Exploring the Not-So-Honorific Faces of Honorific Prefix Particle お

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Abstract

Politeness is a central tenet of Japan’s culture and language. There are three forms of honorifics used to indicate politeness: sonkeigo, which elevates the status of the listener(s); kenjōgo, which humbles the speaker’s own position and actions; and teineigo, which makes the general tone of conversation more polite. An example of teineigo is the honorific prefix particle, お, o, which adds polite connotations. For instance, the word 元気, genki ‘healthy,’ becomes honorific when preceded by the particle.

However, while sonkeigo and kenjōgo mainly occur between people of different social status, there are several cases where people of similar status use the teineigo prefix お. A person can talk to a close friend about the price, o-nedan, of a jacket. Or a mother can tell her son to use his o-hashī, ‘chopsticks.’ In all of these situations, the speaker is not necessarily showing respect to the other person.

I argue that the speaker uses お to relate to the listener(s) on a more familiar level, as if the listener(s) is within the speaker’s in-group. I investigate the casual and familiar functions of the prefix お by analyzing its use in Japanese blogs and then categorizing each instance of the prefix by its role in the sentence. The categories follow a gradient from most standard, polite use of the prefix to most familiar usage. This will show that the prefix お serves not only to indicate the speaker’s polite intentions, but also to portray different emotional states, thereby engaging others.
Exploring the Not-So-Honorific Faces of Honorific Prefix Particle た

I. Introduction

In Japanese, honorifics are used so often that they are an integral part of daily interaction. There are many different types of honorifics, in different forms and playing different functions. I will explore one such form in particular, the prefix particle た, which has traditionally been analyzed as an honorific. However, my thesis will cover the less honorific sides of this particle, as it is used in blogs by native Japanese people today. I will begin by giving an overview of the different honorific systems and styles used in Japan, explaining how these honorifics work and providing examples to demonstrate. Then, I will analyze た prefix specifically, showing how it does not serve solely honorific functions. I will do this by taking sample phrases from the blogs I am using as my sources, and then categorizing each phrase’s use of た prefix in context. In doing so, I will show the prefix particle to be more of a marker of a certain register, rather than simply as an honorific prefix.

II. Introduction of Keigo in general: what are sonkeigo and kenjōgo?

When using honorifics, one must be aware of the referents of nominal constituents of a sentence, according to Shibatani (1990:375). As such, politeness is expressed in varying degrees of formality in different languages. While present in English, there are no linguistic devices that can be used to “explicitly express politeness when conversing with others,” [(Mizutani 1985:187) – my translation]. However, politeness is a central part of Japanese linguistically and culturally. Three major forms of honorifics are used to indicate such politeness, which is differentiated along the speaker-addressee axis and the speaker-referent axis (Shibatani 1990:375): 尊敬語 (sonkeigo), which elevates the status of the speaker’s addressee relative to
the speaker; 謙譲語 (kenjōgo), which humbles the speaker’s own position and actions with respect to the addressee; and 丁寧語 (teineigo), which does not specifically target either the speaker or listener, but adds a neutral tone of politeness to the word being altered.

The manner in which Japanese honorifics affect sentences differs from the way politeness is shown in English, since in English, one must sometimes alter the entire sentence to accommodate any honorific particles or set phrases. There are certain English equivalents to Japanese instances of sonkeigo and kenjōgo, where the speaker adjusts his or her social positioning relative to the listener. For instance, in the sentence, “We are glad to be associated in our small way with the academic excellence of your school,” (Mizutani 1985:187), the “small” acts in such a way that the speaker’s status becomes humble relative to the addressee. This can be equated to an instance of kenjōgo. On the other hand, the “academic excellence of your school” functions to raise the addressee’s status compared to the speaker, which is like sonkeigo.

Honorifics in Japanese for the most part, however, involve certain structural modifications to verbs and verb phrases. For instance:

お待ちする

O-machi-suru

‘(I) wait.’

お待ちいたします

O-machi-itashi-masu

‘(I humbly) wait.’ (Mizutani 1985:190)

These two verb phrase modification forms are stylistically representative of kenjōgo, because the speaker is intentionally humbling his or her position relative to the addressee. One could use the plain verb form, matsu (‘wait’), or either of the two honorific forms above in the same grammatical spot in a sentence. In this way, the modified structure of these verb phrases does not entail the changing of the entire sentence.

Indeed, as sonkeigo and kenjōgo are controlled by the speaker-referent axis, involving the speaker and the addressee, they are referent honorifics. The typical honorific structures of
Japanese discourse are composed of these two forms, and the speaker must constantly observe the social hierarchical relationship between him- or her-self and the other person. These forms of politeness usually entail changing the form of the verb or using completely different honorific forms of words altogether. When I mention changing the form of the verb, I am referring to the modification of a verb or verb phrase to make it honorific. It is usually the case that when a verb or verb phrase is modified, it becomes nominalized. In the case of sonkeigo, the nominalized verb form and the honorific prefix お preceding it “assume the role of an adverbial complement of the verb 彼る ‘become,’” (Shibatani 1990:375). The structure one would use is お+verb stem+ni narimasu, where the verb stem refers to the ます (masu) form of the verb being used. Another variation of sonkeigo would be to use the addressee-raising honorific form of the verb いいます, ‘speak,’ which becomes お-sshaimasu. This verb would be used to raise the status of the other person’s action of speaking. For instance:

 Sensei-ha  o-ii-ni-narimasu.
 Teacher  sonkeigo structure for ‘speak’

 Sensei-ha  osshaimasu.
 Teacher  sonkeigo verb for ‘speak’

Without the honorific form of the verb, this particular sentence becomes:

 Sensei-ha  いいます.
 Teacher  speak

As can be seen in the previous examples, the honorific verb forms can be substituted for each other in the same position. In both cases, the verbs are raising the status of the sensei, the teacher.

When using kenjōgo, the nominalized verb form with the honorific prefix お along with the verb’s arguments become the objects of the verb する ‘do’ (Shibatani 1990:375). The structure one would use is the お+verb stem+shimasu form to alter the verb into a humble form.
The other option is to use the humble form of the verb meaning ‘speak,’ which becomes moushi-agemasu, ‘apply to oneself.’

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Watashi-ha} & \quad \text{sensei-ni} & \quad o-ii-shimasu. \\
\text{I} & \quad \text{teacher (to)} & \quad \text{kenjōgo structure for ‘speak’}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Watashi-ha} & \quad \text{sensei-ni} & \quad \text{moushi-agemasu.} \\
\text{I} & \quad \text{teacher (to)} & \quad \text{kenjōgo form for ‘speak’}
\end{align*}
\]

Without the humbled form of the verb, this sentence becomes:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Watashi-ha} & \quad \text{sensei-ni} & \quad \text{iimasu.} \\
\text{I} & \quad \text{teacher (to)} & \quad \text{speak.}
\end{align*}
\]

Note that in all of the above cases that pertain to sonkeigo and kenjōgo, the particle オ (o) is used to make speech more polite. As such, sonkeigo and kenjōgo are complementing sets of honorifics to each other, used constantly in people’s daily interactions.

**III. Introduction and contrast of teineigo to other forms of keigo.**

The third major form of honorifics in Japanese is teineigo. Unlike sonkeigo and kenjōgo, this third form is controlled by a speaker-addressee axis, making it a type of addressee honorific, which is used to express the social positioning of the addressee relative to the speaker, but without necessarily raising or lowering the addressee’s level. The most common forms of teineigo being used in everyday Japanese are the desu and masu sentence endings and the オ prefix particle that precedes certain neutral words. Although these sentence and word alterations do not elevate the addressee or humble the speaker’s position, these linguistics devices are still considered honorifics for their ability to express formalities. For instance, rather than use the casual form to express that one will ‘go,’ or iku, one can change register to the formal and say ikimasu instead.

Casual form:  Watashi  iku-yo.
Formal form: *Watashi-ha ikimasu-yo.*
I go (plain form)

Use the casual form above, when amongst friends or family or other members of one's in-group, expresses to the listener that the speaker considers the listener to be intimate familiars. However, in Japanese society, it is usually by social convention that one uses the formal form with *masu* or *desu* when talking with members outside the in-group.

For instance, a stranger might ask for directions by saying,

*Toshokan ha doko desuka?*
‘Where is the library?’

The other side may then answer with,

*Asoko ni arimasu.*
‘It’s over there.’

Because neither side knows each other well enough to be able to accurately identify the superior in the situation, both sides are equally expected to use the *masu* or *desu* form when conversing with each other. This is because the *desu/masu* form is used to express a generic politeness and sense of mutual respect. Thus, *teineigo* is classified as a category of honorifics, since using *teineigo* raises the overall level of politeness in the conversation but does not necessarily alter the participants' social positioning. The other major form of *teineigo*, the prefix particles, will be the focus of this paper.

IV. **Introduction to the 조사 prefix: traditionally teineigo.**

As mentioned above, the honorific prefix particle 조사 can be used in the context of referent honorifics when used as a device of *sonkeigo* or *kenjōgo*. In the 조사+verb stem+ni *narimasu* structure for *sonkeigo* and the 조사+verb stem+shimasu verb structure for *kenjōgo*, the 조사 in front
is a form of honorific prefix particle. However, the `敬` prefix when it occurs without an honorific form on the verb can also be used as a form of addressee honorific. In this case it would be an instance of teineigo. For example:

\[
\text{(Watashi-ha) } o\text{-tegami-wo kakimasu.} \\
\text{(I) O-letter write}
\]

holistically sounds more respectful, as opposed to the same sentence lacking the `敬` prefix in front of the tegami. The presence of the particle indicates the speaker’s intention of adding polite overtones to their discourse.

In its teineigo function, the prefix is usually taught in the classroom environment as an honorific particle specifically used to convey politeness toward another person. And although an accurate translation of the particle that encompasses all of its subtle meanings and functions might not be possible, the particle is usually said to indicate respect for the addressee or the situation. One might then expect that the particle would mostly be used by people when talking to their social superiors, or in locations where people should show respect, such as temples or other sacred locations. However, in reality the particle is actually used quite frequently amongst people of similar, if not equal, social status. Friends use it when talking to other friends. Intimate couples use the particle as well. Even more unexpectedly, the boss of a company may use it when talking to his or her employees as well.

From looking at texts from Inoue (1979) to Nagiko and Nagiko (2009), I think it is plausible that linguistic creativity through the generations resulted in a proliferation of the `敬` particle. In other words, the particle was used so often that it slowly became adapted to different contexts. Depending on the situation, one would use `敬` to express different emotions appropriate to that time and setting. In fact, this evolution would help to account for the range of situations
that は is attested in today. The factors that contribute to formality vary by situation, but the
“nature of the addressee, the formality of the occasion, the nature of the topics of discussion, and
the nature of the bystanders” (Shibatani 1990:377) are a few examples of factors relevant to
one’s level of politeness in speech. Use of the particle は reflects the results of taking such
factors into consideration. We will now see how the range of uses attested today supports that は
can be used in many places to serve different functions depending on context.

