

## ***SU(M)IMASEN AND GOMEN NASAI: BEYOND APOLOGETIC FUNCTIONS IN JAPANESE***

Roxana Sandu

### **Abstract**

Previous research on Japanese apologies has presented us with a somewhat static approach, connecting one linguistic form to one aspect of the social context. However, interaction itself is a dynamic and spontaneous process; consequently, apology expressions' meanings are situated and negotiated in the place of interaction. Therefore, in this study, shifts from *gomen* to *su(m)imasen* and *gomen nasai*, and from *su(m)imasen* to *gomen nasai*, were analyzed in order to demonstrate that Japanese apologies function as indexical signs of emotional expression. To this end, data was collected from Japanese television dramas, where the ongoing development of the relationships protagonists were involved in was chronologically observed. Using as analytical concepts, (1) the social context of an interaction, (2) the selves participants impersonate, and (3) the speech styles the interactions occur in, to explain situated variation in the use of apology expressions, the current study revealed new meanings an apology carries in a situated context and also reinforced some of the previous research findings.

**Keywords:** Japanese apologies; *Su(m)imasen*; *Gomen nasai*; Speech styles; Self-presentation; Emotivity; Indexicality.

### **1. Introduction**

Traditionally, research on Japanese apologies has focused on the multiple functions they serve in social interactions. Their multifaceted nature, especially the co-occurrence with thanks, has attracted a great deal of research (Coulmas 1981; Kumatoridani 1988, 1990, 1999; Nakada 1989; Sumida 1990, 1992; Ogawa 1993, 1995; Miyake 1994; Kimura 1994; Shishido et al. 1996; Ide 1998; Ono et al. 2001; Komori 2001; Tateyama 2001; Cohen and Ishihara 2005; Long 2010, among others).

Japanese apologies exhibit a striking diversity. Previous research sheds some light on how we can differentiate them, especially in regard to social factors intervening in the selection of the appropriate expression, such as social status, age, degree of intimacy, and *uchi* (in-group) versus *soto* (out-group) relationships. Whereas these findings have provided us with crucial insights into the use of Japanese apologies, they present a somewhat static approach, mapping one linguistic form to one aspect of the social context (i.e. *sumimasen* is used towards people of higher status; *gomen* is used towards people of equal or lower status).

However, one has to keep in mind that interaction is mainly spontaneous and

human relationships do not always follow the expected norms. Relationships' statuses are constantly changing or undergoing negotiation, progressing or digressing; relationships are constructed over time, and people make their linguistic choices based on the status of their relationship at a certain moment in time and space.

For instance, the use of honorifics in Japanese mirrors the way apologies are bound by the dynamic nature of human relationships. Barke (2010: 472) emphasizes the fact that "the establishment of norms in relation to honorific use between interactants is not always a straightforward process" and I believe the same could be said about apologies. "In each interactional relationship, norms emerge over time, and they are often negotiated, especially when competing contextual factors make the distinction of comparative social statuses unclear", Barke (2010) further argues. Likewise, the use of apology expressions is negotiated, and its norms created within a relationship over time.

Hence, fully concurring with the idea that "language is a socially organized phenomenon, and meaning is not a sole property of language but is situated and negotiated in social context" (Cook 2008: 2), this study aims at highlighting that Japanese apologies could also be part of a dynamic and negotiative process. This could be especially true, when referring to the use of apologies between people involved in a relationship where social conditions apparently remain unchanged. Given this basic assumption the current study is based on, it will be argued that these expressions' functions could go beyond apology, involving complex negotiations and presentations of selves.

Moreover, this study puts into perspective Maynard's definition of "emotives" and their critical role for the understanding of Japanese apologies. Emotives are "indexical signs that reveal the speaker's identity indexically associated with the speaker's social, cultural, and emotional conditions, and are interpreted on the basis of cotextual and contextual information that are indexically linked to the place of communication" (2002: 4). In this sense, Japanese apology expressions will be presented as indexical signs, whose meanings are situated and negotiated in the actual social context of an interaction.

Summing up all of the above, the scope of this study is threefold: (1) to demonstrate that Japanese apologies undergo a dynamic and negotiative process, (2) to reveal the complex process of self-presentation hidden behind mere apologies, (3) to argue that Japanese apology expressions are mostly situated and negotiated in the actual context of an interaction, and not used based on some previously agreed norms.

## **2. Emotion, apology, speech style and self**

Maynard (2000, 2001, 2002) argues that language is filled with emotion. She investigates different linguistic aspects (i.e. stylistic shifts, vocatives, interactional particles, interrogatives etc.) and reveals that emotive meanings are omnipresent in interaction, governing and influencing our linguistic choices. Although the speech act of apology has been associated with emotional expression – illocutionary acts performed by a speaker who expresses emotions or attitudes (Searle 1979) – to my knowledge, few studies, if any, investigate them as indexical signs of emotional expression.

Cook (2008: 1) defines indexicality "as the function of language that points to an aspect of the social dimension in the immediate situation at hand." Language commonly appears in a certain speech style, and so does an apology expression. With respect to the

Japanese language, honorifics and sentence-final particles as indexical signs have been extensively studied. Barke (2010, 2011) is one of the few who mentions apology expressions, such as *su(m)imasen* and *gomen (nasai)*, when analyzing Japanese honorifics. Barke (2010: 462) classifies *su(m)imasen* and *gomen nasai* as “horizontally distancing (henceforth HD) forms [which] index social/psychological distance between the speaker and the addressee, not hierarchical status differences between the speaker and the addressee/referent.”, and *gomen (ne)* as “-HD”, which stands for non-horizontally distancing.

At this point of our discussion, without agreeing or disagreeing with the above-mentioned classification, I would like to draw attention to yet another aspect ignored by previous apology speech act research, which is the close relation between an apology expression and the speech style in which it is performed. This section will report relevant results on the use of apology expressions, as well as the use of honorific and non-honorific forms in the Japanese language.

### 2.1. Japanese apologies: A hybrid species

*Su(m)imasen*, *mōshiwake arimasen*, *gomen (nasai)*, *shitsurei (shimashita)*, *warui* and their variants, are commonly recognized as typical expressions used in daily apologetic interactions. Coulmas (1981: 82) explains, “there is a great variety of very general apology formulae whose range of application is not very specific” and “in many cases, ‘apologizing’ is not the sole function which their utterance serves”. In this line of thought, much of previous research concentrated on revealing the multiple functions these expressions serve, and the different factors intervening in their performance.

*Su(m)imasen* is the only apology expression that has received focused attention for the last three decades and the findings offer crucial insights into its usage. However, other apology expressions have been only adjacently researched and the results merely disclose the meanings concealed beyond the simple form of what is commonly believed to be an apology. Since the results of this study will mainly deal with *su(m)imasen* and *gomen nasai* the focus of this review will be primarily on these two expressions.

Interestingly, neither *su(m)imasen* nor *gomen (nasai)* have the meaning of apology or to apologize embedded in their form. Whereas the literal meaning of *sumimasen* is ‘this is not the end’ or ‘it has not finished’ and represents the polite negative form of the verb *sumu*, which means ‘to finish’, *gomen nasai* presents a more complex and peculiar form. The expression consists of three parts: *Go*, a prefix used to convey deference, *men*, which means ‘permission’ and *nasai*, the imperative form of *nasaru*, which is the honorific form of the verb *suru*, ‘to do’.

In social interactions, both expressions are encountered in a variety of situations, serving numerous functions and covering a wide range of meanings. As already stated, researchers unceasingly used as their point of reference *sumimasen* (Coulmas 1981; Kumatoridani 1988, 1999; Sumida 1990, 1992; Ogawa 1993, 1995; Kimura 1994; Ide 1998; Ono et al. 2001; Komori 2001; Tateyama 2001, among others). In the attempt to determine its multi-dimensional nature, Sumida (1992) mentions *sumimasen* as marking an upcoming refusal and Ide (1998) identifies up to seven pragmatic functions of this expression: Sincere apology, quasi-thanks and apology, request marker, attention-getting device, leave-taking device, affirmative and confirmational response, reciprocal exchange of acknowledgment.

On the other hand, *gomen nasai* is commonly associated with ‘request for forgiveness’, rather than with acknowledgement of the wrongdoing (Nakada 1989; Kimura 1994; Shishido et al. 1996). However, Sandu (2009a, 2009b) identified more functions *gomen nasai* serves in social interactions, including acknowledgement of the wrongdoing (i.e. mistakes, misbehavior etc.). In addition, she also found *gomen nasai* to mark an upcoming refusal, a request (i.e. favors, permission to pass through etc.), an interruption (i.e. activity or talk disruption), as well as an expression of gratitude, and apologizing for somebody else’s misbehavior, placing it on a par with *su(m)imasen*, considering the similar functions they serve and its revealed multifaceted nature.

