: *teinei* and *reigi* (*tadashii*). According to the Kojien dictionary, *teinei* is defined as “to be warm and correct in one’s *reigi*” and “to be attentive in what one does” (*teatsuku reigi tadashii koto* and *chui-bukaku kokoro ga yukitodoku koto*) (Shinmura, 1998, p. 1818), while the main sense of *reigi* relating to politeness is “the behavioral forms and patterns that people ought to preserve in order to protect the order of social life, in particular, manners/etiquette which express ‘upward’ respect” (*shakaiseikatsu no chitsujo o tamotsu tameni hito ga mamoru beki koto yoshiki, tokuni kei’i o arawasu saho*) (Shinmura, 1998, p. 2827). An initial analysis of these two lexemes thus indicates that *teinei* involves being warm-hearted

(*teatsuku*) and attentive (*chui-bukaku*) (Shinmura, 1998, p. 1818), while *reigi tadashii* involves showing upward-looking respect (*kei'i*) towards others (Shinmura, 1998, p. 2827). ”

Language usage plays a large role in Japanese politeness. The use of *keigo* (honorific forms) is a major strategy in demonstrating politeness in Japan (Ogawa & Gudykunst, 1999-2000). Japanese scholars speculate that it developed from terms used to praise God, terms used to avoid taboos, and other types of expressions. The use of beautiful language toward God was thought to bring happiness to people through the magical power of language, thus functioning as a positive strategy. Honorific forms also originated from expressions referring to something or someone of high status. As these expressions were used repeatedly over time, they became conventional grammatical forms and crystallized into a system of honorific forms.

The long and the short of it is that Chinese and Japanese have long been known as the “land of ceremony and propriety”. However, there has been little study on native-speaker beliefs about politeness or on a number of important questions:

- What is people’s understanding of the concept politeness in communicative behavior in different cultural contexts?
- How do Chinese and Japanese young people perceive the concept of politeness?
- What differences are there between the Chinese and Japanese understanding of politeness?

Interviews and questionnaires focusing on native-speaker beliefs about (im)politeness are another valuable source of insight into the emic perspective (Haugh, 2007, p. 661). The aims of this study are: (a) to provide useful insights into the ideas and traditional moral values of young people on which politeness behavior is based in both countries, (b) to analyze actual data from questionnaires, and (c) to analyze the results from the standpoint of gender. The specific purpose of this study was to discover how the emic concept of politeness differs between Chinese and Japanese.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

A questionnaire was filled out by 320 college students: 160 Chinese students (55 males, 105 females) enrolled at universities in Beijing (March 2009) and 160 Japanese students (55 males, 105 females) enrolled at universities in Tokyo (November 2008), and Toyama and Kanazawa (May 2009). Their ages ranged from 17 to 28 years.

2.2. Material and Procedure

This study employed a written questionnaire. The Japanese questionnaire surveyed current conceptualizations of what constitutes *teinei* (Japanese politeness), according to university

students, and was taken from Marui, Nishijima, Noro, Reinelt & Yamashita (1996). It was translated into Chinese. The survey allowed us to plot the concepts of communicative behavior concerning politeness, *teinei*, and *limao* (Chinese politeness) against other concepts in English, Japanese, and Chinese that assess human behavior. Thus, Chinese and Japanese versions of the questionnaire were prepared. In order to avoid the distortions of direct translation, bilingual and bicultural speakers discussed the translation and verified the accuracy of the final form. Some of the questions on the questionnaire were multiple-choice, but most allowed the students to respond freely. This paper concerns findings based on Questions 28, the final question of the questionnaire.

English: Finally, when you hear the word “politeness”, what initially comes to mind? Please write down some of the things you think of.

Japanese: では最後に、「丁寧」という語を聞いて、あなたはまず何を思い浮かべますか？思い当たることばをいくつでも書いて下さい。

Chinese: 最後，當聽到「禮貌」這個詞時，你首先聯想到什麼？請寫下你聯想到的幾個詞語。

3. Results

In order to examine differences between Chinese and Japanese males and females, the analysis of the data obtained from the written questionnaire involved first separating the responses by gender. Then, qualitative differences among the responses were obtained by grouping them into specific categories. This analysis revealed great variety in the types of responses. Below, similarities and differences in politeness described by Chinese and Japanese students are examined.

