

The routine formula, *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*

—The implementation of one's *tachiba*—

Yasuko OBANA

I. Introduction

This paper aims to re-examine the routine formula, *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*, which has attracted attention ever since Matsumoto (1988) claimed that Brown & Levinson's (1987) (thereafter, B & L) negative face, i.e. the desire to be unimpeded in one's action, is not congruous with Japanese politeness. She says the formula is a typical example which, though honorific-marked, is in fact an imposition with the speaker's dependence (*amae*; Doi, 1981) on the hearer's benevolence.

Since Matsumoto (1988), several attempts have been made to re-define, to further elaborate, or to modify the pragmatic features involved with the routine formula (Fukushima, 2000; Matsumoto, 1993; Ohashi, 2003; Pizziconi, 2003; Takekuro, 2005; Wierzbicka, 1991). However, the previous analyses, except Ohashi who analyses the formula with the term, 'debt', base themselves on B & L's binomial principles, 'FTA vs. non-FTA', 'negative vs. positive', which lead them to first checking whether the formula is imposition or not, and when they find the formula does not follow B & L's rule, i.e. 'imposition, then, be indirect', they resort to different features such as 'deferential imposition' or 'dependence'. Pizziconi is against Matsumoto's (1988) imposition and claims that the formula is a positive face-saving strategy though her analysis is limited to its use as an initial greeting.

This paper views *yososhiku onegaishimasu* from a different perspective. First, this formula has nothing to do with 'imposition'. Indeed, it may be an imposition in the English sense especially when the formula is used in request. However, given a certain interpersonal relationship where both speaker and hearer recognise their *tachiba* (role, standpoint; the term to be explained below), whether it is socially established or momentarily created in a given situation, the formula simply implements the speaker's *tachiba*, and the hearer accepts and grants it. In such a context there is no room for imposition to enter the interaction.

Second, I argue that the formula can be used only when acknowledging speaker and hearer's mutual roles, and in such a pragmatic situation there is no *amae*. It is because *amae* occurs when one can presume another's benevolence, i.e. the two interlocutors should have established a certain relationship, in which one can lean on another's good will. However, *yososhiku onegaishimasu* occurs in numerous situations including interactions between strangers. Even if Doi (1981: 169) asserts that *amae* is 'a peculiarly

Japanese emotion', surely it cannot freely be used in every social interaction; it is risky to use *amae* toward a stranger. It is also because the formula is used by both seniors and juniors to each other; on the other hand, *amae* usually comes from juniors to seniors, expecting seniors to help juniors cope with their work and life. Just because *amae* is considered to be pervasive in Japanese society (though this may need further investigation for clarification), it is not omnipotent in explaining every Japanese socio-linguistic phenomenon.

The present paper is organised in the following way. First, previous research on *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* is examined. Second, a different perspective is introduced to illustrate the phenomena of this formula. I argue that the formula is neither an imposition nor a result of dependence. It is either an example of phatic communion or the implementation of the speaker's *tachiba*, depending on where it occurs and what pragmatic functions it has in a given context.

II. Previous analyses of *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*

Ever since B & L's (1987) theory of universality of politeness across cultures, the last three decades have witnessed a great number of challenges to their definition of 'face' and their dichotomy of 'positive' and 'negative' politeness. A notable critique came from Matsumoto (1988, 1989, 1993) and Ide (1989, 2006), who contended that B & L's 'face' is an individual motivation, thus, alien to Japanese society. Particularly Matsumoto (1988) exemplifies the routine formula, *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*, arguing that by uttering this formula, the speaker humbly places themselves in a lower position and asks for the dependence and the need to be taken care of and treated well by the addressee or referent. She says that it is formally an imposition, but used as 'relation-acknowledging device' between interlocutors. The concept of 'imposition' as a feature of the formula is also supported by Wierzbicka (1991).

Ohso (1983) says that the formula is a stylised form of a case of begging due to the term, *o-negai-suru* (I beg you). However, 'begging' means 'asking someone earnestly or humbly for something' (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2003), therefore, it is a different form of imposition: imposition used humbly, depending upon the hearer's benevolence. In this respect, Ohso's idea basically conforms to Matsumoto (1988).

Fukushima (2000: 53–58) argues against Matsumoto's statement of uniqueness of Japanese imposition. Although she does not analyse the formula *per se*, she claims that interdependence in fact exists in other cultures, and therefore, 'imposition' here cannot be considered unique in Japanese politeness. However, she does not deny the imposing feature Matsumoto claims.