Furthermore, taking into consideration factors like age and the *uchi* (in-group) and *soto* (out-group) distinction, Ogawa (1993, 1995) and Ono et al. (2001) conclude that *gomen nasai* is mainly used by younger people when addressing others of a lower status from *soto* (out-group) or even people from *uchi* (in-group), in case of a serious offence. In contrast, *sumimasen* appears to be commonly used when addressing people of a higher status from *soto* (out-group). Additionally, Sumida (1992) introduces *sumimasen* as a marker of distance, when someone wants to keep distance from somebody. Discussing the importance of *sumimasen* in public interactions, Kimura (1994: 296) states that this expression is rarely used in interactions among family members and close people.

Therefore, from the brief overview of previous research above, what could be concluded about *su(m)imasen* and *gomen nasai* usage is summarized in the table below.

Characteristics	<i>Su(m)imasen</i>	<i>Gomen nasai</i>
Multiple functions	✓	✓
<i>Soto</i> (out-group)	✓	✓
<i>Uchi</i> (in-group)	–	✓
Higher status	✓	–
Equal or lower status	–	✓
Desire of distancing	✓	–
Family members or intimates	–	✓

Table 1: General characteristics of *su(m)imasen* and *gomen nasai*

## 2.2. Addressee (non) honorific markers: *Desu/masu* and *da* forms

Speech style in the Japanese language has been associated with the choice of addressee honorific *desu/masu* forms and non-honorific *da* forms and has been widely investigated in a variety of social contexts and from numerous perspectives (Ide 1982, 1989; Ikuta 1983, 2008; Maynard 1991, 1993, 2001b, 2002, 2008; Suple 1994; Cook 1999, 2008; Okamoto 1997, 1999; Janes 2000; Jones and Ono 2008; Geyer 2008; Matsumoto 2008; Saito 2010; Barke 2010, 2011, among others).

The differentiation between the Japanese addressee honorific *desu/masu* and the non-honorific *da* has traditionally been viewed more as a formal versus informal one. Early studies reported that formal or polite styles, associated with *desu/masu*, are used when addressing someone unacquainted or of a higher status, whereas, on the other

hand, informal or plain styles associated with *da*, are used among close people of equal status. In spite of these early assumptions, more recent studies have revealed that the mixture of these two forms is commonly encountered in daily interactions, and many interpretations have been given of this phenomenon from the viewpoint of indexicality (Cook 1996, 1998, 2008; Okamoto 1997, 1998, 1999 among others).

Scholars, such as Cook (1996, 1997, 1998, 2008), revealed that actual usage of honorific forms in real settings does not always correspond directly with external factors, such as formality or the social status of the participants. Similarly, shifts between the use and non-use of Japanese honorifics can occur even when the addressee and context remain unchanged (Ikuta 1983; Maynard 1991, 2001b, 2002; Cook 2008; Barke 2010, 2011, among others). Such style shifts have been associated with changes in: High or low awareness of the addressee (Maynard 1991, 1993), linguistic emotivity (Maynard 2000, 2001b, 2002), self-presentational stance of the speaker (Cook 1996, 1997, 1998, 2008), and changes in attitudinal or cohesional distance (Ikuta 1983).

Maynard (1991: 577) views the speakers' choice for either *desu/masu* or *da* forms as a phenomenon "founded in the Japanese speaker's sensitivity toward 'thou'". She argues that in relationships where closeness and intimacy is the norm, and the choice of *da* style is imminent, "the speaker finds less need to address 'thou' as a completely separate and distinct entity" and "the distinction between 'thou' and 'thy thou' becomes less distinct". Thus, Maynard concludes that low awareness situations, where *da* style is likely to be chosen, are when: (a) the speaker exclaims, or suddenly recalls something; (b) the speaker expresses events as if s/he is right there and then; (c) the speaker expresses internal feelings (including self-addressed utterances); (d) the speaker jointly creates utterances; (e) the speaker presents information; (f) the speaker is in an intimate relationship with 'thou', expressing familiarity and closeness (Maynard 1991: 578, 2002).

On the other hand, the choice of *desu/masu* forms marks the speaker's awareness of 'thou' "as a separate and potentially opposing entity". Therefore, high awareness situations, where the choice of *desu/masu* style is more likely to occur, are: (a) the speaker expresses thoughts that address to 'thou' or 'you' in a direct manner, using expressions appropriate in terms of sociolinguistic variables; (b) the speaker communicates main information addressing 'thou' or 'you' in a direct manner (especially when the *desu/masu* appears within *da* style discourse) (Maynard 1991: 578).

Following a similar indexical approach to address the issue of style shifting between the honorific addressee forms and non-honorific ones in Japanese, Cook (1996, 1997, 1998, 2002, 2008) suggests that *desu/masu* forms index a public presentational mode of self in which a speaker is in his or her "public display" mode and is performing a certain social persona. Cook (2008: 46) defines this 'self-presentational stance' "as the self which presents an on-stage display of a positive social role to the addressee. It is a particular affective stance of presenting oneself to other(s) when one is literally or figuratively 'on stage' and being watched by others."

Cook (2008: 46) further argues that the affective stance of self-presentation constitutes various identities: "the *masu* form can indirectly index various social identities and activities such as those of a person in charge (e.g. parent, teacher), a knowledgeable party (e.g. teacher, other authority figures) and a presenter (e.g. newscaster, interviewer). It also indirectly indexes another's voice (e.g. reported speech), and a lower status person in some non-reciprocal exchanges between *masu* and plain form, among others." Hence, Cook's analysis incorporates Maynard's views on low and

high awareness of the addressee, and advances it by stating: “the speaker is most likely to display the self-presentational stance when he or she is aware of being watched by the addressee(s)” (Cook 2008: 49).

In this context, in her more recent work, Maynard (2000, 2001b, 2002) discusses the above-mentioned awareness towards ‘thou’ or ‘you’ and ‘thy thou’ or ‘your you’ within the framework of Place of Negotiation Theory, along with the presentation of various aspects of self. She reports three aspects of self: Thinking, feeling and interactional. The latter two are the aspects that interest us the most in the present analysis. The feeling self is commonly presented when the speaker is “emotionally stirred both personally and interpersonally”, and the interactional self is “the self that is keenly aware of the partner and acts accordingly” (Maynard 2002: 67). Maynard asserts that the three kinds of self are generally found in various combinations, and do not represent exhaustive aspects of speaker’s displayed self, since the self is always negotiated in relation with the addressee. Furthermore, the socially bound interactional self presents two aspects, subordinate and equal selves, in addition to gendered selves, girlish, boyish, womanly, manly selves, and the playful self.

In order to meet the objectives of the present study as stated in the introduction, the main focus of the analysis was on the sudden shifts occurring among apology expressions, namely *gomen* to *su(m)imasen* and *gomen nasai*, and from *su(m)imasen* to *gomen nasai*. These were analyzed as such in order to demonstrate that Japanese apologies function as indexical signs of emotional expression. Based on what has been discussed in the brief literature overview above, three aspects of great importance to the current analysis have emerged and will be addressed in order to understand these apology expressions’ functions in the emotive and interactional aspects of communication.

First, given that apology expression shifts often coincide with changes in speech style, such common speech style shifts as *desu/masu* and *da* forms will be considered in this analysis. Second, as the emotionally charged atmosphere often created in the place of communication (i.e. situations of a confrontational nature) may affect the form of expression, the way the speaker and the addressee perceive themselves in relation to each other is also a significant aspect to account for. Thus, the self the speaker and the addressee want to display every time they make a shift will be another focus of the analysis. Third, the concurrent use of final particles, *yo* or *ne*, with the apology expressions will also be analyzed, for these interactional particles carry emotive meanings (Maynard 2001b).

Hence, based on the collected data, this study attempted to reveal when and why people engaged in relationships where social conditions remain the same, shift from one expression of apology to another, in addition to disclosing implicit meanings these expressions might bring to light when the shift occurs. The results of the analysis are discussed taking into consideration the above-mentioned aspects: (1) social context, (2) self-presentation, and (3) speech style markers, honorific and non-honorific forms.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Data

The data comprises discourse samples containing apology expressions, such as *gomen* (*nasai*) and *su(m)imasen*, gathered from four different television dramas produced for a general audience by Japanese television networks. Two of the dramas were broadcasted by the Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS), namely: “Beautiful Life” (2000) and “Around 40” (2008). The other two were aired on the Fuji Television Network: “*Kimi no hitomi ni koi shiteru!*” (‘Can’t take my eyes off you!’ 1989) and “*Fukigenna jīn*” (‘Grumpy Gene’ 2005).

Needless to say, fictional materials such as television drama scripts are not comparable to spontaneous conversations. Interactions found in television dramas are often perceived as artificial, lacking the spontaneity and touch of improvisation that naturally occurring conversations commonly have (Kumagai 2003). However, as Kumagai (2003) further argues, television dramas often depict scenes likely to happen in our daily real lives and generally, the relationships among the protagonists are made clear by the scriptwriters, making it easy for researchers to work with this type of data. In addition, Hatfield and Hahn (2011) underline the benefit these fictional stories provide by stating that “dramas frequently focus upon situations that are extremely difficult to encounter in any other way, such as arguments within a family or between lovers; i.e., offenses that in many societies are considered private.”

