

A Study of Gerunds in Japanese Respect Language

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Abstract

Modern Japanese honorific language displays a variety of gerund constructions, such as *go*~[kanji gerund]~*ninaru*, *go*~[kanji gerund]~*nasaru*, [kanji gerund]~*nasaru*, and *go*~[kanji gerund]~*kudasaru*. However, these differing structures do not seem to reflect significant semantic differences. This paper, therefore, aims to explore alternative factors influencing the usage of gerund phrases by examining the contexts of their use in “The Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese” (BCCWJ). After extracting and analyzing all sentences containing the aforementioned gerund forms, four major findings emerge:

1. The *go*~*kudasai* variation of the *go*~*kudasaru* pattern is primarily used in honorific commands.
2. ~*nasaru* is the most statistically common pattern in Japanese honorific language.
3. Besides showing respect for the verbal action, *go*~*nasaru* is adopted to additionally highlight the status of the person addressed.
4. Gerunds of verbs such as “echo,” “dry,” “happen,” “initiate,” and “operate” are mainly used to describe objective facts and as such are irrelevant to the actions of the person addressed. Hence, they are rarely used.

Key words: Respect Language, Chinese Gerund, Honorific Language