

# Forms of Address to Superior and Organizational Culture in Japan Creative Industry

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## Abstract

The objective of this research is to identify the form of address used to superiors in companies, uniquely creative industry in Japan. This research is a preliminary study for a research that aims to prove the relationship between the use of language and organizational culture in a company. The method used was qualitative research by an in-depth interview with participating employees who work in Japan's creative industry. The results show that the 2 (two) companies used "*family name + san*" to address superiors, and used "*family name + professional ranking*" to address president or *shachou*.

**Keywords:** creative industry; form of address; open system; organizational culture; results oriented.

## Resumen

El objetivo de esta investigación es identificar la forma de dirección utilizada por los superiores en las empresas, industria exclusivamente creativa en Japón. Esta investigación es un estudio preliminar para una investigación que tiene como objetivo probar la relación entre

el uso del lenguaje y la cultura organizacional en una empresa. El método utilizado fue la investigación cualitativa mediante una entrevista en profundidad con los empleados participantes que trabajan en la industria creativa de Japón. Los resultados muestran que las 2 (dos) compañías usaron "apellido + san" para dirigirse a los superiores, y usaron "apellido + clasificación profesional" para dirigirse al presidente o shachou.

**Palabras clave:** industria creativa; forma de dirección; sistema abierto; cultura organizacional; orientado a resultados.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Japan is one of the developed countries known for its high-quality automotive products and technology in the world. Cars, motorbikes, electronic devices, and household appliances produced by Japan dominate the global market share. In addition to automotive and electronic products, Japan is also renowned as a country producing many unique creative products, such as manga or comics, anime, games, and so on (Yoshimoto, 2009). Most of the creative industries that produce anime, games, comics in Japan are small and medium scale companies providing a wide array of products.

The way and work culture of this creative industry are different from the non-creative sector; for example, the software developer industries that have excellent teamwork is different from the characteristics of a 1-2 year project of with the number of 30 -100 people . The creative industry requires the team to have excellent interpersonal skills in addition to the individual technical abilities. Moreover, strong initiative from the personnel to suggest ideas and not relying on their superiors' ideas, is another practice in Japanese creative industry. Besides, the composition of workers involved in the creative sector is dominated by young people aging 20-30 years old (Okeda & Koike, 2011). The demand for communication in Japan creative industry has led to some unusual practices in the use of language within the companies.

Formal Japanese for the business setting is very different from the use of standard Japanese in daily life. There are some specificities in official Japanese language, for example, the concept of modesty. The application of humility in the Japanese language occurred in the

selection of language usage. The use of polite speech in Japanese is closely related to some social aspects, such as status, age, title, the position of the interlocutor, and also the distance (the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor). However, the condition in Japanese creative industry may be different from other industries where they use more familiar language. The use of language that is more familiar and does not create a gap among members in a team is expected to support the success of the project undertaken by the organization. This research is interesting because it discusses the forms of addressing used to superiors in Japan creative industries, which in practice, is different from other companies in general. This research is conducted to find the answers to the questions on what kind of forms of address used in the company based on the organizational culture.

## **2. THEORITICAL FOUNDATION**

### *2.1. Creative Industry*

Creative industries have different characteristics or culture compared to the industry in general. Creativity in the creative sector is essential for innovation. Japan's creative industries not only emphasize technology but also prioritize Japanese art and culture (Kakiuchi, 2014). Some characteristics in the creative sector are, the composition of workers that are dominated by young workers, priority on creativity and work experience, and orientation toward teamwork. Most of them are small and medium-sized industries, which are located in the Tokyo, Osaka, or Kyoto area. Besides that, good coordination and communication in the team is considered to be a determinant of success in completing a job. Workers in the creative industry are required to have the ability to communicate and coordinate with other team members (Kohashi, 1999). The animation industry is youthful; 70% of its employees are young men and women in their 20s, and 30% in their 30s. The hierarchy in the creative industry is an informal organizational structure that ensures and maximizes freedom of creation within the corporate framework. (Morisawa, 2015)