Ohashi (2003), on the other hand, analyses the formula with the term, 'debt'. He re-examines the concept of 'face' of B & L (1987) who claim that Speaker can redress an Face Threatening Act (FTA) by explicitly claiming his indebtedness to Hearer, and

emphasises more on ‘indebtedness’ in the treatment of Japanese politeness. He (*ibid*: 269) says that ‘Japanese “face” is more sensitive to debt and the debt-credit equilibrium than to the threat to freedom of action’. Thus, making a request with *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* is polite because it is ‘a debt-provoking act in a debt-sensitive culture such as in Japan’ and ‘acknowledging the speaker’s debt is more important than reducing imposition to the hearer’. Therefore, the formula is a ‘debt-conscious choice’.

Ohashi does not define ‘debt’, therefore, it is not clear whether it is a specific cultural term or it can be taken literally in the English sense. However, his statement that ‘...the state of being in debt and not repaying the debt is dishonourable...(*ibid*: 270) implies that he keeps this term in mind as equivalent to *on* (a debt of gratitude, emotional obligation) or *kari* (a favour owed) in Japanese. Mitsubishi Corporation (1987: 151) defines that ‘*On* is the act of bestowing on another person something...which makes the receiver feel grateful and arouses in him a sense of obligation’. With this interpretation in mind, let us examine Ohashi’s argument.

Ohashi’s ‘debt’ may be prevalent in many interactions in Japanese society, however, this term does not apply to speech phenomena of the formula, for example, placed at the end of a self-introduction speech toward a large audience and uttered as a greeting to those who have a social power (e.g. a student’s mother says the formula to the teacher to take care of her child in education). ‘Debt’ also hardly pertains to interaction between strangers.

Yoroshiku onegaishimasu, used at the end of a self-introduction speech, is rather conventionalised as a greeting. It is more formulaic especially when it is expressed to multiple listeners. In this situation, it is most unlikely to evoke debt-credit emotions because debt is something targeting a particular person (for later repayment), and yet the formula in this situation would not specify any debtor or even creditor.

When a mother of a student asks a teacher to look after her child in education, the formula may have a sign of request and provoke some ‘debt’ on the speaker’s side. However, it normally does not promise repayment of the debt to the hearer because this formulaic request does not specify what the speaker wants except her hope that her child will be well treated. Furthermore, debt, if any, in educational situation is gradually developed (as *on*) after a long term relationship between teacher and student/mother. In this respect, I doubt that such a single greeting as *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* at the initial meeting with the teacher would have so strong an impact on him/her that he/she would be obliged to develop a good relationship with the student. Then, the formula is not a request strictly speaking, but remains simply as an apposite and sincere (terms by Pizziconi, 2003: 1482) greeting.

Debt is even more scarce when the formula is expressed to strangers. Ohashi (2003: 263) gives an example that a porter brings passengers’ luggage to the limousine bus driver, and upon loading all the luggage, the porter says *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* to the driver. The porter and driver are most likely strangers to each other and may not meet in the future. In such a brief encounter, neither of them would owe any debt to the other. They

are simply fulfilling their duty. The formula indicates their mutual recognition of their work, i.e. the porter has completed his/her duty (loading) and the driver is taking it over. Because the porter knows that the driver will do the rest of work (looking after the luggage), he/she can safely say *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*, which pragmatically delivers his/her trust to the driver, leaving the job to the latter.

Takekuro (2005) contends against Matsumoto's (1988) deferential imposition from junior to senior because the formula is 'a reciprocal verbal routine' (*ibid*: 92). However, she does not exclude 'imposition' in considering its semantic-pragmatic interpretation (*ibid*: 94). She expands Matsumoto's 'relation-acknowledging device' and states that the formula 'affirms social bonds' (*ibid*: 90), that 'its use increases feelings of connections among interactants...to develop more solid and meaningful relationships...' (*ibid*: 92). Takekuro is more focused on the effect of the expressing of the formula than its socio-psychological motivation.

Pizziconi (2003) is against Matsumoto's (1988) 'imposition' nature involved in the formula. Due to the lack of evidence in Matsumoto's argument, Pizziconi assumes that Matsumoto is based on the presence of the explicit performative *negau* (to request) in a declarative form, and asserts that the humble form, *o/go_suru* as in *o-negai-shi-masu* of the formula, is used to addressees without being adversative effects on them; under such a condition the declarative form itself has no threatening nature. By giving a few examples with the humble form, she says that 'lacking the condition of non-adversative effect, the use of the humble *o/go_suru* is inappropriate' (*ibid*: 1482).