V. Grammatical/Ungrammatical aspects of the presence and lack of the は prefix.

First, I will address the question of how one should go about using this particle in the
correct grammatical fashion. One should first note that, in general, the は prefix is added to
native Yamato words (of Japanese origin) and 御 go is used in conjunction with kango, or the
multitude of Sino-Japanese compounds that originated as assimilated loanwords from Chinese
(Soga and Matsumoto, 1978). These different origins are usually recognizable in words today by
their syllable structure. Words with any bi-moraic syllables (which contain a diphthong or end
with a consonant) are of Chinese origin (Soga and Matsumoto, 1978). However, there are some
words with only light syllables that are of Chinese origin, as well. For instance, words like
kaimono ‘shopping’ are preceded by the は prefix, whereas words that retain the sounds of the
original Chinese reading use the voiced 御, such as ryoushin (‘parents’). In other words, whether
the は prefix or its voiced counterpart can be attached to the front of a word can be differentiated
by onyomi ‘on-reading’ and kunyomi ‘kun-reading’ readings. The onyomi refers to the reading of
a word that is passed down from Chinese origin, while the kunyomi reading refers to a native
yamato word in Japanese that has been fitted to the Chinese characters with the same semantic
meaning. は is used in front of kunyomi characters while 御 is used for onyomi readings. Other
examples of words that are Japanese in origin and take the お particle are o-huro ‘bath’ and o-tegami ‘letter,’ while Chinese-originating words that take 御 are go-juusho ‘address’ and go-renraku ‘contact’ (Nagiko and Nagiko 2009:107).

There are some exceptions to the honorific prefix particle rules, however. Not all Chinese-originating words are preceded by solely the 御 particle, as in denwa ‘telephone’ and cha ‘tea,’ which are preceded by the お particle instead (Nagiko and Nagiko 2009:107). As will be discussed later, it may be possible that the Japanese use the お prefix in front of words that they feel more attached to emotionally. Also, the prefix particles may be used frequently, but this does not entail that they can be attached to the front of just any noun or nominalize just any verb.

Up to this point in the thesis, all words have been spelled out in hiragana, the traditional Japanese script for writing words. The prefix particles can be used in front of many words written in hiragana. However, these honorific prefixes are typically not added to words originating in any other languages, such as those written in katakana, or the kana Japanese script used commonly to spell other foreign-borrowed words (Soga and Matsumoto 1978:410). Examples include オノマトペー (onomatope—) for ‘onomatopoeia’ and パン (pan) for ‘bread.’

Please note that I am phrasing the restrictions in terms of possibilities in script rather than speech. I do this because the speech is entirely compatible with the writing (since Chinese-origin and foreign words are generally recognized by their sounds) and because this thesis presents below a study that uses a written corpus.

The following are two lists of example words that take either the お particle or the 御, as given by Soga and Matsumoto (1978:411).

Japanese-originating words with the prefix お:
お茶 (ocha)、お休み (oyasumi)、お元気 (ogenki)、お花 (ohana)、お手紙 (otegami)、お金
Chinese originating words with the prefix 御:
御飯 (gohan), 御病気 (gobyouki), 御勉強 (gobenkyou), 御卒業 (gosotsugyou), 御心配 (goshinpai), 御結婚 (gokkekkon), 御旅行 (goryokou), 御質問 (goshitsumon), 御予定 (goyotei), 御都合 (gotsugou), 御本 (gohon)

It should be noted that in the above examples, a couple of words that take the prefix お are in fact nominalized forms of verbs, as in お休み, お答え, お出かけ, and お帰り. Without the prefix, each of these examples could become a verb when they are converted into the teineigo masu/desu form: 答えます (kotae-masu, or ‘answer’) and 出かけます (dekake-masu, or ‘depart’). Soga and Matsumoto (1978:411) claim that a pattern among words that take the お particle seems to be that verbs become nominalized, whereas most of the 御 particle words are originally nouns. However, I disagree with this conclusion, because the above words without the お prefix are already in nominalized form themselves: 休み ‘holiday,’ 答え ‘answer,’ 出かけ ‘going out’ and帰り ‘return.’ With words that take the prefix 御, I argue that it is not a characteristic of御-words to be nouns, but rather that the character of Sino-Japanese words to be nominalized in form to begin with. Thus, the rest of the nominalized words that did not take お as their prefix particles would have taken the voiced prefix instead.

In the above examples, the prefix particle may serve honorific or non-honorific functions. A few of the words, like お茶 ‘tea,’ are used so often that it is almost convention to refer to the word with the prefix particle. However, words like おうち ‘house,’ do not require the particle and usually take on honorific connotations. Non-human proper names such as 東京 (toukyou,
‘Tokyo’) or 京都大学 (kyoto daigaku, ‘Kyoto University’) do not have honorific forms; however, human names and personal references do have honorific forms (Soga and Matsumoto 1978:411). The vocative forms, or those used for direct address, are usually in honorific form, and can possibly reflect the speaker’s feelings of endearment if any. As such, professional or occupational titles like the English ‘professor’ or ‘doctor’ may be used for human reference or vocative purposes in Japanese (Soga and Matsumoto 1978:411).

Table 1. Professional/occupational titles in polite, humble, and vocative forms (Soga and Matsumoto 1978:411-2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Polite</th>
<th>Humble</th>
<th>Vocative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>お父さん (otousan)</td>
<td>父 (chichi)</td>
<td>お父さん</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>お母さん (okaasan)</td>
<td>母 (haha)</td>
<td>お母さん</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older brother</td>
<td>お兄さん (oniisan)</td>
<td>兄 (ani)</td>
<td>お兄さん</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older sister</td>
<td>お姉さん (oneesan)</td>
<td>姉 (ane)</td>
<td>お姉さん</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger sister</td>
<td>お妹さん/妹さん (oimoutosan/imoutosan)</td>
<td>妹 (imouto)</td>
<td>Given name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>お孃さん/娘さん (ojousan/musumesan)</td>
<td>娘 (musume)</td>
<td>Given name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>お子さん (okosan)</td>
<td>子供 (kodomo)</td>
<td>Given name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandchild</td>
<td>お孫さん (omagosan)</td>
<td>孫 (mago)</td>
<td>Given name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>御家族 (gokazoku)</td>
<td>家族 (kazoku)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>御両親 (goryoushin)</td>
<td>両親 (ryoushin)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothers (siblings)</td>
<td>御兄弟 (gokyoudai)</td>
<td>兄弟 (kyoudai)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>御主人 (goshujin)</td>
<td>主人 (shujin)</td>
<td>(wife to husband) あなた (anata)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>坊ちゃん/むすこさん (bocchan/musukosan)</td>
<td>むすこ (musuko)</td>
<td>Given name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger brother</td>
<td>弟さん (otoutosan)</td>
<td>弟 (otouto)</td>
<td>Given name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>奥さん (okusan)</td>
<td>家内 (kanai)</td>
<td>(husband to wife) given name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor (MD)</td>
<td>お医者さん (oishasan)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>(田中)先生 (tanaka) sensei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>先生 (sensei)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>(田中)先生</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company president</td>
<td>社長さん (shachousan)</td>
<td>社長 (shachou)</td>
<td>(田中)社長 (tanaka) shachou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense lawyer</td>
<td>弁護士さん</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>(田中)先生</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Indeed, the particle お is often used in such professional and occupational titles in a teineigo fashion, in the sense that such titles are used to convey politeness in general. The first column of polite titles consists of the honorific forms of their vocative or humble counterparts; for instance, the o-ishasan ‘doctor’ can be referred to as simply ishasan, or the doctor’s name + sensei. However, the お prefix serves to make o-ishasan a complete word, while also raising the level of politeness. In the honorific use of お, especially in the above cases of professional/occupational titles, lack of the お prefix would not only create words with different connotations, but in extreme cases, could become rude as well. This is because such titles observe teineigo and referent honorific rules, which depend on using the お prefix to express politeness.

However, the line of distinction between teineigo and referent honorifics like sonkeigo and kenjōgo is not clear-cut. As will be seen in a later example, when I introduce quotes from Japanese blogs, certain titles like o-niisan ‘big brother’ may or may not take the お particle. In these situations, the お prefix not only adds more politeness to the context, but specifically adds more deference toward the addressee, or the older brother. Thus, the status of お prefix as a teineigo or referent honorific particle highly depends on context.

VI. Background history: お’s association with females.

Speaking of context, the お has long been used in female speech, from the past to the present day. Interestingly enough, the rules along which one can use a word with the particle 御
are very strict, not leaving much room for varied interpretations (Nagiko and Nagiko 2009:107). However, when one uses the 〜 particle, it seems to add a “more feminine, softer connotation to the word” in question ([Nagiko and Nagiko 2009:107] my translation). Thanks to the Muromachi Era (approximately from the mid 14th century to late 16th century) and the court ladies of the palace at the time, called nyoubu, used the 〜 prefix so frequently in their speech that the honorific prefix particle became strongly associated with female speech ([Nagiko and Nagiko 2009:107] my translation). Their frequent use of the particle stemmed from the older, more traditional connotations that the prefix particle carried. To them, the 〜 particle gave them a way to avoid using otherwise “vulgar-sounding words,” or other words associated with commoners, for which they had a strong distaste ([Nagiko and Nagiko 2009:107] my translation).

The popular Japanese street food, o-den, is an example of a word that went through the modification process from prefix-less to prefix-attached. Its original form, dengaku, was changed to include the 〜 particle at the front of the word. In the process, the last few syllables were deleted, thus changing the word into o-den ([Nagiko and Nagiko 2009:108] my translation). Though I cannot say for sure if the specific word o-den was transformed by the court ladies, Nagiko and Nagiko (2009:107) say that the court ladies of the past “mass produced” such transformed words in this manner of attaching the prefix and deleting the last few syllables, making this phenomenon a “lasting trend that associated the particle with female usage” [my translation]. Or more specifically, the 〜 became strongly associated with women’s speech, because of their frequent use of the particle to beautify words.

In modern Japanese, the 〜 particle has become something used by both sexes. However, it is interesting to note that 〜 prefix still contains traces of feminine words; for instance, the
word *o-taiko* is not a polite form of *taiko*, the drumming tradition of Japan, unlike what one might anticipate from the function of the particle in previous examples. *O-taiko* does, however, refer to the kimono sash at the back of the traditional Japanese gown worn by women ([Nagiko and Nagiko 2009:108] my translation). Indeed, although it is not the case with all words that take the prefix particle, it seems that the process that produces words that take on the  adjective can be traced back to feminine origins.

**VII. Example situations where the Japanese use the  adjective.**

So then when and in what situations do the Japanese people in general use the particle? The Japanese honorific system is “relativized with regard to an insider-outsider distinction,” in such a manner that honorifics are used when interacting with someone who the speaker regards as psychologically distant (Shibatani 1990:379). Thus, the further apart or more distanced one feels from their listener, the greater their tendency to manifest that psychological distance in their speech patterns. The interesting aspect of Japanese honorifics is that this notion of distance is dependent on the triangular relationship between speaker, referent and addressee—assuming that all three are separate entities. Thus, if the speaker and addressee are close, but the referent is more distant from both, then the two may use referent honorifics with regard to the referent. For example, when a mother and daughter are talking about the father, they can use casual language between themselves while simultaneously using honorifics in reference to the father, depending on how strict that family is about observing the family’s social hierarchy (Shibatani 1990:379).

Respectful language is also perceived as a marker of the speaker’s social class, as deferential expressions are the linguistic prestige features of Japanese society today (Inoue 1979:296). Knowing when to use certain deferential expression “appropriately” and when not to use them are said to be the “mark of good education and good upbringing” (Inoue 1979:296).
Thus, an outsider can potentially gauge a speaker’s social status just by assessing the way in which he or she speaks or the types of expressions he or she uses. Because of the several nuances and levels of respectful language, social factors play a big, if not bigger, role alongside linguistics ones in determining one’s social positioning.