Hatfield and Hahn’s (2011) remark about the television dramas providing situations unlikely to be easily accessible in real life, for example confrontational ones, is especially the reason why this type of data was chosen for this study. In speech act research different types of pragmatic tests, such as written and multiple-choice discourse completion tasks, discourse role-plays and self-assessment tasks, have been extensively used to collect a large amount of data (Brown 2001). Although these methods present the great advantage of allowing the researcher to control relevant variables and they are easy to administer to a large number of informants (Jucker 2009), none will actually allow a longitudinal study, in order to observe the chronological development of a relationship and the linguistic changes or shifts that might appear with its evolution.

In the present study, the researcher attempted to collect data that will expose the actual chronological growth of a relationship between two characters. Therefore, the ongoing development of the relationships protagonists were involved in was chronologically observed throughout a drama, focusing especially on the choice of apology expressions as the relationships evolved.

#### 3.2. Analytical considerations

By applying conversation analysis and discourse analysis methods, this study used a bottom-up approach, that is entirely data driven; models are neither rejected nor assumed, but are seen as the result of empirically observed regularities of co-occurrence between linguistic expressions and context of use in the data. Overlapping results with previous research findings were taken into account, where relevant.

Furthermore, results are discussed taking into account three aspects, social context,

self-presentation and addressee (non) honorific forms, which emerged from the analysis as significant categories.

Firstly, adopting Cook's (2008: 3) definition, **social context** is "comprised of the setting, participants, language ideology, activity type, the sequential organization of talk and the state of knowledge of the interlocutors in the social interaction." It is the context as an "ongoing interactive process". As emerged from the data analysis, the context here could be mainly divided into two: (1) conflict versus conflict avoidance, and (2) distance versus closeness.

Secondly, the way speakers and hearers perceive each other in a situated context, at a certain point in time and space, is taken into account. Moreover, the self they both display at that certain moment is discussed and compared to the self or selves observed to be constantly portrayed throughout the drama. **Self** is defined, drawing again on Cook's (1996, 1997, 1998, 2008) self-presentational stance and Maynard's (2000, 2002) feeling and interactional selves. These various self-presentations are always correlated to the 'other', as self is "negotiated in relation with the partner" (Maynard 2002: 68).

Finally, the speech style chosen by the protagonists is taken into consideration. Markers of the speech style, **addressee honorific forms**, *desu/masu*, and **non-honorific forms**, *da*, are considered in relation to the apology expressions. The speaker's low or high awareness of the hearer (Maynard 1991, 1993, 2002) was accounted for, as shifts from *gomen* and *warui* to *su(m)imasen*, from *gomen* to *gomen nasai*, or *su(m)imasen* to *gomen nasai*, occurred in the collected data.

#### 4. Results and discussion

The results will be presented and discussed according to the given apology that caused the shift to occur. The first section presents the analysis of discourse samples in which *su(m)imasen* triggered the shift, and the second one does the same for *gomen nasai*.

##### 4.1. *Su(m)imasen: Beyond apology in confrontational discourse*

Shifts from *gomen* and *warui* to *sumimasen* occurred mostly in confrontational discourses, where the protagonists engaged in some sort of arguments or in tense situations where conflict seemed imminent. Three realization patterns of these shifts have surfaced from the data: Avoiding conflict and displaying discontentment, staging and negotiating selves, and attitudinal distance. Nevertheless, these patterns are not mutually exclusive; overlapping between the former two and the latter two was encountered in most of the examples, self-presentations remaining the constant. Therefore, the staging and negotiating selves pattern was incorporated and discussed in relation to the other two observed patterns, and in this way creating two categories: (1) avoiding conflict and displaying discontentment and (2) attitudinal distance.

The majority of the samples found in the data belong to the first category, whilst only few to the second category. For discussion, the most illustrative examples are selected from "Beautiful Life" (Kitagawa 2000) and "Around 40" (TBS 2008).



## 4.1.1. Avoiding conflict and displaying discontentment

In this category, most of the shifts occur when one of the protagonists is trying to avoid an impending conflict or end up an argument by suddenly shifting to the use of *su(m)imasen*. In addition to the function of avoiding or suffocating a conflict, the shift also displays the speaker's feelings of discontentment and frustration towards the other's behavior.

The first examples to be discussed are from "Beautiful Life" (Kitagawa 2000). "Beautiful life" (Kitagawa 2000) is a romance between Kyōko, a 27 years old librarian bound to a wheelchair due to illness, and Shūji, also 27 of age, a popular hairstylist, who works at a trendy and popular hair salon in central Tokyo. They are brought together in a traffic incident and despite their first confrontational meeting, they soon find themselves falling in love. While much of the data in this study comprises conversations between Kyōko and Shūji, on a secondary stage, they both interact with friends, family and colleagues at work.

Before we delve into the analysis, it is necessary to mention the predominant speech style used by our protagonists, Shūji and Kyōko. Both use *da* forms, non-honorifics or plain style, when addressing each other throughout the drama, from the very first moment they meet. Although the social etiquette would commonly require the use of addressee honorifics or polite style, *desu/masu* forms, when addressing people from one's out-group, especially strangers, they both choose not to do so.

Throughout the entire script the prevalent apology expressions used between Kyōko and Shūji are *gomen* and *warui* and only on few particular occasions they switch to the use of *su(m)imasen*. The following examples depict scenes where Shūji is trying to avoid or end a conflict with Kyōko at all costs, whilst performing the act of apologizing.

In the example (1), their relationship is still at the beginning, undergoing status' negotiations.

Example (1):

One day, when visiting the library where Kyōko works, Shūji eavesdrops a conversation where Miyama, a volunteer who helps people with disabilities, declares his love to Kyōko and asks her to be his girlfriend. Kyōko politely rejects Miyama's proposal and then the following conversation ensues:

*Shūji: Motemote da ne.*

'You're so popular.'

*Kyōko: Aa. (Anata ka)*

'Ah (It's you)'

*Shūji: Kyōko san! Kore kara mo ore, hon, kari ni kite mo ii desu ka? Datte, motemote.*

'Miss Kyōko! From now on, may I still come borrow books? Because of that (I said) you're popular.'

*Kyōko: Nē.*

'Hey.'

*Shūji: Hai?*

'Yes.'

*Kyōko: Hai (to tetsuzukizumi no hon watashinagara) Anata, so iu toko naoshita hō ga ii to omou yo.*

*Hito no sei warau yō na toki.*

'Here you are (while handing him the book for which she has just finished the lending procedures) I think you should change that. Laughing about people's sincere feelings.'

Shūji: (*Igai to sunao ni hansei shite iru*) Sō..... sō ka? **Suimasen**.....*Sankyū*.  
(Surprisingly, regretting it sincerely) Oh.....is that so? I'm sorry.....Thank you.'

Shūji reproduces Miyama's last words, *Kyōko san! Kore kara mo ore, hon, kari ni kite mo ii desu ka?*, while imitating his voice. Miyama asked this because he was concerned that, after declaring his love and being rejected, he will not be able to visit the library anymore. Therefore, he is asking Kyōko whether he can still come to the library or not.

The sudden transition from the self Shūji has portrayed insofar, to the display of a bullying boyish self, prone to play pranks and make fun of other boys, could be attributed to the feelings he has for Kyōko. Yet to confess his feelings for her, the fact that Miyama has already revealed his, makes him feel in inferiority and sees Miyama as a possible rival.

Kyōko does not approve of his behavior, being obviously irritated by Shūji's insensitiveness to others' feelings; hence, she goes on scolding him for his inappropriate behavior. Adopting a very serious tone of voice, she is advising him to change this attitude he has towards others, making fun when they reveal their sincere feelings. The use of the sentence-final particle *yo* (...*naoshita hō ga ii to omou yo*) is a strong way to express someone's beliefs and it could even be translated as 'I strongly advise/ think you should ...', reinforces how much Kyōko dislikes this type of attitude. Morita (2002: 227) reports that the use of *yo* "marks an epistemic stance of authority on the part of the speaker that is not open to negotiation on the part of the hearer. *Yo* does not require any approval or confirmation from the hearer". This is exactly the case here: A sudden and temporary shift in Kyōko's attitude reveals her in an authoritative position over Shūji.

Since she clearly implied that there's no place for negotiation, Shūji is only left with the choice of accepting he was wrong, conform to her 'game' and shift to a subordinate self. Here, the use of a different apology expression will definitely have a different outcome. For example, the utterance of *gomen* will not suffice since Kyōko momentarily shifted her position in the relationship, by placing herself above Shūji. Thus, the equal self, commonly presented in their interactions, is replaced momentarily by Shūji's subordinate self, triggering the use of *suimasen*. Kyōko's self-presentational stance here is that of a knowledgeable person, similar to that of a parent or teacher. She takes charge by offering advice on how he should correct his conduct.

