

Linguistic Adulthood in Japanese

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日本語、大人の言語発達、社会的成熟マーカー、社会的言い回し、自己表現マーカー
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Abstract

Native Japanese speakers, even adults, are known to lack confidence in their language use. This is because Japanese consider themselves lifelong learners of their own native language, and continue to acquire “proper” language use that matches their age and roles in society. Japanese speakers have a clear notion of linguistic adulthood.

Based on observations, interviews, and questionnaires, linguistic adulthood in Japanese is discussed from the following perspectives: social phrases as social maturity markers, speakers’ awareness about the use of social phrases at each developmental stage, social phrases as self-expression markers, and types of social phrases as they relate to the speaker’s linguistic development.

Native Japanese speakers add to their repertoire of social phrases as they become adults. Linguistic development is expected to keep pace with life stages. Japanese speakers take social phrases as social maturity markers. Some think that using social phrases on certain occasions is a social norm. From a listener’s point of view, the speaker’s choice of social phrases reveals important information about the speaker’s social maturity.

In addition to showing social maturity, speakers make choices about which social phrases to use or not to use, reflecting their awareness of the relation between their self-images and speech styles. Thus, social phrases function as self-expression markers as well as social maturity markers.

1. Introduction

Native Japanese speakers do not have much confidence in their own language use, especially in how to use *keigo* (honorifics). According to the Survey on Japanese Language by *Bunkacho* (Agency for Cultural Affairs), when native Japanese informants were asked to answer questions on their use of honorifics, approximately 30% out of 2212 (ages over 16) responded “I want to use honorifics, but I do not think I can use them properly” (*Bunkacho Kokugoka*, 1996). Another survey by NHK (*Nihon Hoso Kyokai*, Japan Broadcasting Corporation) also indicates that native Japanese speakers want to learn more about honorifics. In response to a question about whether or not they intended to learn more honorifics, about half responded “I definitely want to learn more” or “I want to learn more” (NHK *Hoso Bunka Kenkyujo* 1991, 102). According to the 2007 survey by *Bunkacho Kokugo ka*, the top three interests of native Japanese speakers (ages over 16) about the Japanese language and language use are 1) to learn how to speak daily Japanese properly 73.7%, 2) to learn how to use honorifics 65.5% and 3) to learn the entire writing system and how to write properly 23.3%. There is a big gap between 2) and 3); i.e. 65.5% versus 23.3%, and this indicates that people are aware of the necessity to learn the proper use of the spoken language. It is clear from the above-cited surveys that Japanese people are aware of having to learn proper honorifics and expressions as they get older, but researchers have not paid much attention to this phenomenon.

In the field of developmental sociolinguistics, little research has been done on adults' language development. Dunn (1999) proposed the expansion of current research on “language socialization beyond childhood, or even adolescence, to consider communicative development as a process that extends across the life span,” because “communicative skills continue to evolve within a wide variety of contexts as speakers move into new social roles and situation. Adults entering the workplace or changing careers must acquire the discourse practices linked to particular occupations or institutions, and skills in culturally valued rhetorical or artistic genres may develop over a lifetime.” Dunn (2011, 2013) observed business etiquette seminars offered by Japanese training companies and discussed them in terms of politeness theory and business manners.

Kawasaki (1997) proposed the importance of adults' development of 成熟語彙・表現 *seijukugoi·hyogen*, [socially mature expressions] in Japanese. This paper was favorably reviewed by Koyano (1998) in the 1996-1997 biennial review section of 言語生活 *gengoseikatsu* [Lit. language life] as one that demonstrates that even adults are still in the process of developing their language. According to Koyano (1998), this paper brings up the need to pay attention to this taken-for-granted and often overlooked phenomenon of

on-going linguistic development seen among adults. Kawasaki (1994) first shed light on how-to books of language use for Japanese adults. Kawasaki (2000) used one such how-to book to demonstrate the repertoire and developmental stages of her informant. Yet, only a few researchers have written on adults' language development.

In this paper, I will discuss linguistic adulthood among native Japanese speakers using data collected through interviews, questionnaire surveys, and observations I have made over a time span of twenty years. During the interviews, I asked questions and took notes as informants answered the questions. Questionnaires were distributed to students in a classroom setting and collected after they were filled in. Data collected through interviews were used to analyze speakers' awareness of their own language use and development. Questionnaire results were used to illustrate how listeners associate the speaker's use of social phrases with the personality and character of the speaker.

2. *Okagesama de*

「お元気ですか？」“*Ogenki desu ka?*” [How are you? or Are you well? (Lit. Is it health?)]

「おかげさまで」“*Okagesama de.*” [(I'm fine,) thank you.]¹⁾

This is an exchange I remember hearing between a native Japanese speaker and a young active American woman in her twenties who was visiting Japan. Somehow I found the exchange amusing because the woman's reply did not match her appearance at all.²⁾ I had the feeling that this woman had not internalized all the social parameters of this phrase in her educational experience. Yet others seemed to appreciate her fluency in Japanese each time she said *Okagesama de* — her intonation was appropriate and her tone of voice natural. Later, to test my intuition, I asked my Japanese college students whether they would say *Okagesama de* in situations such as the above. None said yes. However, when I observed that housewives and salesmen used *Okagesama de* frequently in a similar situation together with other elaborate social phrases — utterances expected to be produced by socially mature adults — my scholarly interest in Japanese linguistic adulthood was born.

How is *Okagesama de* used by various speakers? I will begin with some examples of *Okagesama de* that I observed in actual daily conversations and speakers' self-reported explanations of their use.

Case 1 (boy, age 13):

In general, elementary school children and high school students are not expected to use *okagesama de*. I asked a 13-year-old boy to guess what the situation would be if he heard somebody say 「おかげさまで、元気にしております。」 *Okagesama de, genki ni site*

orimasu [*Okagesama de*, she is fine] in reply to a question about how Grandmother is doing. He imagined that probably Grandmother had been sick, so sick that she almost died, and that the speaker was talking to the doctor who saved Grandmother's life. According to the boy, the speaker said *Okagesama de* because he/she felt a strong debt of gratitude for the hearer's *okage* (good help).

