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# Use of a Personal Pronoun as a Strategy to Convey Impoliteness and Power as Observed in the Japanese TV Series *Hanzawa Naoki* (TBS)

Angela A-Jeoung KIM

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine the use of a personal pronoun employed as an impoliteness strategy and as a power shift. The analysis will focus on the use of first person pronoun *ore* from a TV drama series *Hanzawa Naoki* (TBS)<sup>1</sup>. In order to elucidate the use of *ore* in a particular way and in situations it is not normally used, its normal usage is first outlined with examples. The paper will then focus on the use of *ore* in a manner that is socially unexpected.

## 2. Personal Pronouns in Japanese

Japanese has a variety of choices in personal pronouns (金田一 1988; Ishikawa et al. 1981) to refer to the speaker, the addressee, and a third party (Hirose 2000 : 1624) and they reflect relationships between speaker and hearer (Ide 1990 : 43) as well as indicating interpersonal distance (滝浦 2008 : 78-84). In addition to the wealth of choices, Japanese personal pronouns, especially the first and second person pronouns, are “loaded with semantic and pragmatic information” (Kitagawa and Lehrer 1988 : 756).

Male speakers in Japanese have a number of choices to refer to themselves as ‘I’, *watakushi*, *watashi*, *boku*, or *ore* (Suzuki 1976; Kitagawa and Lehrer 1990; Ide 1982; Tsujimura 1996; 桜井 2002). Among these, the use of *ore* is characterised as very casual (桜井 2002: 128; Tsujimura 1996: 374)<sup>2</sup>. Since the use of it is very casual, it is not used in meetings at a workplace (桜井 2002: 128). Suzuki (1976: 260) indicates that the choices of an adult male’s first-person pronouns include the choice between *watakushi* and *boku*, and between *boku* and *ore*, and that this is a “set of choices reflecting power differences and gradation of social distance” (Suzuki 1976: 260).

Examples below show the use of *ore* in usual and socially expected ways: 1)

to family members; 2) between close friends; 3) authority to subordinates; and 4) between equals.

#### Family members

- (1) DVD 第1巻 00:26:18～ 第1話 半沢⇒花(妻)

Hanzawa⇒Hana (wife)

半沢 分かった！ 分かりましたよ 見習いますよ 俺と同期の近藤さんを！

Hanzawa Alright, alright. (I) will learn. (I will learn) from Kondo who started working at the same year as I (*ore*).

- (2) DVD 第1巻 00:56:34～ 第1話 半沢(学生時代)⇒母親

Hanzawa⇒Mother

半沢 俺と母さんを助けてくれた内海信金だって立派な銀行だろ？

Hanzawa Utsumi Credit Union which helped you and me (*ore*) is a fine bank, right?

#### Close friends

- (3) DVD 第1巻 00:03:12～ 第1話 半沢⇒渡真利、近藤

Hanzawa⇒Tomari, Kondo

半沢 俺は…もっと上に行く

Hanzawa I (*ore*)..want to get higher.

#### Authority ⇒ subordinate

- (4) DVD 第1巻 00:33:49～ 第1話 半沢⇒中西

Hanzawa⇒Nakanishi

半沢 中西 俺の家から着替えを持ってきてくれ

Hanzawa Nakanishi, please bring change from my (*ore*) place.

- (5) DVD 第2巻 01:05:29～ 第3話 角田⇒中西

Kakuta⇒Nakanishi

角田 俺の担当先のファイルだって不備はある

Kakuta My (*ore*) client's files also have faults.

- (6) DVD 第2巻 01:33:11～ 第3話 小木曾⇒半沢チーム

Ogiso⇒Hanzawa's team

小木曾 お前ら グルになって俺をハメようとしてんだろ！

Ogiso You guys as a group tried to trap me (*ore*)!

- (7) DVD 第2巻 01:37:03～ 第3話 灰田⇒半沢

Haida ⇒ Hanzawa

灰田 俺は何も(知らなかった)

Haida I (*ore*) didn't (know anything about it).

- (8) DVD 第4巻 00:02:03～ 第6話 内藤⇒半沢

Naito ⇒ Hanzawa

内藤 そろそろ俺も断りきれなくなてな

Naito I (*ore*) could no longer refuse (it).

### Equals

- (9) DVD 第3巻 00:32:57～ 第4話 東田⇒浅野

Higashida ⇒ Asano

東田 俺は必ず もう一旗揚げるともりだ

Higashida I (*ore*) will definitely succeed one more time.

- (10) DVD 第4巻 00:32:57～ 第6話 戸越⇒半沢

Togoshi ⇒ Hanzawa

戸越 俺はお前らに話すことなんか何もない

Togoshi I (*ore*) don't have anything to tell you.