Therefore, the utterance of *suimasen* portrays Shūji as an adult man who has just realized his childish attitude offended the woman he likes and he is truly regretting it. The sudden shift of style also indicates the fact he is seriously reflecting on it, willing to show he is not a boy, but a grown up man. This idea is supported by the scriptwriter's comments, *igai to sunao ni hansei shite iru*, which emphasizes the fact that he is honestly acknowledging his behavior was foolish. The choice of *sankyū* and not the more formal and polite form of expressing thanks, *arigatō gozaimasu*, immediately following *suimasen*, indicates he is ready to redress the status of their relationship to the equal status, since the use of such an expression is common among friends and people of equal status.

Example (2):

While Kyōko and Shūji are still pending between friends or more-than-friends status, their relationship grows closer and closer, as they fall in love with each other. The next scene happens when Shūji invites Kyōko out to celebrate the discovery of a new

hairstyle design. Not being able to find seats at the *ramen* (Chinese noodles) stand they often go to, they drive downtown to find another place. Kyōko is driving and Shūji is sitting beside her, giving directions:

Shūji: *A, soko magatte.*

‘Ah, turn over there.’

Kyōko: *E?*

‘Eh?’

Shūji: *Soko soko.*

‘There, there.’

Kyōko: (*magarinagara*) *Mō chotto hayaku itte ne. Kyū ni wa magarenai kara.*

‘(While turning) Tell me sooner. Because I can’t turn the car suddenly.’

Shūji: (*Chotto kachin to kite, sono atari no mono tataku*) *Sumimasen. A, soko migi. (Kyū ni iu.)*

‘(He gets a bit angry, starting to hit something around there) I’m sorry. Ah, there, to the right. (He says it suddenly.)’

Kyōko: *E?*

‘Eh?’

Shūji: *Uso. (Fuzaketa.)*

‘Just kidding. (Joking.)’

Kyōko: *Saitēi.*

‘You’re the worst.’

Shūji suddenly turns to the use of *sumimasen* when Kyōko takes a somewhat disapproving attitude towards his conduct. She draws his attention for not telling her sooner when to turn the car, explaining she cannot do it if suddenly told so. The use of *ne*, *Mō chotto hayaku itte ne*, softens her scolding; for example, the use of another sentence final particle, such as *yo*, which has been associated with a more authoritarian tone (Morita 2002), would only aggravate it (See Example (1) above). As argued by Lee (2007: 367) *ne* “signals the speaker’s attitude of inviting involvement of the partner in an ‘incorporative’ manner. With *ne*, the speaker is committed to ‘align with the partner’ with respect to the contents and feeling of the utterance, with the intention of establishing mutual understanding with the partner.”

By reproaching Shūji for not telling her sooner when to turn the car, Kyōko implicitly presents herself as being in charge, and places herself above Shūji. Even if there is no other indication of changes in the way both of them are portraying or perceiving each other, Shūji’s choice of using *sumimasen* instead of *gomen* or *warui*, brings a temporary imbalance between the equal selves they normally maintain in the interaction.

Although Kyōko is searching for “mutual understanding”, Shūji is slightly annoyed by her reaction, a fact highlighted by the scriptwriter’s comment: *Chotto kachin to kite* and chooses to use *sumimasen* also as a sign of irritation for being unfairly scolded. However, the sudden fake direction, meant as a joke to lighten up the heavy atmosphere created, *A, soko migi*, stands as yet another proof of Shūji’s efforts in avoiding an unnecessary conflict.

Example (3):

The next example is from “Around 40” (TBS 2008), and it depicts a conversation between Mizue and Akio Takeuchi, her husband. They have been married for a long time, and recently they have been facing many difficulties, as they have started to drift apart. Mizue is 40 years old and has been a housewife since she got married. However,

now that she is 40 and her boy does not require her full attention anymore, she is looking for opportunities to go back to work. Akio does not agree with it, complaining she will not have enough time to do the housework, but she does not give up and actually starts working again.

Throughout the data they both use non-honorific forms when addressing each other, and at times Akio uses imperative forms that put him in an authoritative position, above his wife. In line with the chosen speech style, *gomen* is normally the apology expression used between the two, although at times they shift to the use of *sumimasen* and *gomen nasai*.

This is a typical scene in the Takeuchi family, where Mizue is preparing dinner for her husband and son. She sees her son looking through piles of comic books that reminds her she needs to take out the garbage next day.

Mizue: *A, sō. Ashita shigen gomi no hi da.*

‘Ah, tomorrow is the day for the recyclable waste.’

Akio: *Sonna ni chirakashite. Senshū dasu no wa wasureta darō.*

‘It’s such a mess. (It’s because) You forgot to trash it last week.’

Mizue: *Hai, hai. Sumimasen ne. Ashita chanto dashimasu kara.*

‘Yes, yes. I’m sorry. I’ll do it tomorrow for sure.’

Akio: *Oi, meshi!*

‘Hey, food!’

Mizue: *Hai.*

‘Yes.’

Akio: *Hashi mo nē janai ka.*

‘There aren’t even chopsticks (on the table).’

Mizue: *Gomen, gomen.*

‘Sorry, sorry.’

Akio starts criticizing his wife in the attempt of demonstrating her she is neglecting the housework now that she has started working again. The sudden shift to the use of the addressee honorific *–masu* points directly at the fact that she is not going to enter his ‘game’ and fight back, but rather bottle up her emotions yet one more time and avoid the confrontation. At the same time, this also shows a change in her emotions and attitudes towards her husband, an indirect and subtle way to show her irritation.

The fact that *sumimasen* is marked by the sentence-final particle *ne*, might be viewed as a softener of the transition between speech styles, since *ne* commonly indexes affective common ground and it is also used to mark intimacy (Cook 1992). Moreover, despite Akio’s continuing complaints, the shift to the use of *gomen* Mizue turns to in the end of this conversation proves she has already put an end to the conflict and is in fact willing to balance out the status of their roles in the relationship.

These shifts in Akio’s self-presentations, switching from an equal self to a superior one, who holds the power, occur quite often, but Mizue does not show any sign of irritation by switching to the use of *desu/masu* forms, as she does here. As Akio feels he is losing the authority in the house, because of Mizue’s new job, he insists on emphasizing the fact that he still is the head of the household; hence the imperative and rather depreciatory linguistic forms (i.e. *oi, meshi*) he chooses to use when addressing her. Later in the drama we find out that he got fired that day, which helps us understand better his reactions. In fact, he indirectly reveals his emotions, frustrations and dissatisfactions, which justify to some extent his conduct.

Mainly focusing on the shifts between honorific and non-honorific forms, Barke (2011) discusses a similar situation. In his example, the husband is complaining about

his wife coming back home too late. This triggers her to shift to the use of an honorific form, which coincides with the apology expression *sumimasen*. Barke (2011: 120) argues that this situated use of honorifics is a form of politeness, “as she is going out her way and try not to offend her husband any further (see also Maynard 2002: 383) by expressing consideration for his face needs as the head of the family”. He is further suggesting that she “presents herself as calm and in control of her emotions, thus giving the impression she is unruffled by her husband’s tirade against her.”

In the attempt to apply this interpretation to the example described in this study, viewing the shift as a form of politeness is rather difficult. Although Mizue suffocates the unnecessary conflict by giving in to her husband role-playing (superior - subordinate), no further evidence of her trying to attend to his “face needs” exists. On the contrary, she switches back to *gomen*, redressing the temporary imbalance. Moreover, “the declarative tone, with a sense of finality” (Maynard 2002: 385) embedded in the *-masu* form, supports the idea of communicating attitudes towards others, here, Mizue’s discontent and irritation, along with a momentary high awareness of ‘you’.

All examples described so far enclose similar characteristics: One of the interlocutors gets angry, adopting a higher and stronger position, scolding or criticizing the other. The other feels forced to apologize, no matter if he or she is at fault, in order to end or avoid a conflict. We commonly get scolded by our parents, teachers or superiors, but rather rarely by our friends or colleagues, people of equal status. When that happens, a temporary shift takes place. Although the social conditions of the relationships remain unchanged, due to the confrontational type of discourse people engage in, a sudden shift occurs, causing a temporary imbalance with respect to roles and status in the relationship. Interestingly, this acts against the definition of an apology, commonly agreed to restore the imbalance caused by the offense, and further reveals a different usage of Japanese apology expressions.

Regardless of the previous research findings, *su(m)imasen* appears to be used between close friends or even family members, in some situated contexts, often of a confrontational nature. In such situations, not only a shift in the chosen apology expression and speech style occurs, but also a temporary shift in the selves participants choose to portray at that certain moment. These self-presentations are commonly influenced by speakers and hearers’ emotions, feelings and dispositions, at the moment.

