Strategies of Impoliteness in Japanese Spontaneous Talks

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Abstract   If, on the one hand, Japanese language, with its richness of marked allo-morphs used for honorifics, has been considered one of the most attractive languages to investigate the phenomenon of politeness, on the other hand, a very small number of studies have been devoted to Japanese impoliteness, most of them limited to BBSs' (Bulletin Board System) chats on Internet. Interestingly, Japanese native speakers de-clare, in general, that their language has a very limited number of offensive expressions and that 'impoliteness' is not a characteristic of their mother tongue. I tried to analyse some samples of spontaneous conversations taken from YouTube and other multimedia repertoires, in order to detect the main strategies used in Japanese real conversations to cause offence or to show a threatening attitude toward the partner's face. It seems possible to state that, notwithstanding the different 'cultural' peculiarities, impolite-ness shows, also in Japanese, a set of strategies common to other languages and that impoliteness, in terms of morphology, is not a mirror counterpart of *keigo*.

Keywords   Japanese impoliteness. Spontaneous talk. Keigo. Pragma-linguistics. Jap-anese phonetics.

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1 Introduction

The aim of this article is to present some of the results of my research on Japanese impoliteness. Following the scheme proposed by Culpeper et al. (2003) for what he defined as *impoliteness superstrategies*, Calvetti (2014) pointed out, that in Japanese too face attacks are realised in the same way as in other languages, such as English or Italian.

As Japanese lacks overt derogative expressions (more precisely swear words), or at any rate only has a small number of them, what is more important in Japanese impoliteness is the distance between the expected expression in a certain circumstance and the expression actually used. In other words, in Japanese the simple use of an alternative form of the personal pronoun, one less honorific than the expected form, could be perceived as a genuine attack against the interlocutor, with the same derogative value as a true swear word in another language. One extreme case of this, quoted by Coulmas (2005), is the misuse of honorific terms, which triggered a violent reaction by a man addressed by his colleague with the intimate/colloquial *-kun* suffix. Mr. Yamada, one of two young employees, addressed his colleague as "Tanaka-*kun*" (instead of the probably expected "Tanaka-*san*") and "this made Mr. Tanaka so angry that he hit Mr. Yamada's head against the wall of the railway station […] causing him fatal injuries" and ultimately killing him (Coulmas 2005, 299). Indeed, in court, the misuse of honorifics was invoked by Mr. Tanaka to justify the accident.

Following a pragma-linguistic approach (Leech 2014, 13-18), in my new research I have tried to detect some trigger expressions that seem to be recurrent at the beginning or at the end of an impolite utterance. They are not (or at least are not recognized as) morphologically codified structures, as in the case of *keigo* (Japanese honorifics), but they are rather formulas suggesting to one's conversation partner that the following utterance is meant to break social conventions, thereby revealing the speaker's intention to clash with or contradict the other person's position. These patterns may be combined with phonetic variations, like a raising of the voice, specific intonation patterns or a particular way of expressing certain phonemes.

2 Japanese Politeness

We are often told that Japanese is a language marked by a widespread usage of honorifics and a very polite attitude in daily conversation. There is a huge (specialist as well as non-specialist) literature on "Japanese politeness", which usually stresses the peculiarities of Japanese honorifics, their morphological richness, and their important role in preserving "social harmony" (regarded as an important

value specific to the Japanese case). The Japanese verbal strategy to convey politeness is described and represented as highly codified (Asada 2014). There exists a sort of prescribed code of usage, generally centred on the morphological mechanism of transformation of "neutral utterances" into honorific ones, which is commonly accepted in "formal society": for example, new recruits in a company, or salesmen working in department stores, undergo language training during their first months of service in order to teach them how to "properly" employ the honorific register of the language. Needless to say, in Japanese – as in other languages – politeness is acquired during the language-acquisition process and the variations of each native speaker depend on many factors like their social stratus, family environment, educational background, and prolonged interaction with speakers from other social strata. The acquisition of politeness competences, however, is subject to a sort of explicit "training" within family and school, in particular during school years, when children are exposed to normative *keigo* rules. Significantly, *Japanese politeness* is constantly regarded as an important aspect of the language, deserving attention and care also at an institutional level, as shown by the guidelines frequently issued by the Agency for Cultural Affairs (*Bunkachō*) of the Japanese Ministry of Education.[1]

Japanese politeness has been also a field of academic debate among those who maintain that the Japanese case should be analysed within a universal theoretical framework (Usami 2001; 2002a; 2002b; Pizziconi 2003), and those who stress the uniqueness of Japanese or deal with it as a particular case (Matsumoto 1988; Ide 1989; Matsumoto 2003).

