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IN
LINGUISTICS

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Volume 38(3)

2007
(April)

DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MÂNOA
HONOLULU 96822

An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution

DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS FACULTY

2007

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FUNCTIONS OF THE JAPANESE PLAIN FORM IN A SOCIOLINGUISTIC INTERVIEW

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This paper investigates the Japanese plain form that occurs in one-on-one sociolinguistic interviews. The analysis reveals that the plain form itself indexes informational content and is used for evaluative comments, feedback, and listing, while affect keys used with plain forms index additional social meaning, such as reservation for evaluative comments, and indicate an affecting stance toward the interviewer. The result supports the theory that bare plain forms index content-based information, and that affect keys add social meaning to plain forms. The interviewees who used affect keys frequently showed a stronger commitment to the interview activity, negotiating for a closer stance to the interviewer.

1. INTRODUCTION. Currently, there are two opposing views regarding the use of the Japanese plain form in a formal context. Ide and Yoshida (1999) explained that the plain form in a formal context exhibits the speaker's intentional avoidance of the honorifics (a set of expressions under the category of polite language) to achieve closeness to the addressee. However, Cook (2006) claimed that the meaning of the plain form is not limited to psychological closeness, and such "closeness" is not the meaning inherent in the plain form. She maintained that different meanings can be achieved by interactants' co-construction during the course of conversation. This paper aims to confirm the latter view by providing different interactional patterns of individuals happened in the same context. Ultimately, this paper presents how various speakers use the plain form that suits different pragmatic functions

The plain form in Japanese sentence-endings is traditionally associated with informality, in contrast with the *desu/masu* form, which is commonly called the polite form (Martin 1964, Comrie 1976). For example, when a Japanese interviewer asks if the interviewee understands the instruction, there are at least two options for the answer:

- (a) *wakari masu.* '[I] understand.'
understand
- (b) *wakaru.* '[I] understand.'
understand

Examples (a) and (b) are identical in referential meaning, but different in social meaning. Both of them used a verb *wakaru*¹ 'understand', but only (a) used the morpheme *masu* at the end. The form that uses *masu* for verbs, or *desu* for adjectives and nouns² is called the *desu/masu* form, and the form without such *desu/masu* morphemes, as (b), is frequently called the plain form. Since *desu/masu* is traditionally considered an addressee honorific, example (a) is commonly interpreted as expressing the speaker's (interviewee's in this case) polite attitude towards the interviewer, while (b) does not express such politeness. According to Ide and Yoshida 1999, the choice between the two forms depends on either one of two factors: discernment (*wakimae*) or volition.³ In the framework of discernment and volition, it is assumed that Japanese society has normative expectations regarding the choice between the two forms (the *desu/masu* form and the plain form) that suits the situational and/or social context, although the speaker can choose

¹ *Wakari* is an inflected form of the verb *wakaru*. For a detailed discussion on the inflection of *desu/ masu* forms and plain forms, please see Cook 2006:275.

² This includes adjectival nouns, such as *kirei* 'beautiful', as in *kirei desu*.

³ Ide and Yoshida (1999) proposed discernment as a unique system of Japanese that is not present in the Western system of politeness (volition), in response to the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987).

to go against the expectation for strategic purposes. For example, a TV interviewer uses the plain form in order to achieve a closer stance despite the expected formality from the situation (i.e., volition). Thus, the plain form in (b) is either acknowledging the casualness of the situation and/or the social context (discernment), or indicating the speaker's manipulation of the form for strategic purposes (volition). When the speaker uses the plain form (b) in response to the older interviewer, for example, it is treated as an exception to discernment, which may mean the speaker's attempt to switch the formality of the situation to casual without changing the relationship between the speaker and the interviewer. The discernment and volition framework by Ide and Yoshida (1999) assumes that social identities of the speaker are given a priori, because the speaker essentially does not have much choice in selecting the plain form in a formal context, according to common sense (discernment) in Japanese society. For example, teachers tend to use the plain form to their students due to the difference in rank, but they also use *desu/masu* forms when they request something of their students, just to be "polite." According to Cook (2006), the analysis is based on a one-to-one mapping of the form and its meaning, such as the plain form indexing non-polite meaning.

Cook (2006) criticized the claim above by Ide and Yoshida (1999). Her critique was based on social constructionist theory, which proposes that social identities, among many other social categories, are created and negotiated in social interaction. Unlike the discernment and volition framework that claims that the speaker's choice of linguistic forms is based primarily on societal expectations, social constructionist theory assumes that speakers have an active role in making choices of linguistic forms in order to co-construct their identities with listeners in a particular context. Thus, the speaker's identity can be constructed differently within a particular situation, as a result of moment-by-moment negotiation with the listener. In her analysis of academic consultation data of dyadic interaction between three college professors (40s, 50s, and 60s) and their students (n=8), Cook (2006) demonstrated that students used the plain form to their professors, which contradicted Ide and Yoshida's (1999) idea of situational politeness requiring the "polite" form as discernment, i.e., the *desu/masu* form. In Cook's (2006) data, students used the plain form to complete their teachers' incomplete speech, or to express their own conviction. Both cases above did not demonstrate volition, because their plain-form use did not presuppose the obligatory rules that exist in the society (discernment). Rather, students used the plain form in order to accomplish conversational goals with their interactants, i.e., professors. For example, in the case of completing other's sentence, a student inserted the plain form utterance to complete his professor's utterance. In her study, topics of the consultation are either on thesis or reading assignments, which indicated that the relationship between the teacher and the student were pre-established. Since one motivation for speakers to switch to the plain form is to get "closer" to the listener psychologically, Cook's (2006) claim could be supported more strongly if we could present cases in which students had not met the interviewer at all, especially with more data. That is, the different types of the plain-form use by students to achieve various communication goals should present a holistic picture of students' negotiation of their stances in relation to their teachers, whether or not they come closer during the interaction.