#### 4.1.2. Attitudinal distance

The issue of distance, reflected in *desu/masu* forms, has been addressed by a number of scholars. One of the first and most prominent studies is probably Ikuta’s (1983). Ikuta (1983: 39) argues that “in a conversation where the social conditions remain unchanged, level is often used to express whether the speaker views the addressee in ‘close’ or ‘distant’ terms at a particular moment.” She views the (non) use of *desu/masu* forms as a conversational strategy, in immediate relation with ‘distance’, which she reports to be social, attitudinal and cohesional. What I chose to label ‘attitudinal distance’ in this study is in agreement with Ikuta’s (1983) views.

The example I chose to illustrate this function is taken from “Beautiful life” (Kitagawa 2000) and it depicts clearly a scene where *su(m)imasen* marks attitudinal distance. It represents the only switch to the use of *su(m)imasen* on Kyōko’s part, since

she and Shūji have been negotiating towards a more than friends relationship. Here, the utterance *sumimasen deshita* carries a profound meaning that goes beyond apology or speech style shift.

Example (4):

After a series of incidents, Kyōko decides to distance herself from Shūji, whose love she cannot consent to.

- Shūji:* *Jyaketto sā, kurininguzumi de okurarete kita.*  
‘You know, the jacket, I have received it from the cleaning.’
- Kyōko:* *Sumimasen deshita. Nagai aida karita mama de.*  
‘I’m sorry, for keeping it so long.’
- Shūji:* *Dare to shabeteru no.*  
‘Whom are you talking to?’
- Kyōko:* *E?*  
‘Eh?’
- Shūji:* *Nani sono tanin gyōgi.*  
‘What is that expression, as if you are talking to a stranger?’
- Kyōko:* .....  
*Shūji:* .....  
*Kyōko:* *Datte, tanin ja .....*  
‘But, you are a stranger.....’
- Shūji:* .....*A, sō. Wakatta. (Gatan, to tachiagaru.)*  
‘..... Oh, really? I see. (He suddenly stands up.)’

In her analysis of emotive expressions used between lovers in Japanese television dramas, Maynard (2001a: 185) has also referred to this example, classifying it as appertaining to the category she labels “*Koi kotoba* (Words of love)”. She focuses her analysis on the speech style shift, rather than on the apology expression of *sumimasen deshita*, and interprets it as a sign of Kyōko wanting to distance herself from Shūji. Maynard (2001a) continues arguing that Shūji’s reaction, *Dare to shabeteru no*, only further emphasizes the weight this ‘simple’ shift has.

As pointed out by Barke (2010: 470), “if the shift is unexpected and involves pragmatically marked use of forms, the hearer is generally prompted to consider possible implicit meanings behind the shift and will often react accordingly.” Kyōko’s rejection to any claim of intimacy Shūji is attempting, through the simple use of *sumimasen deshita*, causes Shūji to react. In response to her apology which functions more as an indirect declarative statement regarding their relationship’s status, Shūji is negotiating the actual meaning of *sumimasen deshita*, which he acknowledges as being a *tanin gyōgi*, a behavior adopted when addressing unacquainted people.

The clear distinction Kyōko is attempting by saying *Datte, tanin ja...* dislocates Shūji from the position he might have earned within her *uchi* (in-group) circle, and places him all the way in the *soto* (out-group). Maynard’s (1991, 1993, 2000, 2002) explanations of high and low awareness of ‘you’ are perfectly illustrated in this example. As she explains, a low awareness of ‘you’ commonly brings a sense of oneness, and the speaker does not perceive the other as a separate and distinct entity (Maynard 1991). On the other hand, the use of *desu/masu* forms implies that the speaker is more aware of ‘you’ “as a separate and potentially opposing entity”, which is represented here by the Japanese expression *tanin gyōgi*. The fact that Kyōko used *sumimasen deshita* in order to convey her intention of separation, her desire of distancing herself, is also confirmed

by her friend Sachi in the immediate conversation she has with Shūji, trying to make him understand Kyōko's feelings at the moment.

Interestingly, Shūji's shifts to *su(m)imasen* described in the examples in section 4.1.1. do not trigger such a reaction on Kyōko's side and, moreover, do not seem to be considered "*tanin gyōgi*" by either of them. Then, the next question is in order: How is this example different from the others? As we have noticed from the discussion so far, depending on their emotions, moods, dispositions and temporary changes in the attitudes towards each other, members of a relationship play different roles and present multiple selves.

Maynard (2002: 383) emphasizes the fact that characters experience and share multiple relationships within a single overarching one (i.e. teacher – student; friends etc.). In a relationship where equal selves are maintained the use of *gomen* or *arigato* would be in order; the situation itself does not carry any sense of playfulness, therefore the grave tone of *sumimasen deshita* resonates with her emotions. Hence, the self Kyōko wishes to present here is not one of the role-playing acts they have been engaging as part of the negotiation process of their relationship's status. It is rather a leap she's willing to take out of a relationship whose status has not yet been officially declared. Although previous research mentions *su(m)imasen* as indexing distance, to my knowledge none reports it as playing this decisive role in changing a relationship's status, whilst expressing someone's feelings and emotions.

## 4.2. Beyond the ultimate apology: *Gomen nasai*

Shifts from the use of *gomen* and *warui* to the use of *gomen nasai* have been identified in numerous interactions. The shifts occurred when the speaker attempted to distance himself or herself from the interlocutor (attitudinal distance), or when the speaker offered a heartfelt apology. Shifts from *sumimasen* to *gomen nasai* commonly occurred when the relationship's status the characters are involved in is undetermined, still undergoing negotiations, as a way of adjusting the attitudinal distance. Taking into consideration these realization patterns that emerged from the data, two categories were created: (1) attitudinal distance gauging device and (2) a heartfelt apology, both reflecting functions *gomen nasai* serves in interactional discourse.

The most illustrative examples were selected for discussion. They are taken from "Can't take my eyes off you" (Fuji TV 1989), "Grumpy Gene" (Fuji TV 2005) and "Around 40" (TBS 2008).

### 4.2.1. Attitudinal distance-gauging device

I chose to label *gomen nasai* an attitudinal distance-gauging device, as a result of my analysis of its function: Adjusting the desired attitudinal distance between the members of a relationship in a situated context. As will be shown in the examples below, *gomen nasai* marks both the desire to get close to someone, as well as the desire to distance oneself from someone.

Even if previous research (Maynard 2002; Barke 2010, 2011) reported that *gomen nasai* commonly co-occurs with *desu/masu* forms, in opposition to its variant *gomen*, which co-occurs with *da* forms, in the present data it appeared in both styles, more

frequently in the *da* style than in the *desu/masu* one. Hence, the fact that it does not have a defined *-masu* form, as *su(m)imasen* does, and that it is commonly used towards one's own *uchi* (in-group) members, places it in a rather grey zone, between the borders of honorific and non-honorific forms.

The first example chosen for discussion is from "Around 40" (TBS 2008) and depicts the scene where Satoko is about to sign the papers for getting married, at the restaurant of their friend, Sadao, where all her best friends gathered to celebrate. A brief outline of the story would be in order for a better understanding of the whole context. Satoko Ogata is a single 40 years old accomplished psychiatrist, devoted to her work. One day, Okamura Keitaro, a 33 years old psychologist, starts working under her supervision. Their relationship slips slowly from superior-subordinate to friends, and ends with a marriage proposal.

Throughout the drama, Okamura chooses to address her using *desu/masu* forms, with few exceptions. The commonly used apology expressions between the two are: *Su(m)imasen* by Okamura, *gomen nasai* and *gomen* by Satoko. Okamura constantly calls Satoko, Ogata sensei (Doctor Ogata) and maintains the use of honorifics, as the social etiquette requires, when addressing someone higher in status, senior, moreover, your own superior.

On the other hand, Satoko uses mainly non-honorific forms and the apology expression of *gomen nasai*, as she is his supervisor, and most of their interactions take place in the hospital where they are working. What makes their discourse interesting and relevant for the present study, are Satoko's shifts from *gomen nasai* to *gomen* when their relationship goes beyond the status of superior-subordinate. She constantly starts using *gomen* to apologize to him for all sorts of trivial things, especially once their love relationship is consolidated and they even start talking about marriage.

#### Example (1):

Gathered to celebrate their marriage and the fact that they are going to start a new life working together at a hospital in Hokkaido, her friends decided to make them a surprise. They brought the necessary documents for registering their marriage and now they are about to sign them. After a few seconds of hesitation, Satoko puts down the pen.

*Satoko: Gomen nasai. Watashi, yappari Hokkaido ni ikenai.*

'I'm sorry. I, after all, can't go to Hokkaido.'

*Mizue: Chotto, nani iidasu no?*

'Hey, what are you saying?'

*Satoko: Okamura san, watashi byōin ni nokoru.*

'Mr. Okamura, I'll stay (to work) at the hospital.'