3 Japanese Impoliteness

Given the importance attributed to Japanese politeness, research and papers on Japanese impoliteness are not so numerous, as pointed out by Nishimura (2019) who gives a recent up-to-date list of studies dealing with the subject. Moreover some studies deal mainly with single lexical or phrase forms and focus on curses or swear words (Hoshino 1974; Nishio 1998). In other cases "impoliteness" is included in the theoretical framework of "politeness theory" yet not investigated with concrete linguistic examples (Usami 2002a). In one of her papers on "discourse politeness" Usami, referring to her calculation of the "politeness value", states that "*impoliteness* could be consid-

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[1] The Agency for Cultural Affairs has established a sub-committee devoted to *keigo* and the official documents are available on the internet site of the Agency: `https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/bunkashingikai/sokai/sokai_6/pdf/keigo_tousin.pdf`.

ered as a verbal behaviour in which 'the politeness value', calculated as the difference of the estimate of the face threat between speaker and listener, is expressed as a value contained between 0-α and -1". This range of values (0-α to -1), according to Usami's scheme (2002a, 97), corresponds to what she defines as "minus-politeness". In doing so, Usami tries to include "impoliteness" within her comprehensive theoretical framework of discourse politeness, which derives from Brown and Levinson's (1987) classical theory of politeness.

Some authors even consider Japanese impoliteness a failure, an aborted formation, so to say, of utterances not properly formed.[2] Not necessarily in a Gricean way, this approach appears to rely on the unspoken assumption that conversation and communication should be performed on the basis of reciprocal cooperation, and that keeping harmony and peace between speakers should be the rule of human interaction, in particular in a society, like the Japanese one, where the concept of *wa* (social harmony) has been overvalued and mythicized.[3] This view fails to recognise the fact that impoliteness could be a deliberate strategy to attack the face of our communication partner – actually a recurrent situation in natural communication. As already noted, the absence of *keigo* morphology does not necessarily mean the formation of impolite utterances, whereas the use of morphological structures marked as "polite" in informal contexts could result in a face attack perceived as "impolite".

Calvetti (2014), following the schema of *impoliteness superstrategies* of Culpeper et al. (2003), demonstrates that "bald on record impoliteness", "positive impoliteness", "negative impoliteness", "sarcasm or mock politeness" and "withhold politeness"[4] are also used

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2 See, for example, Noguchi 2013.

3 Social harmony (*wa*), like "cooperation", is an *a priori* element that is taken for granted in many sociological descriptions of the Japanese society (Benedict 1946; Nakane 1973; Hendry 1987), and which still shapes the image of Japan. It goes hand in hand with another myth, namely that Japan has a low number of legal controversies – which is not the case at all, as shown by many jurists specialising on Japan (Haley 1978; Foote, Ōta 2010; in Italian see Colombo 2012).

4 Quoting Culpeper et al. (2003, 1554-5), we could describe these five categories as follows: "1. [...] Bald on record impoliteness is typically deployed where there is much face at stake, and where there is an intention on the part of the speaker to attack the face of the hearer. [...] 2. Positive impoliteness. The use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants ('ignore, snub the other', 'exclude the other from the activity', 'disassociate from the other', 'be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic', 'use inappropriate identity markers, 'seek disagreement', 'make the other feel uncomfortable, 'use taboo words', 'call the other names'. [...]) 3. Negative impoliteness. The use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants ('frighten', 'condescend, scorn, or ridicule', 'invade the other's space', 'explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect', 'put the other's indebtedness on record', 'hinder or block the other – physically or linguistically', etc.). [...] 4. Sarcasm or mock politeness. The use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain

in Japanese to convey an impolite message, at least in daily conversation and oral communication.

Here I wish to focus on some recurrent expressions that appear to signal to one's conversation partner that the utterance conceals a hostile attitude and that it could be associated with what, in Culpeper's terms, is defined as "bald on record impoliteness" or "positive impoliteness".