Case 2 (female, age 32):

One of my colleagues, a 32-year-old female, had been sick. When I called her one day, I started a conversation with 「具合、どうですか？」 *Guai doo desu ka* [How are you doing?]. She answered 「おかげさまで、だいぶ調子がいいんです。」 *Okagesama de, daibu tyoosi ga ii n desu* [*Okagesama de*, I'm getting a lot better]. She said that she used *Okagesama de*, because she appreciated my asking about her and showing concern for her. However, she said that she would not use *Okagesama de* in a situation where she had not been sick nor had she had any other difficulty. For example, in response to a question such as 「お母様、お元気ですか？」 *Okaasama, ogenki desu ka* [How is your mother doing?] or a comment such as 「おめでとう、安産だったみたいね」 *Omedetoo, anzan datta mitai ne* [Congratulations. I heard you had an easy delivery], she would say 「ええ」 *Ee* [Yes] or 「ええ、そうなんです。」 *Ee, soo na n desu* [Yes, that's right], rather than *Okagesama de*.

Case 3 (female, age 41):

A 41-year-old woman, whose son had successfully passed the entrance exam and entered the junior high school of his choice used *Okagesama de* in response to a question from a friend of hers who knew the situation.

The exchange was as follows:

Friend: 「坊ちゃん中1でしたよね、学校どう？」

Bottyan tyuuiti desita yo ne. Gakkoo doo?

[Your son, as I recall, is in the first year of junior high school. How's his school?]

Woman#(41 years): 「おかげさまで、すごく楽しいみたい。」

Okagesama de, sugoku tanosii mitai.

[*Okagesama de*, he really seems to enjoy it.]

The woman said that she used *Okagesama de* because she felt gratitude toward people around her who had encouraged her directly and indirectly when she was helping her son prepare for the entrance exam. Although she could not come up with a concrete reason for thanking people, she felt that she wanted to say *Okagesama de* whenever she had a chance, out of a sense of general gratitude for the way people support each other in society.

Case 4 (female, age 44):

A 44-year-old housewife often used *okagesama de*. She explained to me that she uses *okagesama de* in a reply to expressions such as 「久しぶり... お元気ですか?」 *Hisasiburi ... ogenki desu ka* [I haven't seen you for a long time... how are you doing?] for religious reasons. She felt that her everyday safety is assured by some supernatural power like God. She said that she uses *okagesama de*, partly to thank her friends for asking and caring about her, and partly to give her thanks to God. She clearly remembered a talk that she heard when she was about twenty years old by a famous monk on the word *Okagesama de* and the importance of expressing gratitude to others. She was impressed by the talk and the connection the monk made between the use of this expression and giving thanks to God.

Case 5 (female, age 45 and male, age 47):

A couple, a 45-year-old housewife and her husband, a 47-year-old researcher, used *okagesama de* often. They explained to me that they tend to use *okagesama de* in particular circumstances, which they articulated by examples. For example, they would use *okagesama de* in response to their neighbor's asking 「そういえば、広島のおばあちゃん、お元気ですか?」 *Soo ieba, Hiroshima no obaayan, ogenki desu ka* [By the way, how is your mother in Hiroshima doing?] because they think it is nice for their neighbor to be concerned about their mother who had an operation a few years ago (and the neighbor knows this). They would use *okagesama de* when similar consideration or care by their neighbor was expressed toward their daughters, such as 「お姉ちゃん、新しい学校に慣れましたか?」 *Oneeyan, atarasii gakkoo ni naremasita ka* [How does your elder daughter like her new school?] In this case, they would use *okagesama de* to say "thanks for asking" and "thanks to you who always care about us." They like to grow vegetables, and this year they have a lot of huge *hetima* [sponge gourd] in their garden. They may or may not say *okagesama de* if their neighbor comments on their gourds and say 「今年のへちまはすごい収穫ですね」 *Kotosi no hetima wa sugoi syuukaku desu ne* [This year's *hetima* are huge and plentiful, aren't they?] If they use *okagesama de* in response to this comment, they believe that it would probably mean something like "Thanks to all the sunshine we have been having." There is a common phrase often used by farmers, *otentoosama no okage* [due to the good sunshine]. Farmers also use *okagesama de* to other aspects of nature that help crops grow well.

Case 6 (female age 67):

A 67-year-old housewife explained to me that she only uses *okagesama de* in letters to persons who are more distant than her friends or close relatives. *Okagesama de* has a

formal feel to it, and situations in which and persons to whom she uses *okagesama de* are limited. She said that she uses *okagesama de* as a ritualistic expression in formal situations to persons with whom she has to behave carefully, such as her teacher at art school, her medical doctor, and her elder relatives with whom she feels less close. She uses *okagesama de* primarily to indicate that she owes gratitude to the other person indirectly. I interpret the association she makes between formality and *okagesama de* as related to hearing this expression frequently since childhood. She took *okagesama de* as a ritualized expression, and she seems to use *okagesama de* as one of the alternatives to “thank you” used in formal situations. Since the meaning of words in ritual expressions are not as important as the situation in which they are used, it is not surprising that speakers do not usually think about the original meaning of *okagesama de* carefully.

Based on the six cases described above and my daily observations, a general relationship between the use of *okagesama de* and the speaker’s age is summarized as follows:

Older speakers use *okagesama de* more frequently. In the first stage, the speaker uses *okagesama de* when s/he feels a clear debt to the listener. Then, the speaker gradually broadens the target from a clear debt to consideration shown by others. When the listener shows consideration for the speaker’s health, for example, the speaker uses *okagesama de*. Then, *okagesama de* is used to express gratitude toward those who care about the speaker or support the speaker indirectly or emotionally. Some speakers thank god or nature by using *okagesama de*. In addition to that, there are some speakers who use *okagesama de* just as a greeting.

There was a Sumo grand champion named 貴乃花 Takanohana. He became a grand champion in 1994 when he was 22. I remember him using *okagesama de* smoothly. For example, when he was interviewed by his friend sportscaster:

Interviewer: お子さんが生まれて、おめでとうございます。大きなお子さんだ
そうですね。

Okosan ga umarete, omedetoo gozaimasu. Ooki na okosan da soo desu ne.

[Congratulations on your new baby, I heard that your baby is very big.]

Takanohana: おかげさまで。

Okagesama de.

Despite Takanohana’s young age, his use of *okagesama de* sounded perfect and appropriate. People expect a Sumo grand champion to have 品格 *hinkaku* [dignity]. A grand champion should be calm and humble and know social rules. Takanohana’s use of

this proper expression is one of the indicators that people pay particular attention to when judging his *hinkaku*. The fact that he can use social phrases properly demonstrates that he knows social rules, and the fact that he thanks others by using *okagesama de* shows that he is not pretentious.

