



Proceedings of the 3rd International Scientific Conference

Trends, Issues, and Challenges in Modern Science



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and Challenges in
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Pragmatic Functions of Plain Style (Futsuutai) in Modern Japanese Communication: From Everyday Interaction to Business Discourse

Kostiantyn Komisarov

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, Kyiv

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2164-6244>

Olha Horodyska

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, Kyiv

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2125-0618>

Abstract. *This study examines the pragmatic functions and pedagogical value of the plain form (futsuutai) and Plain Language in Japanese. Moving beyond keigo-centric instruction, it synthesizes research on language socialization, discourse management, and workplace style-shifting. Findings indicate that plain speech and simplified syntax are vital for building socio-affective proximity, reducing cognitive load, and achieving authentic communicative competence across diverse social domains.*

Keywords: *Japanese language pedagogy, plain form (futsuutai), Plain Language, style-shifting, pragmatic competence.*

Traditional instruction in Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL) has historically operated under a structural bias toward polite speech registers, primarily *teineigo*, a subcategory of *keigo*, which is consistently presented as the essential default for non-native speakers. Within traditional pedagogical frameworks, formal verb endings such as *-desu* and *-masu* are introduced at the very beginning of language acquisition. At the same time, the plain form (*futsuutai*) is relegated to secondary status or restricted to informal domains involving close friends and family members. This *keigo*-centric orientation stems from a desire to ensure that foreign learners remain socially polite and avoid inadvertent offense in intercultural encounters. However, this instructional strategy creates an artificial dichotomy between formal and informal speech, fostering a widespread misconception among learners that plain speech is inappropriate or even dangerous for general communication. As a result, non-native speakers often develop a rigid reliance on formal registers, which hinders their ability to fully participate in natural Japanese discourse and leaves them ill-equipped to navigate the nuanced pragmatic demands of authentic social interaction.

In actual linguistic practice, the exclusive reliance on polite speech frequently produces a communication barrier that distances non-native speakers from native interlocutors, making interactions feel overly formal, detached, and emotionally flat. Authentic Japanese conversation is rarely monolithic; rather, it is characterized by continuous stylistic adjustments and fluid register shifts that reflect evolving social

dynamics, affective closeness, and discourse goals. By treating *futsuutai* merely as an informal dialect rather than a fundamental component of general communicative competence, traditional curricula obscure the essential sociolinguistic functions that plain speech performs. To understand the necessity of plain speech in foreign language education, it is essential to examine its socio-affective function in building interpersonal closeness and social solidarity. Sociolinguistic studies on language socialization demonstrate that as foreign speakers immerse themselves in Japanese-speaking communities, their linguistic repertoire undergoes a gradual transformation, shifting from an over-reliance on *teineigo* toward a regular integration of *futsuutai*.

This socialization trajectory is empirically supported by Maiko Okunishi [2], who analyzed the longitudinal speech patterns of international students interacting with native Japanese classmates. Okunishi found that upon arrival, international learners utilized the plain form in 59.2% of casual interactions, frequently exhibiting non-standard style shifts and erratic mixing with polite forms. However, after two months of active immersion in peer networks, their plain form usage increased to 79.3%, demonstrating a marked acquisition of indexical knowledge and stylistic consistency. This socialization process reveals that plain speech is heavily enriched with listener-oriented elements (*kikite meate-gata*), including sentence-final particles such as *ne*, *yo*, and *no*, pitch elevation, and prosodic variations. These pragmatic markers allow speakers to express an affective stance, demonstrate empathy, invite confirmation, and construct a shared psychological space with their interlocutors. Without access to plain speech, non-native speakers struggle to project warmth, sincerity, and emotional presence, remaining perpetually stuck in a polite yet emotionally distant communicative role.

Beyond its socio-affective dimension, *futsuutai* operates as a crucial cognitive tool for organizing, processing, and structuring information during real-time discourse (*jouhou seiri*). Native Japanese speakers regularly deploy plain forms not only to convey intimacy, but also to facilitate cognitive management during complex conversations. When navigating communicative hurdles, speakers use plain verb forms to quote statements, repeat key phrases, execute self-corrections, and handle vocabulary retrieval difficulties without interrupting the macro-structure of the exchange. For non-native speakers facing communication breakdowns, utilizing *futsuutai* serves as an efficient problem-solving strategy, enabling them to process incoming verbal input, confirm understanding through echoic repetition, and maintain conversational momentum. The cognitive efficiency of the plain form reduces the processing burden associated with complex honorific conjugation, thereby freeing mental bandwidth for content planning and interactive alignment.

The functional utility of plain speech is further demonstrated in professional and business settings, directly challenging the prevailing myth that corporate interactions

require exclusive adherence to formal honorifics. Empirical investigations into business discourse reveal that while *keigo* serves as the baseline for formal interactions, workplace communication involves constant register mixing and strategic deployment of *futsuutai*. Chanika Chittarak [3] provides empirical evidence for this phenomenon by investigating intra-corporate conversations between subordinates and superiors among both Thai Japanese-language speakers and native Japanese speakers. Chittarak observed that native Japanese speakers employ the plain form predominantly for repetition and quotation (32%), adding content (23%), and providing information (23%). Thai speakers similarly utilized *futsuutai* for adding content (28%), answering questions (25%), and quotation (19%), but additionally deployed it as a distinct discourse marker (*danwa hyoushiki*) for topic development (17%).