I agree with Pizziconi in that the formula as a self-introductory greeting would not impose any requesting nature. However, her association of the declarative form of the formula with the absence of adversative effects is not acceptable because *o/go_suru* as a humble honorific mark does not always serve non-adversative effects. It can spell antagonistic and intimidating effects just as other honorifics do, in accordance with certain situations and psychological motivations. For example, *shinde itadakimasu* (You are requested to die. = I will kill you.) expressed by gangsters is declarative in the humble-marked form, however, this honorific goes extremely opposite in its effect; it indicates the speaker's cold-blooded and methodical cruelty rather than politeness for smooth communication. Even a simple example, *go-jitai-shimasu* ((I) decline (your offer)), depending on where and in what way it is expressed, may or may not deliver adversative effects. If the speaker is hostile and yet has to use honorifics to a senior, the declarative form is deliberately selected to indicate the speaker's negative emotion, and the honorific form enhances his/her rigid refusal¹⁾.

Pizziconi quotes Hamano (1993: 97) that 'verbs denoting actions causing nuisance or special trouble on the part of the exalted party can be used in nonsubject honorification, provided that they are used to express the speaker's gratitude for the exalted party's

1) Turning down an offer without offending the hearer normally requires elusive utterances with hedges; e.g. *go-jitai shitai no desu ga...* (I'm wondering if I could decline (your offer)...))

understanding' (*ibid*: 1483). In fact, this does not support Pizziconi's argument at all because whatever verbs or syntactic forms are used, honorifics use is just like tightrope walking; honorifics must be expressed with the speaker's goodwill, gratitude and sincerity in appropriate situations; otherwise, honorifics exercise opposite effects. Therefore, Pizziconi looks at only part of honorific use, assuming that the humble form should not be adversative, thus, its declarative form is safely used without any threatening nature. On the contrary, honorifics can be manipulated in many ways, depending on their pragmatic conditions such as how and where they are expressed, what message the utterance delivers, and what strategies the speaker uses to approach the hearer. Therefore, the humble form itself does not eliminate *the condition of non-adversative effect*.

I suggest that the formula used as an introductory greeting should be treated as an example of phatic communion because it 'serves to establish and consolidate the interpersonal relationship' (Laver, 1975: 236) between interactants. It is an 'emotionally uncontroversial communicative material' (*ibid*: 221) since it is non-referential without transmitting a precise content. Takekuro's (2005) 'bonding' mentioned above fits well in the definition of phatic communion.

The formula also serves as a request in many other situations. It is formulaic but forms part of a request. In this respect, Pizziconi lacks material evidence in asserting that the formula offers a positive face-saving feature, because requests aimed at the speaker's benefit are imposing and thus can be an FTA provided we follow the theory of B & L (1987). I will argue in the following that the formula as part of request is not imposition, but it serves as the evidence that speakers are entitled to request in a certain limited way, confirming that their request remains within their *tachiba* role. If a request goes beyond their *tachiba*, the formula would not be expressed. Such a request is indeed a potential FTA, thus requiring another strategy to minimise the imposition.

III. The analysis of *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*—phatic communion or the implementation of the speaker's *tachiba*

1. The definition of *tachiba*

The literal meaning of the term, *tachiba*, is 'the place where one stands'. When it is used in social interaction, it means 'one's social rank/position or circumstances' and 'one's viewpoint or standpoint derived from a certain situation' (digital Daijirin Dictionary: translation by the author), and the definition of *tachiba* used in this paper is close to the former. In this subsection, the definition of *tachiba* is further elaborated in order to illustrate when and where *yososhiku onegaishimasu* occurs because it is one's *tachiba*, once it is recognised in a given interaction, which triggers the occurrence of the formula. It should be noted, however, that its occurrence indeed depends on the mutual recognition of the interactants' *tachiba*, but it does not mean that every *tachiba* liberally prompts its occurrence. Therefore, its pragmatic constraints are also discussed in this subsection.