In addition to the in-group versus out-group distinction, other relational factors that affect one’s level of politeness in speech are age, professional position that comes with age and one’s sex, as well as one’s gender identification. In terms of biological sex, one’s environment becomes different with the way other people treat that person depending on his or her outer sex. However, according to Inoue (1979:292), one may also alter one’s speech depending solely on one’s self-image, despite his or her biological sex. Daniel Long (1996) discusses the phenomenon of gay argot terms used in modern Japan, argot referring to the secret language shared amongst members of an in-group to prevent outsiders from understanding their conversation. Siegal and Okamoto (2003) also describe the phenomenon of breaking out of “traditional gender roles” and ask the question of what kind of language should be taught in the Japanese classroom, if the gendered language in Japanese cultural is as complicated and political as it seems to the speakers. While I will not be going more in depth into the implications of gendered language in Japanese society nor the specific pronouns or other words that the gay community may use, I wished to point out that there is indeed a difference between biological sex and self-identifying gender. Although gender identification, not biological sex, is the relevant factor in the use of honorifics, from here on out I will use the term sex for ease of exposition. For the purposes of my thesis, the prefix particle will not be discussed in the context of self-identified gender.
Women have “traditionally been trained to speak more politely than men among themselves as well as toward men,” according to Inoue. I do not intend to generalize from this statement to apply it across all females in Japan. Yet, I do agree that upon hearing feminine Japanese language, one could argue that the words consist of “gentleness and richness” and help one “feel pleased” (Inoue 2006:199) to the extent that women tend to be more empathetic. They are more willing to relate to their audience, and this shows in their words. One should note, however, that certain forms in Japanese are used only by men, or only by women, and some of these expressions are deferential while others are not so (Inoue 1979:295). Thus, it turns out that the Japanese take both situational and relational factors into account when they are deciding what to say and how to form their words. In terms of situational factors, it is usually the case that the person who is seeking help and guidance uses deferential language, while in relational terms, group affiliation and seniority are the deciding factors (Inoue 1979:295).

Differentiation by sex is another way to distinguish between levels of politeness. In English, there is not as much difference between the way males and females speak in casual settings, whether to one another within the same sex or to the opposite sex. On the other hand, Japanese casual language contains markedly different features that set the two genders’ linguistic styles apart. For instance, take the following few conversations, taken from Kindaichi (1978):72-3):

“‘You write uncommonly fast.’
‘You are mistaken. I write rather slowly.’
‘How many letters you must have occasion to write in the course of a year! Letters of business, too! How odious I should think them!’
‘It is fortunate, then, that they fall to my lot instead of yours.’”

In this first conversation, in English, the participants could easily have been either two men or two women. The tone is mildly polite, but even in more casual settings, it would not be easy to fully determine the sex of the speakers simply by looking at their words.
However, when the same above conversation is translated into Japanese, one needs to take the sex of the speakers into account when choosing the words. For instance, if the conversation were to be between two men, the translation would become:

"Baka ni hayaku kakeru ne."
'Iya, kore demo osoi ho da.'
'Yoppodo takusan no tegami o ichinenju niwa kakun daro ne—bijinesu no tegami date sa. Kangaetemo tamaranai na.'
'Tokoro ga, saiwei to kimi ga kakun ja nakute, boku ga kakun da kara ne.'"

It is interesting that according to Kindaichi (1978), if such a conversation were to be translated into male Japanese, such as that above, the language would automatically take on casual overtones. In this case, the speakers are not using the teineigo desu/masu forms, and sometimes omit the subject and object marking particles, ha (pronounced wa) or ga and wo. Also, the common pronoun that males use to refer to one’s self is boku (‘I’) as opposed to the gender-neutral watashi used by both men and women.

The same conversation, once again translated, but this time into female Japanese speech becomes:

"Zuibun hayaku okake ni naru no ne.'
'Chigau wa. Kore de atashi osoi ho yo.'
'Donna ni takusan no otegami o ichinenju niwa okaki ne narun desho ne. Bijinesu no otegami date, kangaetemo tamanai wa.'
'Demo shiawase to anata ga okaki ni narun ja nakute, watashi ga kakun desu mono.'"

Aside from the fact that the women sometimes use entirely different vocabulary, including the difference between using watashi and feminine atashi as opposed to the males’ boku, the women’s speech also includes more instances of the 〜て particle than the males do. Indeed, in general, female speech seems to use more honorific grammar patterns that make use of the honorific prefix particle (Kindaichi 1978: 73). This is why women would more likely use o-tegami, as opposed to the men’s using just tegami. In the conversation above, the verb kaku is used in its sonkeigo form of o-kaki ni naru, while a variant of the plain form of the verb is used
in the men’s speech. Indeed, it seems that the 조사 particle “contains strong feminine overtones, thus making the tone of the women’s conversation seem politer and softer” (Kindaichi 1978:73).

In general, honorifics are used to express “politeness” or “respect” for guests, older people, customers, or anyone considered socially superior (Soga and Matsumoto 1978:410). And yet honorifics do not have to serve these solely polite functions; they may also be used to express feelings of endearment, or even a sentiment on the opposite end of the spectrum, like insult. It might be very strange to envision honorifics being used for insulting purposes, but there are similar situations in English. For instance, polite vocabulary items such as *sir* and *madam* can be overused for sarcasm (Soga and Matsumoto 1978:410). Thus, the flexibility of the honorific system in general is due to the fact that two different individuals in an incident will describe the same event from entirely different points of view (Inoue 1979:266). Thus, 조사 prefix is used for different purposes to reveal different intentions.

Imagine this scenario: a female high school student is talking to her friend. There is no need for formalities here. And yet in Japan, the females in this situation would still use the 조사 particle. For instance, friend A could refer to sushi as *o-sushi*, instead of without the 조사 prefix, to her friend B. In this case, friend A is not showing respect toward friend B, nor is she necessarily trying to be polite as a whole. However, according to Professor Yoshiko Jo of the Japanese department at Swarthmore College (personal communication, November 2012), by placing the 조사 prefix in front of the *sushi*, friend A emphasizes the popular food dish, or rather highlights its significance either to her or to her friend B.

Likewise, in the English version, the speaker is presumably not intending to be polite, but merely adding emphasis to the need for empathy in the situation. Indeed, it would appear that using the particle 조사 helps the speaker appear more persuasive and makes the message more
appealing. One could even say that the mother is attempting to ascribe some feelings of affection toward the rock, which she hopes will rub off on the child and convince him that the rock should be treated gently. Based off of this situation, and others like it, I will argue that instead of using the は prefix for its most typically known function of making words honorific, females in the present day use the particle and its many variations to garner empathy, make their speech more appealing, and carry out other non-formal functions.

Honorifics, or rather, politeness, seem to be in the eye of the beholder. In a study done by Hudson (2011:3689), recent reports seemed to indicate that young Japanese speakers rarely use “honorifics” (e.g. Inoue, 1999b:40) in the present. However, in Hudson’s study, every college student participating in the study except for one student spoke mostly in desu/masu style while the majority used referent honorifics. This is somewhat revealing of the different perceptions of what counts as honorifics and what does not, for it is possible both the recent reports and the results of Hudson’s study could be accurate. The former could be a more subjective assessment of the context and meaning of the Japanese people’s words in the present, while Hudson’s study was an objective measure of how often the subjects used certain honorific grammar patterns like the teineigo desu/masu forms.

Indeed, variation of the use of the particle は might in fact be inevitable; speakers of Japanese use the は prefix in front of objects that are “close to their daily life, as well as for the kinship terms and the verbs denoting human activities” (Inoue 1979:289). For instance, the words o-cha instead of cha ‘tea,’ o-kashi instead of kashi ‘candies,’ go-han ‘cooked rice/meal,’ go-chisoo ‘feast,’ and o-furo ‘bath’ are all words that do not require the prefix particle but reflect the speaker’s feelings about them upon usage of the particle (Inoue 1979:290). While this statement supports my argument that the は prefix may or may not be used in these
circumstances, I do not fully agree with Inoue’s claim. Words like *o-kashi*, *go-han* and *go-chisoo* require their prefixes in order to retain certain semantic meanings; without the prefixes in any of these cases, the words would become different in meaning (Elizabeth Wiseman, personal communication). Therefore, my guess is that in the past, the prefixes were used to carry out honorific functions, but now that the words have become so contextualized in modern Japanese society, speakers say the words without considering the prefix as an honorific. Whether a speaker considers the もち prefix or its voiced counterpart as honorifics may depend on his or her individual feelings toward the topic.

Use of the もち prefix is not limited to such tangible, solid objects, though. In more polite conversations, one can attach the prefix もち to qualitative expressions of objects and entities, like *o-shizuka* instead of *shizuka* ‘quiet’ and *o-kirei* instead of *kirei* ‘beautiful’ (Inoue 1979:290). It thus seems that the もち prefix can be used to emphasize objects, thus representing the speaker’s interests, or one can use the prefix to add a high-class connotation to one’s speech. Indeed, Okamoto (1999:54) claims that “due to attitudinal differences, not everyone uses honorifics in the same context” and “contextual features do not directly govern the use of honorifics” (Hudson 2011:3691).

**VIII. Introduction of blogs as my sources for raw data.**

For the purposes of this thesis, I will be looking at blogs, written by native Japanese speakers in Japan, and analyzing the ways in which they use the particle in their posts. There are a total of nine blogs that I will obtain my data from, where I will take as many sentences that use the particle もち from the posts I most recently accessed and viewed. I will note patterns between each author’s posts within a blog, as well as patterns of particle usage between blogs.
In order to explore the range of contexts in which the particle can occur, I will look at a variety of topic-centric blogs, ranging from food, careers, pets and family life. The purpose of diversifying the type of blogs in this manner is to attempt to capture the a diverse range of connotations that the particle  Kami might possess. For instance, certain aspects of society and daily life might require more formalities that others. In those situations, I will attempt to analyze if the blog authors are intentionally using the Kami prefix respectfully, and if such analysis produces correlations across blogs. This way, I can also establish contrast between the less formal uses of Kami prefix that may come up in different types of blogs, such as in the subject area of pets. Such evidence will help to back up my claim that the Kami prefix can actually be used colloquially (in terms of blogs) to convey familiarity and sense of empathy to connect the reader to the author.

My focus is on females and so most of the blog authors are female. However, I have also ensured that the mix of blog authors contains a few males, in order to establish a contrast in frequency of Kami prefix usage by type. In the case of my sample, two of the blog authors explicitly identify their sex as male. In the case of one pet blog, of the dog Aki, the author does not identify his or her sex, most likely because the author is speaking from Aki’s point of view. This particular example may be interesting as well, since it leaves an ambiguous distinction between male and female use of language in blogs.

While I deliberately chose the previously mentioned categories of blogs in an attempt to cover different aspects of Japanese society, the actual blogs themselves will be selected at random. In each category, the blogs are ranked in order of their popularity as indicated by number of hits, and while that form of ranking is in itself biased to some degree, I will attempt to minimize bias from my part. This will be done by taking a number from one to 10 provided by a random number generator, and then selecting the blog from a category that corresponds to that
number. Within these blogs, I will be looking for frequency of use of the particle. If the more popular blogs exhibit higher frequency of the particle, this will be taken as affirmation of the claim that the 京 prefix makes one’s language sound more appealing and persuasive.