4   Some Data

For my research I mainly analysed excerpts from YouTube videos of critical situations like quarrels, discussions etc. in which, I assumed, people were more likely to face some impolite utterances. In addition, in order to check some of my intuitions on the use of "trigger expressions", I used the BCCWJ (Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese),[5] making use in particular of Japanese blog dialogues recorded in this corpus.

Differently from codified "polite expressions" (*keigo*), in which is possible to recognize morphological markers or fixed conversational models (often taught at school or in familiar contexts), to detect impolite expressions or impolite language acts it is important to identify the reaction of the interlocutor. Needless to say, it is in fact not the linguistic form in itself that determines a reaction, but how it is interpreted by the interlocutor who is the "target" of an impolite pragmatic act. On this assumption, I analyzed a series of "critical contexts" in which some kind of annoyed reaction is shown.

5   Trigger Expressions

Here I use "trigger expression" not as it is used in informatics, but as a word or phrase that initiates a process or a course in a dialogue. In this sense, Leech too uses *triggers* to define pragmatic actions that lead to a certain interpretation of language messages (Leech 2014, 237). Morphological, syntactical and lexical elements jointly contribute to form-

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surface realizations. [...] 5. Withhold politeness. Keep silent or fail to act where politeness work is expected".

5   BCCWJ is a balanced corpus of about one hundred million words of contemporary written Japanese developed by the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics (NINJAL). The compilation of BCCWJ started in 2006 as a five-year project and consists of three sub-corpora: The Publication sub-corpus, the Library sub-corpus, and the Special-purpose sub-corpus. The last of these contains a series of mutually unrelated mini corpora that include governmental white papers, textbooks, laws, best-selling books, and texts from the Internet.

ing "expressions" within which none of these elements, taken individually, could be identified as the marker of a polite or, on the contrary, impolite register. However, they seem to recur in impolite utterances to introduce some sort of face attack against the interlocutor.

5.1 *Dakara*

As I mentioned earlier, there are some recurrent expressions that act like signals of a strong will on the speaker's part to generate an imposition on the interlocutor or criticize his/her position. One is *dakara* ('that's why') at the beginning of a sentence, as in:

A: *Asobi ni ikō yo*.
   Let's go and play.

B: *Dakara ikitakunaitte*.
   I told you I didn't want to.

Literally, *dakara* is an explicative expression ('that's why' or 'that being so'), but in this case it is used to hint that the speaker's will (which is in contrast to the request or pressure from the interlocutor) has its reasons. It expresses and also underlines a subjective and personal opinion of the speaker and, generally speaking, this attitude seems to be regarded as "non polite". Thus the interpretation of the pragmatic meaning of *dakara* (in spoken language usually occurring at the head of a sentence) should probably be rather glossed as "listen, and get what I'm saying!". In my collection of data it is often found in co-occurrence with a rhetoric question formula (*itta darō*, etc. 'I told you [*didn't I?*]') at the end of the sentence.

A: *Nanji kara?*
   From what time?

B: *Dakara ichiji datte itta daro!*
   I told you, didn't I? It's from one o'clock.

Or, as one can see from the next example taken from a video clip,[6] *dakara* often co-occurs with the final phrase *ja nai* (*desu*) *ka* ('isn't it?') when used in this impolite way.

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6 "Tsukishima keisatsusho no munō, detarame o tsuikyū suru 1/3", http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlzu3fd1U8Y (no more available but downloaded and saved in June 2013). It is the first of three parts of a video clip recorded by the Shuken o kaifuku suru kai, an ultra-nationalist Japanese organization, which usually posts its protests on the Web.

A: a protester B: policeman C: another protester

A:	*Katte ni yatte ii n desu ka.*	'Is it possible to do it as one likes?'
B:	*Nani yaru n desu ka*	'What is it that you want to do?'
A:	*Dakara, itta janai?*	'That's the matter!'
	Mō ikkai ikimasu yo.	'I'll go [there] again'.
C:	*Yamero yo. Abunai kara.*	'Stop it! It's dangerous'.
A:	*Ikkai ittatte wakaranai kara.*	'I told them once but still they don't get it'.

These two examples imply a sort of criticism against the interlocutor's inability to remember the information previously received from the speaker or to understand what the speaker is saying. The explicatory meaning of *dakara* underlines that it is "because of" the dullness of the interlocutor that communication is not going on. In the second example this element is more clearly emphasized in the protester's (A's) last utterance, which explains that he is repeating his action because he "told them once but they still don't understand".