In a broader sense, *tachiba* is closely related to 'social self' as defined through group

memberships. As Roccas and Brewer (2002) say, individuals participate in multiple social activities such as work, social gathering, club, friendship and family, to each of which they present corresponding multiple social identities. In other words, individuals as social beings possess many different social selves, and each self is created through interactions with others. It is continually constructed, modified and moulded in accordance with activities individuals join, which often determines how individuals behave in a given context. We shall take this definition as a starting point to further clarify the term, *tachiba*.

Tachiba at work is strongly associated with job titles/categories. Relationships such as teacher—student, employer—employee, senior—junior statuses at company, business associates between different companies, shopkeeper—customer are all determined by job titles or categories, and their responsibilities and expectations from their organisations quite automatically form one's *tachiba*. When interlocutors recognise their social relationship through their job categories, *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* is more readily provoked to reassure each other's *tachiba*, and to show one's trust to the other that the other will fulfil a requested task or role. In this case, request content should be within the territory the job category refers to. If it goes beyond the territory, interlocutors should create another social relationship, in which the request is more smoothly granted; then, the formula is added to confirm one's request (this is further discussed below). In the case of the formula used as a greeting (Group 1 as categorised in the next section), speakers' *tachiba* here is more to do with the creating of their social relationship with hearer(s) as a new comer into the working environment. Nonetheless, one's *tachiba* supplies one with the entitlement of mentioning this greeting. No establishment of *tachiba* would precipitate the occurrence of the formula.

Tachiba is also used as social categories such as ethnic distinction, age and sex differences, and the difference between employed and unemployed, between rich and poor; it is derived from social dichotomy in which one's social group is compared with the other (e.g. men vs. women, old vs. young), often affiliating them to differentiating between advantaged and disadvantaged. However, this social identity seldom triggers the occurrence of the formula. It is because the formula requires a certain interactional situation where requests are recognised within the domain of one's job or task which either comes from one's job category or other tasks mutually agreed between interlocutors. Social distinctions such as women vs. men would not automatically yield any particular domains that concede them the entitlement of a request. Greetings are also individuals' probing into a new (but predicted or expected) relationship with others (e.g. new employees' greeting to the company people). Therefore, the formula is granted within this domain. It may be argued that as a representative of women, a woman requests something to the public. However, upon treating the issue of women's right, she should be situated in a certain context where she is given an opportunity to speak up. If she has a chance to request to the authority with the formula, it is a temporarily given context which directly triggers its occurrence, not her as a woman. The motivation of a request may well be the social

distinction as ‘woman’, however, the immediate trigger of the formula is the meeting where she is situated and given a chance to request.

Tachiba is also temporarily recognised in a given situation. Roles such as chairperson, a committee member, acting head at university fall into this category. For example, a chairperson’s roles allow him/her to request the meeting, for example, to submit ideas, to come back in five minutes after the break. As long as requests are within the domain of the chairperson’s roles, he/she can request with the formula attached.

A new temporary *tachiba* is also created between interlocutors who already have their *tachiba* at work. For example, the teacher asks a student to play a role of organising a study tour. Upon hearing the student’s consent, the teacher says the formula, although it may not carry honorific forms (*Ja, yoroshiku ne*—OK, (I) leave (the job to you).). Teacher and student have agreed on their arrangement, which has inevitably provided the student with a certain role.

Strangers, given a certain context, can utter the formula because of this type of temporary *tachiba*. For example, the porter and driver’s case exemplified above fits into this although *tachiba* here is derived from each interactant’s job itself. An enquiry from an individual to public places such as council and institution may follow a certain request to them; if it is one of the duties they must fulfil (e.g. sending pamphlets, picking up stray dogs), the request can be concomitant with *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*.

A request of donation in the street, saying *Bokin o yoroshiku onegaishimasu* (= Donation, please.) is directed toward anonymous people. However, those who are requesting donation are pursuing their role to collect money²⁾.

Although the formula apparently occurs quite freely in all sorts of situations, it has certain constraints on its occurrence. First, unless a certain *tachiba* is mutually recognised, the formula cannot occur. Second, even if *tachiba* is recognised, duties which are simply confirmed in the request form (only to be polite) normally do not company the formula. For example, the teacher confirming students’ homework, the president verifying the receptionist’s work, and other examples that seniors guide, advise and instruct juniors’ jobs, may be uttered in request forms, and their *tachiba* (as seniors) are evident, however, the underlying meaning of such utterances is to confirm, to reiterate, or to rehearse juniors’ duties; then, the formula is most unlikely used. Third, if the formula is used as part of a request, it should be stated after the hearer agreed upon a request role or task. Otherwise, it would become an imposition without getting consent from the hearer (See a further discussion in III-3).