As we can see, she makes up her mind and in the end does not sign the papers, effectively breaking the engagement. Although *gomen nasai* functions also as a softener for the upcoming refusal, not going with him to Hokkaido, it also expresses Satoko's feelings of distancing herself from him, now that she is not his bride to be any longer. By using neither *gomen* nor *su(m)imasen*, she changes the status of the relationship to an undefined one, yet to undergo negotiations. The continuation of their conversation will be discussed in detail in the next section, as *gomen nasai* is performed again, this time functioning as a heartfelt apology.



Maynard (1993: 179) states “one chooses the *da* and *desu/masu* style as a result of a filtering process during which one recognizes the differing levels of the “thou” awareness as well as the distance between “thou” and “thy thou.” The way Satoko is juggling between these expressions could be attributed to the low awareness and high awareness of the other, as Maynard (1991, 1993, 2000, 2002) has argued. Although high awareness of ‘you’ is present, it does not have the radical and final declarative meaning we have noticed in the use of *sumimasen deshita* in the example (4) above, which implicitly projected the speaker and hearer’s selves as separate entities. Here, whilst maintaining the intimate and familiar tone, the shift is made so she can directly appeal to him and communicate the information she wants.

Example (2):

The next example presents an opposite situation to the one just described. The sample is from “Can’t take my eyes off you!” (Fuji TV 1989) and depicts a scene between Yasushi Yamashita and Teruyo Kobayashi, who have been dating for quite a few times now. Teruyo, who is younger than Yamashita, likes him very much, but her role is to impersonate a very shy, chaste girl, who is terrified of becoming intimate with somebody. She is rather portrayed as a comic ‘character’, because of her frequent overreactions when their friends bring up the issue of intimate relationships with other boys.

Teruyo constantly uses *desu/masu* forms when addressing Yamashita, as a sign of acknowledging his seniority. The apology expression she commonly uses is *su(m)imasen*, with a single exception, when she shifts to *gomen nasai* in the example below. When addressing her, Yamashita constantly uses plain forms, a style commonly used when addressing friends who are equal or junior to you, and the apology expression, *gomen*.

After she musters the courage to invite Yamashita to join her for a concert, the following scene occurs, on their way out of the concert hall.

*Yamashita: Kōnsāto no kippu ga te ni haïttatte kiita toki wa rokku da to omottetan da kedo.*

‘When I heard you’ve got tickets to a concert, I thought it’s a rock concert.’

*Teruyo: .....Suïmasen.*

‘I’m sorry.’

*Teruyo, hitonami ni osarete baransu o kuzushisō ni nari, hanshateki ni Yamashita no ude ni tsukamaru.*

‘Teruyo is pushed by the crowd of people, loses her balance and grabs Yamashita’s arm out of reflex.’

*Teruyo: A, gomen nasai. (To, hanareyō to suru ga.....omoinaosu.)*

‘Ah, sorry. (And, about to move away (from him).....she reconsiders it.)’

*Teruyo, dokidoki, Yamashita no ude ni tsukamatte iru. Yamashita, sonna Teruyo o mite, sono koshi ni te o mawasu. Teruyo! Bikkuri shite koshi o hiite shimau.*

‘With her heart leaping up, Teruyo is holding up on to Yamashita’s arm. Yamashita, seeing Teruyo like that, puts his arm around her waist. Teruyo panics and moves away from him.’

*Yamashita: .....?*

*Yamashita: .....(Dame da, korya)*

‘.....(This won’t work out.)’

*Teruyo: (Nikoniko to) Nani ka tabe ni ikimasu?*

‘(Smiling) Do you want to go eat something?’

*Yamashita: Uchi de tabete kichattan da yo ne.*

‘I ate at home.’

*Teruyo: Sō desu ka.*

‘Oh, really?’

*Yamashita: Kyō wa kaerō. Kuruma notte konakatta shi.*  
 ‘Let’s call it a day. I haven’t even come by car.’

In spite of the many attempts at not only getting closer to her, but also moving the relationship to a more intimate level, Yamashita seems to start feeling he is trying in vain. Every time he attempts to get closer to her, she takes a step back and rejects him. In the example above the shift from the use of *suimasen* to the use of *gomen nasai*, as well as Teruyo getting closer to Yamashita, by suddenly holding his arm, conveys her feelings, and the desire of narrowing both the attitudinal and physical distance between them. He also interprets this as an invitation to get closer to Teruyo, and even takes immediate action by putting his arm around her waist. For a moment, she is willing to leave behind the girlish self, always shy, anxious when around him, and fearful of intimacy, and portray a different self. However, the narrator’s comments help us visualize Teruyo’s next move, by yet again putting distance between her and Yamashita, and losing the last chance she had of getting closer to him.

The utterance of *gomen nasai* is a way of ‘shortening’ the attitudinal and psychological distance between them. As this expression does not clearly convey either familiarity and closeness, or formality, is the only one that can perfectly communicate her feelings and desires, at the moment. Teruyo wants to get closer to Yamashita, but she is scared; the use of *su(m)imasen* would just keep the relationship at the same level, and the use of *gomen* would sound too intimate and inappropriate for the self she wishes to present.

*Gomen nasai*’s co-occurrence with both *da* forms and *desu/masu* forms places it at the borders of addressee honorific and non-honorific forms. As we have discussed in this section, similar to *su(m)imasen* (See 4.1.2 Example (4)), *gomen nasai* also indexes attitudinal distance, but in a different way than its counterpart. It acts more as a device serving the speaker and the hearer to adjust the desired distance between them, in a situated context. The relationships participants are involved in, have an undefined status, either undergoing unexpected changes or undergoing negotiations; the way participants present themselves is either the result of a sudden change or a way of negotiating their roles in the relationship.

#### 4.2.2. A heartfelt apology

Most of the shifts encountered in the data from *gomen* and *warui* to *gomen nasai*, were in emotionally overcharged situations, where both the speaker and the hearer were overwhelmed by their own feelings of guilt, shame or regret.

The two conversations chosen for exemplification are taken from “Around 40” (TBS 2008) and “Grumpy Gene” (Fuji TV 2005). The first example is the continuation of the conversation between Satoko and Okamoto, described in Example (1) of the previous section.

#### Example (3):

In this scene, Satoko is finally confessing about her recent worries and concerns, explaining why she has decided to stay and work at the hospital in Tokyo.

Satoko: *Jitsu wa, inchō to shite byōin o tatenaosanaitte iwarete, zutto nayandeta no. Okamura san to issho ni itai kara, Hokkaidō ni ikutte kimetan da kedo, jibun ga hontō wa dō shitai no ka, ima yatto wakatta. Okamura san, watashi, ima wa me no mae de komatte iru kanjya san wa, byōin o tasukete, jibun ni dekiru kagiri no koto o shite, risō no byōin o tsukuritai. Hontō ni, hontō ni gomen nasai.*

‘The truth is, I have been asked to restructure the hospital in the position of its director, and this is what has been bothering me all this time. It is because I want to be with you, Okamura san, that I have decided to go to Hokkaido, but after wondering what I really want to do, I finally understood. Okamura san, I, want to help the patients who are in trouble right here, the hospital, and do as much as I can to turn it into an ideal hospital. I am really, really sorry.’

Okamura: *Sō iu to omotte mashita.*

‘I thought you would say that.’

Satoko: *E?*

‘Eh?’

Okamura: *Ayamaranakya ikenai no wa, boku no hō desu. Shittetan desu. Ogata sensei ni byōin o tatenaosu hanashi ga kiterutte koto. Ogata sensei wa byōin ni nokorutte wakatte mashita.*

‘It is I the one who should be apologizing. I knew about it. That you have been asked to help restructuring the hospital. I knew that you would stay to work there.’

The attitudinal distance has been induced by the first utterance of *gomen nasai* (See Example (1) in 4.2.1) and their relationship’s new status became somewhat undefined. In this example *gomen nasai* follows Satoko’s confession, where she finally reveals the reasons why she decided not to follow him to Hokkaido. The expression of her true inner feelings and thoughts, and the fact that she is finally able to tell the truth which was hidden behind her recent worries, causes Okamoto to reveal his, as well. The fact that *gomen nasai* co-occurs with the adverb, *hontō ni*, which is meant as an intensifier of the apology, furthermore expresses her desire to reach his inner self by directly confessing and revealing her own true sentiments. They both understand and respect each other’s decisions; hence the ‘separation’ leaves them on good terms.

#### Example (4):

The next example illustrates a confrontational conversation, which Yoshiko and her boyfriend at the time, Kenichi, engage in. Aoi Yoshiko (nickname Gene), the principal character in the drama is a 23 years old graduate student. In her first year of Masters in Ethology, she is really committed to her research. She is portrayed as a researcher fascinated by insects and their behavior, always watching them and talking about them. Kenichi Shiroishi is her same age, and works as an elementary school teacher, at the affiliated school of Yoshiko’s university. He is neither interested in animal behavior, nor an insects lover, a fact which often brings tension to their relationship, and makes Yoshiko feel guilty about bringing up such ‘boring’ topics.

