

Role of working experience and age in the innovative honorific forms

Yoshiyuki Asahi (*National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics*)

This paper attempts to conduct analyses real-time linguistic changes in Japanese honorifics, and points out that working experience and age play an important role in promoting this linguistic change. Generally speaking, it is widely known that it is young group that takes a lead in the linguistic change. What this paper emphasizes most is, on the other hand, that innovative a middle-age group (30-50 years old) utilizes the innovative o-ninarareru (potential prefix o- and auxiliary verb -rare) from its original form, i.e. o-ninaru. Data in this paper was collected in the second and third survey on Japanese honorifics in Okazaki, Japan, towards 400 respondents (for the second survey) and 306 respondents (for the third survey) by NINJAL (National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics). These surveys were conducted in 1972 and 2008 respectively.

This innovative form in Japanese honorifics is known as ‘double honorifics’ in the sense that additional marker, rare, was used in the o-ninaru type honorific construction. This form is regarded as ‘wrong’ honorifics amongst Japanese speakers.

The analyses on the use of this innovative honorific forms are most frequently used in the middle-age group. What is more, this age-group employed this innovative form more in the third survey than the second survey. Compared with other age groups, this age group has the most frequent use of this innovative honorific form.

Based on this analysis, this paper will point out that this group has spent a certain amount of the working experience where they have been imposed to utilize the Japanese honorific forms on the daily basis. This paper also shows that an amount of working experience and age determines the use of this innovative form.