### *2.2. Form of Address in Japanese*

The form of address is the term or phrase used to address someone. In many languages, addressing form refers to 3 (three) classes of words, namely pronoun, verb, and noun (Braun, 1986). The form of address relating to a noun functioned as a substitute for addressing the interlocutor or referring to a person in several ways. Some addressing types in Japanese are different from the English, in which title and company name are additional variations in Japanese, and it means different levels of politeness. In Japanese, there are several classifications in addressing. The title attached to the name is also one form of polite expression. Tanaka (1996) studied the types of address proposed by Braun (1986) and made 11 classifications of Japanese addressing forms. In his article entitled *Sociolinguistics: Honorifics and Gender Differences*, Ide (1999) suggested that there are several titles attached to the name as a form of address (Ide & Yoshida, 1999):

1. *Last Name(LN)/First Name(FN)/ kinship terms + sama*  
     LN/FN/kinship terms + *san*  
     LN/FN/kinship terms + *kun*
2. LN + *sensei* (*sensei* literally means teacher, and is also used for professionals who have high status as the teacher, for example, doctor, politician, and writer).  
     LN + *senpai* (*senpai* mean senior, and is used for seniors in an organization).
3. The professional ranking is used independently or followed by *the Last Name*.  
     (LN) *shachou*: president director  
     (LN) *senmu*: executive director  
     (LN) *buchou*: head of a division  
     (LN) *kachou*: head of the department  
     (LN) *gakuchou*: university president/rector

Nagata (2015) reiterates the results of research on the use of keigo in the workplace that has been conducted by the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics or 国立国語研究所 in 1982. This institution wrote a report on 企業の中の敬語 (*kigyō no naka no keigo*). Results show that the terms of addressing are by the title such as "*buchou*," "*kachou*" towards the people who have a higher position such as to "*buchou*," "*kachou*."

While for the people whose status is under the chief/head, the form of address is the family name followed by "*san.*"

### 2.3. *Hofstede's Theory of Organizational Culture*

Hofstede (2010) defines organizational culture as holistic, historically determined, related to the anthropological concept, socially constructed, soft, and difficult to change. Based on Richard L Daft (2010), organizational culture also classified 2 (two) levels of cultures. The first level is superficial matters such as symbols, habits, etc. and the next level is the values that underlie all of these things. Cultures enhancing the stability of the organization activities and events. Moreover, focus of cultures to provide members with a sense of identity and to generate within them a commitment to beliefs and values of the organization. (Hakim, Airlangga, Sawarjuwono, Airlangga, & Djalaluddin, 2019)

Geert Hofstede proposed a cultural concept in organizational theory. Artistic concept is a dimension in understanding organizational behavior. Hofstede (2010) divides corporate culture into 6 (six) dimensions, which are process-oriented vs results-oriented, employee-oriented vs. job-oriented, parochial vs. professional, open system vs. closed system, loose vs. tight control and normative vs. Pragmatic.

In the process-oriented organization, people will focus on avoiding risks and working with limited effort where they do the same thing every day or routine. On the other hand, in an organization with results-oriented culture, its people perceive themselves as those who can adapt to all situation that include uncomfortable conditions. In this type of organization, people strive to make maximum effort to achieve goals, and they consider that there is a new challenge every day.

Open or closed system dimension describes the communication climate within an organization. In an organization with a free communication system, both the organization and its members are open to new employees. It means that almost anybody can be part of an

