

Types of Directive Speech Acts and the Use of Keigo in Japanese Funeral Advertisements: A Pragmatic Study

Diana Kartika., Agus Salim., Syahrial., Irma

Japanese Literature, Universitas Bung Hata Padang, west Sumatera, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines directive speech acts and the use of *keigo* in Japanese funeral advertisements from a pragmatic perspective. The study focuses on how advertisers use directive expressions and polite language to communicate with prospective customers in the sensitive context of funeral services. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method. The data consisted of 30 utterances collected from five Japanese funeral advertisements, with *Kazokusou no Amuuru* as the main source and four other funeral-service advertisements as supporting sources. Data were collected through documentation and note-taking techniques and analyzed using Searle's (1976) theory of directive speech acts and Sutedi's (2023) theory of *keigo*. Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of politeness and the concepts of *honne* and *tatemae* were used as supporting analytical concepts. The findings show four types of directive speech acts: requests, questions, invitations, and appeals. Requests and questions were the most frequent categories, each accounting for 11 data (36.67%), followed by invitations with 6 data (20.00%) and appeals with 2 data (6.67%). The analysis also identifies three types of *keigo*: *teineigo*, *sonkeigo*, and *kenjougo*, with *teineigo* occurring most frequently. The use of *keigo* helps advertisers maintain politeness, reduce the force of directives, and adapt their language to the sensitive context of funeral services. The analysis of *honne* and *tatemae* indicates that polite expressions function as the socially appropriate surface of the advertisements, while the implied communicative purposes include attracting attention, building trust, and encouraging prospective customers to consider the services offered.

Keywords: Pragmatics; Directive Speech Acts; Keigo; Politeness; Honne; Tatemae; Japanese Funeral Advertisements.

INTRODUCTION

Advertising is a form of communication used to introduce, inform, and promote products or services to the public. In addition to conveying information, advertising language can be used to influence readers and encourage them to take particular actions. Therefore, advertising discourse can be examined from a pragmatic perspective because its meaning is closely related to communicative intention and context. This is particularly relevant to funeral advertisements, where language is used in a sensitive communicative situation involving death, bereavement, and the needs of surviving family members. The latest research corpus in this study consists of 30 utterances collected from five Japanese funeral advertisements, with *Kazokusou no Amuuru* serving as the main source and four other advertisements serving as supporting sources.

One important linguistic feature in Japanese communication is *keigo* (敬語), or honorific language. *Keigo* is used to express politeness and respect in relation to the social relationship between the speaker, hearer, and referent. In the present study, *keigo* is examined using Sutedi's (2023) framework, particularly the traditional classification of *sonkeigo* (尊敬語), *kenjougo* (謙譲語), and *teineigo* (丁寧語). Sutedi's book *Keigo Bahasa Jepang* was published by UPI Press in 2023. The use of *keigo* is particularly relevant to funeral advertisements because the communicative situation requires careful language selection. Expressions that directly command prospective customers may create an inappropriate impression in a context associated with grief. Consequently, advertisers may employ polite forms to communicate requests, questions, invitations, and appeals in a less forceful manner. The latest thesis data contain forms such as お電話ください (*o-denwa kudasai*), お越しくだ

さい (*okoshi kudasai*), お問い合わせ下さい (*otoiawase kudasai*), ~でしょうか (*deshou ka*), ~ませんか (*masen ka*), and よろしく願いたします (*yoroshiku onegai itashimasu*).