Chinese students gave sixteen types of answers. Most associated politeness with “honorifics and polite expressions”, “good breeding”, “polite behavior”, “ceremony and propriety”, and “refined and cultured”. Male Chinese (Table 1) gave thirteen types of answers: They used expressions such as “honorifics and polite expressions” (33.3%), “good breeding” (19.0%), “polite behavior”, “ceremony and propriety” (19.0%), and “sense of morality” (6.3%).

Table 1. Types of Responses to Question 28: Male Chinese

| Type | Expressions Used, Number of Respondents | Number (%) |
|-----------------------------------|---|------------|
| Honorifics and Polite Expressions | politeness expressions 1; “您”(Nin) 1; please 3; “您好”(Nin hao) 3; respect 1; Thank you 5; Excuse me 1; It doesn't matter 1; I'm sorry to trouble you. 1; You're welcome 3; Take care of yourself 1 | 21 (33.3%) |
| Good Breeding | one's self-cultivation 2; self-cultivation 2; be well brought up 2; character is very good 1; have a good education 1; good breeding 2; be self-cultivated 1; traditional virtues 1 | 12 (19.0%) |

| | | |
|---|--|------------|
| Polite Behavior, Ceremony and Propriety | ceremony and propriety 1; etiquette 1; manner 1; disposition of refined and courteous 1; Nobody will blame you for being too polite 1; one's moral quality 2; human dignity 1; know knowledge and etiquette 1; behavior and manner 1; polite; courteous 1; Japan 1 | 12 (19.0%) |
| Refined and Cultured | warm 1; honesty 1; honesty, unsophisticated 1 | 3 (4.8%) |
| Sense of Morality | good child 3; elementary schoolchild 1 | 4 (6.3%) |
| Personal Relationship | outsider; stranger 1; stranger 1; a member of society 1 | 3 (4.8%) |
| Senior and Junior | the old 1; senior 1 | 2 (3.2%) |
| Hierarchical relationship | one's superior 1 | 1 (1.6%) |
| Consideration | modesty 1 | 1 (1.6%) |
| Distance | distance 1 | 1 (1.6%) |
| Derogatory Sense | derogatory sense 1 | 1 (1.6%) |
| Miscellaneous | one's home 1; vary with each individual 1 | 2 (3.2%) |
| Total | | 63 (100%) |

Female Chinese (Table 2) also gave thirteen types of answers. Most of them associated politeness with “honorifics and polite expressions” (39.8%), “good breeding” (19.9%), “polite behavior”, “ceremony and propriety” (11.4%), “refined and cultured” (6.3%), and “harmony and kindness” (6.3%).

Unlike Chinese females, Chinese males did not give any answers regarding harmony and kindness, gestures, and stiffness and awkwardness. On the other hand, unlike Chinese males, Chinese females did not give any answers about personal relationships, the home, or variation depending on the individual. But the results for both Chinese males and females tell us that Chinese young people think politeness involves honorifics and politeness expressions, shows good-breeding, is indicative of polite behavior, is used in ceremonies, and shows propriety.