- (11) DVD 第4巻 00:32:57～ 第6話 戸越⇒古里、古里⇒戸越

Togoshi ⇒ Kozato, Kozato ⇒ Togoshi

戸越 お前がそれをもみ消して 俺のことを羽根専務にリークしたんだろうが

古里 それは誤解だって言ってたんだろう 俺はきちんと上に報告したんだ

Togoshi You hid that and told executive director Hane on me (*ore*), didn't you?.

Kozato I said that it was misunderstanding. I have reported it properly to my boss.

- (12) DVD 第6巻 00:32:03～ 最終話 福山⇒半沢

Fukuyama ⇒ Hanzawa

福山 俺がやったって証拠はどこにあんだよ

Fukuyama Show me the proof that I (*ore*) did it.

According to Brown and Gilman (1960: 273) behavioural norms are “practices consistent within a group” and where the choice of a pronoun clearly violates a group norm, or even the customary practice of the speaker, “the meaning of the act will be sought in some attitude or emotion of the speaker. It is as if the inter-

preter reasoned that variations of address between the same two persons must be caused by variations in their attitudes toward one another” (Brown and Gilman 1960: 273–274). In the data, *ore* was used in situations where the power relationship between the interactants has shifted, or where the speaker is trying to shift the power between the two by conveying impoliteness. Here is an example of just that:

- (13) DVD 第5巻 01:20:30～ 第5話 半沢⇒浅野

Hanzawa ⇒ Asano

半沢           あなたを許すつもりはない 俺はあんたを刑事告発する

Hanzawa    I don't have any intention of forgiving you. I (*ore*) am going to lodge a criminal complaint.

In example (13), Hanzawa as a subordinate is talking to his branch manager Asano. Although it is clear that the branch manager holds a higher social status, Hanzawa uses *ore* to Asano, which should not be acceptable as it is inappropriate under usual circumstances. In fact, up to this point in the series, Hanzawa has been using *watashi* to refer to himself when he speaks with Asano, a use that is socially appropriate. Their relationship provides an explanation for Hanzawa's use of *ore* in this case. Asano initially tried to make Hanzawa responsible for the loss of 500 million yen brought about by a fraudulent loan he (Asano) had set in motion. Hanzawa gradually realised the truth behind Asano's scheme and confronted Asano with his (Asano's) “crime”. In doing so Hanzawa inverted the power relationship between them. Brown and Gilman (1960:172) state that “(t)he general meaning of an unexpected pronoun choice is simply that the speaker, for the moment, views his relationship as one that calls for the pronoun used. This kind of variation in language behaviour expresses a contemporaneous feeling or attitude. These variations are not consistent personal styles but departures from one's own custom and the customs of a group in response to a mood.” Hanzawa's use of the first person pronoun *ore* when speaking to Asano would be unexpected under usual circumstances, but here can be understood as an overt expression of power. This would not have been conveyed had *boku* or *watashi* been used.

### 3. Discussion

In discussing the subordinates' use of plain forms to people of authority in Japanese, Saito (2010: 3281) claims that “(t)he relationship between linguistic

forms and social variables, such as social status and power, is not static but indeterminate". Linguistic choices are made according to situated contexts and this delivers varied indexical meanings (Saito 2010: 3281). This same observation can be made in relation to the use of address terms in Japanese. With respect to the use of *ore*, it is noteworthy that second person pronouns such as *omae* (such as (6), (10), and (11) above), or *anta* ((13) above) are used with it. In addition to this, the frequent use of plain style was observed. Although examining the co-occurrence of the address terms as impoliteness strategy and the use of plain form and/or style shift were outside the scope of the current study, further examination on this issue may contribute to the deeper understanding of how linguistic impoliteness is manipulated in the Japanese cultural setting.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Kim (2014) for the justification of using *Hanzawa Naoki* (TBS) as data.
- <sup>2</sup> Tsujimura (1996 : 374) states with an example taken from Ide (1990) that *ore ga shimasu*, 'I will do (it)' is awkward since there is a stylistic conflict between the formal ending *masu* and a very casual pronoun *ore*. Although a very casual *ore* and a plain ending, such as *ore ga suru*, 'I will do (it)' may occur more frequently than with the formal ending *masu*, the use of *ore* is not limited to the use only with the informal ending (see 桜井 (2002) of the workplace in which *ore* is frequently used, or used for all cases to self-reference).

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### Data

- Hanzawa Naoki. 2013. Original story by Ikeido Jun, script by Yatsu Hiroyuki, produced by Iyoda Hidenori and Iida Kazutaka, and directed by Fukuzawa Katsuo. TBS, *Episode 1* ~ *Episode 10*. DVD.