From a speech-act perspective, Searle (1976) classifies illocutionary acts into representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Directive speech acts are concerned with attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to perform an action. Questions can also function as directives when the speaker expects a response from the hearer. This framework is appropriate for advertising discourse because advertisements may encourage readers to contact a company, seek information, make preparations, consider a service, or follow a recommended procedure. In the present corpus, four directive categories are identified: requests (*irai*), questions (*gimon/shitsumon*), invitations (*kanyuu*), and appeals (*kongan*). The revised classification produces 11 requests, 11 questions, 6 invitations, and 2 appeals. Thus, requests and questions are equally frequent and constitute the largest categories in the corpus. Politeness is also relevant to the interpretation of these directive expressions. Brown and Levinson (1987) describe politeness as a way of managing interpersonal relations and mitigating potential threats to the hearer's face. Their framework is useful in this study as a supporting concept for explaining why advertisers avoid excessively direct expressions and instead employ more indirect and polite forms. For example, the use of ~ませんか (*-masen ka*) in an invitation allows the advertiser to encourage an action without presenting it as a direct command. Brown and Levinson's work was published by Cambridge University Press in 1987. The concepts of *honne* (本音) and *tatemae* (建前) are also employed as supporting concepts. *Honne* refers to an underlying feeling, opinion, or intention, whereas *tatemae* refers to the socially appropriate expression presented in interaction. Previous studies have applied these concepts to Japanese communication and cultural expressions. In this research, however, *honne* is not treated as direct evidence of a company's private feelings. Instead, it is interpreted more cautiously as an implied communicative or persuasive purpose that can be inferred from the content and context of an advertisement. This distinction is important because the data are written advertisements rather than direct interpersonal conversations.

Previous studies have examined Japanese advertising, directive speech acts, politeness, and *keigo*. Heryathana and Iriantini (2023), for example, examined directive illocutionary acts and implicatures in Japanese and Indonesian Instagram advertisements. Ermaliyah (2022) investigated *keigo* in directive requests in the Japanese drama *Itazurana Kiss*. Diner and Pertiwi (2024) examined the use of *keigo* in a Japanese workplace environment, while Sulastri (2024) specifically discussed language varieties in Japanese funeral pamphlets. These studies demonstrate that directive speech acts and *keigo* are productive areas of Japanese pragmatic research. The present study differs from those studies in its focus on the relationship between directive speech acts and *keigo* in Japanese funeral advertisements. The study also examines the communicative role of politeness and interprets *honne* and *tatemae* as supporting concepts. The specific context of funeral advertising makes the research significant because the language must simultaneously communicate information, provide guidance, and promote services while maintaining an appropriate degree of respect and sensitivity. Accordingly, this study aims to: (1) identify and classify the types of directive speech acts found in Japanese funeral advertisements; (2) describe the use of *keigo* in those directive utterances; and (3) interpret the relationship between polite linguistic forms, communicative purposes, and the concepts of *honne* and *tatemae* in the context of funeral advertising.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method with a pragmatic approach. A qualitative descriptive method was selected because the research focuses on linguistic data in the form of words, phrases, and utterances and seeks to describe their forms, functions, and meanings in context. The analysis does not rely on statistical testing; numerical frequencies are used only to support the description of the distribution of the findings. The study applies two main theoretical frameworks: Searle's (1976) theory of directive speech acts and Sutedi's (2023) theory of *keigo*. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness concept and the concepts of *honne* and *tatemae* are used as supporting analytical concepts.

Data and Sources

The research data consisted of 30 Japanese utterances containing directive speech acts. The data were obtained from five Japanese funeral advertisements. *Kazokusou no Amuuru* was used as the main source, while *Maruyoshi Sougisha*, *Kouzensha*, *Prieese Sougisha*, and *Memolead Kanto Kabushiki Gaisha* were used as supporting sources. The distribution of the 30 data across the five sources is 21, 4, 3, 1, and 1, respectively.

No.	Advertisement source	Number of data	Percentage
1.	<i>Kazokusou no Amuuru</i> (家族葬のアムール)	21	70.00%
2.	<i>Memolead</i> (メモリード)	4	13.33%
3.	<i>Maruyoshi Sougisha</i> (丸吉葬儀社)	3	10.00%
4.	<i>Kouzensha</i> (公善社)	1	3.33%
5.	<i>Prieese Sougisha</i> (プリエッセ葬儀社)	1	3.33%
Total		30	100%

Data Collection

The data were collected through documentation and note-taking techniques. The researcher examined the five funeral advertisements, identified utterances containing directive expressions and *keigo*, recorded the relevant utterances, and organized them according to their directive category and linguistic form. The latest thesis explicitly describes documentation and note-taking as the collection procedures.