organization, as new employees only need a few days to feel accepted by the group. On the contrary, in an organization with a closed communication system, new employees need more time to feel comfortable working at the company.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study used a qualitative method. A qualitative approach is a research process and understanding based on the methodology which investigates the social phenomena and human problems. According to Creswell (2007), in this approach, the researcher makes a complex overview, examines detailed reports and words from the viewpoint of the informants, and conducts a study on the natural situation. Data collection was performed by conducting an in-depth interview with 2 (two) participants working in 2 (two) Japan creative industry. Interview was conducted in Japan on August 23, 2017 (1st informant) and August 29, 2017 (2nd informant). The researcher also did an observation in one (1) company where the first informant is working. The sample of the creative industry in this study is an animation production company and games developer company. The first informant is a 36-year-old Japanese male employee who has been working for 15 years in an animation production company. The company was founded in 1973. Its business activities are on the media and entertainment field. The company is also a member of The Associations of Japanese Animations. The second participant is an employee of a game company, headquartered in Tokyo and has a branch office located in Osaka. Andy (shadow name) is a non-Japanese citizen and has been working for four years at Osaka branch. The questions delivered during the interview are open questions about the form of address used to superiors in the company, the type of relationships between subordinates and superiors, and also about the organizational culture found in both companies.

### **4. ANALYSIS**

Below are the results of the interview with 2 (two) informants.

Data (1) – (2) is the result of an interview with the first informant. Meanwhile, data (3) – (6) is the result of an interview with the second participant.

#### 4.1. Data (1)

*Participant 1* : アニメも似てますよ。◦Result出してほしい、リミットだけ決まらず。二時間働いて、十分休憩取ると言うようなやり方よかったらそれでも良い、で十時間ずっと働いて、あのを十時間休むとかだったらそれでも良い、四十八時間働いて、四十八時間休むでもOk、間に合うだったら何でもいい.. そうなりますね..

Translation:

*Participant 1*: It is similar to Animation Company. It only determines the limit, yet the most important is the results. For instance, 2 hours working and 10 minutes break. It's ok to work this way. Ten hours working and 10 hours break is no problem, or even straight 48 hours working and 48 hours break. Anything is allowed as long as the result is given on time...I guess so.

Data (1) illustrates that the animation company applies a flexible work system on its working hours, focusing more on the results rather than the procedures in achieving the results. It can be drawn from the explanation of the participant who stated:

Result出してほしい、リミットだけ決まったんです。

Result dashite hoshii, rimitto dake kimattan desu.

Translation:

It only determines the limit, yet the most important is the results.

The work system in the animation company does not limit employees, who are mostly creators, in managing their work time and rest periods. From the observation, the work hour begins at 10:00 AM, yet until noon, many employees have not arrived at the office yet. A

habit in the organization, to a certain degree, tells about the culture in the organization. The workhours system in such a company, if associated with organizational culture, according to Hofstede (2010), is in line with the dimension of results-oriented, rather than process-oriented. Hofstede (2010) explains that in a process-oriented organization, people will focus on doing the same thing or routine to avoid risk.

Meanwhile, organization with results-oriented culture can adapt to many kinds of conditions. Also, they will work with maximum effort to achieve goals. These characteristics meet the shape of the creative industry where employees required to be creative, and employees need space to maximize their chance to be creative (Morisawa, 2015).

#### 4.2. Data (2)

Q :あなたは社長に「ヤマウラ社長」の呼びかけを使っていますね。次のレーヤは誰ですか。

A: 部長になりますね..

Q: 「一部長」を使っていますか。

A: 使いません。

Q: 「-さん」使っていますか。

A: はい...

Q: で、あなたの部下もその部長に対しても「-さん」使っていますか。

A: 「さん」使ってますね。

Q: でも、やはりその社内で皆、社長に対して「一社長」と使ってますね。

A: そうですね..名前を付けないですね..「社長」とだけ呼んでますね。

Q: あ、「社長」だけ..「社長」ですね..

A: 社長ですね..

Q: 「社長さん」じゃなくて..社長ですね..

A: 社長です..社長に対して、「さん」を付けるのはあまりないじゃないですかね..

Translation:

Q: *So you call the President Director with "shachou"...and then what level after you?*

A: *It's "buchou."*

Q: *So, do you call buchou by "—buchou"?*

A: *No, I don't use that.*

Q: *Do you call your buchou with "-san"?*

A: *Yes.*

Q: *So, your subordinate also call buchou with "san"?*

A: *Yes, using "-san"*

Q: *So, at the office, all the employees address the President Director with "Yamaura Shachou"...*

A: *That's right, but we don't call it by name...only "Shachou"*

Q: *It's "Shachou," instead of "Shachou san, right?"*

A: *Yes, "Shachou." We don't add "san" to the "shachou" form...*

From data (2), the addressing form used towards the President Director is "Shachou." Based on theory explained by Ide, this form of address is professional ranking(Ide & Yoshida, 1999). However, the level below used the usual addressing form, "family name + san." Please see the statement below:

Q: 「一部長」を使っていますか.