5.2 Omission of the Copula

Another syntactic construction suggesting an impolite attitude is the ellipsis of the copula in interrogative sentences like *Anta wa dare?* ('Who are you?'), where the equivalent of the English verb *to be* is omitted ('Who [are] you?'). This sentence sounds impolite for the use of the pronoun *anta* (a particularly informal allomorph of the pronoun *anata*) and for the omission of the copula *desu*. These reinforce the negative implications of the fact that the sentence transgresses the *default* Japanese communicative (or behavioural) norm according to which one does not usually ask direct questions (on this *default* concept, see Agha 2007; Pizziconi 2011, 56-7).

Consider the two following excerpts from a YouTube video.[7] The first represents a verbal attack by the same representative of the Japanese ultra-nationalist group presented above, who addresses a woman in an inquisitorial tone, asking her if she is Korean:

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7 This is a scene from a protest by the same ultra-nationalist organization quoted above, against an exhibition about the so-called "comfort women", Korean women forced to work as prostitutes for the Japanese army during the Second World War: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wvxj3luBMj4&list=PLFBE1AB54B1624DEB&index=14 (removed from the net, but downloaded and saved in June 2013).

A:	*Nan no shusshin*, *anta wa*?	What's [your] birthplace, you?
	Doko no shusshin?	Where [do you come] from?
	Chōsenjin, anta?	'You Korean?'
B:	*Chōsenjin yo!*	'Korean, yes!'

The second excerpt shows the same man asking the Korean woman if she likes Japan:

A:	*Nihon suki, kirai?*	'Japan: do you like it or dislike it?'
B:	*Suki to ka, kirai to ka, kankē nai!*	'Like, don't like… it doesn't matter!'

In both examples, characterized by the scrambling of POS and the ellipsis of postpositions – features that are typical of spoken language – and by the absence of the polite colloquial suffix -*masu*, the impoliteness is also conveyed through the omission of the copula – in particular in the utterances by the male speaker – in nominal predicates (*doko no shussin* [desu ka], *chōsenjin* [desu ka], *anta*) and in adjectival noun predicates, as in *Nihon suki* [desu ka], *kirai* [desu ka]?

Again, in the following video excerpt[8] (a police check in an urban railway station in Tōkyō) the man questioned refuses to state his name and in return asks if it is legal for him to film the policeman. At the beginning he uses the copula in the noun predicate, but at the end he asks the same thing in a more rude form, without using the copula:

A: man B: policeman

A:	*Bideo o toru no ga hihō kōi desu ka*	'Is it an illegal act to film?'
B:	*Janakute…*	'That's not the point…'
B:	*…Go-kyōryoku* [indistinct]… *de*	'your collaboration [*indistinct*]… and'
A:	*Hihō kōi ka dō ka o kiite ru n desu, docchi?*	'I'm asking if it's a legal act or not. Which one [is it]?'
B:	*…*	'…'
A:	*Gōhō ka hihō ka. Docchi?*	'Legal or illegal? Which one [is it]?'

Again, as shown in Calvetti (2014), the expression *no desu ka* ('It is that… ?'), along with its abbreviated variations, at the end of a sentence could act as a question "intensifier". It stresses the speaker's assumption that the interlocutor may indeed have some knowledge of something (this is the case with the verbs *shiru/wakaru* 'to know/

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8 "Kita Senjū eki de shokumu shitsumon ni aimashita", http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j6nxwOV8fcI (last accessed in November 2015).

to understand'). For this reason it seems to be perceived as rough, inquisitive and hence "impolite", especially when it co-occurs with verbs like *wakaru* and *shiru*, whereby the speaker is effectively asking if the interlocutor is clever enough to get the point.

The following are just two examples taken from *Yahoo! Japan* and from a novel, both recorded in the BCCWJ:

Dore dake ya na omoi shite sunde iru no ka, wakatte n no ka? Betsu no basho ni hikkoshitai. Mō, konna tokoro ni sumitakunai!!

Do **you** know how much I'm suffering while living here? I'd like to move to another place. It's enough, I don't want to live here!! (*Yahoo!* 2008)

Yamero. Omae jibun ga nani itteru no ka wakatte n no ka?