IX. Summary of Intent/Purpose

By looking at the situations in which the above mentioned blog authors use the particle 京 in their posts, I will organize, analyze and explain how the 京 prefix functions to create rapport with the addressee that allows for a more intimate kind of language. In using this particle, these authors are expressing their emotions and personal opinions. Indeed, as I will show and analyze in the following sections, the 京 prefix gives the authors more flexibility with the manner in which they can express their emotions or opinions; whether it be through highlighting a certain word to indicate the author’s implied respect toward that topic, to soften the tone of the whole sentence or to depict the author’s affections toward the element, the 京 particle accomplishes many different subtle functions, all from the same prefix position of a sentence.

The nine blogs from which I obtained my information contained a range of different 京 prefix uses. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I will not consider the 京’s that are traditionally used in Japanese society by pure convention. Examples are those instances of the particle that are included in the titles of holidays like o-higan or ‘Buddhist services during the equinoctial week,’ according to jisho.org. In this case, it is either by social convention or respect for the holiday or other element in society that people use the 京 prefix in front of the word. However, I will be looking at the instances of the 京 prefix that are not related to such official holiday names or other phenomena acknowledged across the Japanese islands. These uses of the 京 prefix occur in situations that allow for more open interpretations of the particle’s function.
While the  хоз  prefix that occurs in these situations may contain some polite connotations, I have noticed that the contexts in which most of the хоз’s appear are not necessarily ones that require respectfulness. The tone of voice in the blog author’s posts suggests that there are more layers to the particle than simply meets the eye. When one takes context (which includes the background of the blog author), the subject of the blog and the readers all into account, one will notice that the хоз prefix can indeed take on numerous semantic roles.

X. Data from blogs by category of the хоз prefix, and analysis of patterns.

The blog posts that I looked at span across a time range of September and October of the current year, 2012. For one of the blogs, which did not have posts made quite as recently, I took quotes from the first several posts from which I could identify uses of the particle хоз. These posts were all from November of 2011 to April of 2012. (As opposed to the other blogs, from which the posts that I took are all from 2012, and in the range of May to October.) When making my selection of quotes from the blog posts, I did not single out only the phrases from which I thought the use of the хоз prefix might be non-formal. Instead, I attempted to include as many phrases as I could that seemed to use the хоз as a prefix particle and not as an inseparable part of a word, such as oudanhodou or ‘pedestrian crossing.’ In doing so, however, I did come across some uses of the хоз prefix that were written for respectful purposes, conforming to the typically known honorific purposes of the particle. I will use these examples to establish a clearer contrast with those instances of the хоз prefix that are more casual, more appealing, and help the reader feel more familiar to the blog author.

I have divided the types of хоз prefix uses I identified from posts in the nine blogs into six different categories. These categories range from use of the particle in the most polite way, down
to the particle being used in a familiar, affectionate manner. In other words, the categories are separated by degree of honorific politeness.

In the following subsections, I will lay out some blog post quotes that I obtained from my blog sources. The structure of this paper will be the following: I will first lay out the quotes as they were written in their original Japanese form in the posts, followed by their transliteration, a glossing, then the translation of the phrase. After providing the quotes, I will provide analyses, for each category, of how each quote conforms to the same general pattern that connects that quote with the rest in its group.

Here, I have first given the abbreviations for the glossing I give for each quote.

**Table 2. Glossing conventions used in blog quote transliterations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>Copula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cond</td>
<td>Conditional Particle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConjP</td>
<td>Conjugation Particle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CopP</td>
<td>Copula Particle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EmpP</td>
<td>Empathetic Particle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EP</td>
<td>Emphatic Particle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FP</td>
<td>Female Particle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HP</td>
<td>Honorific Particle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP</td>
<td>Informative Particle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBJ</td>
<td>Object Marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PastP</td>
<td>Past Tense Formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PossP</td>
<td>Possessive Particle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It should also be noted that the method of transliteration that I used for my thesis stems from what I learned in my first-year Japanese language class at Swarthmore College. As such, the spelling and other phonetic representations I use throughout this paper, including the transliterations in previous sections, are from Hatasa, Hatasa, and Makino’s textbook, *Nakama: Introductory Japanese-Communication, Culture, Context*.

**A. Category 1: Typical (teineigo) honorific お prefix**

The first category consists of お prefix usage as an honorific prefix particle. Here, the authors most likely intended for their お prefix use to portray respectfulness either toward their topic in question, or toward their potential blog audience. In other words, the お prefix used in these situations conforms to the typical, polite uses of the お prefix.

(1) お兄さん お手手におやつ 持っていませんか？
Onii-san o-tete-ni oyatsu mo-tte-i-masen-ka?
Big brother-polite suffix HP-hand-at snack hold-PresP-CP(negative)-QP?
‘Older brother, aren’t you holding a snack in your hand?’

(2) お取引先の社長さんに先日教えて頂いたお店...
O-torihikisaki-no shachou-san-ni senjitsu oshiete itadaita o-mise.
HP-customer-PossP CEO-formal suffix-to other day inform received(formal) HP-shop.
‘The shop that I learned from (my) CEO client the other day…’

(3) それで今日も学校&お仕事に行けてらっしゃい。
Soredewa kyou-mo gakkou & o-shigoto-ni itterassha—i.
Then today-too school & HP-work-to take care.
‘Well then, I hope you have a good day today as well at school and work.’

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1 From *Chiba Inu Aki De-Su* – 10/9 post
2 From *Kuraudia no Kaiun Burogu* – 10/7 post
(4) ニコプチブログサポーターのテーマ。
Nikopuchi blog supporter-PossP HP-theme.
'The theme of Nikopuchi blog’s supporter(s).'

(5) 某店の内藤さん。。。のおすそわけで頂いた物です。
Bou-mise-no naikin-san...-no o-susowake-de itadaita mono-desu.
Certain-shop-PossP office/indoor work-formal suffix...-PossP HP-sharing with others-by received(formal) object-CP.
'(It is) something (I) received thanks to a (generous) sharing of goods by an employee from a certain shop.'

(6) この時期は体がとても温まる野菜なんで是非ご家庭でもお試しください。
Kono jiki-ha karada-ga totemo nukumaru yasai-nan-de zeji go-katei-de-mo o-tameshi kudasai.
This period-SBJ body-SBJ very to get warm vegetable-EmpP-as definitely HP-household-by-even HP-trial please(formal).
'It is a time of warmed up vegetables, so please test them out within the family as well.'

(7) 皆さんのご意見お待ちしています。
Mina-san-no go-iken omachishi-tei-masu.
Everyone-formal suffix-PossP HP-opinion wait(humble)-PresP-CP.
'(I am) (humbly) waiting for all of your opinions.'

As noted above, this first category consists of blog quotes that use the お prefix in its classroom-taught, honorific function. Most of the quotes that fall under this category either included formal titles or contexts in which the blog author was obligated to treat a subject politely or show deference to potential readers. For instance, the お兄さん in (1) is a whole title, conventionally used when addressing an older male figure (whether he is part of the family or not). It is a formal version of other, more casual and familiar, titles that could have been given to the male, who in this case is in fact the speaker’s older brother. The speaker is a dog, named Aki, who is inquiring into the possibility of the older brother’s holding a snack. In this case, with the brother being an older member of the family, Aki must show some deference to the brother’s position and adjust language accordingly.

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3 From JS Ga-ru Nakajima Yuki Burogu – 10/12 post
4 From Naru Mana Burogu – 10/11 post
5 From Tamagota Chi-hu no Ki Magure Burogu – 3/15 post
6 From Tamagota Chi-hu no Ki Magure Burogu – 1/21 post
7 From Hutatsu no Puro – 12/5/11 post
The scenario in (2) is much more formal, since the subject of this sentence is a customer that the blog author directly communicated with. The blog author is a middle-aged female head of a company that sells and promotes beauty products. In (2), the client is also a CEO, one to whom the blog author needs to show respect. In Japanese society, even when talking about a person to whom one needs to be respectful, one is encouraged to use honorifics to elevate that person’s status. Thus, the blog author uses the honorific prefix particle to embellish the word for the customer. The reader can deduce from the tone of the rest of the sentence that the blog author is indeed attempting to be polite to her customer, as the verb form for 頂いた is the honorific form of the verb, morau ‘receive.’ (5) works in a similar way, as the blog author, a male in his mid-20’s as shown on his blog, writes about his restaurant adventures and exploits in Japan. In this sentence, he is talking about how he and his friends received food, most likely on the house, from an employee at the restaurant they went to. In order to show deference, as well as appreciation, to the gracious host, the blog author uses お世話け instead of just すそわけ without the prefix particle. In the same blog, but in a different post, the blog author once again uses the prefix particle in an honorific manner, even though he is speaking to a more general audience. In (6), he uses the voiced form of the prefix particle, ご (go), in front of the word for household. As in (2), Japanese social convention highly encourages that one be respectful when talking about another person’s family. As such, the blog author adds the ご to 家庭 (‘household’) in order to appeal to readers. He makes an open suggestion in this sentence, and so adding the honorific prefix particle helps not only in satisfying his readers’ expectations for politeness but also in becoming more persuasive. Had the 家庭 not been preceded by the honorific prefix particle, the sentence would have become considerably less polite, almost to the
point of rudeness and consequently detrimental to the goal of persuading the speaker’s audience into any sort of action.

Sentence (7) is also an example of politeness. Like the author of (2), the author for (7) is talking to potential customers. Thus, he uses the voiced honorific prefix particle, ご, in front of the word for opinion. In doing so, he indicates that he will respect any suggestions that his readers make to him. Additionally, the お待ちしています construction at the end of the sentence is the humble form of honorifics, or kenjōgo discussed toward the beginning of this paper. Thus, the author truly means to show respect for his readers and their opinions.

The other sentences in this category also conform to the typical politeness function, but in less direct ways than the former sentences. The blog author for (3) is a teenage girl, who appears to be a kid celebrity of age 15. Her career involves singing and dancing on stage, and it is likely that this lifestyle influenced her speaking and writing style. Many of the quotes from her blog posts were very persuasive in tone, with the お prefix being used for its honorific function and more. In (3), she uses the お prefix in front of the word for work, in order to appeal to her readers who have careers. In many of her other posts, she uses the お prefix in front of words that do not normally take the particle, such as kaimono ‘shopping’ and kirei ‘pretty.’ It is debatable why she does this, but the patterns that I noted amongst her posts, in conjunction with her starlet-background, seem to reveal a desire to make her words sound more appealing and familiar. However, I will address these posts in later categories. In (3), she deviates from her normal tone of voice and uses the お prefix for more polite reasons. This is because the connotations of the word 仕事 (‘work,’ as in one’s job in society) are serious, such that if she had mentioned the word without attaching the honorific prefix particle before it, the sentence would have sounded condescending.
The remaining sentence (4) depicts another instance of the blog author’s attempt to show deference to another party. There are actually two authors to this particular blog: two sisters, both of whom are around late elementary or early middle school age. Interestingly, they tend to use the 조사 prefix in front of words that are already serious in connotation, further adding to the politeness factor of the word. In the case of (4), the author(s) means to show respect to her (their) blog supporter. As a favor to this supporter, the author elevates the status of the word for theme, a theme that is attributed to the outside supporter. Without the 조사 prefix and its honorific function, the sentence would have sounded more casual. As such, the 조사 prefix helps the author show her appreciation toward the supporter by being polite.

Indeed, the uses of 조사 prefix in this category were centered on politeness and showing appreciation/respect to another party. This teineîgo honorific function of the 조사 prefix is what is traditionally taught to Japanese language learners, making it a default use for the particle.