In a similar way, I saw some young actors also use *okagesama de* properly in TV interviews, being sensitive to expressions that show their appreciation of fans' support. In addition, they may use *okagesama de* to express their gratitude to others who cooperate and work with them to create shows or plays in which they appear. *Okagesama de* allows them to sound mature, humble, and cooperative.

As the above examples show, it is not only the age but also the 社会的成熟 *syakaiteki seizyuku* [social maturity] of the speaker that makes successful use of *okagesama de* possible. The reason I felt amused by the use of *okagesama de* by the young American woman I mentioned in the beginning of this section was because she did not look socially mature enough in other ways to use it successfully.

Thus, social maturity is an indispensable prerequisite for using *okagesama de* meaningfully. The speaker can and does use the phrase to show his/her social maturity, and when successfully communicated, the hearer recognizes and appreciates the social maturity of the speaker expressed through the phrase *okagesama de*. Therefore, I propose to consider *okagesama de* to be a social maturity marker.

3. Developmental stages of social phrases

In the previous section, various meanings and situations associated with the use of *okagesama de* by Japanese speakers were discussed. The use of *okagesama de* is closely related to the age and the social maturity of the speaker, so the phrase may be seen as a social maturity marker. In this section, I will add more examples of social maturity markers and explore their developmental stages.

3. 1. When to start using *haha*

We expect college students to say 母 *haha* [mother] instead of お母さん *okaasan* [mother] when they refer to their mother in formal situations. Whether or not the speaker is expected to use *haha* or *okaasan* may be based on the age of the speaker. In general, it would be acceptable for 8-year-old children to say *okaasan*, but not for 18-year-old college students.

When do native Japanese speakers start using *haha*? Shibata (1978) conducted a series of surveys beginning in 1959 on the use of *haha* among elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school students. He found that there was a gradual increase

in the use of *haha*. Shibata also found a sudden increase in the use of *haha* when the levels of school changed from the last year of elementary school to the first year of junior high school, and also from the last year of junior high to the first year of senior high school. Entering junior high school or senior high school presents a good opportunity for students to change their speech habit. Since Japan has the unified 6-3-3 (or 6-6) system of school education all over the nation, people are accustomed to thinking and talking about a change of school levels as a change of life stages. We often hear mothers say “Since you have become a junior high school student” as a good reason for their children to change their speech habit. Mothers would continue by saying “you should say *haha* instead of *okaasan* when you talk about me to teachers or strangers.”

After graduating from the school system, stages of life are not referred to in educational categories but in association with one’s occupation and social roles. Social roles include 社会人 *syakaizin* [an adult member of society] or ちゃんとした社会人 *tyantosita syakaizin* [a full-fledged member of society] after getting a full-time job after graduation, 主婦 *syuhu* [housewife], 妻 *tuma* [wife] or 夫 *otto* [husband] after getting married, and 母親 *hahaoya* [mother] or 父親 *titioya* [father] after having a child. Job categories such as サービス業 *saabisu gyoo* [service industry worker], 営業マン *eigyoo man* [salesman] and 秘書 *hisyo* [secretary] are also often referred to when talking about the occupation in which ことばづかい *kotobazukai* [proper language use] is expected. There are marked ways of talking, not so rigid as rules, but with some typical obligatory expressions with higher levels of honorifics and social phrases.

3. 2. Listeners’ expectations of the use of social phrases

There is an expectation for each age group and type of speakers to talk in certain ways. A small survey was conducted to explore hearers’ expectations on the use of social phrases (Kawasaki 1995).

I asked 30 college students to indicate their expectations about the likelihood of certain categories of people using particular social phrases. I used nine categories of people and 20 social phrases. All the questions on the survey were worded as follows: “Do you expect [a category of people] to say [a social phrase]?” Although the use of social phrases is closely related to the context, for the purposes of this survey, I described the context as “any common formal situation.” Respondents indicated their expectation levels using a scale of 1 to 5. The top two most positive expectation levels are: (5) My expectation is so strong that I would feel strange if the person did not use it and (4) I expect that the person would say it.

I have chosen typical eight phrases and summarized the results of this survey in Table 1. Each number in this table indicates the combined percentage of the students who gave

4 (expect) and 5 (strongly expect) expectation ratings. For example, the 70 in the column for elementary school students for the row of *Yoroshiku onegai shimasu* indicates that 70% of the students surveyed expected high school students to say *Yoroshiku onegai shimasu*.

Table 1: Degree of expectations for the use of social phrases (N=30)

(Numbers indicate combined percentage of level 4 and 5 expectations) (↑ =honorific form, ↓ =humble form)

	Expressions	English translation	elementary school 5th & 6th grader	junior high school student	senior high school student	university student	7-11 parttime worker	secretary	white color worker	TOYOTA salesman	housewife
(1)	よろしくお願ひします Yoroshiku onegai-simasu	I request your kindness (lit.)	70	97	97	100	97	100	100	100	97
(2)	出口はこちらです Deguti wa kotira desu	The exit is this way.	27	43	70	90	97	100	97	97	90
(3)	先生は来週いらっしゃいます Sensee wa raisyuu irassyaimasu ↑	The professor will come ↑ next week.	13	46	73	93	90	100	100	100	90
(4)	私の方からうかがいます Watasi no hoo kara ukagaimasu ↓	I will pay a visit ↓	0	17	40	83	70	100	97	100	87
(5)	(自分に非がある) 申し訳ありません Moosiwake arimasen	(As an apology for doing something wrong) There is no excuse (lit.)	7	36	60	93	93	100	100	100	97
(6)	(自分に非がない) 申し訳ありません Moosiwake arimasen	(As an apology even when not having done anything wrong) There is no excuse (lit.).	0	10	23	63	77	87	87	87	97
(7)	かしこまりました Kasikomarimasita	Certainly	0	3	7	17	70	100	97	93	40
(8)	(自分が、誰かが) いつもお世話になっております Itumo osewani natte orimasu	(I/Someone) is always obliged ↓ to you	0	3	20	50	47	97	97	93	93

The foregoing table shows that Japanese native speakers expect certain people to use certain social phrases. For example, almost all persons above junior high school are expected to use (1) *yoroshiku onegai shimasu* (Lit. I request your kindness), a very common ritualistic social phrase, while only adults with certain jobs such as secretary are expected to use (7) *kasikomarimasita* (Certainly + formal), which sounds overly polite in ordinary situations. Senior high school students are expected to be able to use (3) *sonkeigo* (respect honorific) but not yet (4) *kenzyoogo* (humble honorific). More than 90% of the informants expect university students to apologize, (5) *moosiwake arimasen* (Lit. There is no excuse.) for doing something wrong, but two thirds of the informants expect them to apologize when they have not done anything wrong. 87% of informants expect secretary,

white-color worker and salesman to apologize even they have not done anything wrong.³⁾

Though it is limited, the survey results in 3.1. and 3.2. support the proposition that native Japanese speakers share a common idea that the speaker's age, education level, stage of life and occupation have a close relationship with how s/he speaks, especially with the use of honorifics and social phrases.