Stop it! Do you understand what you're saying?! (Miyabe Miyuki, *Dareka*, 2003)

5.3 Mitigation of Impolite Expressions

I now wish to quote some expressions, usually found at the beginning of sentences, or in parenthetic clauses, just before phrases containing impolite speech acts, that formally introduce an apology about what the speaker is about to say, like "I'm sorry to say that…" or "It's impolite to say that…". As noted by Culpeper, the result of this strategy is that it "seems to exacerbate the impoliteness" (Culpeper 2011, 178).

The pattern is the introduction of a mitigation expression followed by an adversative conjunction like *ga*, *kedo* ('but', 'however') etc. This acts as a warning signal to introduce the impolite phrase, as in the following examples:

Sukina hito niwa mōshiwake nai kedo konna koto suru nara inakunare.

I'm sorry for those who like him, but if he does things like that, he can go and get lost! (*Yahoo! blog* 2008)

Sono ue de, okugata to kodomo no namae made kaite kuru no de areba, shitsurei desu ga, tan n naru baka deshō.

On top of this, if he even writes the names of his wife and children, I'm sorry, but he's nothing but a fool. (*Yahoo! Chiebukuro* 2005)

Here again, the imbalance between the formal aspect of the sentence and the real objective of the utterance (a face attack on one's partner) ends up enhancing the power of the attack, and increasing the level of the offence. This strategy too seems to be common to many languages and, differently from swear words, could be translated, almost word for word from Japanese.

5.4 Further Investigations

In the near future, further research is likely to reveal other syntactic strategies and elements associated with impolite acts. For the time being, however, it is enough to note that, differently from the honorific language, where specific morpho-syntactic structures support the formation of polite sentences, in impolite utterances the devices used to signal the speaker's impoliteness rely on aspects of the language that are not symmetric to those of the honorific system of the Japanese language. Needless to say, also in the case of Japanese honorifics, it is not only the structure of the language and the selection of honorific allomorphs that contribute to the realization of so-called "honorific utterances". Indeed, in analysing Japanese, as well as in teaching it as a second language, much weight has been given to the morphology of Japanese honorifics. Teaching Japanese impoliteness (which is considered necessary at least for the sake of students' comprehension skills) requires a wider analysis of the pragmatic aspects of the language.

6 Phonetic and Prosodic Features

Lastly, I briefly wish to analyse some phonetic aspects of Japanese impoliteness. As is clear from the few examples I have already introduced, impolite intentions are often associated with prosodic features. Shouting at one's partner, interrupting him/her by rising one's voice, etc. are, in particular contexts in which impolite intentions are involved, universal aspects of impoliteness since they are strategies to show that the speaker is willing to attack the interlocutor's face.

I do not have comparative data about speech loudness across different languages. Therefore, I am unable to confirm the common impression that Japanese talk with a low voice compared, for example, to Italian or German native speakers in similar contexts. Yet, raising one's voice, speaking louder and changing the intonation are all relative phenomena within one language, and also in the case of Japanese, phonetic and prosody contribute to the formation of impoliteness.

Speaking of face attacks, I will focus on just three phenomena related to impoliteness strategies: 1. noticeable jump in pitch accent; 2.
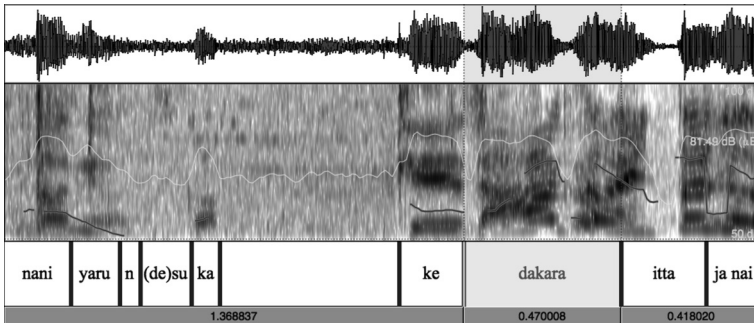
nani	yaru	n	(de)su	ka		ke	dakara	itta	ja nai
		1.368837					0.470008		0.418020

falling intonation denoting a "rhetoric question"; and 3. trill (stressed trill) /r/ marked as an "impolite" feature of oral communication.