They both use plain forms when addressing each other and the apology expressions used from the beginning are *gomen* and *warui*. Few shifts to *gomen nasai* are identified and one of them is described below. On one of their first dates, they accidentally pass by a park where an event related to insects is held: “*Kiite miyō. Aki no mushi no koe*” (Let’s listen to the autumn insects!). Kenichi agrees to go in, but later he somewhat regrets it because Yoshiko, trying to save an insect from being sold, ends up in a dispute. A little boy asks his mother to buy the bell-ringing cricket he has just caught, and the mother is trying to negotiate a price with one of the event guides. Seeing this, Yoshiko intervenes, kindly explaining to the boy that the cricket is alive and not a toy to take home and play with. The mother gets very angry with Yoshiko trying to preach to her son. Seeing that Yoshiko does not give up, Kenichi cannot stand it anymore, grabs her hand and takes

her out of the park in a hurry.

Outside the park, Yoshiko immediately starts apologizing for her behavior, trying to justify it.

*Yoshiko: Gomen. Gomen ne. Gomen ne. Demo nan ka, iwazu ni irarenakute.*

‘I’m sorry. Sorry. I’m sorry. But, I could not just stand in there without saying anything.’

*Kenichi: Sō nan darō ne. Hajimete atta toki mo sō datta. Seigikan tsuyoi no wa ii koto da to omou yo. Demo, dō kangaete mo are wa yokeina osewa da yo.*

‘Thought so. When I met you the first time it happened the same. To have a strong sense of equity is fine. But, no matter how I look at it, that was just none of your business.’

*Yoshiko: Yokeina osewatte, datte,*

‘(You say it was) None of my business, but,’

*Kenichi: Ore wa sā, ore wa tada, futsū ni tanoshimitai dake nan da yo. Ore ga wagamama na no, korette.*

‘I just want to be able to normally enjoy. Am I selfish by saying this.’

*Yoshiko: Uun, chigau. Watashi ga waruin da yo. Demo ne, ano suzumushi...*

‘No, you are not. It was my fault. But, that bell-ringing cricket...’

*Kenichi: Mō ii yo. Mō mushi no hanashi wa ii.*

‘Enough. Enough talking about insects.’

*Yoshiko: Gomen nasai. Dō shiyō, watashi?*

‘I’m sorry. What should I do?’

*Kenichi: Kyō wa mō ii yo. Mata renraku suru.*

‘I’ve had enough for one day. I will call you.’

Although at the beginning of this conversation, Yoshiko uses *gomen* and *gomen ne*, to apologize for the scene she caused in the park, trying to justify her behavior, then towards the end of it, a shift to *gomen nasai* occurs. Kenichi brings up an issue, which has bothered him for a while now, that is the fact she goes out of her way to do things that should not be of her concern. Moreover, he also points out he had enough of the ‘bug talk’ she naturally engages in. Through the several objections he makes, Kenichi displays irritation and discontentment, which represents a very direct emotional attack on Yoshiko’s way of conduct.

Even if *gomen* is the common apology expression used when there is a low awareness of the other, due to the offense severity level and the self Yoshiko presents in the end, *gomen* is just not sufficient. A direct expression of Yoshiko’s true inner self, who has just realized how much her behavior cost their relationship, *gomen nasai* expresses more her internal thoughts, as well as a weak, helpless self, desperately looking for the hearer’s forgiveness. She is indulging in *amae*<sup>1</sup>, which is normally employed among close in-group members, slightly shifting her self to one that seeks forgiveness through showing an evident dependence on the hearer’s opinion. By doing this, she transmutes Kenichi’s position to being the person who decides whether she is to be forgiven, and who has the power to decide the ‘faith’ of their relationship. In support to this comes the self-reflective utterance that follows, also a potential self-addressed utterance, *Dō shiyō, watashi?*, which reflects both attitudinal and psychological closeness to the addressee.

However, these shifts in the presentation of self are not the same as the ones we have noticed in the discussion of *su(m)imasen*. The equal selves they commonly display and the *da* forms are maintained throughout the argument. In contrast, here, Kenichi

---

<sup>1</sup> Doi (1971) has first introduced the concept of *amae* to explain the Japanese psyche. He defines it as an emotional and psychological dependence, which implies a strong desire of being cared for by another. (i.e. mother-child relationship)

attempts to “present the inner self wishing to emotionally appeal to the partner in as direct a manner as possible” (Maynard 2002: 69). Moreover, Kenichi’s frequent use of the sentence-final particle *yo*, shows a very powerful way of presenting one’s opinions, thoughts and feelings. Maynard (2001b: 28) explains that “*yo*, while foregrounding information, indexes the speaker’s strong desire to emotionally reach thou, almost to the extent that the speaker is crying out for the partner’s response.” Through the display of his inner self, Kenichi is also directly expressing his true inner feelings, and in this way attempts at reaching Yoshiko’s.

This function might resemble what previous research labeled as “sincere apologies”, even though detailed explanations were not provided. However, Deutschmann (2003: 92) states that the investigation of the level of sincerity is rather problematic, since “only the speaker knows the actual level of sincerity with which an apology is uttered”. He further argues that “it is only the form of the apology which can be used in determining its level of *apparent* sincerity”, hence what we can probably infer from an apologetic discourse is its emotional intensity, and not the exact feeling of remorse, regret or guilt the speaker might feel at the moment.

These shifts could also be attributed to the severity of the offense, as perceived by both the speaker and the hearer, as a representation of a substantial reason for a heartfelt apology to occur. This reinforces what previous research reported, namely that *gomen nasai* is used towards people in one’s *uchi* (in-group) circle, when the severity of the offence is more serious.

## 5. Conclusions

This study used as analytical concepts the social context of an interaction, the selves participants impersonate, and the speech styles the interactions occur in, to explain situated variation in the use of apology expressions. Observing the chronological development of different types of relationships in various television dramas, the current study revealed new meanings an apology carries in a situated context, and it also reinforced some of the previous research findings.

With respect to *su(m)imasen*, the study unveiled its usage among members of someone’s *uchi* (in-group), and also its occurrence within a *da* style, despite of what earlier research reported. The situated context the shifts were encountered in was mostly of a confrontational nature, and *su(m)imasen* was either uttered to avoid or end a conflict, or to index attitudinal distance. The self-presentational stances employed by both participants in a conversation, played a decisive role in the selection of an apology expression.

On the other hand, regarding *gomen nasai*, the study reinforced the fact that its usage is common among members of someone’s *uchi* (in-group), in case of a more serious offence. Also, the analyzed examples suggest it is used among members of a relationship whose status is undetermined. Furthermore, the study showed that *gomen nasai* co-occurs with both *da* and *desu/masu* forms, in spite of what previous research suggested.

The emotionally charged situations in which all these shifts occurred illustrate the importance of speakers’ and hearers’ emotions and feelings at a certain moment in time and space. These emotions, feelings, and dispositions influence both: (a) the linguistic choices people make, and (b) the consequences these choices bring to the relationship’s

status. It is in this context that Japanese apologies are a result of a dynamic and negotiative process that unfolds within the complexities of human relationships.

Hence, Japanese apologies function as indexical signs, with new meanings being created and negotiated locally in the course of communication. Though the results of this study are limited to the confines of dramatic discourse, the kind of (a)typical situations described here may very well apply to everyday Japanese usage. Moreover, this study may serve not only as a means for looking into the cultural complexities involved specifically in the use of *su(m)imasen* and *gomen nasai*, but also as a potential basis for a more general cross-cultural analysis of apologetic speech behavior. Clearly, further analysis is needed in order to assess possible generalizations, taking into account a wider range of types of discourse and situated contexts.

## References

- Barke, Andrew (2010) Manipulating honorifics in the construction of social identities in Japanese television drama. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 14: 456-476.
- Barke, Andrew (2011) Situated functions of addressee honorifics in Japanese television drama. In Davies L. Bethan, Michael Haugh, and Andrew J. Merrison (eds.), *Situated Politeness*. London: International Continuum Publishing Group, pp. 111-128.
- M. Brown, and J. Dean (2001) Pragmatics tests: Different purposes, different tests. In K.R. Rose, and G. Kasper (eds.), *Pragmatics in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 301-325.
- Cohen, D.A., and N. Ishihara (2005) A web-based approach to strategic learning of speech acts. Retrieved December 20, 2008, from <http://www.carla.umn.edu>
- Cook, Haruko M. (1992) Meanings of non-referential indexes: A case study of the Japanese sentence-final particle *ne*. *Text: An interdisciplinary journal for the study of discourse* 12: 507-539.
- Cook, Haruko M. (1996) Japanese language socialization: Indexing the modes of self. *Discourse Processes* 22: 171-197.
- Cook, Haruko M. (1997) The role of the Japanese *masu* form in caregiver-child conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics* 28: 695-718.
- Cook, Haruko M. (1998) Situational meanings of Japanese Social Deixis: The mixed use of the *masu* and plain form. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 8: 87-110.
- Cook, Haruko M. (2002) The social meanings of the Japanese plain form. In N.M. Akatsuka, and S. Strauss (eds.), *Japanese/ Korean Linguistics* 10: 150-163.
- Cook, Haruko M. (2008) *Socializing identities through speech style: Learners of Japanese as a foreign language*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Coulmas, Florian (1981) 'Poison to your soul' thanks and apologies contrastively viewed. In F. Coulmas (ed.), *Conversational routine: Explorations in standardized communication situations and prepatterned speech*. The Hague: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 69-91.
- Deutschmann, Mats (2003) *Apologising in British English*. Umeå: Umeå Universitet.

