Systemic Metaphors of Social Deixis in Japanese

ABSTRACT

Politeness may be characterized as a mere concept residing in our brain with no particular iconic representations. To express politeness, interlocutors have no alternative but relying on linguistic as well as non-linguistic forms of all kinds including body language, such as kowtow, the hat-tip, and rituals of the 21-gun salutes and half-mast. These are all regarded essentially as show of disarmament, namely submission. Japanese speakers make use of rich words and idioms of politeness from their lexicon, as English speakers do, but they also rely on grammatically encoded politeness expressions (often referred to as 'honorifics'). These notoriously complex expressions have been under vigorous scrutiny and have been revealed as having operated in three distinct spheres. To date, however, the works in the literature have been confined largely in the realms of practical application and taxonomy, and have failed to tap into the metaphoric nature of the honorific expression. In a radical departure, this paper argues, along the line of Kim (2004, 2006a, and 2006b), that Japanese honorifics are governed by a small set of fundamental principles based on a single premise: a superior person in honorifics is a model, but a taboo model. In this view, all honorific expressions are reduced to manifestations of a coherent set of 'systemic' metaphors: (i) 'envelope metaphor,' (ii) 'topological metaphor,' (iii) 'emergence metaphor,' (iv) 'servitude metaphor,' and (v) 'grace metaphor,' which are projected to the rule system of the entire gamut of Japanese honorifics.

References