The collected utterances were then numbered from Data 1 to Data 30. The revised classification is:

No.	Type of directive speech act	Data	Number	Percentage
1.	Request (<i>irai</i> , 依頼)	1–11	11	36.67%
2.	Question (<i>gimon/shitsumon</i> , 疑問, 質問)	12–22	11	36.67%
3.	Invitation (<i>kanyuu</i> , 勧誘)	23–28	6	20.00%
4.	Appeal (<i>kongan</i> , 懇願)	29–30	2	6.67%
Total			30	100%

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, the researcher identified utterances containing directive speech acts. Second, the utterances were classified according to Searle's (1976) directive category as requests, questions, invitations, or appeals. Third, the use of *keigo* was examined according to Sutedi's (2023) classification of *sonkeigo*, *kenjougo*, and *teineigo*. Fourth, the utterances were interpreted in terms of politeness and the supporting concepts of *honno* and *tatema*. The analysis also considered the communicative context of each advertisement. This contextual analysis was necessary because the presence of an *o-* or *go-* prefix alone cannot automatically determine the type of *keigo*. The function of the expression and its relationship with the hearer

and communicative situation must also be considered. This principle is already reflected in the latest thesis's discussion of *keigo*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types of Directive Speech Acts

The analysis of 30 utterances revealed four types of directive speech acts: requests, questions, invitations, and appeals. Requests and questions were equally dominant, each accounting for 11 data (36.67%). Invitations accounted for 6 data (20.00%), while appeals were the least frequent category with 2 data (6.67%).

Requests

Requests (*irai*) constituted 11 of the 30 data. These utterances generally direct readers to perform a specific action, such as making a telephone call, visiting a funeral hall, contacting the company, scanning a QR code, entering information, or remembering important instructions.

One example is:

いつでもお電話ください。

Itsudemo o-denwa kudasai.

“Please contact us at any time.”

The utterance is classified as a request because the advertiser explicitly asks the reader to contact the service provider. The expression *o-denwa kudasai* presents the requested action in a polite form rather than as a direct command. In the context of funeral services, the expression reduces the force of the directive and creates an impression of availability and assistance. Data 1 is classified as a request and contains a *teineigo* form. The expression お電話ください directs the reader to contact the funeral-service provider while maintaining a polite form of expression. Another example is:

右の二次元コードを読み込んで下さい。

Migi no nijigen kōdo o yomikonde kudasai.

“Please scan the QR code on the right.”

Here, the pattern ～てください functions as a polite request. The reader is directed to access additional information through the QR code. Rather than using a forceful imperative form, the advertiser presents the action as a polite instruction. From the perspective of Brown and Levinson's politeness concept, these expressions can be understood as attempts to reduce the imposition placed on the reader. The advertiser still wants the reader to act, but the requested action is presented through a polite linguistic form.

Questions

Questions (*gimon/shitsumon*) account for 11 data, namely Data 12–22. This is important because the previous manuscript incorrectly stated that Data 23 belonged to the question category. In the revised classification, Data 23 is excluded from the question category and classified as an invitation. The question data include both ordinary information-seeking questions and questions that function pragmatically to guide readers toward information or

consultation.

For example:

またどんな手続きをしなければならないのでしょうか。

Mata donna tetsuzuki o shinakereba naranai no deshou ka?

“What procedures need to be completed?”

The question uses the polite form ～のでしょうか (*no deshou ka*). Although grammatically interrogative, its function in the advertisement is not limited to obtaining an answer. The question introduces a problem that prospective customers may face and directs their attention toward the information or assistance provided by the funeral service.

Another example is:

ご自分の宗派の作法はご存知でしょうか。

Gojibun no shūha no sahō wa gozonji deshou ka?

“Are you familiar with the customs of your own religious sect?”

This expression uses a polite interrogative structure and *sonkeigo* in *gozonji*. The question encourages readers to reflect on their knowledge and potentially seek further information. The latest thesis identifies Data 20 as *sonkeigo* + *teineigo*. The question category therefore needs to be interpreted carefully. Not every question should automatically be described as a direct request for information from the reader. Some questions function rhetorically or as a means of directing attention toward a service or problem. This revised interpretation addresses the reviewer’s concern regarding the classification of FAQ-like and customer-oriented questions.