We have understood that *tachiba* is one’s social selves identified through interpersonal relationships. It is derived from one’s job categories, roles in groups one belongs to, and tasks provided or mutually agreed in a given situation. The formula occurs when one’s *tachiba* is clearly understood in either initial greeting or requesting something that is within

2) This example is in the same category as Example (2) in III-3, in which its pragmatic features are further discussed.

the domain of one's *tachiba*. As long as this *tachiba*-role is mutually recognised, hearers would NOT interpret the formula in a request or greeting as imposition. Unlike English politeness which primarily concerns the content of a statement, *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* presupposes one's *tachiba* role, and *tachiba* allows one to request with the formula in a direct manner.

Tachiba may overlap *wakimae* (discernment), the term initiated by Ide (1989). Both terms refer to one's social identities by acting as a group member. However, I use the term, *tachiba*, here to avoid confusion. First, Ide used *wakimae* as a yardstick to measure social ranks and roles, determining which person is expected to use honorifics. She argues that honorifics as social norms are conventionally anchored, in which *wakimae* plays a key role. On the other hand, *tachiba*, as mentioned above, varies from social ranks to individuals' temporary roles mutually agreed in a given situation. In this respect, *tachiba* encompasses larger social activities.

Second, *wakimae* is a direct trigger of the occurrence of honorifics, i.e. the recognising of one's social relationship with the other determines the use of honorifics. *Tachiba* provides more constraints on the occurrence of the formula as mentioned above, and a mere recognition of a social relationship would not prompt the formula.

Furthermore, *tachiba* used in this paper is rather one's entitlement to use the formula, which may pragmatically differ from *wakimae*; the latter is derived from one's reserved attitude whereas *tachiba* is something more positive, conferring the speaker an advantage to pursue what he/she wants.

Using the term, *tachiba*, let us examine examples in which the formula is used and interpreted differently.

2. Analysis of *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*—its pragmatic domains and functions

In order to analyse the formula appropriately, it is necessary to classify it according to its domains in usage because the formula presents various pragmatic features in different contexts.

The following are possible situations where the formula is used.

1. Self-introduction speech, New Year greeting, greeting in the first meeting
2. Part of request (the real request form is replaced by the formula)
3. Request followed by the formula (to confirm the request)

Group 1 is a ritual greeting. The formula in this group should be considered 'phatic communion' because it is a form of 'relationship' communication as opposed to idea exchange or information delivery. As Laver (1975: 236) says, the formula as phatic communion functions to 'facilitate the management of interpersonal relationships'. The formula in Group 1 does not inflict anything on the hearer to take an action for the speaker, except indicating the speaker's hope to be in good terms with the hearer(s).

In self-introduction speech, the formula is used at the end of the speech. Its function is to mark the closing of the speech while its pragmatic effect is to show the speaker's

humble attitude to the audience. On the New Year's day, families and relatives may become formal, and bow with this formula uttered (*Kotoshi mo yoroshiku onegaishimasu*. = We will be good to each other this year as well.). The formula is purely ritual while its pragmatic effect is to reassure family ties. When new people meet in formal settings such as business, parent-teacher meeting and ceremonial scenes, the formula is expressed when introducing each other's name. Its primary function is to demonstrate the mutual acceptance of their possible lasting relationship from thenceforth. The honorific form in the formula, no matter how ritualistic it has become, still serves as the speaker's humble attitude. Thus, casual encounters among new friends at a party, for example, most unlikely call forth the formula due to its formal form which is incompatible with the casual atmosphere.

Group 2 is the formula functioning as part of request. Instead of clearly stating what the speaker wants hearers to do, *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* serves to indicate what to be done. For example,

- (1) *Kochira wa chuusha kinshi to nat-te imasu node, yoroshiku onegaishimasu.*
 this TOP parking ban QT be-TE Polite as
 (Since this place is no-parking area, ~. =Please do not park here.)
- (2) *Shichoo-sen niwa Manabe Tsutomu o yoroshiku onegaishimasu.*
 mayor-election for Manabe Tsutomu ACC
 (For mayor election, Manabe Tsutomu ~. =Please vote for him.)
- (3) *Kore no taisaku ga are-ba, yoroshiku onegaishimasu.*
 this of measure NOM exist-if
 (If (you) have any measures (to solve) this, ~. =Please suggest your idea.)