3. 3. Speakers' self-analysis of her own developmental stages

Each individual is also aware of his/her own developmental stages and corresponding changes in speech. I conducted an ethnographic case study of a 22-year-old college senior, S (Kawasaki 2000). S perceived her linguistic growth in stages that were associated strongly with her school levels as well as social roles. Below is a summary of her stages of linguistic development as S described in the interview.

- 1st stage: in elementary school. S found school to be the place where she had to be formal (use *-desu/masu*).
- 2nd stage: in junior and senior high school. S became conscious of different ways of speaking in casual and formal occasions, and the use of polite expressions.
- 3rd stage: in college when she met many new people. S began to care about other people's feelings, and so she began to try to guess how they were feeling and to adjust her speech accordingly.
- 4th stage: in college, after she started living alone in an apartment and working part-time. S began to know and understand the world outside the university and realized that she had to act as a responsible adult. Her experiences such as having to say no to salespeople and solicitors who came to her apartment, contacting with students' parents as a cram school teacher, and working as a waitress at a fast-food restaurant added many formal and polite expressions to her repertoire.
- 5th stage: in college, after she started job hunting. S had to meet strangers and make a good impression. She had to negotiate and persuade other people politely. Job hunting was a pivotal point in her linguistic development.
- 6th stage (Possible future stages): in a company as a full-time worker. S will speak as a young office worker should.
- 7th stage: in her 40s or 50s. Probably after marriage and having children. S will talk somewhat differently.

When S explained her development after she started working part-time, she added the job information such as a cram school teacher and a waitress at a fast-food restaurant. She started using proper ways of speaking as a teacher to students and their mothers, and as a service provider for customers. Even for her future language use, she explained

that she will talk as a young office worker should. She had an awareness of a social role in each workplace and the relationship between the social role and a proper way of speech. One person, as s/he gets older, holds multiple roles in society and s/he code-switches according to the role s/he is playing. For example, a woman in her 30s may have multiple roles such as being a wife, mother, PTA member, and businesswoman.

3. 4. Social phrases as knowledge and as repertoire

After eliciting S's views on her linguistic development, I asked S four questions about 765 expressions from the how-to book, titled 『ちよつとしたものの言い方』 *Tyotto sita Mono no ikata* [Subtle Expression](Pakirahausu, 1990). The questions related to 1) her knowledge about each expression, 2) the degree to which she felt that the expression was established in her speech, 3) her confidence in using the expression, and 4) when she started to use the expression.

S had a remarkable knowledge of polite and formal expressions. Out of 765 polite/formal expressions in the book, she knew 738 well. S's knowledge was considerably beyond my expectation, and this may be due to the fact that as she herself said, she was exceptionally well trained.

Among the 738 expressions which S knew well, she said that she could use 379 as fully experienced expressions and 110 when necessary or when she wanted to use. Although she had never used the other 249 expressions, she expected that she would use 203 of them in the future — 140 within a year or two and 63 when she reached the age and status which required her to use them. The other 46 expressions were the ones she thought she could not or would not use. These responses indicate that S knew a lot about polite/formal expressions, she could use 66.3% of them well, and she had stored 27.5% of them for her future use. Here again, she has a clear idea about her stage of life and keeps some of the expressions for her future use.

4. Social expectation

4. 1. Stereotype

Hudson (1996, pp.206-8) discusses language-based prejudice and observes that “one person can draw conclusions about another person's character and abilities simply on the basis of how that person speaks.” This may be socially problematic, as Hudson points out, when the conclusions drawn are wrong. However, the same underlying mechanism of reading social markers in the speaker's linguistic choices could serve as an important process to get information about the speaker in communication.

Hudson explains this phenomenon clearly:

“If characteristics A and B are typically (‘prototypically’) associated with each other, we *assume* the presence of B whenever we *observe* the presence of A, or vice versa. If A is some characteristic of speech and B is some characteristic of personality, speech will be used as a clue to personality, which is generally harder to observe directly than speech. Similarly, if some speech characteristic is linked in a prototype with a social characteristic, such as some particular type of education, the former will be used as a clue to the latter. As noted earlier, the widely shared prototypes underlying such judgments are called ‘(social) stereotypes.’” (Hudson, 1996, pp.211-212)

The fact that social phrases are used by the hearer to guess the speaker’s level of social maturity is well explained by Hudson’s theory.

4. 2. Listener’s image of speakers elicited from social phrases

I conducted a small survey with 20 students on the stereotype associated with Japanese social phrases. I asked 20 college students to describe the kind of speaker that would use the two expressions below, which are extremely polite and typically used by socially mature individuals. (Kawasaki, 1995)

- (1) 「おかげさまで 元気にいたしております。」
Okagesama de genki ni itasite orimasu.
[Thanks to you, I’m fine.]
- (2) 「恐れ入りますが お電話を拝借できませんでしょうか？」
Osore irimasu ga odenwa o haisyakudekimasen desyoo ka?
[Please excuse me, but, may I use the telephone?]

The two sentences above contain words and phrases that stand out as social phrases. *Okagesama de* and *osore irimasu ga* are elaborate ways of saying “thanks to you” and “excuse me.” *Itashite ori masu* is an extremely polite (humble) way of saying *site iru* [is doing]. *Haisyaku* is also a highly polite (humble) way of saying *kariru* [borrow]. They are prominent markers of social maturity.