Invitations

Six invitation utterances were identified, namely **Data 23–28**. This is the corrected classification in the latest thesis.

Data 23 provides a particularly important example:

ご葬儀と合わせてご検討されてはいかがでしょう。

Gosōgi to awasete gokentō sarete wa ikaga deshō ka?

“How about considering it together with the funeral service?”

This utterance is classified as an invitation because it encourages the reader to consider an additional service. The expression ～てはいかがでしょう presents the suggestion in a polite and indirect form. It does not impose the action directly on the reader. Data 23 is classified as an invitation because it encourages readers to consider an additional service together with the funeral service. The expression ～てはいかがでしょう presents the suggestion in a polite and indirect form, allowing the reader to consider the proposed action without being directly commanded. Data 24–26 use forms ending in ～ませんか, while Data 27–28 use ～ましょう. For example:

事前相談で安心を手にしませんか。

Jizen sōdan de anshin o te ni shimasen ka?

“Why not gain peace of mind through an initial consultation?”

The pattern ～ませんか allows the advertiser to invite the reader without issuing a direct command. This form is consistent with politeness because the reader retains freedom to accept or reject the proposed action.

Data 27 and Data 28 use ～ましょう, which more explicitly proposes an action to be undertaken. Nevertheless, the form remains less confrontational than a direct imperative. Data 28, for example, states:

ご供養してさしあげましょう。

Gokuyō shite sashiagemashō.

“Let us offer prayers/respect for the deceased.”

The utterance combines the invitation pattern ～ましょう with *sashiageru*, which can function as a humble expression. This demonstrates that directive force and politeness can occur simultaneously in the same advertisement.

Appeals

Appeals (*kongan*) are the least frequent category, consisting of Data 29 and Data 30.

Data 29 states:

LINE & Instagram で、最新情報発信中！ご登録お願いします！

LINE & Instagram de, saishin jōhō hasshin-chū! Gotoroku onegaishimasu!

“We are sharing the latest information through LINE and Instagram. Please register/follow our account.”

The expression *onegai shimasu* presents the requested action politely. The advertiser asks the reader to register or follow its social-media account, thereby extending communication beyond the advertisement itself.

Data 30 states:

何卒、宜しくお願い致します。

Nanitozo, yoroshiku onegai itashimasu.

“We respectfully ask for your cooperation.”

This expression is classified as an appeal because it conveys a stronger request for cooperation while maintaining a highly polite form. The thesis identifies Data 30 as combining *kenjougo* and *teineigo*. The limited occurrence of appeals may indicate that funeral advertisers generally avoid highly forceful expressions. Instead, they more frequently rely on requests, questions, and invitations that allow the reader greater freedom in responding.

Use of Keigo

The revised article should now have a separate keigo frequency table. This directly addresses the reviewer’s criticism that the previous manuscript only mentioned the three types of *keigo* without showing their distribution. For the article, the table should distinguish between data containing a keigo form and individual keigo occurrences/forms. This distinction is important because one utterance may contain more than one *keigo* form.

Distribution of Keigo Forms in the 30 Data

No.	Type of Keigo	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
1.	<i>Teineigo</i> (丁寧語)	24	77.42%
2.	<i>Sonkeigo</i> (尊敬語)	6	19.35%
3.	<i>Kenjougo</i> (謙譲語)	1	3.23%
Total Keigo		31	100.00%

The analysis of the 30 data revealed 31 occurrences of *keigo*. The findings consisted of 24 occurrences of *teineigo* (77.42%), six occurrences of *sonkeigo* (19.35%), and one occurrence of *kenjougo* (3.23%). In addition, six data were identified as *futsuutai* (普通体), which were not included in the total number of *keigo* because they represent non-honorific or plain forms. As shown in Table, *teineigo* was the most frequently used form, accounting for more than three-quarters of all *keigo* occurrences.