B. Category 2: Automatic, lexicalized 조사 prefix

The second category consists of 조사 prefix usage in which 조사 has collocated so often with a given word in the past that it is now social convention to use the prefix plus word combination as an indivisible unit (Soga and Matsumoto 1978:410-11). That is, the prefix has been reanalyzed as being part of the root. As mentioned before, there are words that are so strongly associated with the prefix particle that it would be awkward, both linguistically and in terms of social convention, not to use the 조사 prefix. One such example of a word is おみやげ, meaning ‘gift’ or ‘souvenir,’ which in fact comes up in one of the following example sentences. Also, in words like お茶 (o-cha) ‘tea’ and お菓子 (o-kashi) ‘cookies/cake,’ the prefix is usually used, but may sometimes be dropped when one is not required to be polite in the context of describing tea or
cookies. Such a less formal setting could be as simple as describing a certain tea within a book (Soga and Matsumoto 1978:410-11). Indeed, the blog authors use quite a few of these lexicalized お prefix instances in their posts. In general, without the お prefix, such words would often mean something completely different, and no longer be appropriate to the context in which they appear.

(8) おやつまだですか～
Oyatsu mada desu-ka～
Snack still CP-QP～
‘(Is it) not yet (time for) snacks?’

(9) お土産に買ってきたわ！
Omiyage-ni katte kita-wa！
Souvenir-as buy came-FP!
‘(We) bought (these) as souvenirs and came back’

(10) わかちゃんのおかげで私もオーブンというものを使える。
Waka-chan-no okage-de watashi-mo o-bun-to-iu mono-wo tsukaeru.
Waka(name)-familiar suffix-PossP assistance-from I-also oven-Quote-called thing-OBJ use(potential).
‘Owing to Waka-chan’s assistance, I also can use this thing called an oven.’

This is the group in which the お prefix has been so often associated with a word that it has become social convention to include the particle in the word. I was not interested in examining this group at length, because the convention now obscures whatever nuances the prefix might have contributed to the word it attaches to before that attachment was lexicalized as a whole and complete word. However, the few examples that I have collected and provide here are meant to act as contrasting elements to other, more decorative and familiar uses of the お prefix.

In daily interactions in Japan there are many such examples of words that took on the particle お in the past and continue to be associated with it today. In (8), for example, the おやつ

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8 From Chiba Inu Aki De-Su – 9/26 post
9 From Neko na Burogu – 9/28 post
10 From Kuraudia no Kaiun Burogu – 10/5 post
as one whole word refers to a snack. Without the particle in front, the word やつ by itself becomes a derogatory term meaning ‘guy’ or ‘chap.’ Indeed, the やつ by itself does not fit into the context of this sentence at all. Likewise, for (9), the prefix particle is also used within words that cannot stand alone without the particle, since the お土産 in (9) requires the お prefix in front. However, in the case of (10), the お prefix in front of kage is not, strictly speaking, necessary. Although the conjunction of o-kage is extremely conventionalized, kage can stand by itself in certain cases. However, because the word is often used in situations where one is expressing gratitude from having received beneficial influence from another party, it is to be expected that the kage would take the prefix particle in front. As such, the frequency of the word’s usage in such formal situations suggests the formation of o-kage can be regarded as a conventional word, (William Gardner, personal communication, October 2012).

Otherwise, these sentences would remain syntactically correct, but would change the whole meaning of the originally intended sentence. In dramatic cases, the sentence with the お-less word could become anomalous, meaning that it would make no sense. However, in many other cases, the sentence would still make sense, but in a distinctly different sense. For instance, taking (8) as an example, if one were to use the first word without the prefix particle, the sentence would mean something entirely different from its original counterpart.

(11) やつまだですか〜 (cf. (8))
Yatsu mada desu-ka~
‘(Is) he still (not here)?’

Indeed, while the tone of (8) was more playful, with the focus of the sentence being on the snack in question, (11) becomes a more accusatory statement, implying the speaker’s impatience with the subject being referred to by やつ.
These situations thus rely on the presence of the prefix particle し in order for the author to convey his or her desired message. In fact, for these words, the し prefix no longer acts as a prefix particle. It is part of the word as a whole. All of the blog authors included a fair amount of such situations in their blog posts, but I have deliberately chosen not to deal with this category of し prefix usage as much in my paper. Alongside category 1 of し prefix usage, this second category is among the most obvious layers of meaning comprising the prefix particle. However, the categories that will follow deal with subsequently more familiar uses of the し prefix.

C. Category 3: Strong Interest (Emphatic) し prefix

The third category consists of the usage of the し particle that is used to emphasize the word it is attached to, in order to reflect the author’s interest in that item or else draw attention to the importance and relevance of the item to other content in the blog post. The third category is still very much related to the first category in the sense that the author could well have had intentions of showing respect to the item in question by emphasizing it with the し prefix. In some of my examples, the author seems to highlight appreciation for the item embellished with the prefix particle, thereby adding respectful connotations. The politeness inherent in this third category of し’s will be made clearer with solid examples from the blog posts and their analyses.

(12) お散歩には行けそうもありません。
    O-sanpo-ni-ha ike-sou-mo ari-masen.
    HP-walk-to-SBJ go(potential form)-seem-even is-CP(negative form).
    ‘It doesn’t even look like we can go for a walk.’

(13) 公園の周りをお散歩
    Kouen-no mawari-wo o-sanpo.
    Park-PossP Surrounding-OBJ HP-walk.
    ‘(We will) take a walk around the park.’

(14) お肌のキレイなママには絶対なるべく
    お肌のキレイなママには絶対なるべく

11 From Chiba Inu Aki De~Su – 9/25 post
12 From Chiba Inu Aki De~Su – 10/3 post
O-hada-no kirei-na mama-ni-ha zettai nareru.
HP-skin-PossP pretty-ConjP mother-to-SB absolutely become(potential).
‘(I) will absolutely become a mother with clean skin.’

26-inch datta pantsu-no saizu-ga 24-inchi ni natta-no-mo kono o-mizu-no eikou-ka?
26-inch was pants-size-SBJ 24-inch to became-PossP also this HP-water-PossP influence-QP?
‘Could this water have had an influence on my 26-inch size becoming a 24-inch?’

O-nedan-mo 1-ppon 2980-en-to o-tegoro-desu.
HP-price-also 1-bottle 2980-yen Quote HP-reasonable-CP.
‘The price of 2980 yen per bottle is also reasonable.’

O-hada-ni-mo yosa-so.
HP-skin-to-also good-seems.
‘(It) also seems to be good for the skin.’

 nodo-ga mada sukoshi akai mitai-da-kara nodo-no o-kusuri moraimashita-n.
Throat-SBJ still little red appear-CP since throat-PossP HP-medicine received-CP(past)-EmpP.
‘Because my throat still appears to be a little red, I obtained some medicine for the throat.’

Ashita-ha o-benkyou-mo ganbara-nai-to.
Tomorrow-SBJ HP-study-also strive-not-Cond.
‘For tomorrow, if I don’t strive to even study (...).’

The previous blog quotes use the お prefix in a slightly different manner from category 1, using the particle instead to emphasize certain words. I would like to stress, however, that this does not mean that the uses of the お prefix in this category are completely exclusive from the honorific usage. Rather, by emphasizing a word with the particle, the author shows respect for the item by indicating how important it may be to the author and the author’s intended audience.

Sentence (12) is one such example, written once again by the author in the voice of the dog Aki, where the particle お is used in front of the word 散歩 (Sanpou), or a ‘walk’ (in the

13 From Neko na Burogu – 9/24 post
14 From Kuraudia no Kaiun Burogu – 10/10 post
15 From Kuraudia no Kaiun Burogu – 9/27 post
16 From My Favorite... – 9/11 post
17 From JS Ga-ru Nakajima Yuki Burogu – 10/10 post
18 From Naru Mana Burogu – 10/12 post
park). Interestingly enough, throughout this particular post and throughout multiple posts in the blog as well, this word is consistently preceded by the prefix particle. This pattern led me to the conclusion that, to Aki, taking walks are an important part of his routine, as is appropriate for a dog. Indeed, the お散歩 conjugation appears again in sentence (13), in Aki’s blog. Although I have not included the other phrases in this paper, there were countless other occurrences of this particular conjugation. In these situations, Aki is not necessarily being respectful to the idea of taking a walk, but by emphasizing the word 散歩, the author means to indicate the significance of this event specifically to the dog. Other dogs, or humans for that matter, could have referred to sanpou without the prefix particle in front, since the word is not conventionalized to take the prefix. However, Aki is showing, or the author is showing Aki’s feelings of, appreciation for the idea of taking a walk.

Likewise, (17) reveals a similar emphasis on a topic, not out of politeness, but out of the author’s feelings toward the topic. The author of this blog is a young Japanese female who writes about the goings-on in her life and her interests. The few posts surrounding this particular one involve the author’s interest in clean skin. Just before (17), she praises the skin of a passing mother, and in (17), the author expresses her wish to become someone similar. The prefix particle in front of the word for skin thus serves to show the author’s interest in the subject, as well as indirectly show awe toward such women with clean skin. According to Professor Yoshiko Jo of the Japanese department at Swarthmore College (personal communication, November 2012), the presence of the particle in this situation marks how precious the topic of ‘skin,’ or hada, is to the author. The same conjugation of particle and the word for skin appears in (17). The author of this blog, a female (age undisclosed), discusses the many positive aspects of fruit and fruit desserts. While admiring the appealing presentation of some desserts, like fruit
parfaits, she also comments on how the fruit seems to be “good for the skin.” In this case, the author may be highlighting the word for skin to show that she is interested in the subject. If she had not used the ardash prefix in front of the word, the sentence might have sounded stiffer, as if she were a pharmacologist prescribing something to a patient. And along the lines of using the ardash prefix for appreciation, (18) functions in a similar way, by using the particle to highlight an item to which the author is grateful. The author of this blog post had been suffering from a variation of a cold for a couple of days, and so she obtained medicine to help with the sickness. In the sentence, she uses the ardash prefix in front of the word for ‘medicine’ to express her desire to become better and her hopes for the medicine. Indeed, the prefix particle ardash does not necessarily entail the author’s politeness, but rather serves to display other feelings, like appreciation and hopeful expectations. And in this context, the highlighted word for ‘medicine’ serves an additional function of indirectly garnering the readers’ sympathy. Due to such emphasis, readers are reminded of how sick the author is, and how this medicine can strongly influence her condition.

Sentence (15) includes a similar use of the ardash prefix to display the author’s appreciation toward the highlighted subject. The author of this blog talks about a certain type of water in this post. In (15), she describes how this particular water product might have helped in decreasing her pants size. In this case, rather than referring to the product as simply 水, she attaches the ardash prefix in front to show her appreciation for it. To the author, this product is not just any kind of water, it is the water product that helped her lose weight.

And the ardash prefix continues to play the role of an emphasizing element. In (16), the author expresses her approval of a certain wine, commenting on its reasonable price. By
attaching the prefix particle to the front of the word for ‘price,’ the author highlights the fact that the price is reasonable at the same time that she implicitly reveals any shock or surprise she might have felt upon seeing the price. In using the particle to emphasize the word for ‘price,’ the author engages her readers more. Without the 孜 prefix in front, the sentence would have sounded much more like a report, where she is objectively saying that the price is reasonable. The presence of the 孜 prefix, therefore, reveals not only this objective fact, but also includes her subjective appreciation for it.