The students were free to write down whatever they thought. They wrote several adjectives and descriptions about the speaker’s character. I summarize these descriptions below:

Table 2: Adjectives and descriptions about the speaker's character

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 知性と教養がある <i>tisee to kyooyoo ga aru</i> (intellectual and educated/cultivated/cultured) 2. 誠実 <i>seezitu</i> (sincere/honest) 3. 信頼できる <i>sinrai dekiru</i> (reliable/trustworthy) 4. しっかりしている <i>sikkari site iru</i> (steady) 5. 落ち着いている <i>otituite iru</i> (calm) 6. 明るい <i>akarui</i> (cheerful/spirited) 7. 温厚 <i>onkoo</i> (courteous/affable/mildmannered) 8. 控えめ <i>hikaeme</i> (moderate/modest) 9. 上品 <i>zyoohin</i> (refined/elegant) 10. 丁寧 <i>teenee</i> (polite) 11. 礼儀正しい <i>reegi tadasii</i> (courteous) 12. 協調性がある <i>kyootyoosee ga aru</i> (cooperative) 13. 周囲の人に慕われている <i>syuu ni hito ni sitawarete iru</i> (be adored by others) 14. 言語に敏感 <i>gengo ni binkan</i> (sensitive to language use) 15. 配慮・気配りがうまい <i>hairyo/kikubari ga umai</i> (good at expressing consideration and careful attention) 16. 目上に気を配る <i>meue ni ki o kubaru</i> (pays careful attention to superiors) 17. 相手をたてる <i>aite o tateru</i> (pays due respect to the hearer) 18. 自分の立場を把握 <i>zibun no tatiba o haaku</i> (understands one's own status) 19. 目上の前でも萎縮せず礼儀正しく振る舞える <i>meue no mae de mo isyukusezu reegi tadasiku hurumaeru</i> (does not quail/cower before his/her superiors and is able to be proper and polite) 20. 経験豊富だが思い切ったことはできない <i>keeken hoohu da ga omoikitta koto wa dekinai</i> (has a lot of experience but cannot take drastic steps)

These two sentences motivated the informants to write a good many adjectives and descriptions as listed above, and they all have something in common. These adjectives and descriptions give a sense of what it means to be socially mature in Japan. Native Japanese speakers share clear social stereotypes of a socially mature person, which are heavily associated with how they speak. Therefore, social stereotypes commonly inspire us to draw conclusions about the level of social maturity of the speaker.

5. Social phrases

Social phrases consist of unconscious (ritualistic) and conscious components to varying degrees. Social phrases were more common and probably used unconsciously decades ago when people used honorifics in their homes. Nowadays, with the overall decrease in the use of social phrases in daily life, native Japanese speakers learn to use social phrases more consciously.

As I argued at the end of 2, social phrases such as *okagesama de* play the role of social maturity markers. Listeners regard social phrases as a cue to understanding the speaker's social maturity. Speakers use social phrases to express how mature they are. For example, when college students start job-hunting, they start using social phrases to demonstrate that they are mature enough to work. Even when they are still less experienced college

students, social phrases that they use in their talk make them appear mature, experienced, and able candidates. If they want to show that they are unique and do not care so much about social norms, they do not use typical elaborate social phrases, which may sound too formal. From the speaker's point of view, social phrases can be self-expression markers as well.

How do native Japanese speakers acquire social phrases and reach their linguistic adulthood? Japanese speakers naturally and gradually acquire them at home from older family members, at school from peers, and at workplaces by observing others' behavior. However, because learners of social phrases often encounter difficulty in mastering them, there are a variety of how-to books on linguistic etiquette available. Books on linguistic etiquette cover topics such as honorifics, letter writing, and wedding speeches, and they are good sources of examples of social phrases. In Japan, how-to-speak books in the form of anthologies of common useful expressions have been popular.

I have analyzed all the lists of social phrases given in the how-to books mentioned in this paper from the point of view of social maturity. I propose to divide these social phrases into two groups: 1) the 出世魚 *syusseuo* [Lit. promoting fish] type and 2) the 高級魚 *kookyuugyo* [expensive, high-class, high-quality fish] type.

5. 1. *Syusseuo*-type

Syusseuo are fish that get different names as they grow based on their size, which differ according to the age of the fish. For example, yellowtail is first called イナダ *inada* (a young yellowtail) when it is small, then ワラサ *warasa* (a middle sized yellowtail), and finally ブリ *huri* (*yellowtail*) when it is full grown. Though they get different names, the fish is the same yellowtail.

Syusseuo-type social phrases include expressions such as *papa*, *otoosan* and *titi*, which all mean father. A Japanese boy may call his father *papa*, which is derived from English, when he is very young, both to address and to refer to his father. At some point, probably when he becomes around ten years old, he may feel that the expression *papa* is childish and start using *otoosan* especially when referring to his father in a conversation with someone outside his immediate family. As he grows, most likely when he enters junior high school at about 12 years of age, he starts using *titi* to refer to his father when talking to those outside the family. He may even stop using *papa* at home and address his father as *otoosan*, and use *utino otoosan* when talking to a friend about his father. When he enters college, he may use *titi* when referring to his father in a conversation with those outside the family, and use *uti no oya* or *oyazi* when talking to close friends in college. If he uses *otoosan* to refer to his father when talking to close friends, it sounds as if he is more dependent, while *oyazi* sounds more like an independent adult. In this way, a boy

may use and add different reference forms for his father as he grows, although the referent remains the same. A girl may follow a slightly different path. There are many girls who keep addressing their father *papa* even when they become adults, but they change the reference form from *papa* to *titi* in formal situations and *otoosan* or *uchino oya* in casual situations when they become adolescents.

Expressions such as *koko/kotira* (here), *kuru/irassyaru/oideninaru* (come), and *suimasen ga/moosiwake arimasen ga/moosiwake gozaimasen ga* (I'm sorry) are also examples of *syusseuo*-type social phrases. In formal situations, small children do not typically use polite forms, nor are they expected to do so. When they get older, they gradually learn and begin to use honorifics and more elaborate expressions.

5. 2. *Kookyuugyo*-type

Kookyuugyo, literally expensive fish, are eaten only on rare occasions. Japanese people can usually eat *kookyuugyo* only at expensive 料亭 (*ryootee*) restaurants. Those who have a number of opportunities to go to *ryootee* restaurants know how *kookyuugyo* taste, and knowing how *kookyuugyo* taste in turn indicates their social status with rich experience of the culture of Japanese cuisine. Usually people have more chances to go to *ryootee* and eat *kookyuugyo* when they become older, because they are more likely to socialize over expensive food. There are also some people who may have chances to eat *kookyuugyo* at home from childhood, and these people are often considered to be well bred.