Furthermore, Chittarak highlights that Thai learners co-occurred the plain form with laughter significantly more often than native speakers (9 instances versus 1 instance), strategically using laughter as a paralinguistic buffer to soften tension, reduce hierarchy, and smooth style shifts in professional settings. This movement between speech levels—referred to in sociolinguistics as speech level shift or style-shifting—allows speakers to dynamically adjust their psychological proximity. Down-shifting from polite to plain speech often signals sincerity, spontaneous emotion, or a desire for collaboration, whereas up-shifting back to polite speech reinstates professional boundaries, signals serious intent, or marks a return to official agenda items. Learners who possess indexical awareness regarding these style-shifting dynamics are far better equipped to navigate professional hierarchy without appearing either excessively rigid or inappropriately casual.

The pragmatic advantages of *futsuutai* are inextricably linked to the broader principles of Plain Language (*yasashii nihongo*) [1], a movement that advocates for clear, accessible, and simplified linguistic expression in Japanese communication. In both native and intercultural communication, overly complex syntactic structures—such as intricate passive-causative combinations, multi-layered honorifics, benefactives (*~te ageru/kureru/morau*), and dense Sino-Japanese compound words—frequently lead to ambiguity, processing fatigue, and communicative failures. Lee Sang Su [4] explicitly addresses these challenges by introducing Plain Language principles into undergraduate Japanese writing courses, noting that before instruction, non-native students exhibited persistent errors in verb transitivity, passive/causative voices, benefactive auxiliaries, and convoluted sentence structures with twisted subject-predicate alignment. By implementing rewriting tools and teaching strategies focused on structural simplification, Lee demonstrated a drastic reduction in grammatical, lexical, and syntactic errors.

From a cognitive and linguistic standpoint, adopting Plain Language strategies empowers non-native speakers by enhancing their capacity for real-time self-

monitoring during speech production and writing. When learners are forced to manage complex honorific transformations while simultaneously formulating novel thoughts, their cognitive capacity becomes overwhelmed, increasing the likelihood of grammatical errors and communicative freezing. Conversely, using simplified syntax and plain structures allows speakers to monitor their output effectively, self-correct with precision, and convey their intended meaning with clarity. Plain Language thus transforms Japanese from an intimidating, highly stratified code into a functional tool for mutual understanding, fostering inclusive communication across diverse cultural and social backgrounds.

Integrating the study of plain speech, style-shifting, and Plain Language principles into Japanese language curricula represents an essential paradigm shift for modern language pedagogy. Rather than treating *futsuutai* as a dangerous or advanced register to be postponed until higher levels of study, educators should introduce plain forms alongside polite forms from the early stages of acquisition. By explicitly teaching the pragmatic triggers, socio-affective meanings, and cognitive advantages of plain speech, instructional programs can help learners develop a nuanced understanding of how Japanese speakers actually construct meaning in real-time interactions. Pedagogical activities that focus on contextual style-shifting enable students to practice moving fluidly between registers, preparing them for the communicative realities of both casual social gatherings and dynamic workplace environments. Ultimately, achieving true communicative competence in Japanese requires moving beyond a rigid, *keigo*-centric mindset and recognizing *futsuutai* and Plain Language as indispensable assets in human interaction. Plain speech is not merely an informal alternative to polite language; it is a fundamental instrument for expressing empathy, structuring cognition, navigating professional relationships, and achieving communicative clarity. By embracing the full spectrum of Japanese speech styles and mastering the art of register flexibility, learners transition from passive users of textbook rules into active, culturally agile communicators capable of building meaningful connections in an increasingly interconnected world.

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Changes in Lexical Diversity in the Works of Terry Pratchett

Mykola Demchenko

Oles Honchar Dnipro National University

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-9754-1756>

Viktoriia Yashkina

Oles Honchar Dnipro National University

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0570-8772>

Abstract. *The works of T. Pratchett are a valuable material for research of changes in lexical diversity of a person. T. Pratchett's bibliography, which includes more than 40 novels, provides an opportunity for a researcher with an opportunity to make a large-scale study of changes in an individual's lexical ability. During the research using method of type-token ratio it was found that there is a decrease in lexical variety in the works of T. Pratchett. It was suggested that such a change may be explained by several factors including transformation of the author's style, varying target demographics of his books and his health condition.*

Keywords: *lexical diversity, type-token ratio (TTR), Terry Pratchett, Discworld, Unseen Academicals.*

Changes in lexical diversity in works of an author can be a source of a lot of valuable information for a research of a writer's linguistic style. Decrease or increase in lexical variation can be a sign of a change in style, in target demographic of a text, specific features of lexis of characters etc. Furthermore, this criterion may also be indicative of changes in cognitive abilities of an author. For example, Alzheimer disease (AD) in its mild phase can lead to a language deficit [5]. This early symptom may appear even before any clinically significant ones. Therefore, study of lexical variation may help researchers in the medical field to understand early markers of the incurable disease. This may lead to a treatment that can significantly postpone later development of AD [4].

Terry Pratchett's body of work and specifically his fantasy cycle Discworld was chosen as a subject for this research due to several factors. The first one being the author's usage of a wide range of various lexis in his works. There can be found a lot



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