6.1 Jump in Pitch Accent

In the example provided for the trigger expression *dakara* (*dakara itta janai* 'I told you! That's the matter'), the man protesting against the policeman introduces the word *dakara* with a remarkable rising jump of the pitch accent **[fig. 1]**. Usually in *dakara* we have a falling of the pitch accent after the first mora, according to the pattern H-L-L (high, low, low). On the contrary, here we can observe a rising intonation (and a slight lengthening of /a/ in the first syllable /da/ [da˥ːkaɾa])[9] that stresses the role of the explicative conjunction *dakara*. In this case, then, we can assume that the production of an impolite form is not only the result of the use of a particular lexical or phrasal form, but that it could also derive from the application of specific phonetic or prosodic elements.

6.2 Falling Intonation

In the example of a quarrel between an old lady bothering a group of high school students with annoying requests, we find the question pattern "*janai desu ka*" ('isn't it…'), which is normally used to ask for confirmation of the speaker's belief.

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9 Here I have added to the IPA transcription the non-standard diacritics ˥ and ´ to mark, respectively, the rise and the fall of the pitch accent, as in [da˥kaɾa] (H-L-L) and [bɑˊɾɑ] (L-H).
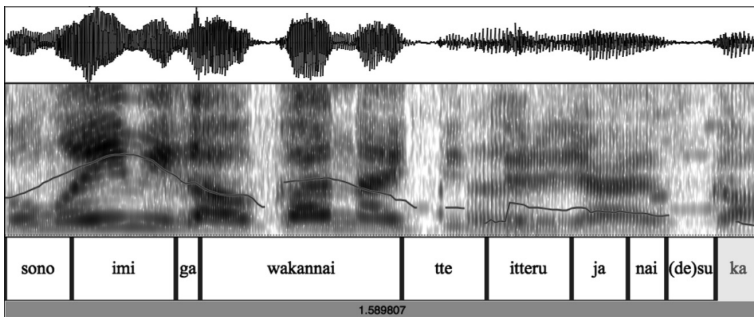
| sono | imi | ga | wakannai | tte | itteru | ja | nai | (de)su | ka |

1.589807

Sono imi ga wakannai tte itteru ja nai [de]su ka

Am I not telling you that I don't understand what it means?!

Despite the "polite" form of the copula (*desu*), here we can notice the contracted forms of the verb and the verb auxiliary (respectively *wakannai* instead of *wakaranai* and *itteru* instead of *itte iru*), as well as the relaxed form *tte* instead of the quotation particle *to* that belongs to a colloquial register. Moreover, as we can see from the shape of the intonation, the blue line of the pitch is descending (by contrast to the normal trend for question intonation), and this indicates that the question is a rhetorical one, where no answer is expected from the partner **[fig. 2]**.

This is a strategy used to put pressure on the interlocutor, by attacking his/her positive face, and demonstrating that he/she is not able to understand what the speaker is saying. Rhetorical questions seems to be an effective tool (in a disputative context) to convey a sharp criticism of the positive self-evaluation of one's conversation partner, and hence to slight – albeit not in an overt way – one's counterpart during discussions and squabbles.

6.3 Stressed Trill /r/

Normally in Standard Japanese we have only one type of liquid consonant, the so-called apico-alveolar flap, as in *bara* [bɑ́ɾɑ] 'rose'. However, it actually seems that there are many individual variations of this: the flap can vary from an alveolar trill [r] to a retroflex flap [ɽ] or an alveolar lateral approximant [l]. In particular, the phoneme /r/ could be pronounced as an apico-alveolar trill with a strong vibration when the speaker wants to sound tough (Vance 2008, 89). This kind of sound is found in gangster slang, and it is not limited to Tōkyō's dialect.
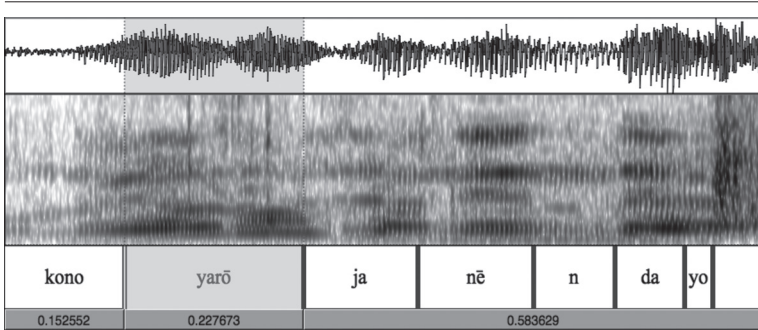
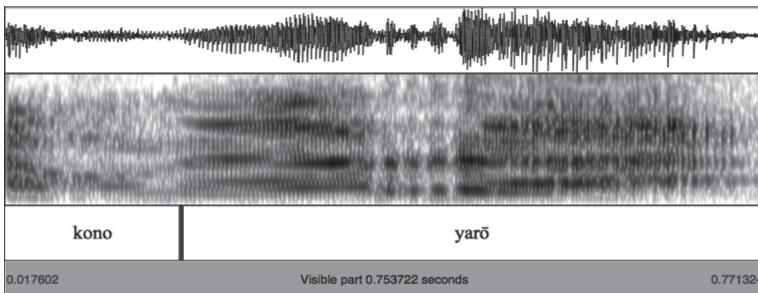**Figure 3** Policeman's utterance