Similarly, the acquisition of *kookyuugyo*-type social phrases relates closely to the speaker's social experience. Japanese speakers learn new *kookyuugyo*-type social phrases through changes in their social experiences; for example, when they become an employee of a company, or when they get married. Just as it is difficult to imagine the taste of *kookyuugyo* without actually eating the fish, it is difficult for those with less experience to guess the meaning or understand the actual use of social phrases. The idea of saying *Okagesama de* when there is no specific reason to thank someone is alien to a young boy who is in the self-centered stage of life. This *kookyuugyo*-type social phrase can be learned only if one has the experience of hearing people around use this expression, at which point s/he also realizes that s/he can only be successful in life with the support of others.

Based on a study of various how-to books, I divided *kookyuugyo*-type social phrases into four categories according to whether their content related to 1) owing gratitude (or indebtedness), 2) social rules, 3) self-disparagement or 4) appreciation/reward. Because these notions are difficult for younger people who have more self-centered ways of thinking, they tend to be associated with more experienced, socially mature members of society.

Kookyuugyo-type social phrases express a sense of indebtedness related to the

speaker's experience of being taken care of by the addressee. These phrases acknowledge the fact that people cannot live alone, and need to help and be helped by others. With these phrases, people indicate that they support and rely on each other, and are happy that this is possible. In addition to *Okagesama de*, the social phrase, 主人がいつもお世話になっております *Syuzin ga itumo osewa ni natte orimasu* [My husband is always owing gratitude to you/taken care of by you] is a typical *kookyugyo*-type social phrase related to the sense of indebtedness. This phrase, often uttered by a housewife to her husband's work-related colleagues, expresses the housewife's appreciation of the fact that her husband and the hearer have a good relationship, rather than making a statement that her husband is a man who is not able to do anything alone, which might be implied by the English translation. This phrase also indicates that the speaker is socially mature enough to mention that people support each other.

Salespeople also use *kookyugyo*-type social phrases of indebtedness. A bank officer often initiates a phone conversation with a customer with いつもお世話になっております *itumo osewani natte orimasu* [(I/we) are always supported (by you)] and then adds "how about putting your bonus in our new savings account?" They use this phrase to all customers regardless of the amount of money they may have in their accounts. Stores often include words *Okagesama de* in their advertisements, e.g. おかげさまで、新店舗10周年 *Okagesama de, sin tenpo zyussyuunen* [Thanks to you, 10th anniversary of our new shop].

Typical examples of *kookyugyo*-type social phrases related to social rules are ご無沙汰いたしております *Gobusata itasite orimasu* [(I'm sorry) for being out of touch] and 立ち話で失礼ですが *tatibanasi de situree desu ga* [It's rude of me for not preparing a proper place to sit and talk]. With these phrases, speakers indicate their awareness of social rules that relate to the frequency they should see one another or a proper place to sit and talk. These phrases also have a negative politeness function, and soften the face threat caused by violating the social rules to which they refer. At the same time, they indicate the speaker's social maturity by showing that the speaker is aware of these social rules.

Kookyugyo-type social phrases, which function in role recognition, lower status recognition or 謙遜・自己卑下型 *kenson·zikohige gata* [self-disparagement type] like humble polite forms, had an expectation rating that was lower than the expectation rating that honorific forms had for younger people. Examples of these phrases include elaborate phrases such as 僭越ですが *Senetu desu ga* [It is presumptuous of me] and 恐縮です *kyoosyuku desu* [I am much obliged, more than I deserve] and expressions such as 心ばかりのものです *kokoro bakari no mono desu ga* [it is just a small thing from my heart]、何のおもてなしもできず *nan no o motenasi mo dekizu* [I am unable to treat you well enough]、私のようなものが *watasi no yoo na mono ga* [a person as (bad/low) as me]、

～させていただく ... *sasete itadaku* [I receive your allowing me to do]. This suggests that the notion of humbling and role/lower status recognition appear to be difficult for young people to acquire.

Kookyugyo-type social phrases related to appreciation/reward or ねぎらい型 *negirai gata* [reward type] reflect the speaker's ability to notice the amount of trouble the addressee has put in to do something for the speaker, or to recognize some aspect of the addressee's behavior to appreciate. The ability to express this appreciation verbally is a characteristic of sensitive and socially mature individuals. Examples of the phrases include お忙しいところをわざわざ～ *oisogashii tokoro wazawaza...* (despite your busy schedule, you go out of your way to ...), 遠路はるばる～ *enro harubaru...* (you came all the way from very far away to do ... for me).

5. 3. Social phrases and developmental stages

Based on my analysis of social phrases, I propose four developmental stages that reflect the correlation between socialization and the use of social phrases.

Stage 1 is the stage where native Japanese speakers, usually children, are in a privileged position in society where they are not always expected to follow social rules. They may be taught to use some common ritual expressions such as *yorosiku* (please treat me kindly), but they do not use honorifics or social phrases.

In Stage 2, people are still relatively self-centered, but begin to accept some social rules. They use more ritualistic expressions, and may use some honorifics.

In Stage 3, people become more aware of other people. They are able to think about other people's feelings and begin to show consideration towards others. They often use expressions such as *yokattara* [if it's okay (with you)], which shows that they do not need to control the addressee, because they know that people around them appreciate them and are comfortable asking others to make decisions. They begin to learn social rules. They also become aware of various honorifics and try to use them.

In Stage 4, people become aware of direct and indirect benefits they receive from other people, not only from the immediate addressee, but also from other members of the group to which they belong. Through experiences of being helped by and helping others, people become aware that they coexist by helping each other. Negative experiences also help them to learn how to skillfully avoid confrontation by using certain phrases such as *sumimasen* [I'm sorry] even when they have not done anything wrong. People also become aware that social rules, though sometimes annoying, are necessary and effective if we want to have a comfortable life in a safe community. People learn that they feel better when they are treated respectfully and are appreciated, and grow to be able to treat others the same way in order to make them feel comfortable. At this level,

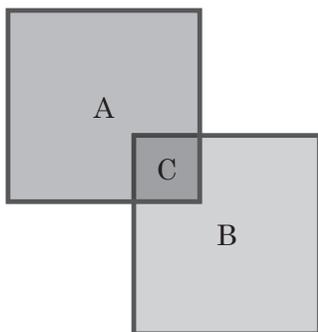
people try to learn social phrases on their own through their experience or with the help of how-to books. By using social phrases, they are considered to be socially mature members of the community, and the contentment they feel gives them incentive to add more elaborate social phrases to their repertoire.