Example (1) is an announcement of a regulation, implicitly asking hearers to follow it. A direct instruction would be too demanding, therefore, the formula is replaced with it to mitigate the tone of a strong request. By leaving to hearers what to be done, the formula functions as part of a request.

One may assume that if it is a request, it has an imposition. However, the speaker, who is in charge of controlling traffic in the area, is entitled to refer to the regulation. The speaker is given a certain role, or *tachiba*, and as long as requests come from the domain of this *tachiba*, they are not an imposition.

In Japanese politeness, direct requests using *~te kudasai* (e.g. *Kaigi ga hajimarimasu node, minasan oatsumari kudasai* = The meeting starts soon, everyone, please come.) are commonly made when the speaker is fulfilling his/her given task or role. In this respect, the English sense of 'request = imposition; therefore, it should indirectly be expressed' does not apply here because English politeness primarily considers the content of an utterance to check whether it causes some burdens on the hearer. If it does, English tends to take an indirect approach. In many ways, this is plausible in Japanese, too, when speaker and

hearer have no mutual recognition of their roles; thus, requests can be potentially FTAs. However, direct requests are used when the speaker's *tachiba* is definite. They are the manifestation of the speaker's confidence in fulfilling his/her role given in a certain situation. Indirect forms in such a situation would cause anxiety among hearers, and they might even judge the speaker as unprofessional.

Yoroshiku onegaishimasu in Example (1) is analysed in a similar way. The declarative form is the implementation of the speaker's *tachiba* role as a traffic controller. At the same time, without directly referring to what hearers should do (i.e. no parking here), the formula is indirectly requesting by letting hearers guess. Two diverse pragmatic features are involved in this formula, and yet successfully constitute a unique polite strategy. The honorific form in the formula, as mentioned above, serves as the speaker's humble attitude.

Examples (2) is different from Example (1) in that apparently there is no evident *tachiba* role³. The formula in (2) is expressed to anonymous audiences to ask them to vote for the candidate. This may be a request, but it's not threatening because no particular hearer is chosen, and upon hearing the utterance (2), hearers have choices whether to vote for him, and their choice does not have to be verbalised. There is no obligation imposed upon them here. Example (3) can be expressed toward a particular individual, however, the if-clause (*are-ba* = if you have) offers the hearer options, and the formula which prevents the direct mentioning of a request (please inform me) encodes the speaker's only hope without imposing it upon the hearer. Furthermore, the speaker's request of certain measures on something problematic presupposes that speaker and hearer have been involved in the discussion, in which case the speaker (perhaps as a chairperson) is entitled to play a role of this request.

Group 3, in which the formula follows a specific request, is a typical example of the manifestation of the speaker's *tachiba*. Let us look at the following examples.

(4) (email) *linkai no gidai o asu madeni okut-te-kudasai.*
 committee of agenda ACC tomorrow by send-TE-please
Yoroshiku onegaishimasu.

(Please send me the agenda for the Committee meeting by tomorrow.
Yoroshiku onegaishimasu.)

(5) A 1: *Shachoo, shorui ga deki-ta-n desu ga, mi-te-itadak-e-masu ka.*
 president report NOM finish-PAST-N-POLITE CONJ look-TE-HON-can-POLITE Q

B: *Wakat-ta. Asu madeni mi-te-oku yo.*

Understand-PAST tomorrow by look-TE-done MOOD

A 2: *Yoroshiku onegaishimasu.*

3) However, given a situation where the audience understands what the speaker is reaching them for, the speaker's *tachiba* as an election campaigner is somewhat recognised, allowing the formula to be uttered.

- (A: Sir, the report has been completed, and I'm wondering if you could check it for me.
B: OK. I'll have a look by tomorrow.
A: *Yoroshiku onegaishimasu.*)

(4) is an email from a member of the Committee to another. In this utterance, fulfilling the task of sending the agenda is most highly expected. Both sender and receiver of the mail mutually understand that the email receiver is in charge of agenda making. The formula confirms after the direct request that the sender has *tachiba* to request it, trusting that the receiver will do the task, although the sender is humbly asking. Email requests without fail are completed with the formula. The formula indicates closing the message, but at the same time confirming the request.