Table 2. Types of Responses to Question 28: Female Chinese

| Type | Expressions Used, Number of Respondents | Number (%) |
|--|--|------------|
| Honorifics and Polite Expressions | honorific words 1; “Nin” (您) 6; “Nin hao!” (您好) 8; “Ni hao” (你好) 3; Excuse me 4; Thank you 14; Thank you very much.1; Please 13; Good-bye 3; Bye-bye 1; bai 1; I’m sorry to trouble you 2; Please do me a favor 1; Please Look after me a little 2; You’re welcome 1; Take care 1; respect 4; esteem 1; Japanese 1 | 70 (39.8%) |
| Good Breeding | Good breeding 11; family education 1; be self-cultivated 10; well-grounded 4; very well-grounded 2; Parents are also of good character 1; culture 1; The level of the education is fairly high 1; intelligent 1; One has cultivated one’s knowledge 1; a person with culture 2 | 35 (19.9%) |
| Polite Behavior, Ceremony, and Propriety | being polite 2; know etiquette 1; refined and courteous 7; gentle, urbane 1; gentleman 3; play the gentleman 2; have poise 1; lady 1; a man of noble character 1; land of ceremony and propriety 1 | 20 (11.4%) |
| Refined and Cultured | refined in manner 4; gentle and soft 1; refined and elegant 1; gentle and quiet 2; refined and cultured 1; relation with one’s disposition 1; habits and customs are good 1 | 11 (6.3%) |
| Harmony and Kindness | harmony 2; be easy to approach 1; kindness 4; be a person of excellent character 2; be in a cheerful frame of mind 1; be comfortable 1 | 11 (6.3%) |
| Sense of Morality | sensible and intelligent 1; good boys or good girls 2; student 1; behavior regulation of middle school student 1; good person 1 | 6 (2.8%) |
| Gesture | smiling 2; smiling expression1; bowing 2 | 5 (2.4%) |
| Personal Relationship | earnestly occasion 2; social occasion 1; strange 1 | 4 (2.3%) |
| Senior and Junior | superior 1; mother 2 | 3 (1.7%) |
| Distance | show distance 1; have a feeling of distance 1; security in distance 1 | 3 (1.7%) |
| Consideration | modesty 2; be guarded in one’s disposition 1; reserved 1 | 4 (1.7%) |
| Stiff and Awkward | not intimate 1; stiff and awkward 1; feel rather ill at ease 1 | 3 (1.7%) |
| Derogatory Sense | sometimes appropriate politeness 1; you feel some derogatory sense 1; sometimes feel a little hypocritical 1 | 3 (1.7%) |
| Total | | 176 (100%) |

Japanese students gave fifteen types of answers (Tables 3 and 4). Most of them mentioned “honorifics and polite expressions”, “polite behavior”, “ceremony and propriety”, “consideration”, “a way of speaking”, “refined and cultured”, and “personal relationship.” Male Japanese gave thirteen types of answers (Table 3), the main ones being “honorifics and polite expressions” (25.0%), “polite behavior,” “ceremony and propriety” (17.9%), “consideration” (13.1%), “refined and cultured” (7.1%) and “personal relationship” (7.1%).

Table 3. Types of Responses to Question 28: Male Japanese.

| Type | Expressions Used, Number of Respondents | Number (%) |
|---|---|------------------|
| Honorifics and Polite Expressions | honorifics 1; respect 3; Thank you 7; Look after a bit 1; See you soon 1; I am sorry 1; Add “Desu” to the end of a word 3; Add “Masu” to the end of a word 1; Please do 1; polite 2 | 21 (25.0%) |
| Polite Behavior, Ceremony and Propriety | It is polite. 5; propriety 3; elegance 3; manners 1; common sense 2; gentleman 1 | 15 (17.9%) |
| Way of Speaking | the wording 1; word 1; greeting 1; beauty 2 | 5 (6.0%) |
| Refined and Cultured | It is wonderful 1; You should acquire it 1; humanity 1; steady person 1; reliable person 1; a good person 1 | 6 (7.1%) |
| Consideration | scrupulousness 1; Care is good 1; having a mind of consideration 1; solicitude 1; carefulness 2; affectation, posturing 1; Be careful 1; delicacy 1; show consideration 1 | 11 (13.1%) |
| Personal Relationship | personal relationship 1; exchange by social intercourse 1; society 1; palliative of interpersonal relationship 1; exchange with interested concern 1; stranger 1 | 6 (7.1%) |
| Hierarchical Relationship | hierarchical relationship 2; one’s superior 3 | 5 (6.0%) |
| Senior and Junior | exchange relation to senior 1; age 1; on age 1; senior 1 | 4 (4.8%) |
| Kindness. | kindness 4; good feeling 1 | 5 (6.0%) |
| Work | work 1; interview 1 | 2 (2.4%) |
| Importance | the important one 1 | 1 (1.2%) |
| Gesture | look at a person in the eye when speaking 1 | 1 (1.2%) |
| Stiff | stiff and inflexible 1 | 1 (1.2%) |
| Miscellaneous | calligraphy 1 | 1 (1.2%) |
| Total | | 84 (100%) |

Female Japanese gave fifteen types of answers (Table 4). They mentioned “honorifics and polite expressions” (39.8%), “polite behavior” & “ceremony and propriety” (18.6%), “consideration” (7.6%), “a way of speaking” (7.6%), and “refined and cultured” (5.2%).

