

1. Two basic dimensions of honorifics in Japanese:

Distality: The social distance between speaker and addressee (i.e., close or distant).

Affiliation: Whether the *subject* is identified with the speaker or addressee.

2. *Distality*: Social distance can sometimes be expressed in terms of physical distance: to be polite you want to stand back from people and defer to them, give them room. Standing closer implies being less polite because it seems like you are standing on another person's territory, invading that person's space. Standing farther away gives an impression of respect (or dislike, or fright, or of not wanting to get involved, etc.). Social distance can also be expressed with language. One can speak in a 'familiar' tone, or in a 'distant' tone. This is distality.

Verb example: Less distal: 行く? / 行く。
 More distal: 行きますか。 / 行きます。

Noun examples:

Less distal: これ、なに? / 本(だ)。
 More distal: これ、何ですか? / 本です。
 Very distal: これ、何でございますか? / 本でございます。
 Super distal and careful: これ、何でございましょうか。 / 本でございましょう。

Distality depending on social contexts:

At home, people tend to use less distal patterns.

...speaking to close family, out drinking with old pals (maybe), etc.

On formal occasions, people tend to use more distal patterns.

...weddings, funerals, at work in front of the boss, etc.

Distality depending on social inferior-superior relations:

Inferiors (are 'supposed to') use more distal patterns.

Superiors (are 'supposed to') use less distal patterns.

Note, however, that differences in generation, social class background, etc., will often result in an inversion of this rule: example: student to professor: 「先生、メンくった?」 「はい、さきほどいただきました」 (overheard at Tokyo University School of Medicine, students speaking to a senior professor of brain sciences, circa 1995).

3. *Affiliation*: First, figure out the grammatical *subject* (basically, it is whatever would take the case-particle が in the sentence). The subject can be either:
- The speaker him/herself, or someone on his/her side of the conversation.
 - The addressee, or someone on the addressee's side of the conversation.
 - Something bearing no human relation to speaker or addressee (and thus neutral).

Less-distal language will usually not mark *affiliation*, but more-distal language will mark it:

Examples (all very distal):

5時にまいります。 [I' (or someone on my side of the conversation) will go.]
 5時に行きます。 [It' will go.]
 5時にいらっしゃいます。 [You' (or someone on your side of the conversation) will go.]

NOTE: Many textbooks refer to these forms as "humble" and "honorific" (following a history of imprecise linguistics in Japan) but this is really misleading. When you assert a social distance between yourself and other people, it might be out of respect or humility, but it might also be because *you* want *them* to keep *their* distance. These forms work just as well for fear and loathing, bitter arguments, a desire not to get involved, etc.

NOTE: Many other textbooks refer to these forms as "in-group" and "out-group." This, too, is misleading (or, at least, it needs much explanation), because it gives the impression that you first should decide whether the person you are referring to is in or out, and then use the according form. It is much better to think of any conversation as having a line between speaker and addressee, and simply determining, for any given sentence, whether the subject of the sentence is on the speaker's side or on the addressee's side.

4. Charting Honorifics:

- a. Example: for the verb 「行く」 (irregular)

| | | ----- | AFFILIATION | ----- |
|-----------|------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|
| | | subject=speaker | neutral | subject=addressee |
| | very distant | まいります | 行きます | いらっしゃいます |
| DISTALITY | somewhat distant | - | 行きます | - |
| | very close | - | 行く | - |

b. 「食べる」 (irregular)

| | | ----- | AFFILIATION | ----- |
|-----------|------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|
| | | subject=speaker | neutral | subject=addressee |
| | very distant | いただきます | - | めしあがります |
| DISTALITY | somewhat distant | - | 食べます | - |
| | very close | - | 食べる | - |

c. 「話す」 (regular: uses verb stem in very distant forms: THIS IS THE PATTERN FOR MOST VERBS)

| | | ----- | AFFILIATION | ----- |
|-----------|------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|
| | | subject=speaker | neutral | subject=addressee |
| | very distant | おはなしします | - | おはなしになります |
| DISTALITY | somewhat distant | - | 話します | - |
| | very close | - | 話す | - |

d. ~だ [remember 'da' can only occur with nouns in standard Japanese]

| Nouns... | | ----- | AFFILIATION | ----- |
|-----------|------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|
| | | subject=speaker | neutral | subject=addressee |
| | very distant | マーツでございます | 本でございます | 先生でいらっしゃいますか |
| DISTALITY | somewhat distant | - | 本です | - |
| | very close | - | 本 (だ) | - |

5. Adjectives with distality:

良い: Very close: いい。
 Somewhat distant: いいです。
 Middling distant: よろしいです。
 Very distant (rare): よろしゅうございます。

Also (the following are rare, sounding like a great-grandmother on the verge of obsolescence):

おいしい > おいしゅうございます。
 さむい > さむうございます。
 あつい > あつうございます。
 たかい > たこうございます。

Note: はやい > おはようございます (the 'お' is gratuitous, and only for greetings)

6. Nouns with distality: The following examples are rarely heard without お~, but dictionaries list them without it and rarely indicate how common the お~ forms are:

布団 (ふとん₀) > お布団₂、風呂 (ふろ₂) > お風呂₂、豆腐 (とうふ₀) > お豆腐₀、
 菓子 (かし₁) > お菓子₂、金₀ > お金₀、酒₀ > お酒₀、尻 (しり₂) > お尻₀、宅 (たく₀) > お宅₀、
 仕事 (しごと₀) > お仕事₂、

Other nouns with distality (often overlapping with 'written-style' readings):

明日 (あした₃) > 明日 (みょうにち₁)、明後日 (あさって₂) > 明後日 (みょうごにち₃)
 これ > こちら、それ > そちら、だれ > どなた、

7. Nouns and expressions with affiliation (besides family names, each of which have variants):

Note that these are highly irregular and unpredictable:

電話 > お電話 [= a telephone call for you], etc.
 家 (うち₀) > お家₀、お宅₀ [= your house]
 弊社 (へいしや₀) > 貴社 (きしや)、御社 (おんしや) [= your company]
 本 > 御本 (ごほん) [= your honorable book]
 先 (さき₀) にどうぞ [= please go in front of me] > お先に失礼 [= I'll go ahead of you]
 心配 (しんぱい) する [= I'll worry] > ご心配なく。 [= no need for you to worry]
 [however:] 心配しないでください。 [= don't worry]
 遠慮 (えんりょ) する [= I'll hold back] > ご遠慮なく。 [= no need for you to hold back (so eat!)]
 [however:] ご遠慮しないでください。 [= don't hold back]

8. Other honorific verb forms:

(a) This form is like the one below it, but uses the differentiated form of する.

(b) Note that the passive form is often used as a mid-distality addressee-affiliation form (usually for men).

(c) Note the use of very close, addressee-affiliation among “housewife” speech (cloying but clear on you/me)

| | | ----- speaker | AFFILIATION neutral | ----- addressee |
|-----------|--------------------|------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| | very very distant | (a) お待ちいたします | | |
| | very distant | お待ちします | - | お待ちになります |
| DISTALITY | a bit more distant | - | - | (b) 待たれます |
| | somewhat distant | - | 待ちます | - |
| | very close | - | 待つ | (c) お待ちになる |

9. More verbs with unpredictable forms:

| Dictionary form | Subject=speaker version | Subject=addressee version |
|-----------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| いる | おる | いらっしゃる |
| “ | “ | 見える/お見えになる |
| “ | “ | おいで (です) |
| 来る | まいる | いらっしゃる |
| 行く | まいる (参る) | いらっしゃる |
| する | いたす | なさる |
| あります | ございます | |
| | | |
| 言う | 申す (もうす) | おっしゃる |
| 食べる、飲む、吸う | 頂く (いただく) | 召し上がる (めしあがる) |
| 知っている | 存 (ぞん) じています | 御存知 (ごぞんじ) です |
| 会う | お会いする | お目にかかる |
| 聞く/訪ねる = ask | 伺う (うかがう) | |
| | | |
| 連絡 (れんらく) する | ご連絡する | 連絡なさる = contact someone |
| 紹介 (しょうかい) する | ご紹介する | 紹介なさる = introduce someone |
| 結婚する | 結婚する | ご結婚なさる |
| | | |
| 見る、読む | 拝見する | ご覧になる |
| | | |

10. Some irregular personal terms:

me: わたし、わたくし、あたし、ぼく、おれ、(われ、わし、おのれ)

> you: あなた、きみ、おまえ、てまえ、きさま、おのれ、じぶん、そちらさま = polite on phone

wife (speaker side): 家内 (かない)、妻 (つま)、女房 (にようぼう)

> wife (listener side): 奥さん (おくさん)、奥様 (おくさま)

husband: 主人 (しゅじん)、夫 (おっと)、ハズ、

> your husband: 御主人 (ごしゅじん)、旦那さん (だんなさん)、旦那様 (〜さま)

Note that a husband will directly address his wife by her first name (or some endearing form thereof, or きみ, or even おかあさん if there are children, etc.), but almost never using a demonstrative for ‘wife.’ Wives will use the first name or a cutesy-version (てっちゃん), or お父さん if there are children, or あなた if they are creepy and cloying, but will generally not use a demonstrative that directly means ‘husband.’

11. More family terms:

Note that with most other family terms, when you address the person directly, the person is on the 'listener' side of the conversation. For this reason, the labels 'in-group' and 'out-group' are misleading.

| | | | |
|--|---|------------------------------------|--|
| 母 (はは) | > | お母さん (おかあさん) | |
| 父 (ちち) = おやじ | > | お父さん (おとうさん) | |
| 姉 (あね) = 姉貴 (あねぎ) | > | お姉さん (おねえさん) | |
| 妹 (いもうと) | > | お妹さん (おいもうとさん) [not used directly] | |
| 兄 (あに) = 兄貴 (あにぎ) | > | お兄さん (おにいさん) | |
| 弟 (おとうそ) | > | 弟さん (おとうとさん) [not used directly] | |
| 息子 (むすこ) | > | 息子さん [not used directly] | |
| 愚息 (ぐそく) = my stupid son [literary] | | | |
| 娘 (むすめ) | > | 娘さん [not used directly] | |
| 子 (こ)、子供 | > | お子さん [not used directly] | |
| 両親 (りょうしん) | > | ご両親 [not used directly] | |
| 祖母 (そぼ) | > | おばあさん | |
| 曾祖母 (そうそぼ、ひいばば、ひおおば、ひばば) = great-grandmother | | | |
| 祖父 (そふ) | > | おじいさん | |
| 曾祖父 (そうそふ、ひいじじ、ひおおじ、ひじじ) = great-grandfather | | | |
| 叔父 (おじ) = uncle who is the younger brother of mother or father | > | おじさん | |
| 伯父 (おじ) = uncle who is the older brother of mother or father | > | おじさん | |
| 叔母 (おば) = aunt who is the younger sister of mother or father | > | おばさん | |
| 伯母 (おば) = aunt who is the older sister of mother of father | > | おばさん | |
| 甥 (おい) = nephew | | | |
| 姪 (めい) = niece | | | |
| 孫 (まご) = grandchild | > | おまごさん [not used directly] | |
| 義理の母 (ぎりのはは) = my mother-in-law | | | |
| 義理の父 (ぎりのちち) = my father-in-law | | | |