Another instance of emphasis occurs in (19). In the sentence, the young elementary student author adds the 孜 prefix in front of the word for ‘studying’ to emphasize her thoughts about the subject. Taking the author’s background into consideration, one could sympathize with this young student’s need for studying. Seeing as how the author is a student at school, one can anticipate frequent studying and pressures related to studying, and may therefore empathize with the child author’s reluctance and implied negative feelings toward studying. So although she does not necessarily show respect towards studying, readers can feel her implicit feelings of priority and importance toward the subject.

As such, emphasizing a subject with the prefix particle can serve not only to indicate respect and politeness, as in the first category of 孜 prefix usage, but also displays other indirect feelings associated with the subject in this third category of usages. The Japanese language is very explicit in the sense that the appearance and lack thereof of certain linguistic devices are quite revealing of the speaker or writer’s intentions. However, the limited number of such linguistic devices in the form of particles, paired with the various scenarios in which the particles can be used, leaves much room for guesswork and indirect deducing on the part of the listener or reader. For instance, the empathetic particles ne and yo are usually used when the speaker is
indirectly expressing his or her empathy with the addressee, and thus trying to show or gain attention. However, because the particles do serve the secondary function of catching the other party’s attention, they can be used in a variety of situations. Likewise, using the は particle allows one to add multiple, implicit layers of meaning and emotions onto the highlighted word.

D. Category 4: Modifying Hedge (mitigating) は prefix

Speaking of the vagueness of Japanese particles and language, Mizutani (1981:76) speaks of the “weakness of logical expression in the language behavior of the Japanese,” saying that the Japanese do not have the custom of “explaining and expressing matters precisely and to the point.” With this statement, I interpreted Mizutani’s message as one saying that the Japanese tend to avoid being too explicit in their expression of emotions or opinions.

Thus, Mizutani (1981:77) demonstrates that there is a tendency in Japanese language behavior to be poor at expressing emotion frankly, leading Japanese speakers to suppress emotion instead.

It could be due to this fact that the Japanese tend to use linguistic elements, such as the prefix は, as cushioning elements, placed in front of a word in order to make the phrase sound less brusque and choppy. The fourth category of は prefix usage consists of scenarios in which the particle seems to act like such a cushioning element. In other words, these particular は’s act as “hedges,” or items that serve to soften the tone of a word or phrase by making their meanings “fuzzier (e.g., ‘sort of),” (Lakoff 1973: 458). Such items add an extra layer of meaning on to words, deliberately making them seem more vague.

Likewise, in Japanese, when students are learning to speak in casual form (as opposed to the typical, formal てineigo -desu and -masu forms) in the classroom environment, they are usually taught to add certain particles to the end of their sentences. For instance, the casual form
of bangohan wo tabemashitaka or ‘(Did you) eat dinner,’ would be contracted into bangohan tabetano. Incidentally, this contracted form is usually associated with females and young children (Elizabeth Wiseman, personal communication). By adding that last particle 〜 at the end of the phrase, one is in effect softening the tone of the sentence. Without the final particle, the sentence could sound drier and less inviting. However, with the addition of 〜 the speaker is showing more interest and empathy with the listener. In fact, the particle 〜 is the casual, contracted form of the empathetic construction of 〜んです (〜 desu) in formal speech. Likewise, the 〜 prefix used by the blog authors in their posts could be acting as a similar cushioning hedge item, which serves to soften the tone of the phrase.

However, this particular category of 〜’s does not simply serve as a cushioning function, but rather also seems to act as a modifying device. From my sample of blog quotes, there were many cases in which the blog author used the prefix particle 〜 in front of a certain word, only to replace that 〜 prefix with an adjective in a subsequent sentence. I have not provided the sentences with the new adjectives in them, but most of the following sentences in this category contain words that were preceded by the prefix particle or some other adjective as some point in the blog post. This demonstrates that the 〜 prefix is, in fact, not necessary to the construction of the word. In a way, many of the 〜 prefix-using phrases that I collected from blog posts may actually fit under this fourth category. These usages further help portray the embellishing aspects of the particle, used to make the speaker seem more appealing, more approachable.

(20) 今度はお買い物もしたいなぁ〜
Kondo-ha o-kaimono-mo shi-tai-naa~
‘This time, (I) want to go shopping as well~’

19 From Chiba Inu Aki De~Su – 10/9 post
サービスも良くお気に入りのお店でした
Sa—bisu-mo yoku o-ki-ni hairi-no o-mise-deshita.
Service—also good HP—feeling—to enter-PossP HP—shop-
CP(past). ‘(This was) a shop that also had good service and got into my favor.’

お泊りで1泊してきます
O-tomari-de 1-ppaku shite ki-masu.
HP—stopover-by 1-night do come-CP.
‘As for the stay, (I) will do a one-night trip and come back.’

お掃除とかお化粧して、出かけてきますね！！！！
O-souji-toka o-kesou-shite, dekakete ki-masu-ne!!!
HP—clean up—or HP—makeup—do, depart come—CP—EmpP!!!
‘(I) either clean up or do makeup, then will leave and come back!!!’

きょうはお出掛けしていたからパパがお料理担当でした。
Kyou—ha o-dekake shite-ita-kara papa-ga o-ryouri tantou-deshita.
Today—SBJ HP—departdo—PastP—since dad—SBJ HP—cooking
responsibility—CP(past).
‘Since (we) left the house today, dad was in charge of the cooking.’

The following discussion in this section, especially that regarding (20) and (21), has been enriched by conversations via personal communication in November 2012, with Professor Yoshiko Jo.

In (20), the author uses the お prefix in front of the word for ‘shopping.’ I observed that while the word for shopping can stand alone, many of the blog authors from my sample in fact used the お prefix in front of the word. Therefore, although one can argue that お買い物 (‘shopping’) may be becoming lexicalized so that it would belong in category 2 above, my take of this phenomenon is that the particle is instead used to soften one’s tone of voice. Taken without the お prefix in front, (20) would have sounded duller, as if Aki thinks he will not have as much fun. The kaimono by itself would have sounded more like a necessary chore, with the author having specific items in mind. With the お prefix, however, the blog author makes it sound as if Aki is really anticipating going shopping, along with other events of his schedule for
the day. In addition, the particle takes away the necessary-chore connotation and instead gives the impression that the participants could potentially go window-shopping in a leisurely way.

In (21), the 조사 prefix plays a similar function in that ὰ (‘feeling’ or ‘emotions’) traditionally does not require the prefix particle in front of it. By attaching the particle to the front, however, the female CEO author achieves a more familiar stance with her readers. Without the 조사 prefix, this sentence could have been interpreted in such a way so that the author is attempting to manipulate readers into thinking along the same lines as herself. However, the prefix particle in this situation acts to direct the tone of the sentence away from this misinterpretation, to avoid imposing her opinions on anyone. Thus, in placing the 조사 prefix in front of き, the author hedges around a potentially bossy message. In the case of (21), I also took into consideration the fact that the author is a woman with a business, an employer. It seems very likely that from her career life, she had to become accustomed to speaking persuasively and as non-intrusively as possible to customers. Thus, by adding elements like the prefix particle to her words, the author achieves a more relatable, familiar stance.

It is interesting to note that in (21), the author uses the 조사 prefix two times. However, the two 조사’s used in this sentence are different in terms of their function. The former carries out the cushioning and modifying role, while the latter 조사 matches the function of the third category more, as the latter emphasizes the word for shop to indicate the author’s interest and implied positive feelings toward the shop. (24) achieves a similar effect, as there are two 조사’s being used in the sentence. The first 조사 prefix acts as a modifying element, implying that the author could have used many other words to describe the type of outing she (and her sibling) went to. The second 조사 prefix, however, conforms more to either the third or first category of 조사 prefix usage.
While the author may simply be emphasizing the fact that her father cooked a meal for the family, she may also very likely be showing respect to him for doing so. Indeed, the sentence implies that it is not part of the daily routine for the father to cook for the family. Thus, the author could be showing both respect and appreciation by emphasizing the word for cooking with the お前 prefix.

Adding on to my argument that the お前 prefix may be used as modifying hedge elements in front of words that do not traditionally take the prefix particle, (22) and (23) are also good examples that demonstrate this function. As with the CEO female author’s example sentence from before, the お前 prefix serves to take away from the sentences’ otherwise stiff, report-like connotations. Especially in the context of (23), the お前 prefix seems to act like a default modifier that can easily be replaced with a different, more colorful adjective according to the author’s mood and taste. For instance, the author of (23) seems to be in a hurry. She could have replaced either of the two お前の with 大変な (taihen-na), which here means ‘immense or disastrous,’ changing the tone of her sentence into more of a desperate complaint. But in using the お前 prefix instead to embellish the words for cleaning up and doing makeup, the author allows for a more flexible reading into her implied feelings behind the two processes. Once again, the お前 prefix indicates that the author could be feeling a multitude of emotions about the subject. Without the particle in front of these two words, (23) would have sounded more emotionless, as if the author were merely reciting her chores for the day.

This fourth category of お前 prefix usage at times bleeds into the third category of お前の that I set apart. Both types of お前の serve to highlight the word they are placed in front of. But the main difference between the third and fourth category of お前の is that the prefix particles used in
this fourth category seem to stand in for different modifiers. Such modifiers can be specific, words that would make up the entire experience the author felt about a certain topic, a trip to the mall for instance. However, uses of the お prefix that conform to the third category serve more to highlight a topic, to indicate its importance to the author and establish more rapport with readers.

The following blog sentences, also a part of category 4 of お prefix usage, includes those situations where the blog author seems to use the particle to make the written words seem more appealing to the reader. In other words, the blog author seems to attempt to soften the tone of the sentence by adding the particle and hedging around potentially awkward situations. The Japanese generally try to avoid getting into arguments that delve into the painstaking details of the rights and wrongs of a certain matter (Mizutani 1981:71). However, if they get engaged in this kind of debate with outsiders, they will try to “turn [such outsiders] into insiders” rather than continue the debate in words (Mizutani 1981:72). Again, empathy and deductions play a key role in interaction in Japanese society.

In other words, the お prefix serves to emphasize the object in question, but in doing so, it reflects the author’s awareness of the general importance of that topic. Thus, as opposed to the third category, in which the particle emphasizes a subject to highlight the author’s interest in the topic, these sentences use the お prefix to intentionally highlight the topic and recognize its significance.

(25) こちらお試しセット
Kochira o-shigishi setto.
This way HP-trial set.
‘This here is a sample/trial set.’

(26) 腸のお掃除にも最高です
Wata-no o-souji-ni-mo saikou-desu.
Gut-PossP HP-clean-to-also best-CP.

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24 From Kurauidia no Kaiun Burogu – 9/26 post
‘(This is) also the best for cleaning out the guts.’

(27) カステラちと高い。

Kasutera chito o-takai.

Castella (pound cake) little bit HP-expensive.

‘(The) Castella pound cake is just a bit too expensive.’

(28) じゃお手伝いしてくるね～

Jaa o-tetsudai shite kure-ne～

So then HP-help do provide-Emp～

‘Well then, I will provide help～’

Most languages in the world have two major types of expressions of deference: the first kind is a group of grammatical devices and words whose primary function is not deferential but which can be used for such respectful purposes in certain contexts (Inoue 1979:285). This is equivalent to the type of お’s used in the above blog quotes. To get a better sense of the kind of role these particles play in the phrases, take this example in English from Inoue (1979:285).

(98) Come in.

the speaker would say:

(99) Come in, won’t you?