Table 4. Types of Responses to Question 28: Female Japanese

| Type | Expressions Used, Number of Respondents | Number (%) |
|------------------------------------|--|------------|
| Honorifics and Polite Expressions | honorifics 15; honorific language 2; “ <i>itadaki</i> ” 1; please 1; “ <i>gozaimasu</i> ” 3; humble expression 1; I’m very sorry 1; I’m sorry. 3; certainly. 2; “ <i>itasimasu</i> ” 1; polite language 3; “ <i>Desu</i> ” 7; “ <i>Masu</i> ” 7; Please sit down. 1; Look after a bit 1; Thank you 15; Take care 1; Good morning 1; express your gratitude 1 | 67 (39.8%) |
| Polite Behavior, Courtesy, Manners | courtesy 9; polite 11; politeness 1; common sense 3; manners 2; diplomatic 1; formality 1; elegance 3; dignified 1 | 32 (18.6%) |
| Way of Speaking | language 2; greetings 4; beautiful word 1; beautiful wording 1; It is beautiful 2; beauty 3 | 13 (7.6%) |
| Refined and Cultured | character 1; sincerity 1; seriousness 1; serious diligence 1; serious; tidy person 1; neat 1; person who is fully alive 1; sincerity 1 | 9 (5.2%) |
| Consideration | Japanese virtue 1; be considerate of others 1; careful 1; scrupulous 2; feelings shut oneself up for the person 1; consideration 2; It is pleasant 1; The mind shuts oneself up 1; It takes care with 1; moderation 1; good attitude 1 | 13 (7.6%) |
| Hierarchical Relationship | Used when speaking with persons of higher rank 1; Imperial household 1; Crown Prince 1 | 3 (1.7%) |
| Good image | good image 1; good impression 2; other party’s favorability 1 | 4 (2.3%) |
| Personal Relationship | It is natural in the first meeting 1; member of society 1; “ <i>otonashi</i> ” (obedient, docile) 3; TPO (time, place, occasion) 1 | 6 (3.5%) |
| Kindness | It seems to be gentle 1; It is gentle 2; kindness 1 | 4 (2.3%) |
| Importance | importance 1; I think it is important 1 | 2 (1.2%) |
| Senior and Junior | “ <i>senpai</i> ” (senior) 1; one’s senior 1; “ <i>kohai</i> ” (junior) 1 | 3 (1.7%) |
| Good Breeding | environment in which one grows up 1; good breeding 1 | 2 (1.2%) |
| Work | work 1; train conductor 1; news broadcaster 1 | 3 (1.7%) |
| Stiff | stiff 1; stiff and awkward (it is formal) 1; tightness 1 | 3 (1.7%) |
| Miscellaneous | It is comprehensible 1; clearly 1; slowly 1; woman 1; A type 1; It is detailed 1; penmanship 1; have one’s own idea 1 | 8 (4.7%) |
| Total | | 172 (100%) |

The results indicate cultural and linguistic diversity. Most of the respondents associated polite characteristics with “honorifics and polite expressions”, “polite behavior”, and “ceremony and propriety”. An important finding of this study is the cultural differences regarding the responses “good breeding”, “consideration”, “way of speaking”, and “sense of morals.” More Chinese than Japanese felt that politeness showed good breeding (male, 19.0%; female, 19.9%) or a sense of morality (male, 2.8%; female, 6.3%); but more Japanese than Chinese thought that politeness showed consideration (male, 13.1%; female, 7.6%) or a way of speaking (male, 6.0%; female, 7.6%). Of particular interest is the fact that no Chinese students answered using the expressions “good image”, “work”, or “importance”; and no Japanese students used the expressions “sense of morality” or “distance”. Only a few Chinese and Japanese students felt that sometimes politeness would be derogatory, stiff and awkward (“It is formal.”), or not intimate, or would make them feel ill at ease or a little hypocritical. This reflects the fact that most of the Chinese and Japanese students are conscious of using polite expressions as a means of minimizing or avoiding conflict, as a way of maintaining smooth and harmonious interpersonal relations, and as socially appropriate behavior.

This study shows that there is a gender difference. For example, no male Chinese students used expressions such as “harmony and kindness”, “gesture”, and “stiff and awkward”. More female Japanese than male Japanese felt associated politeness with honorifics and polite expressions.