When I discuss social phrases from a developmental perspective, I take the view that the meaning of social phrases is learned as the speaker's experiences increase. Now I turn to consider the ritualistic use of social phrases. People do not pay much attention to the literal meaning of the phrase if it is used as a ritual phrase.

People often use social phrases as ritualistic expressions. A person starts using *okagesama de* without thinking about its meaning, as we often do to say *itadaki masu* and *gotisosama desita*⁴⁾ without thinking about their meanings. We have to assume some of the uses of the social phrases are very ritualistic, and that their acquisition is not based on how mature they are, but on the environment in which they encounter the phrase. I add the notion of "any stage" here to acknowledge the fact that people may learn ritualistic phrases at any stage of linguistic development regardless of their level of experience. This is possible because they do not have to learn the meaning of the ritualistic phrase; they only need to know how and when to use it.

5. 4. Social phrases as a social norm and a self-expressive tool

Figure 1 explains the relationship between social phrases as social maturity markers and social phrases as self-expression markers.



A & C = phrases as social maturity markers

B & C = phrases as self-expression markers

C = phrases as social maturity markers and self-expression markers

Figure 1. Social phrases as social maturity markers and self-expression markers

Phrases in A & C are those used mainly as social maturity markers. For example, the use of *sonkeigo* (respect honorifics) as in Table 1 (3) *Sensee wa raisyuu irassyai masu* [The

professor will come next week] is used as a social maturity marker. As a social norm, Japanese people expect adult speakers to use respect honorifics, and native Japanese speakers usually try to use them.

Phrases in B & C are those used mainly as self-expression markers. I have not discussed them in this paper because they are not directly related to linguistic adulthood. For example, *Suggee* [incredible, unbelievable] is a slangy way of saying *sugoi* [incredible, unbelievable] and considered to be brusque and masculine. Sometimes, young women use *suggee* to emphasize a mannish personality; a clear example of the use of a self-expression marker.

Phrases in C are those that are used both as social maturity markers and self-expression markers. These phrases include most of the *kookyugyo*-type discussed in 5.2.

In a cross-cultural study of requests for a pen in Japanese and American English (Hill et al., 1986 and Ide et al. 1986), we proposed two factors in sociolinguistic systems of politeness: Discernment and Volition. Discernment is an English translation of *wakimae*. “In colloquial usage, *wakimae* refers to the almost automatic observation of socially-agreed-upon rules.... A capsule definition would be ‘conforming to the expected norm.’” (Hill et al. 1986, p.348)

The difference between social phrases and *wakimae* is well explained with Figure 1. A in Figure 1 is *wakimae*, but C is not. Social phrases in C reflect the speaker’s social maturity, and are used voluntarily to express the speaker’s desire to improve their relationship with people around them and to show their social maturity. For example, when *okagesama de* is used, for the speaker who uses it not in a ritualistic way, the feeling it expresses is far from the automaticity of expressions of *wakimae*. As various people I interviewed conveyed, *okagesama de* expresses the speaker’s sincere consideration for and appreciation of others. *Okagesama de* encapsulates not just an old concept but something which is considered good in Japanese society. Though people may use *okagesama de* less and less over time, I do not expect it will go out of use entirely, because of the special role it plays in helping relationships to proceed smoothly.

A function of *okagesama de* as a self-expression marker is also explained well with the recent interview with the informant of Case 1 in section 2. Twenty years have passed since I interviewed him and he is now 34. He now works as a section chief at his workplace. He has joined several projects and experienced the importance of cooperation. He has been supported by many people, and he has helped others, too. So now with his experiences he clearly understands the usage of *okagesama de* and that it is often used without having any particular debt. He told me that many of his colleagues at his workplace use *okagesama de*, but he doesn’t. He is not so sure but he thinks he cannot use it so nicely as other people do, and he is not the type of person who says *okagesama de*. Instead, he

thinks he uses *itsumo osewani natte imasu/orimasu* [Lit. always being taken care of] and *arigatoo gozaimasu* [thank you] instead. They can replace what *okagesama de* expresses. He takes *okagesama de* as a social maturity marker, but at the same time, he thinks it is a *self-expression* marker. And right now, he himself feels that it is not what he would say. I also asked him whether or not he would use *okagesama de* in 10 years. His answer was yes and no; he doesn't know how he would say in 10 years. So like the informant S in section 3.4, he knows the phrase's meaning and usage, but he keeps it in his storage. The slight difference is that he thinks whether he uses it or not may also depend on what type of person he wants to be. Since *okagesama de* is often used ritualistically, he has some hesitation to express himself as a typical *okagesama de* user.

These days, the use of social phrases, honorifics and elaborate expressions has become less obligatory as a social rule, and speakers have more freedom to use expressions as they see fit. The freedom varies depending upon which group of people the speaker belongs.

Social phrases are now explained as an effective tool to have better communication. In that sense, it is considered as the volition-type in the discernment/volition distinction. Most recent data I found about the use of *okagesama de* come from a website for businessmen. The website is titled 大人のための正しい敬語の使い方 *otona no tame no tadasii keego no tukai kata* [a guide to proper honorific use for adults] (<http://honorific-language.com/>). It has short explanations on specific topics such as "how to say 'please teach me' in proper *keigo*" and what is written there is of very basic level. One of the topics is "the proper use of *okagesama de*, a business 枕詞 *makura kotoba* [Japanese poetic epithet]." In Japanese sociolinguistic studies, particular phrases added before the main sentence are called 前置き *maeoki* [introductory short remark], or 注釈 *tyuushaku* [note] (Sugito 1983), and this new term *bizinesu makura kotoba* may be included there. *Bizinesu makura kotoba* function to "口調をなめらかにする *kutyoo o namerakani suru* [make the speech smooth]." Even when speaking about the job you did alone, if you add *makurakotoba*, you can create an impression that you have 協調性 *kyootyoosee* [cooperation, harmony] and a good attitude toward work.