This apparently ambivalent combination of humble forms with the almost imposing request may be quite strange from the viewpoint of B & L's request principles. However, even in English, using imperative forms when instructing how to use a machine, for example, by the same token, facilitates the speaker with a role of 'instruction', which is at the same time recognised by the hearer; e.g. 'Now, push this red button. OK, next pull this lever, then, this part starts rotating. Yes, that's right.' In this situation, requests in the imperative form are not an imposition, but manifest the speaker's role as an instructor. Imposition is a psychological effect when there is no presupposing feature that allows requests to be made, however, mutual understanding of *tachiba* counteracts such a negative effect.

In a similar way, Person A in (5) is junior to B, asking the latter to check the document. Honorifics are used in Person A's utterances, functioning as the linguistic evidence of social ranking differences. When Person B accepts the request, A says the formula, which implies completing his/her request. In business situation, juniors' work is expected to be under the control of seniors, therefore, checking a document as in (4) is anticipated to be part of the senior's job. The junior then has his/her *tachiba* or entitlement /expectation to safely ask his/her senior to check the document (as in Utterance A 1). The formula (A 2) performs as confirming the request after Person B accepts his/her request. Its underlying motivation is that the speaker can request certain things within the domain of his/her *tachiba*. The humble form of the formula just like Group 1 and 2 serves as the speaker's humble attitude toward the hearer.

It should be noted that unlike (4), (5) allows the occurrence of the formula only when Person B has accepted A's request. The formula functions as confirming the request, therefore, it should be uttered after the other has accepted the request. Otherwise, the formula has a reverse effect; it executes imposition. This is similar to 'thank you' in English mentioned after a request without waiting for the other's consent.

Let us look at another example of Group 3, in which the formula is used toward a stranger.

- (6) A civilian phones up the council and complains about her neighbours who leave their lands overgrown with weeds, and asks them to request her neighbours to cut weeds.

A: *Wakari-mashi-ta.*

understand-POLITE-PAST

O-shirabe-shi-te, kusa o karu-yoo yoosei-shi-masu.

HON-examine-do-CONJ weeds ACC cut-AUX request-do-POLITE

B: *Yoroshiku onegaishimasu.*

(A: I understand. After checking (around your place), (we) will request (your neighbours) to cut (weeds).

B: *Yoroshiku onegaishimasu.*)

Persons A and B are strangers, however, B knows that she is entitled to request the council to take a certain action because it is their job for their citizens. This provides B a certain *tachiba* to request it and the formula confirms the request, closing the conversation. *Tachiba* in this example displays certain presuppositions.

- a. Person B should be a citizen living in the area the council is in charge of.
- b. Person B can request only what the council is responsible for.
- c. Person A is a council worker, ready to accept requests mentioned in (b).

Although Persons A and B are strangers, their *tachiba* already presupposes what they can or should expect from each other before the phone conversation. Given their tacitly recognised *tachiba*, the formula is automatically attached, functioning almost a mere confirmation at the end of the conversation.

A more pure confirmation is found in Example (7) in which Person B just confirms her booking.

- (7) (A customer phones up a restaurant to book a table).

A: *Kashikomarimashita. Tanaka-sama, san-mei-sama de,*
OK[HON] Tanaka-HON three-people-HON and
asu no shiti-ji desu ne.

tomorrow of seven-o'clock POLITE MD

O-machi-shi-te-ori-masu.

HON-wait-do-TE-AUX[HON]-POLITE

B: *Yoroshiku onegaishimasu.*

(A: OK. Ms Tanaka, (a table for) three people, at seven tomorrow, right?

B: *Yoroshiku onegaishimasu.*)

In Example (7), the formula confirms Person B's booking in an indirect way. Although

Person B's *tachiba* is evident (as a customer), and thus entitled to book a table, the formula is used as a mere confirmation. Unlike the examples above, the situation in (7) is not a request in a strict sense, but a process of booking a table. Nonetheless, Person B is polite enough to use the formula, only to create a good atmosphere in ending the conversation.

One may assume that the Examples, (4) and (5), can be explained with the concept of *amae* as interactants can resort to their social relationships, which allows the speaker (or writer) to depend on the other's benevolence. Whether or not Doi's 'dependence' is a peculiar Japanese social habit which is intertwined in all sorts of social interactions needs another research for its validity, and it is not my intention to discuss it in this paper. Here, let us examine whether *amae* applies in explaining the formula's pragmatic background.