The tag-question present is an instance of a device that can be used to tone down a request by making it sound more polite and less demanding. Likewise, the お prefix in the above sentences serve to tone down otherwise demanding, awkward, or serious tones in a sentence. However, this does not necessarily mean that the お prefix makes the sentence more polite; rather, the お prefix helps make the sentence easier on the ears.

To expand on this idea, I will first take (27) as an example. In this statement, the young author comments on the price of a loaf of pound cake. Implied in the words is a complaint, a feeling of disapproval at the expensive price. But instead of saying outright that the price of the pound cake is too high, she mentions that it is “just a bit too expensive,” and also adds an お.

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25 From Kuraudia no Kaiun Burogu – 9/26 post
26 From Naru Mana Burogu – 10/12 post
27 From Naru Mana Burogu – 10/9 post
prefix in front of the adjective meaning expensive. In using the ぼ prefix, the author aims to soften her words somewhat by acknowledging that the price is indeed high. Without the prefix particle in front, this statement would have sounded like more of a complaint than it does with the ぼ prefix present.

In a way, the role of the prefix particle in these sentences is therefore not unlike the one played by the roundabout style of speaking common in Japanese interactions. Mizutani (1981:137) points out that generally indirect expressions will be used when, for instance, one is assessing the performance of a subordinate. The grammar pattern of kashira is added on to the end of a sentence to mean, “I wonder if...” Females mainly use this, but males use this structure as well. So when a worker asks his or her boss for an assessment, the boss could say sore-de daijoobu-kashira (I wonder if that is all right) (Mizutani 1981:138). In most cases, this actually translates into, ‘That’s no good. Do it over.’ Thus, the kashira at the end of the sentence serves to soften the tone of the sentence. The Japanese try to avoid even appearing to disregard the listener by giving some instruction in a clear and definite form, and so to avoid imposing one’s wishes onto another, they use indirect expressions to ameliorate such demanding tones (Mizutani 1981:138). (27) was a good example of such indirect expression, softening the author’s real implied message behind her words.

(28) works in the same way as (27), using the ぼ prefix to soften the author’s implied suggestions. In (28), the blog author is stating that she will provide assistance for her (and her sibling’s) readers and blog followers. Just before (28), the author had discussed the attractiveness of a certain type of rice bowl, and then suggested that her readers and followers could make this dish in their homes as well. She then adds (28) as a follow-up to her suggestion to try out her recipe for that particular dish. The ぼ prefix in front of the word for ‘help’ makes her statement
sound more appealing, rather than imposing. This is because in Japan, a spontaneous act of providing assistance is welcome, but can also be interpreted as imposing on another’s personal space. Therefore, the particle helps soften the potentially imposing tone.

(26) is an interesting case. The author talks about a subject that could potentially be repulsive, the gut. The author is talking about a certain product of yogurt, which she claims is also extremely helpful for cleaning out the gut. In order to minimize what feelings of disgust readers might get from seeing the statement, she adds an お prefix in front of the word for cleaning up. Note here that the お prefix is placed in front of 掃除 (souji, meaning ‘cleaning’) and not the word for ‘gut.’ This further serves to emphasize that the author wishes to focus on the cleaning aspect of this yogurt product. (25) uses the お prefix in a complementary manner; instead of preventing readers from feeling repulsed by the author’s words, the お prefix is used to attract more readers. I noted that the CEO author would be accustomed to using softened language, especially when talking about products she wishes to advertise. As salespeople talk in an appealing manner to their customers, softening their tone of voice and word choice when dealing with potential buyers, so this author also adopts a professional tone. In doing so, the author sounds less demanding, or at least less likely to push her products on to unwilling customers. In this situation, since she is indeed suggesting the benefits of the yogurt product to readers, the female CEO chooses to use the お prefix in front of the words for ‘trial set’, in order to make the subject seem more appealing to readers. Lack of the お prefix would have made the statement sound more demanding. The presence of お therefore helps the reader feel more familiar with the author and her statement.
In other words, this use of the お prefix somewhat makes the sharp edges of the words seem rounder. Readers can feel more comfortable reading these statements than if they had not contained the prefix particle.

**E. Category 5: Casual, affectionate お prefix**

And finally, the fifth category that I have made to classify the different uses of the お prefix demonstrated by these blog authors consists of those particles that are used in an affectionate context. A few examples use the particle as part of a familiar-suffix construction, used after a person or other object’s name to express one’s feelings of affection, or other positive emotion, for it.

(29) お兄ちゃんとのお散歩 4回目
Onii-chan-to-no o-sanpo 4-kaime.
Big brother-familiar suffix-with PossP HP-walk 4-th time.
‘(This is) the 4th time (I am) taking a walk with my older brother.’28

(30) おぬし、やるわね
Onushi, yaru-wa-ne.
You(informal), do(informal)-FP-EmpP.
‘You do (quite a bit, don’t you?)’29

(31) お寿司たべて…お父ちゃんにゴルフ教わったよ。
O-sushi tabete… o-tou-chan-ni goru-hu osowatta-yo.
HP-sushi eat… HP-father-familiar suffix-to golf taught-IP.
‘(I) ate sushi… and was taught golf by my father.’30

(32) お口に少ししか入ってこない！！！
O-kuchi-ni sukoshi-shika haitte ko-nai!!!
HP-mouth-at little-only enter come-not!!!
‘(It) went into (her) mouth just a little and won’t come out!’31

(1) お兄さん お手手におやつ 持っていませんか？
Onii-san o-tete-ni oyatsu mo-tei-masen-ka?
Big brother-polite suffix HP-hand-at snack hold-PresP-CP(negative)-QP?
‘Older brother, aren’t you holding a snack in your hand?’

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28 From Chiba Inu Aki De-Su – 10/7 post
29 From Neko na Burogu – 10/9 post
30 From Neko na Burogu – 9/6 post
31 From Miittan – 9/27 post
Once again, the discussion of blog quotes in this category 5 has been enriched by conversations with Professor Yoshiko Jo, particularly the discussions of (29) and (32).

This final category consists of the most familiar uses of the お prefix. Alongside category 2, this category is also one of the smallest, because I could not find as many quotes from the blog posts that used the お prefix in as affectionate a way as the following sample sentences do. These situations are the farthest removed from the polite teineigo function of the particle discussed towards the beginning of the thesis, in category 1. The connotations attached to these instances of the お prefix are in fact affectionate, indicating the author’s possibly positive feelings of endearment toward the subject. In a few cases, such affections arise upon making the topic’s social status more equal to the speaker’s, rather than lowering or raising it.

In (29), Aki refers to his older brother with the familiar title of 兄ちゃん instead of the more formal title of 兄さん. The お prefix in the situation of the more familiar title is not necessary, as little children can often be heard saying 兄ちゃん without the prefix particle in front. To utter that particular title to someone requires a very intimate relationship with the other person, such as belonging to the family or being a very close friend. Indeed, Inoue (1979:282) states that one would usually use the respectful affixes of お- and -san even within the family, but use the “more affectionate” -chan for younger member, both male and female. The formal title of 兄さん is formal for a reason: it creates and maintains a kind of distance between the speaker and the listener. Used even in the family, it indicates the user’s respect for that family member.

In the context of (29), the お prefix supposedly highlights the familiar aspect of the 兄ちゃん title, since the sentence seems to indicate that Aki is mentioning his older brother with
affection. Indeed, the 兄ちゃん alone would have sounded like a social superior talking down to a social inferior; however, the addition of the prefix particle in front serves to make the ‘older brother’ more equal in status with the speaker. Thus, the author intends to show Aki’s affection toward his brother as social equals. Also, the fact that the title occurs in the same sentence as お散歩, a recurring element that is very likely one of Aki’s favorite activities, strongly suggests that the familiar title is indeed meant to give off a warm feeling.

There is a very similar, almost identical, occurrence in (31), with the appearance of a familiar title. This time, the title refers to the blog author’s father. Typically, one would either refer to one’s father as お父さん, which is the formal version, or as 父ちゃん or 父, the two familiar titles. But the author here uses お父ちゃん, where the お prefix may or may not be added. In attaching the お prefix to the front of the familiar title, the author is adding even more affectionate connotations to the sentence. Note that the お prefix used in this context is different from the お prefix used in front of sushi. The お prefix used in front of sushi belongs more to the second category of conventional お prefix usage, where the conjugation of the particle and the word is becoming more and more common so as to almost become a whole unit together.

The お prefix used in (30) is related to the previous uses in the familiar titles, but differs slightly in its additional functions. By itself, ぬし can mean ‘you’ as well, but in the context of this sentence, one would not be able to say that the meaning of おぬし is the same as without the prefix particle. At the same time that the お prefix helps specify the meaning of おぬし to mean ‘you,’ it also serves to soften the tone of the word. It could be possible that the particle was added to the front of the word with the intentions of having the お’s polite
connotations cancel out the potentially derogatory implications behind (strtolower}. Regardless, the tone of the rest of the phrase, written in a very casual manner, implies that the ‘you’ was meant to come across in a familiar way. Indeed, the context of the sentence is such that the author means the ‘you’ to be directed at a pricey item. The author seems to be poking fun at this item, thus prompting the casual reference to the object.

The author of (32), a mother who writes about daily life in the household with her baby daughter, writes about a scenario where she is trying to get her daughter to be able to feed herself. The author comments on how it is quite a feat to get her daughter to eat by herself, since, as in (32), the daughter refuses to cooperate in the process. But to the mother’s eyes, her daughter’s antics are still adorable. By adding the istringstream prefix to the word for ‘mouth,’ or kuchi, the mother in effect makes her daughter’s mouth the central focus of the phrase. She most likely emphasizes ‘mouth’ in this phrase to indicate her feelings of endearment toward her daughter, despite her naughty disobedience. Had the particle not been present in this situation, the sentence could have given off a less adoring, humorous tone of voice.

Finally, turning back to sentence (1) from category 1, the second instance of the istringstream prefix used to modify the word istringstream for ‘hand’ seems to play more of an affectionate role than a deferential, honorific particle. In the context of that sentence, the snack appears to be an especially appealing item to Aki, and so the blog author uses the istringstream prefix to modify ‘hand,’ indicating how much Aki desires the snack in his older brother’s hand. Additionally, the combined word, otete, is reminiscent of children’s language. Thus, the author seems to have intentionally adjusted Aki’s language in this blog post to reflect his childlike affection for his older brother. Instead of simply referring to the hand as the generic word, te, the author uses otete to add an extra layer of loving emotion.
Back when the ladies of the court were popularizing widespread use of 日, one of the reasons behind their doing so was because they wanted to soften, or make less crude, the more vulgar-sounding words. The 日's used in this category in fact add to their words in an affectionate way. Indeed, the prefix particle can be added to words to prevent them from either sounding too derogatory, or further emphasize their familiarity.

XI. Conclusion and applications: where will this study of the familiar use of the 日 prefix go?

The many different usage types of the 日 prefix in the data that I collected from blog posts suggest that the 日 exhibits polysemy, or the capacity for a single morpheme to have a range of meanings understood variably through the context. The prefix is similar to so-called “light verbs” in Japanese (Miyamoto, 1999), which are very low in meaning. In other words, a single verb in Japanese can often be used appropriately in many different types of contexts. Low in meaning is equivalent to low-information, such as the low-information verbs of English, like run. In the case of the verb, run, the word can be used in many different contexts, but another verb like waddle cannot be used in such a manner.