To summarize, the types of behavior covered by the Japanese term *teinei* (politeness) show that traditional aspects of politeness in Japan and Japanese virtue (honorifics and polite expressions, polite behavior, ceremony and propriety, consideration and beautiful words (way of speaking) still remain. The Chinese concept of *limao* (politeness, including respectfulness, attitudinal warmth, refinement, good breeding, and a sense of morality) is also still important and meaningful to Chinese students.

4. Discussion

In this study similarities and differences on concepts of politeness in Chinese and Japanese verbal communication have been elucidated. A great deal of information was collected: The number of expressions used was 239 for Chinese (males, 63; females, 176) and 256 for Japanese (males, 84; females 172). The results not only reflect the Chinese and Japanese cultural and behavioral differences in perceived politeness in communicative behavior, but also objectively compare the awareness and usage of polite expressions in the two languages.

Figure 1 compares the responses of male and female Chinese students to Question 28 of the questionnaire: “When you hear the term ‘politeness’, what initially comes to mind?” It is natural to expect great differences in degree of politeness related to differences in politeness demands based on social distance and differences in social status, familiarity of the speaker with the listener, in-group or out-group status and gender.

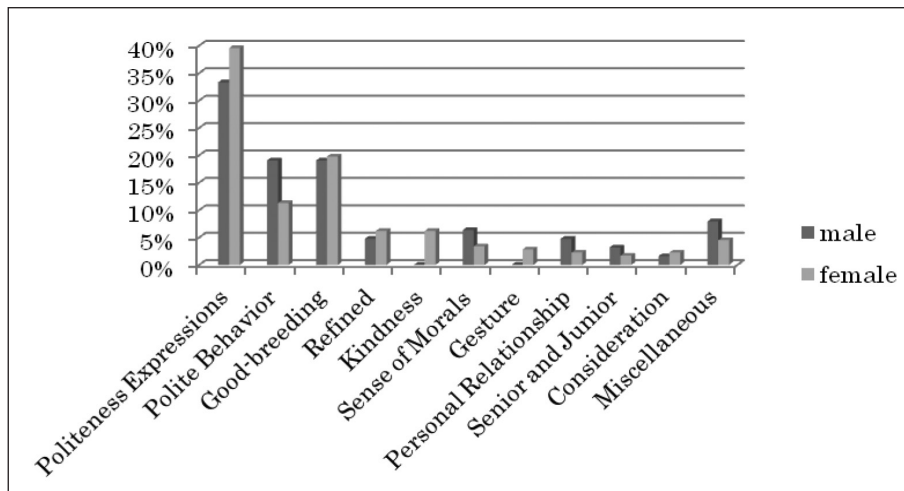


Figure 1. Chinese Responses by Gender

The results show that most of the Chinese students associated the following ideas with the Chinese *Limao*: polite expressions, polite behavior, good breeding, refined and cultured. Nevertheless, some students commented using the expressions kindness, sense of morality, personal relationship, senior and junior, and consideration, but the number was small. In addition, five students mentioned the gesture of smiling. They thought that politeness meant greeting someone with a smile.

The closest Chinese equivalent to the English word “politeness” is “*Limao*.” Gu (1990) pointed out that there are basically four notions underlying the Chinese conception of *Limao*: respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth, and refinement:

“Respectfulness” is self’s positive appreciation or admiration of others concerning the latter’s face, social status, and so on. “Modesty” can be seen as another way of saying “self denigration.” “Attitudinal warmth” is self’s demonstration of kindness, consideration, and hospitality to others. Finally, “refinement” refers to self’s behavior to others which meets certain standards (p.245).

In the last three decades or so, the “Beautification of Speech” campaign [which focuses especially on the words *Ninhao* (How do you do?), *Xiexie* (Thank you), *Zaijian* (Goodbye), *Duibuqi* (Excuse me), and *Qing* (Please)] has tried to revive the four elements, which are part of Chinese heritage, and has explicitly appealed to the nation to abide by them. So, in my findings, many students used many words associated with *Limao*, namely *Ninhao*, *Ni hao*, *Nin*, *Xiexie*, *Qing*, and *Goodbye*. “*Nin*” is an honorific form for the second person. Chinese always use this word when showing deference to someone. Deference is an important element of modern *Limao*. Its social function is to maintain harmony, eliminate conflict, and promote cooperation between people. Generally speaking, “to understand Chinese politeness, it is necessary to

study *face* (*mianzi* and *lian*) from an ‘emic’ perspective.” (Mao, 1994, p. 466). After all, being polite in Chinese discourse makes a good impression on the person one is speaking to and on those nearby; and it improves one’s reputation (*lian* and *mianzi*) in society because polite behavior is praised by society. Thus, one earns a good reputation, thereby increasing one’s self-respect. In my findings, the Chinese students showed that respectfulness, polite expressions, polite behavior, good breeding and refinement are still very important in the Chinese concept of politeness (*Limao*).