Doi (1981) defines *amae* as behaviour of depending and presuming upon another's benevolence. He states that it is originated from the psychology of an infant in the relationship with its mother. Its helpless and needy psychology, which makes its mother provide indulgent love and care, is the proto type of *amae*, and its concept is prevalent in Japanese society, though *amae* in the society is not like childish reliance but more toward a viable relationship. Although he admits *amae* does exist in many other societies, it is more predominantly witnessed in Japanese society. *Amae* as social psychology works as one's endeavour of a close bond with others in the same organisation, particularly with seniors who will in turn look after one at work and even in one's private life.

Doi uses the term which is strongly associated with interactants in a close social relationship. Juniors use dependence toward their seniors in the same organisation because they feel comfortable with their seniors as Doi (2001: 67) claims that the basis of *amae* is comfortableness with the other; if one is not comfortable with the other, one does not depend on the other. In other words, *amae* presupposes that interlocutors know each other well, and one is senior and the other junior; it is seniors who allow juniors' dependence, and it is seniors who are in charge of showing juniors their big-heartedness.

Matsumoto (1988) held a belief that the formula, *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*, is an imposition because the speaker is dependent on the hearer, asking the latter to take care of the former. Because such a dependent request is considered to be an honourable responsibility on the hearer, Matsumoto calls it 'deferential imposition'. Doi's *amae* seems to closely fit Matsumoto's argument.

However, as has been discussed, the formula is uttered in a wider range of contexts. Interlocutors may meet for the first time; the formula is used as a greeting. They may be strangers in a street; the speaker campaigns something to the public in the street. Both seniors and juniors use the formula in a given situation. Doi's *amae*, on the other hand, postulates that *amae* is formed between members of a group, assuring them of a solidarity in which juniors can safely depend on seniors. Then, it is simply wrong to assume that the formula is premised on *amae*. First of all, it is quite bizarre in any society that strangers could rely on each other's benevolence. Second, it is even more strange that a mere initial

meeting would indicate such a big emotional burden on the hearer as looking after the other at work and in life. Third, the fact that the formula can be used by seniors to juniors does not correspond to the definition of *amae*.

One may say that the Examples, (4) and (5), in the above may presuppose *amae* when uttering the formula because the interactions occur between seniors and juniors. As far as the definition of *amae* is some psychology which juniors, as a socially weaker position, can resort to in facing their seniors, *amae* may work quite well when juniors need to go through new or difficult working situations. It is only natural for seniors, unless they are self-centred and dogmatic, to assist, advise, support juniors. In this respect, I doubt that *amae* is used in every interaction. I doubt that people who know each other always rely on 'dependence' to attain what they want because no sensible, competent adult members of the society would liberally take advantage of their junior position and resort to dependence.

Although Doi does not elaborate when and how *amae* is used in actual social interactions, I can assume that it is a tacit expectation that only when juniors need to depend on seniors, seniors are available to help them. On the other hand, the formula is used as a daily routine in closing a statement. Almost every work-related request is concluded with the formula. Therefore, it is difficult to assume *amae* in the formula. The Examples, (4) and (5), show that the speaker (or email sender) is fulfilling their task professionally, and the formula implies that the request has smoothly been completed. In this circumstance, there is no need for the use of *amae*.

IV. Conclusion

This paper has re-examined the routine formula, *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*. It used to be considered an example of Japanese politeness which argues against B & L's theory of universal politeness and to be a deferential imposition using dependence on the other's benevolence. However, the present paper has looked at the formula from a different perspective, claiming that as a greeting, the formula is an example of phatic communion, and that as part of request, it is the implementation of one's *tachiba*-role whether it comes from one's job categories or from a temporarily established task or responsibility. In pursuing one's *tachiba* which is also recognised and granted by the other, there is no imposition or dependence in the uttering of the formula.

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The routine formula, *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*

—The implementation of one's *tachiba*—

Yasuko OBANA

The present paper re-examines the routine formula, *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*. The formula has been considered to be an example of Japanese politeness, contending against Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness. To show that imposition is not necessarily a Face Threatening Act, Matsumoto (1988) and others have claimed that the formula is formally imposition and the speaker depends on the other's benevolence, which is prevalently conducted in Japanese society as *amae*. However, the paper looks at the formula from a different perspective. It is the implementation of one's *tachiba*-role. This *tachiba* triggers the occurrence of the formula, showing fulfilling one's social role and responsibility. It is also recognised and granted by the other, and within this domain, the formula is not an imposition or a result of dependence. It is the evidence of mutual recognition and affirmation of interactants' social standpoints.