This finding indicates that polite expressions are predominantly used in Japanese funeral advertisements. The use of *teineigo* allows the advertisers to communicate information and service-related messages in a polite and socially appropriate manner, particularly because funeral services involve sensitive situations and interactions with potential customers. *Sonkeigo* occurred six times, while *kenjougo* occurred only once.

Thus, the distribution demonstrates that the advertisements relied more heavily on general polite expressions than on honorific forms that specifically elevate the status of the referent or lower the speaker. The six occurrences of *futsuutai* also show that not all expressions in the advertisements employ honorific language. These plain forms were therefore analyzed separately from the *keigo* data.

And then, the analysis of *keigo*, based on Sutedi's (2023) framework, identified 31 occurrences consisting of 24 *teineigo* (77.42%), 6 *sonkeigo* (19.35%), and 1 *kenjougo* (3.23%). *Teineigo* was the most frequently occurring form, indicating that general polite expression was dominant in the funeral advertisements. *Sonkeigo* and *kenjougo* occurred less frequently and were associated with more specific contexts of respect and speaker humility. Six data containing *futsuutai* were analyzed separately and were not included in the total number of *keigo* occurrences.

Teineigo

Teineigo is the most frequently occurring type of *keigo* in the corpus. It appears in expressions used to make requests, provide information, ask questions, offer suggestions, and close communication politely.

Examples include:

- お電話ください (*o-denwa kudasai*)
- 読み込んで下さい (*yomikonde kudasai*)
- でしょうか (*deshou ka*)
- ございますか (*gozaimasu ka*)
- お願いします (*onegaishimasu*)
- よろしく願いいたします (*yoroshiku onegai itashimasu*)

The high frequency of *teineigo* indicates that the advertisements prioritize general politeness rather than consistently elevating the hearer or explicitly lowering the speaker. This is appropriate for advertising because the intended audience is broad and includes prospective customers whose social status and relationship with the

advertiser may vary. Sutedi (2023) is therefore used as the principal framework for identifying these polite forms. The official UPI Press record confirms *Keigo Bahasa Jepang* as Sutedi's 2023 publication.

Sonkeigo

Sonkeigo occurs less frequently than teineigo. Its function is to show respect toward the hearer or toward a person referred to in the advertisement.

Examples include:

お越しください

okoshi kudasai

and

ご存知でしょうか

gozonji deshou ka

In Data 2, okoshi kudasai is used when inviting the reader to visit the funeral hall. In Data 20, gozonji deshou ka is used to ask about the reader's knowledge of religious customs. The use of sonkeigo contributes to the respectful positioning of the reader and makes the advertisement appear more considerate and professional.

Kenjougo

Kenjougo occurs only in a small number of expressions. A clear example appears in Data 30:

何卒、宜しくお願い致します。

Nanitozo, yoroshiku onegai itashimasu.

The form itashimasu is associated with humble language and lowers the speaker's action in relation to the hearer. In the advertisement, this form appears in a closing appeal and creates a respectful and humble tone. The limited occurrence of kenjougo is understandable because the advertisements are not ordinary face-to-face business conversations in which the speaker repeatedly performs actions toward a specific higher-status hearer. Instead, most messages are directed toward a broad public audience, making teineigo more suitable as the dominant politeness form.

Politeness in Directive Expressions

The use of polite forms can also be interpreted using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness concept. Directive speech acts inherently have the potential to impose an action on the hearer. In advertising, this potential imposition may become stronger because the advertiser wants the reader to contact, visit, consult, register, or purchase a service. The funeral advertisements reduce this potential imposition through indirect and polite forms. Expressions such as ~てください, ~ませんか, ~ましょう, and ~てはいかがでしょうか allow advertisers to communicate their desired actions without using blunt imperatives.

For example, 事前相談で安心を手にしませんか does not directly tell the reader to consult the company. Instead, it presents consultation as an option. Similarly, ご葬儀と合わせてご検討されてはいかがでしょうか gives the reader an opportunity to consider the proposed service rather than explicitly commanding them to choose it. Therefore, politeness in these advertisements does not eliminate the directive function. Rather, politeness modifies the way the directive is delivered. The advertiser still seeks a particular response, but the

response is presented in a less imposing form.