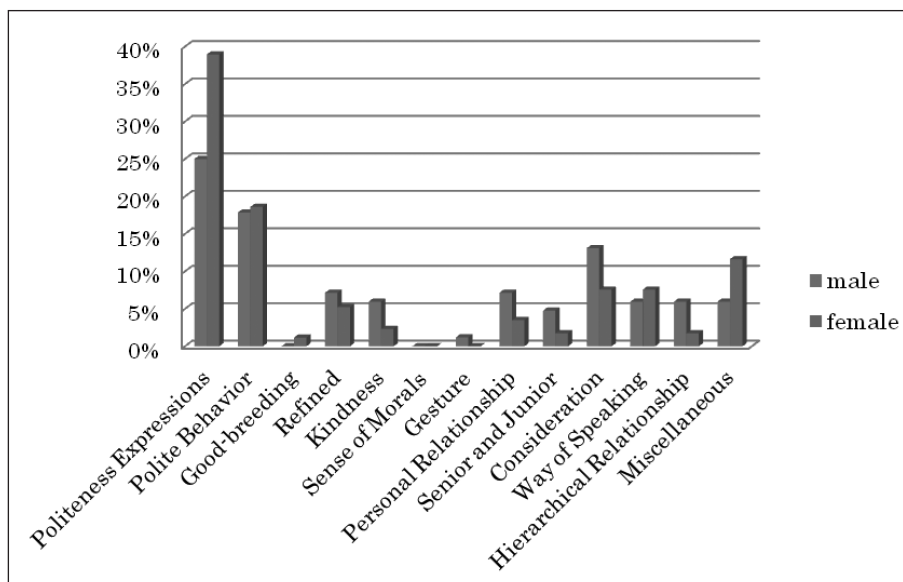


Figure 2. Japanese Responses by Gender

On the other hand, Figure 2 shows Japanese responses by gender. Most of the Japanese students associated politeness with the expressions “honorific forms”, “polite behavior”, “refined and cultured”, “consideration”, “personal relationship” and “way of speaking”. Female Japanese are much more conscious of honorific forms than male Japanese. This demonstrates that both Chinese and Japanese students are aware that the use of politeness in verbal communication is very important in maintaining good human relations. Nonetheless a few of the Japanese mentioned “good breeding”, “kindness”, “senior and junior”, and “hierarchical relationship”. Unlike Chinese, only one mentioned the gesture of looking a person in the eye when speaking.

According to Haugh (2007), “the emic notion of politeness in Japanese can be approached, in the first instance, from the perspective of two key lexemes, namely *teinei* and *reigi* (*tadashii*).” Language usage plays a large role in Japanese politeness. The use of *keigo* (honorific forms) is a major strategy in demonstrating politeness in Japan (Ogawa & Gudykunst, 1999-2000). The findings presented here confirm this point. Many students mentioned honorific forms as their image of politeness *teinei*. Akasu and Asao (1993) explain that “*keigo* typically is used to show deference to the listener, to some third party, or to some referent related to him/her. That means

that the person to whom the *keigo* is directed must be someone worthy in some way of that deference.” (p. 98). The more recent conceptualization of politeness in Japanese shifts the focus away from a concern for social position (*mibun*) or status (*chi'i*) to potentially less hierarchical dimensions, such as the dignity and character of others (*jinkaku*).