A: 使いません。

Q: 「-さん」使っていますか.

A: はい...

Translation:

Q: So, do you call *buchou* by "*—buchou*"?

A: No, I don't use that.

Q: Do you call someone with "*-san*"?

A: Yes

The addressing term used in the above data to the President Director is in line with the theory presented by Ide. According to Ide (1982), terms of addressing indicate the professional ranking, namely *Shachou*, *Buchou*, *Kachou*, where these terms are intended to show position. But in data (2) above, the addressing form used towards the head of division whose job in *Buchou* is using *-san*. It is in contrast with Ide and Nagata theory. Ide (1999) stated that the term *family name + san* was used in the context of kinship. Nagata (2015), in his research, said that towards the people of higher position, it should use *Buchou*, *Kachou*, *Shachou*.

Moreover, for the people whose position is under the chief, the form of addressing used is *family name + san*. Meanwhile, to address the President Director, a form of the professional term is used, which is *shachou*. This using of term of address is in line with Ide's theory (1982) stating that professional ranking is used to address the interlocutor who has a high position in a company. Nagata (2015) also said that for people who are in a more top place, the form of address is *shachou*.

From data (1) and (2), the form of address used towards the highest position to the president director is *shachou*, while the form to address the superiors in the middle management usually uses the standard *family name + san*. In his research, Kohashi stated that excellent communication and coordination between employees is the main requirement to finish the project successfully (Kohashi, 1999). Besides, creatives industry is an industry whose employees are young, hence, would most likely have creative ideas. The hierarchy of

the organization looks like an informal structure because they need space and room to be creative. The organizational culture found in this company is the result-oriented culture where the employees are provided with flexibility in terms of process or effort to complete the work. Excellent results and submitting the results on time are the main things required by the company. So, the use of *family+san* is needed to make communication between staffs and middle management, who need to coordinate each other every day, smoother. The researcher concluded that based on the conditions above, the form of address tends to establish a closer relationship between the superiors and subordinates and minimizing a gap among them. Employees need to coordinate with each other, exchanging ideas, and finish the project successfully. *shachou*, in this context, is used to address the President Director to recognize that he has the highest position. Staffs are very seldom to meet the president director directly because they usually do the work and coordinate with middle management.

#### 4.3. Data (3)

*Q: What are the terms of address used in your company?*

*A: We use the standard and polite Japanese. We even use the common Japanese form of address every day, instead of sonkeigo or kenjogo. Also, when we are talking with the superiors, we use polite language and teineigo. When we address the superiors, we don't use terms for a position title, but family name + san.*

*Q: How do you feel about the relationship among the employees at the office?*

*A: Well, with that kind of condition, I feel closer to my superiors and feel no distance. Moreover, maybe because we have the same interest, hobby, and even often playing games together. I think the relationship is equal and closer like best friends, though they are my superiors.*

From data (3) it was found that the form of address used by the participant to his superiors is *family name + san*. It contrasts to the theory suggested by Ide where the form of address used for superiors is the professional term of addressing. However, in data (3) above, the term of address used to the superior whose position is a leader is "family name+san." It

contradicts to Idea and Nagata's theory. Ide (1982) stated that the form "family name + san" was used in the context of kinship. Nagata (2015), in his research, said that towards the people of higher position, it should use *Buchou*, *Kachou*, *Shachou*.

Moreover, for the people whose status is under the chief, the form of address used is *family name + san*. As stated by a participant, they feel that they have no distance between staff and superior because they have the same interest, the same hobby, even they often play games together. By calling the excellent with "family name+san," the participant feels that he is closer to his superiors at personal level. This kind of situation happens in the creative industry because employees are required to produce creative ideas. Employees also need to have excellent communication and proper coordination between staff and superior and feel no gap between staff and superior (Kohashi, 1999).