6. Summary

Native Japanese speakers keep learning Japanese even when they become adults. This is mainly reflected in Japanese social phrases and elaborate expressions, which are expected to be used along with the speaker's social maturity. Native Japanese speakers share this idea and they are aware of their own language development as adults. Social phrases and elaborate expressions are social maturity markers of the speaker when they

are used. As a listener, native Japanese speakers use social maturity markers of the speaker to guess the speaker's character and abilities. If the listener hears the speaker's fluent and proper use of social phrases, the listener thinks that the speaker must be socially experienced and able person to work with, for example. So as a speaker, native Japanese speakers become careful about how to say things. College juniors and seniors start using typical social phrases at the same time when they start wearing suits and leather shoes instead of T-shirts and sports shoes for job hunting occasions. From the speaker's point of view, social phrases are self-expression markers. If s/he wants to look casual, s/he would wear casual clothes and speak casually. If s/he wants to look decent, s/he would include social phrases.

In section 2, one of the typical social phrases, *okagesama de*, was analyzed in detail. Actual cases of the use of *okagesama de* by six people of ages from 13 to 67 were described and explained based on my observations and interviews with them. A young person says *okagesama de* to express thanks to specific matters such as a help he receives. Older speakers use *okagesama de* to express thanks to broader matters, such as appreciation for interest in speaker's personal affairs, appreciation for assistance, and so on, by the listener and/or even by the weather or God. A much older person who was born in early *Showa* era uses *okagesama de* as an elegant reply of gratitude to "How are you?" *Okagesama de*, when used without any specific debt of gratitude, is a social maturity marker, which conveys that the speaker is socially mature.

In section 3, three studies were introduced to illustrate developmental stages of social phrases. The first survey, one of Shibata's studies clearly shows that children learn to use *haha*, a formal way of referring to his/her mother when talking to non-family members or in non-casual occasions, when they get older, especially upon entering junior high school or senior high school. The second survey shows that native Japanese speakers expect certain people to use certain social phrases. Each social phrase represents a certain level of social maturity, and native Japanese speakers share this understanding. So listeners can tell the level of social maturity by noticing what kind of social phrases the speaker uses. The third survey illustrates how an individual perceives her developmental stages of social phrases. The latter part of the same survey tells us that she has a rich collection of social phrases as knowledge but she uses only half of them or so now. What she does is to store them so that she can use them in a year or two, or when she gets much older, or has a certain position in society. She is aware of the proper stage of the speaker for each social phrase.

Section 4 discussed social phrases from the perspective of language-based prejudice. The reason why Japanese speakers can use social phrases as social maturity markers is that they have a clear stereotypical image of the speaker that matches each social phrase.

Survey results show the stereotypes native Japanese speakers share, and demonstrate the fact that only two social phrases can be enough to elicit a clear image of the speaker.

In section 5, more examples of social phrases from how-to books were analyzed and categorized from a developmental perspective into two types: the *syusseuo* type and the *kookyugyo* type. The *syusseuo* type is the one that has a core meaning that is understood even by children, so almost all native Japanese speakers have a chance to use them. The *kookyugyo* type is the one that we may need certain experiences to understand the notion and to know how to use them. Certain types of *kookyugyo*-type social phrases, particularly the ones that demonstrate self-disparagement of the speaker or appreciation/reward to the listener, are typical *kookyugyo*-type social phrases, which can be used only when the speaker has enough experience to understand the importance of such notions.

In the last segment of section 5, keywords such as social maturity marker and self-expression marker, developmental stages, *syusseuo*-type and *kookyugyo*-type social phrases are summarized with a figure and discussed to illustrate linguistic adulthood in Japanese.

In sum, this paper illustrates the following: native Japanese speakers add to their repertoire of social phrases as they become adults. Japanese speakers take social phrases as social maturity markers. Some think that using social phrases on certain occasions is a social norm. From a listener's point of view, the speaker's choice of social phrases reveals important information about the speaker's social maturity. In addition to showing social maturity, speakers make choices about which social phrases to use or not to use, reflecting their awareness of the relation between their self-images and speech styles. Thus, social phrases function as self-expression markers as well as social maturity markers.

7. Notes for further research

In this paper, Linguistic Adulthood in Japanese has been analyzed from multiple perspectives. I have proposed the following new terms: social maturity marker, self-expression marker, *syusseuo*-type social phrase, *kookyugyo*-type social phrase, and four subcategories of *kookyugyo*-type social phrases. These terms and concepts are all new, and they need to be examined in greater detail. Furthermore, in this paper, I have treated the data from the 1990s and those from the present without making any distinction between them, but speakers' awareness and social stereotypes are changing, and such changes must also be studied. I have discussed linguistic adulthood only in Japanese language, but I believe that in any language, there exists the notion of linguistic adulthood, which must be studied to add a dimension that has been largely missing in the field of developmental sociolinguistics.

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Notes

This study was originally presented at the Eleanor Jordan Festival at Portland State University, Oregon, USA in 1995. More than 20 years have passed and new research results, analyses and concepts are added, but the original idea of dealing with linguistic adulthood in Japan has remained the core of this paper.

- 1) The explanation and translation here is taken from *Beginning Japanese Part 1*, p.2. The pair "Ogenki desu ka." "Hai. or Ee. Okagesama de. Anata wa?" is introduced in the Introductory Lesson: Greetings and Useful Phrases. Jordan explains that "Okagesama de indicates the speaker's appreciation for interest in his personal affairs ('thanks for asking') and/or appreciation for assistance ('thanks to you'). It always accompanies, or itself implies favorable or pleasant information." (Jordan 1963, p.3).
- 2) Here I should exclude the Japanese people's low expectation for foreigner's Japanese ability. If I introduce that notion, the case would be explained too simply.
- 3) Japanese terms of apology are different from English ones in their use. For example, the most typical term of apology, *suimasen*, can be commonly used in situations where "I'm sorry", "excuse me" and "thank you" are used. To apologize in Japanese society means not only to express the regret of having done or said something wrong but also to express the speaker's understanding of the hearer's situation such as "I'm sorry about the fact that you are having trouble." So as a mature member of society, native Japanese speakers sometimes apologize without having done anything wrong, and simply to make the communication run smoothly.
- 4) Both *itadaki masu* and *gotisoo sama desita* are ritualistic phrases Japanese people say at the beginning and end of a meal. They also create an atmosphere of having a meal together.

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