- Doi, Takeo (2001) *The anatomy of dependence* (Rev. Ed.). Tokyo: Kodansha International.
- Geyer, Naomi (2008) Interpersonal functions of style shift: The use of plain and *masu* forms in faculty meetings. In K. Jones, and T. Ono (eds.), *Style shifting in Japanese*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 39-69.
- Hatfield, Hunter, and Jee-Won Hahn (2011) What Korean apologies require of politeness theory. *Journal of Pragmatics* 43: 1303-1317.
- Ide, Risako (1998) 'Sorry for your kindness': Japanese interactional ritual in public discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics* 29: 509-529.
- Ide, Sachiko (1982) Japanese sociolinguistics: Politeness and women's language. *Lingua* 57: 357-385.
- Ide, Sachiko (1989) Formal forms and discernment: Two neglected aspects of universal linguistic politeness. *Multilingua* 82: 223-248.
- Ikuta, Shoko (1983) Speech level shift and conversational strategy in Japanese discourses. *Language Science* 5: 37-53.
- Ikuta, Shoko (2008) Speech style shift as an interactional discourse strategy: The use and non-use of *desu/-masu* in Japanese conversational interviews. In K. Jones, and T. Ono (eds.), *Style shifting in Japanese*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 71-89.
- Janes, Angela (2000) The interaction of style-shift and particle use in Japanese dialogue. *Journal of Pragmatics* 32: 1823-1853.
- Jones, Kimberly, and Tsuyoshi Ono (2008) *Style shifting in Japanese*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Jucker, H. Andreas (2009) Speech act research between armchair, field and laboratory – The case of compliments. *Journal of Pragmatics* 41: 1611-1635.
- Kimura, Kazumi (1994) The Multiple Functions of Sumimasen. *Issues in Applied Linguistics* 5: 279-302.
- Kitagawa, Eriko (2000) *Byutifuru raifu – shinario* (Beautiful Life: Scenario). Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten.
- Komori, Mari (2001) Sumimasen no imi kino. *Kinki University Language Institute Journal* 10: 14- 32.
- Kumagai, Tomoko (2003) Shinario no aru kaiwa – drama no nihongo no tokushu. *Nihongogaku* 22: 6-14.
- Kumatoridani, Tetsuo (1988) Hatsuwakoi riron to danwa kodo kara mita nihongo no wabi to kansha. *Hiroshima Daigaku Kyoiku Gakubu Kiyo* 2.37: 223-234.
- Kumatoridani, Tetsuo (1990) Nihongo no 'kansha' ni okeru hyougen koukan genshou to sono shakaigengogakuteki moderu. *Hyogen kenkyu* 52: 36-44.
- Kumatoridani, Tetsuo (1999) Alternation in co-occurrence in Japanese thanks. *Journal of Pragmatics* 31: 623-642.
- Lee, Duck-Young (2007) Involvement and the Japanese interactive particles *ne* and *yo*. *Journal of Pragmatics* 39: 363-388.
- Long, Christopher (2010) Apology in Japanese gratitude situations: The negotiation of interlocutor role-relations. *Journal of Pragmatics* 42: 1060-1075.
- Matsumoto, Yoshiko (2008) Tuning speech style and persona. In K. Jones, and T. Ono (eds.), *Style shifting in Japanese*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 213-227.

- Maynard, Senko K. (1991) Pragmatics of discourse modality: A case of *da* and *desu/masu* forms in Japanese. *Journal of Pragmatics* 15: 551–82.
- Maynard, Senko K. (1993) *Discourse Modality: Subjectivity, Emotion and Voice in the Japanese Language*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Maynard, Senko K. (2000) *Jooi no Gengogaku: Bakooshooron to Nihongohyoogen no Patosu*. Tokyo: Kuroshio Shuppan.
- Maynard, Senko K. (2001a) *Koi suru futari no 'Kanjo Kotoba': Dorama hyogen no bunseki to nihongoron*. Tokyo: Kuroshio Shuppan.
- Maynard, Senko K. (2001b) Falling in love with style: Expressive functions of stylistic shifts in a Japanese television drama series. *Functions of Language* 8: 1–39.
- Maynard, Senko K. (2002) *Linguistic Emotivity: Centrality of place, the topic–comment dynamic, and an ideology of pathos in Japanese discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Maynard, Senko K. (2008) *Linguistic Creativity in Japanese Discourse: Exploring the multiplicity of self, perspective, and voice*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Miyake, Kazuko (1994) Wabi igai de tsukawareru wabi hyogen: Sono tayoka no jittai to uchi, soto, yoso no kankei. *Nihongo Kyouiku* 82: 134–146.
- Morita, Emi (2002) Stance marking in the collaborative completion of sentences: Final particles as epistemic markers in Japanese. In N.M. Akatsuka, and S. Strauss (eds.), *Japanese/ Korean Linguistics* 10: 220–233.
- Nakada, Tomoko (1989) Hatsuwakoi to shite no chinsha to kansha: Nichiei hikaku. *Nihongo kyoiku* 68: 191–203.
- Ogawa, Haruko (1993) 'Sumimasen' no shakaigengogakuteki kosatu. *Gengobunka to nihongo kyoiku* 6: 36–46.
- Ogawa, Haruko (1995) Kansha to wabi no teishiki hyogen. *Nihongo kyoiku* 85: 38–52.
- Okamoto, Shigeko (1997) Social context, linguistic ideology, and indexical expressions in Japanese. *Journal of Pragmatics* 28: 795–817.
- Okamoto, Shigeko (1998) The use and non-use of honorifics in sales talk in Kyoto and Osaka: Are they rude or friendly? In N.M. Akatsuka, H. Hoji, S. Iwasaki, S.-O.Sohn, and S. Strauss (eds.), *Japanese/ Korean Linguistics* 7: 141–157.
- Okamoto, Shigeko (1999) Situated politeness: Manipulating honorific and non-honorific expressions in Japanese conversation. *Pragmatics* 9: 51–74.
- Ono, Yumiko, Xu Qingping, Mori Kiyotaka, and Mori Yuki (2001) Nihongo bogowasha ni miru kansha to shazai hyougen no shiyou – arigato, sumimasen saiko. *Naruto Kyoiku Daigaku Jitsugi Kyoiku Kenkyu* 11: 75–83.
- Saito, Junko (2010) Subordinates' use of Japanese plain forms: An examination of superior-subordinate interactions in the workplace. *Journal of Pragmatics* 42: 3271–3282.
- Sandu, Roxana (2009a) Gomen nasai to sono barieshon no bunseki – hatsuwa koi riron no kanten kara. Proceedings of the *Conference of the Pragmatics Society of Japan* 4: 55–62.
- Sandu, Roxana (2009b) A Study of Japanese apologies and its pedagogical implications – A speech act



theory approach. Paper presented at the 11<sup>th</sup> *International Pragmatics Conference*. Melbourne, Australia.

Searle, John (1979) *Expression and meaning: Studies in the theory of speech acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shishido, Michiyasu, Masako Hiraga, Morio Nishikawa, and Tsutomu Sugawara (1996) *Hyogen to kotoba no rikai-gaku*. Kyoto: Minerva Shobo.

Sukle, Robert J. (1994) *Uchi/soto: Choices in directive speech acts in Japanese*. In J.M. Bachnik, and C.J. Quinn, Jr. (eds.), *Situated meaning: Inside and outside in Japanese self, society, and language*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, pp. 113-142.

Sumida, Ikuko (1990) Kansha no aisatsu kotoba: 'arigato' to 'sumimasen' nitsuite. *Nihon Bungaku Kenkyu* 26: 1-11.

Sumida, Ikuko (1992) Nihongo no wabi no aisatsu kotoba: Jyoshi gakusei no gengo seikatsu ni okeru danwa shiryō wo moto ni shite. *Nihon Bungaku Kenkyu* 28: 235-243.

Tateyama, Yumiko (2001) Explicit and implicit teaching of pragmatic routines: Japanese sumimasen. In K.R. Rose, and G. Kasper (eds.), *Pragmatics in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 200-222.