She ran across the room / She ran the meeting / The refrigerator ran just fine yesterday / I ran him down / My nose runs when I have a cold / Ideas run through my mind / ...

She waddles slowly / *The meeting waddled badly / *I am waddling late / ...

Just as the ‘run’ in the previous example sentences can be used in many different contexts, so the 日 prefix was used in multiple situations from the scope of the examples I obtained from my blog sources. The fact that the word run is used in different scenarios does not necessarily mean that they are different forms of the verb. Likewise, the various occurrences of the 日 prefix in the
blogs do not necessarily entail that these prefixes are different forms of the particle. Rather, the same particle in each situation serves a slightly different function depending on the context surrounding it.

In the case of the  كس prefix, however, we saw that context refers to a wider range of factors than just the words surrounding the particle and its following word. Interpretation of the كس prefix’s function can change very subtly from formal to familiar, or vice versa, depending on the intended audience and the speaker or author’s perceived self-image relative to those he or she was around at the time. Indeed, like much of the Japanese language as a whole, the كس prefix is a situational linguistic element. As we saw with the blog posts, the function of the كس prefix could change depending on the author’s own background, intended audience and the subject matter being discussed. Whether or not it is because of the nature of the blogs that I chose to investigate, the كس prefix particles used in these sentences seemed to be used largely to express personal emotions and opinions. By using the particle, one could soften the tone of the phrase, add affectionate connotations to the message or emphasize a certain topic considered important or noteworthy by the author. The differences in meaning would change according to the author's purpose, background and the inspiration behind the words. For instance, did the author say this in a seemingly good mood? Or did the author write that phrase as part of a critique, which he or she is trying to soften by adding the كس prefix particle? The following is a chart summarizing the frequency with which the blog authors used a certain category of the كس prefix.

<table>
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<th>Table 3. Frequency of كس prefix usage by category and blog author</th>
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<td>Blog Author</td>
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<td>Aki</td>
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I would like to emphasize once again that my selection of blog quotes from these authors was not intentionally narrowed down. I simply took the most recent couple of posts from each blog and collected all sentences with the :t3 prefix in them. From these sentences, I used a few representative sentence samples, excluding ones that continuously used the same word (such as o-sanpou) or else used the :t3 prefix for its category 1 honorific function. As such, readers should note that for blogs like Mika and Yuutarou’s, which are portrayed in the above table as having only one sample blog sentence each, I actually collected many sentences but did not include the majority of them in my thesis to avoid repetition.

After taking this fact into account, it is interesting, and significant to me, to note that use of the prefix was most prominent amongst the female blog authors. The level of familiarity of the :t3 prefix gradually becomes more casual, according to the way that I divided them, from category 1 through to 5. However, the two male authors from my selection used their blog sentences with only the category 1 :t3 prefix. From my previous investigation of sources that mentioned that the :t3 prefix was used frequently by court ladies of the past and still retain
feminine influence to this day, I am guessing that this is because the males regard the ます prefix as highly associated with females in contexts other than honorific function.

I collected many sample sentences from the blogs from these two male authors, a majority of which I did not include in this paper because of repetitiveness in terms of ます prefix category. My data sample revealed that the two male authors from whose blogs I took quotes did not use as many different types of ます’s as the female authors did. Indeed, the only category under which both male blogs’ quotes fell was category 1, which consists of ます that are used for their polite and respectful connotations. To be fair, one of the male authors is an employee, one who works for a hotel. It may therefore be custom for him to consistently be polite to others, like the way he treats his guests. However, the CEO female author from my sources also used a variety of different ます’s, ranging from the emphasizing ます prefix to the cushioning, modifying ます’s. Also, the second male author from who I collected blog quotes based his whole blog on the theme of a male writing about his restaurant exploits over Japan, as well as his home cooking. And yet a great majority of quotes I was able to observe from his blog used ます’s in the way that conforms to my category 1 of ます usage. Indeed, this seems to show that females may in fact have a wider repertoire of ます when it comes to speech and writing. According to Gardner (personal communication, October 2012), it may be worthwhile to ask if this is because females tend to use devices that are appealing in such a way as to enlist the empathy of their listeners more frequently than males do.

There are a few exceptions to this claim, however, with the blog authors Mika and Yuki Nakajima. I will not get into the finer details with my analysis at this point, but I would like to point out how Mika only had one instance of the ます prefix for category 3 and Yuki had one
instance each in categories 1 and 3. While I cannot say much for Mika, as she has only disclosed her sex and not her age, Yuki is a female student in middle or high school, and she also seems to be a teenage celebrity. Therefore, I presume that Yuki would be expected to use proper language, in the sense that she use her に prefixes for honorific or otherwise less casual or familiar uses. Indeed, most of the blog sentences that I collected from her blog used the に prefix in either a category 1 or 3 function.

With the other blog authors, however, one should note that upon looking at the table of frequency of に prefix usages, the bulk of the other female authors’ uses occur between category 3 and 5. It is interesting to see how all of these authors are female. I cannot say just from this sample that casual or familiar use of the に prefix increases with age, as Naru and Mana, elementary school age female students, use the prefix many times for their category 3 and 4 functions. However, this pattern of familiar に prefix usage seemed to be consistent among the other female authors, two of whom I have confirmed to be adults of age 20 or above. Following this analysis, I think it would be reasonable to assume that the author of Aki’s blog (or Aki’s owner) is female. By not disclosing his or her sex, the author of Aki’s blog leaves it to the reader to guess the sex from the tone of the posts. While it is likely that the blog author here intentionally did not identify a sex in order to make the dog’s point of view in the blog more convincing, it is highly probable that the actual blog author is female, at least according to the way in which she uses her に’s. The pattern of に prefix usage for Aki’s blog follows the hefty number of uses from category 3 to 5. Within the scope of my research and other blog posts, the author’s tone of voice and contextual use of the に prefix are consistent with patterns of posts in other blogs whose authors are identified as females.
Also, within their uses of the 조사 prefix, these female authors seemed to use the particle mainly in situations that required them to sound more appealing or inviting. When using the category 3 prefixes, most of the sentences consisted of situations that emphasize elements that are "close to [the blog author's] daily life" (Inoue 1979:289). With category 4 prefix usages, the authors were trying to soften the tone of their blog posts in order to let readers feel more comfortable and thus better relate to the speaker. Finally, category 5 조사 prefix use was used for the most part in situations that can be likened to talking to a child. Instances of the prefix in this category came in front of words like the affectionate title for 'brother,' the 'mouth' of a child and the casual word for the pronoun 'you.' The former two instances are directly related to children, but the third example is also related to youth, because the connotations of this informal 'you' are such that one can pretend-scold a child or talk very casually to a friend but cannot use this term when trying to be polite and respectful. As such, it can be argued that the 조사 prefix does indeed help make the overall tone of one's words more casual, friendlier and more inviting, enough to make a child feel comfortable and relatable to the speaker.

To better illustrate how using the 조사 prefix can help one adopt more of a child-directed tone, take the example of a mother who is attempting to teach her child a lesson about not throwing things on the ground. She could attach the 조사 prefix to words that typically do not take 조사, such as ishi, or 'rock.' By referring to a rock as o-ishi, the mother is potentially ascribing humanness to the rock, especially if she mentions to her child that the rock could feel hurt if something is thrown at it. The notion of the importance of empathy in Japanese syntax, as mentioned in works by Kuno (1987) and Kuno and Kaburaki (1977), is key to understanding the how empathy can be reflected in honorifics. In the case of the above example with the rock, using the 조사 prefix in front of ishi has more of an empathetic effect in that it makes the listener
feel more relatable to the rock. It would be like the English equivalent of saying “Mr. Rock” instead of just “that rock.” In other words, the き prefix helps the listener feel more empathetic toward the speaker. While I do not wish to generalize by saying that only women use the き prefix in a casual context, I would like to claim that women seemingly use the particle more often in their attempt to empathize more with their audience while simultaneously informing them about their views and opinions.

To further investigate into the empathetic potential of this き prefix, one could possibly take the particle into consideration within the context of the なぜ (ne) and よ (yo) particles. In such an explicit language like Japanese, where certain particles are used to indicate certain emotions or the willingness to empathize with those involved in the conversation, the appearance or lack thereof of such particles can dramatically change the tone and mood of the conversation. The particles ne and yo have been associated with creating empathy and a tone of instructing, respectively, although the particle yo can also create a sense of shared learning and realization.

More specifically, ne usually indicates or solicits agreement of confirmation, usually used when the speaker assumes that the listener shares knowledge of the information that the speaker is talking about. When the speaker is dealing with exclusive information, ne cannot be used, as in the sentence: *Atama ga itai desu ne ‘I have a headache’ (Maynard 2005: 286). To use a comparable example in English, take another example with a tag question, provided by Inoue (1979:257). The following sentence indicates the speaker’s lack of assertiveness, and translated into English, one can see the implied tag question behind the speaker’s words.

(13) kore-ga anata-no hon desu ne.
    this you ‘s book be
    This is your book isn’t it?
However, when *ne* accompanies information that the listener does not know of, the empathizing connotations of *ne* adds a sense of empathy and intimacy to the otherwise exclusive sentence (Maynard 2005:286). *Ne* can also be used to add a tone of friendliness, at both the phrase- and sentence-final positions, and may be added when making a request, offering an invitation or giving orders in the *nasai* form: *Denwa shite ne* ‘Please call me’ and *Renraku shinasai ne* ‘Make sure to contact me’ (Maynard 2005:287).

*Yo*, on the other hand, represents the speaker’s insistence. There is no tag question involved. Rather, the speaker is asserting some fact that he or she knows to be true, and is trying to impress this fact on the addressee in a softened manner by using the *yo*. Take this English example, again provided by Inoue (1979:257):

(14) *kore-ga anata-no hon desu yo.*
I’m telling you—this is your book.

This particle is an utterance-final particle, and usually used for “empathic appeal,” meaning that it demands special attention and can be used to “pass judgment empathically and to vent one’s opinion strongly” (Maynard 2005:291). In a sense, the particle allows space for the author to state a strong opinion without sounding too offensive, since the particle softens the brunt of the force of strong words. However, *yo* also serves a function of indicating the speaker’s desire to reach out to the listener. In a conversation, the particle can be added to the sentences containing the main points, since it aims to appeal directly to the listener (Maynard 2005:292).

Thus, *ne* and *yo* are empathetic particles in Japanese speech that help create a stronger sense of intimacy and sharing between speaker and listener, or author and reader. I believe that the *kô* prefix acts in the same way, serving an honorific function in some cases but also serving such empathetic roles in many others. The *kô* prefix could be studied in a way so that one could measure how often the *kô* appears relative to *ne* and *yo* in a casual setting. This way, one could
investigate into how the use of the  avaliações prefix correlates to using *ne* and *yo* in a sentence; in casual speech, does the  avaliações prefix more often occur with or without the *ne* or *yo*? Indeed, this would be an interesting way to investigate more into the Japanese people's image of the  avaliações prefix, and a long-term study of this type could provide insight into the changing customs and increasing casual tones of Japanese speech. The  avaliações prefix, while once regarded mainly as an honorific, may in fact be taking on non-honorific layers with time.
Bibliography

Discussion of blog quotes in sub-sections D and E in Section III are strongly enriched with insights from Professor Yoshiko Jo, through personal communication via communication in November 2012.

The example phrases using *run* and *waddle* were suggested by Professor Donna Jo Napoli of the Linguistics department at Swarthmore College, via personal communication through email, October 2012.