Figure 4 Utterance of a man questioned at a police check

In the following examples we have an exchange of utterances between a man questioned at a police check and a policeman.[10] Both pronounce the word *yarō*, but the policeman only uses it when quoting the offensive words directed at him by the man. In this case the phoneme /r/ is realized as an apico-alveolar flap [ɾ] **[fig. 3]**, while the young man who wanted to offend the policeman uses the marked stressed alveolar trill [r] **[fig. 4],** as shown by the following instrumental analysis, where the repeated vibration of the trill is evident.

The same man, protesting against an underhand body search, shouts that the behaviour of the police is disgusting. He says *kimochi warui n da yo* ('It's disgusting!') and here again the phoneme /r/ in the adjective *warui* ('bad') is pronounced loudly, with a strong stress, as an alveolar trill **[fig. 5]**.

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10 "Keishichō jitsuroku 24ji. Asakusa keisatsu shukumu shitsumon 2", http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVoiVWmtRoQ (last accessed in November 2015).

kimochi	warui	n	da	yo
0.406062	0.245986		0.394194	

7 Conclusions: Distance Between Expected Register and Register Used

Differently from the construction of morphological patterns used in Japanese honorifics, for strategies of impoliteness we do not have commonly recognized and prescriptive codified patterns. Needless to say, also in the case of politeness, the use of honorific and polite forms (verbal or adjectival forms, polite noun prefixes, etc.) does not necessarily and automatically produce "polite utterances" (as discussed in Agha 2007, 302 and Pizziconi 2011, 62). On the other hand, the use of "plain" (not honorific and polite) morphology is not a marker of impolite language. The main strategy to cause offence in using the language seems to be the creation of a gap between the expected forms (lexical items, morphology, intonation) and the realized forms of utterance, as demonstrated by the extreme and exceptional reaction quoted by Coulmas (2005).

In this perspective, I have tried to select some forms that in face attacks help convey the speaker's intention to oppose the interlocutor's attitude and to behave in an uncooperative way, by suggesting that the conversation partner is not intelligent or quick-witted enough to get what the speaker is saying.

Along with the use of what I have called "trigger expressions", phonetic and prosodic features work together and jointly contribute to the formation of marked utterances that are perceived as impolite messages by native speakers, as well as by advanced speakers of Japanese as a foreign language.

When analysing strategies of impoliteness, we must always bear in mind that Japanese does not have a large number of terms used as offensive expressions. The simple change of a personal pronoun, for example, or the choice of the form of the copula or of the auxiliary verb etc. could be enough to create a gap between the interlocutor's expectations and the speaker's utterance.

While it is possible to state that the strategies of Japanese impoliteness follow general mechanisms outlined by Culpeper (2003) in his theoretical framework about the *impoliteness superstrategies*, it is also true that is possible to detect different levels of subtlety in the mechanism for the realization of face attacks.

In conclusion, it is possible to say that the mismatch of forms is one of the most productive mechanisms for the realization of impolite utterances in Japanese. This strategy can be observed, as we have seen, in cases where trigger expressions are employed or where inappropriate speech levels are chosen. In a language that is not very rich in offensive expressions and swear words, the simple choice of a personal pronoun unsuited to a certain context is equivalent to the use of a swear word in other languages like Italian or English.

Similarly, the use of expressions that imply a low opinion of the interlocutor's capability to understand things, like reiterated rhetorical questions or underlined explanations, accompanied with particular intonation patterns or phonetic features, could be enough to realize an impolite linguistic performance.

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