Using native-speaker judgments, Ide, Hill, Carnes, Ogino, and Kawasaki (1992, p. 290) have demonstrated that the Japanese concepts of politeness are respectful (*keii no aru*), pleasant (*kanzi yoi*), appropriate (*tekisetuna*), considerate (*omoiyari no aru*). “*Tekisetuna* is the adjective used in Japanese to evaluate behavior in the light of worldly criteria, i.e., *wakimae* (discernment), which is the key concept of linguistic politeness in Japanese (see Hill et al., 1986 and Ide, 1989).” In Japanese, it is crucial for a speaker to perceive the social context, such as the kind of situation or setting that he or she is in. It is also called discernment; that is, in contact between Japanese people, the speaker should pay attention to addressing certain factors of the situation, and then select an appropriate linguistic form and appropriate behavior. Obana (1994) reported that her respondents associated politeness with knowing where one stands in social interactions (*wakimae*, discernment), showing upward respect (*kei'i*) towards others and modesty about oneself, as well as horizontal distance. Interesting additions to the notions of politeness that emerge from ordinary speakers of Japanese, which are not encompassed by dictionary definitions, include showing consideration and relational distance towards others, as well as modesty towards oneself. Different cultural and linguistic groups express politeness in different ways. Politeness in Japanese can also involve showing one's social standing (*shitsuke*, breeding) and modesty, although this is restricted to certain individuals who use beautification honorifics to show good breeding (Ide, 2005). Politeness thus involves not only showing what one thinks of others, but also what one thinks of oneself (Chen, 2002; Haugh and Hinze, 2003; Ruhi, 2006; Haugh, 2007). But my findings show that good breeding is not important for some students. None of them mentioned distance as a factor in politeness.

To summarize, politeness in Japanese verbal communication is somewhat similar to that in Chinese. According to Konrad (1992), we are beginning “to understand how politeness is actually constituted and used not only in terms of purportedly universal principles, but in both universal and specific terms, thus finally taking into account social realities, be they traditional or modern ones.” (p.158). But, different cultural and linguistic groups express politeness in different ways. More Japanese than Chinese students had that feeling, from which we can conclude that honorific speech has a greater impact on the minds of Japanese students.

In short, they feel that it is common sense to use polite language. This study shows that the concept of politeness in communicative behavior is specific to a particular culture, sense of values, and standard. For example, based on four notions underlying the Chinese concept of *Limao* (respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth, and refinement), more Chinese than Japanese students think that, if a person does not use polite language, he/she is uneducated or ill-bred (Tao, 2012). The Chinese students have a keen sense of morals. This is because being polite in Chinese discourse makes a good impression on the person to whom one is speaking and on the people nearby, and it improves one's reputation (*lian* and *mianzi*); in a word, polite behavior is praised by society. Thus, one earns a good reputation and self-respect. On the other hand, in Japan the use of polite expressions may relate to the Japanese concepts of *tatemaie* (facade) and *honne* (true feelings). The traditional aspects of politeness in Japanese society,

including upward respect, honorific expressions, beautiful language, and consideration, still remain. Moreover, women in both China and Japan tend to be more verbally polite than men (Tao, 2010, 2012). The results show that the concept of politeness in intercultural communicative behavior should involve polite expressions, beautification language, and polite behavior if one wants to communicate smoothly and if one wants to make a good impression on the person to whom one is speaking.

5. Conclusion

The Asia-centric focus of this study is important for future research on politeness. This study is a contribution to research on politeness. Especially, using native-speaker judgments, the comparative study of intercultural politeness in Chinese and Japanese verbal communication is a very interesting and important theme. The concepts of politeness discussed here validate many opinions of Chinese and Japanese students regarding cultural awareness and evaluated concepts of self concerning politeness. Polite expressions, beautification language, and polite behavior continue the Asian social-perspective tradition of politeness from the standpoint of present-day Chinese and Japanese young people. Linguistic communication requires that interlocutors understand each other's utterances. It will be necessary to do a similar analysis of intercultural politeness in other societies in the future to examine how to improve cooperation through an understanding of communicative behavior. Speakers from different cultures or linguistic backgrounds will produce a given expression differently. Further research on concepts of politeness in intercultural communication should more fully explore cultural and linguistic differences, and other questions for linguistic and psycholinguistic theory because of variability, perhaps by using a different methodology or a different group of informants to confirm the findings of this study. That is, "several questions have not been solved but rather brought to a head. From this point of view, the linguistic concern with politeness is a task for the future, not a thing of the past." (Held, 1992, p. 151)

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This research is subsidized by the Society for the Study of Vocabulary in Japan. The author would like to express her appreciation for Professor Nishijima, Yoshinori, National Kanazawa University for the cooperation, in the preparation of this paper. Appreciation is also acknowledged for the editors and the reviewers for their valuable suggestions and comments.