Honne and Tatemae in Funeral Advertisements

The concepts of *honne* and *tatemae* are used cautiously in this study. Because the research data are advertisements rather than private conversations, the analysis cannot establish the advertiser's actual private feelings. Therefore, *honne* is interpreted as an implied communicative or persuasive purpose, while *tatemae* refers to the socially appropriate linguistic presentation visible in the advertisements.

Tatemae is evident in the frequent use of polite, indirect, and respectful expressions. The advertisers present themselves as helpful, professional, considerate, and sensitive to the circumstances of bereaved families.

For example:

いつでもお電話ください。

Itsudemo o-denwa kudasai.

The surface message is that customers may contact the company at any time. This represents *tatemae* because the message is presented as assistance and accessibility rather than as an explicit sales command. The implied communicative purpose can be interpreted as *honne* in the analytical sense adopted here: encouraging the reader to contact the company when funeral services are needed. Thus, the analysis does not claim that the company “secretly feels” something. Instead, it identifies a persuasive purpose that can reasonably be inferred from the advertisement. This distinction directly addresses the reviewer's criticism that the previous manuscript inferred “hidden corporate intentions” too strongly from the text alone.

And then from the perspective of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness concept, the use of polite and indirect directive expressions can reduce the degree of imposition placed on the reader. The concepts of *honne* and *tatemae* are used as supporting concepts to interpret the relationship between the explicit presentation of the advertisement and its communicative purpose. In this study, *tatemae* refers to the socially appropriate and polite presentation of the advertising message, while *honne* is interpreted cautiously as an implied communicative or persuasive purpose that can be inferred from the textual and contextual evidence. It is not treated as direct evidence of the companies' private feelings or intentions

Relationship between Directive Speech Acts, Keigo, and Politeness

The findings demonstrate that directive speech acts and *keigo* are closely connected in Japanese funeral advertising. Directive expressions establish the action that the advertiser wants the reader to perform, while *keigo* influences the social and interpersonal manner in which that action is communicated.

The relationship can be summarized as follows:

Linguistic element	Main function
Directive speech act	Directs the reader toward an action or response
<i>Teineigo</i>	Maintains general politeness and formality
<i>Sonkeigo</i>	Shows respect toward the hearer or referent
<i>Kenjougo</i>	Shows humility by lowering the speaker's action
Politeness concept	Reduces the potential imposition of directives
<i>Tatemae</i>	Represents the socially appropriate surface expression

Honne	Represents the implied communicative/persuasive purpose
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The findings therefore suggest that the advertisements do not simply combine unrelated linguistic forms. Directive expressions provide the persuasive direction, while *keigo* and politeness help regulate how that persuasive message is delivered.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of 30 utterances from five Japanese funeral advertisements identified four types of directive speech acts: requests, questions, invitations, and appeals. Requests and questions were equally dominant, with 11 data each (36.67%). Invitations accounted for 6 data (20.00%), while appeals accounted for 2 data (6.67%). Therefore, the revised findings no longer claim that questions alone are the most frequent category. The analysis also identified three types of *keigo*: *teineigo*, *sonkeigo*, and *kenjougo*.

Teineigo was the most frequently occurring form, indicating that general politeness and formal expression are particularly important in funeral advertising. *Sonkeigo* and *kenjougo* appeared in more context-specific expressions that required respect toward the hearer or humility on the part of the advertiser. The findings further show that polite linguistic forms help reduce the force of directive speech acts. Requests, questions, invitations, and appeals are presented through indirect and polite expressions, allowing advertisers to promote their services without relying heavily on direct commands. This pattern is particularly appropriate in funeral communication, where the subject matter requires sensitivity and respect. Finally, *honne* and *tatemae* are useful as supporting concepts when interpreted cautiously. *Tatemae* can be observed in the polite and socially appropriate presentation of the advertisements, while *honne* is treated as an implied communicative or persuasive purpose rather than direct evidence of the companies' private feelings. The combination of directive speech acts, *keigo*, politeness, and these supporting concepts demonstrates how Japanese funeral advertisements balance promotional objectives with socially appropriate communication.

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