#### 4.4. Data (4)

*Q: And then, how do you address the President Director, do you use the same form of address for other superior?*

*A : Off course not, we call him shachou*

*Q: How old is your President Director?*

*A: About 50 years old...*

From data (4), we can see that it is slightly different from the form of address used towards the direct superiors. For the highest superiors or the President Director, the participant uses *shachou*. According to Ide (1999), professional ranking is used to address a person with a high position in the company. Nagata (2015) also suggested that for people with a more top place, then it used *shachou*. Even though they are working in creative industries with no distance ambiance, they are still using *shachou*"to address President Director. President Director is the highest position in a company and they address him with his title to recognize his position.

#### 4.5. Data (5)

*Q: Have you got into conflict with your superior?*

*A: Absolutely, I have.*

*Q: How are you superior's reaction when having a different opinion with his subordinate?*

*A: My superior accepted our opinions well. He even allowed us to implement our idea as long as it can help us to achieve the goals or the expected results of our project. He gave us freedom on the condition that the result is excellent.*

From data (5), we can see that there are 3 (three) aspects implied here. The first is about freedom of opinion from the subordinates. The second is an attitude of the superiors who are open to suggestion and input from the assistants. The last is the freedom to apply ideas in completing a project. These three things describe the organizational culture found in game industries. The first and second things are freedom of opinion and the attitude of superiors who are open to the ideas of subordinates, which is following the cultural dimension of the free system (Hofstede, 2010). In this dimension, the communication system between employees is open, so that a new employee can adjust quickly to his job. Freedom of stating opinion and openness of the superiors to the ideas applied in this company is also by the culture in Japanese companies called the Japanese Organization Culture Scale (Tang et al., 2006). The third thing is freedom in completing work; this is in line with Hofstede's theory (2010), i.e., the results-oriented culture, rather than process-oriented. Hofstede (2010) explained that in a process-oriented organization, people would focus on doing the same thing or routine to avoid risk. Conversely, organizations with result-oriented culture will be able to adjust in all kinds of conditions. Besides, they will make maximum effort to achieve their goals.

#### *4.6. Data (6)*

*Q: One more question, "is there any rules to wear a formal outfit which determines its style by the company?"*

*A: No, we are free to wear any style we want.*

This company does not determine a specific outfit or uniform for its employees. Employees are free to express themselves through styles that suit them. If it is related to organizational culture theory presented by Hofstede (2010), it shows that the game company adheres to the pragmatic dimension. In this dimension, practical organizations emphasize more to meet customer needs. Outcomes are considered more important than the right procedures. Freedom to determine styles and appearance is a form of reflection that the company is responding to the needs of its employees to express themselves. The most important thing is the result of work compared to the emphasis on the procedure. The creative industry also emphasizes the freedom to express ideas and creativity (Hanzawa, 2004).

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The use of addressing forms to superiors in the creative industries producing animation and games is different when compared to other conventional companies in general. This study concludes that there are similarities between an animation production company and game production company in using forms of address to the superiors. It is divided into 2 (two) types: the first form is "shachou" as professional ranking which is used to address the highest superior/president director. The second is the standard form of address, *family name* + *san*, which is used when addressing direct or indirect superiors whose position is under the president director. The use of this form can lead to less formal communication between subordinates and superiors, making the relationship closer and removing the gap between superiors and subordinates. The standard way to address the superiors makes the relationship between superiors and subordinates closer so that communication becomes more flexible, and the assistants can express their opinions or feelings freely. This condition is needed in the creative industry that emphasizes creativity, excellent communication, and coordination to produce the best result of work. The use of the term of address is closely related to the organizational culture. Culture in creative industries emphasizes on the results rather than the monotonous process. They also have open communication among the employees, including

openness from subordinates to superiors. The most important is game and animation companies prioritize the results rather than process and the rules applied to the job.

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