In line with Cook's (2006) view, this study examines how twenty-two college students used the plain form in sociolinguistic interviews, based on social constructionist theory. All students met the interviewer for the first time; thus they were expected to be formal in the context of Japanese culture. First, the study illustrates (1) how the plain form was used differently among twenty-two native speakers when they met an older person for the first time, and (2) how it was not simply used to indicate the casualness of the situation. After the overall analysis of forms and functions, I will investigate the speakers' will to change the relationship with the interviewer. My hypothesis is that the social meaning of the plain form (and other related forms) is used as a tool to construct the social stance of the speaker. Prior to the analysis, an overview of studies on the social meaning of the plain form is in order.

2. PREVIOUS STUDIES OF THE PLAIN FORM. In this section, I summarize two issues: (1) studies of the *desu/masu* form and the plain form, and (2) studies of the bare plain form and affect keys.

2.1 THE DESU/MASU FORM AND THE PLAIN FORM. As mentioned earlier, studies of the plain form traditionally contrasted it with the *desu/masu* form. Makino (2002), for example, examined the plain form in written narratives and claimed that it is a kind of expression of *uchi* 'inside', i.e., an expression in which

the speaker’s attention is directed inwardly, while the *desu/masu* form is for *soto* ‘outside’ expression. More recent investigations on the plain form have revealed that it is used differently in various social contexts (Cook 1996a, Cook 1996b, Cook 1998b, Cook 2006, Megumi 2002, Okamoto 1998, 1999). For example, Cook pointed out that the bare plain form is not limited to informal contexts, e.g., written forms as newspaper articles and highly detached speech contexts such as enumeration of items on a list (Cook 2006, Cook 1998a).

2.2 THE BARE PLAIN FORM AND AFFECT KEYS. In previous studies, the bare (or “naked”) plain form indicates the plain form that is not followed by affect keys, such as sentence-final particles. Affect keys add affective meaning to the content (Maynard 1993, Cook 1998b). For example, sentence-final particles *ne*, *yo*, and *no* independently add interactional meaning to the sentence-final forms. Maynard (1993:159) was the first to point out that sentence-final particles add meanings to the plain form, claiming that the bare plain form is used when the speaker’s stance is “not deliberately addressed” to the listener in conversation. Makino (2002) similarly observed that the bare plain form is an indicator of expressions addressed to oneself, or *uchi* ‘inward’. Cook (1998b) further developed the issue by considering sentence-final particles as affect keys. “The plain form without an affect key foregrounds the informational content of an utterance, while the plain form with an affect key foregrounds the speaker’s affecting stance toward the addressee or the content of talk” (Cook 1998b:104). In other words, because the bare plain form is devoid of such an affecting stance, the bare plain form directs and foregrounds the referential content of an utterance. This analysis can explain why newspaper articles are written in plain forms, which do not have affect keys.

According to Cook (2006), possible linguistic forms of affect keys are (1) sentence-final particles such as *no* and *ne* (Cook 1990, Cook 1992), (2) prosodic features such as pitch and vowel lengthening, and (3) form variations such as coalescence (Cook 2006), i.e., shortened form of speech,⁴ and right dislocation (Dunn 1999).⁵ Below are an example of the bare plain form (the plain form without affect keys) and the same plain form verb with an affect key, a sentence-final particle *yo*.

TABLE 1. EXAMPLES OF THE PLAIN FORM AND AN AFFECT KEY.

The bare plain form	<i>wakaru</i> ‘[I] understand’	The plain form with an affect key	<i>wakaru yo.</i> ‘[I] understand, I’ll tell you.’
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Based on the findings on the distinctive meaning of the bare plain form and affect keys above, some studies have analyzed in detail how the bare plain form is used in different social contexts. With data from TV programs, Cook (2002) and Ikuta (2002) showed that some instances of the bare plain form are “detached” speech styles in which the TV interviewer either summarizes or provides evaluative comments for the audience. Such a “detached” speech style is used in highly restricted contexts with minimal emotional involvement by the speaker. Similarly, with data from classroom interaction, Cook (2006:29) demonstrated that the bare plain form can index both an informal speech style in informal talk and a detached speech style in highly restricted contexts with minimal emotional involvement by the speaker. This is because a bare plain form “picks out the immediate contextual dimensions and indexes a particular aspect of the context.” Maynard (1991) presented five cases where speakers may use the bare plain form in three different situations: casual conversation among friends, modern prose, and dialogues in modern fictional works. The five cases are: (1) remembering something abruptly, (2) echo responses, (3) speakers’ internal thoughts, (4) jointly-constructed conversation, and (5) intimate conversation.

⁴ For example, *gakusee ssu* instead of *gakusee desu* ‘[I am] a student.’ Or, *i ccha tta* instead of *itte shima tta* ‘[He has] gone.’ In both cases, the former uses shortened forms (*ssu* and *ccha*), which add a colloquial tone to the meaning, although the translation does not change. Coalescence can be seen in many different morphemes, both in plain and *desu/masu* forms.

⁵ It is the postposing of elements, for example, subject postposition in a SOV language, such as OVS.

In order to investigate how a student negotiates for his/her stance within an interaction, I will first demonstrate how students use the plain form in the context of the sociolinguistic interview. My research questions for this study are as follows.

1. To what extent do interviewees use the plain form in a sociolinguistic interview?
2. Do the interviewees use both the bare plain form and the plain form with affect keys?
3. How are the pragmatic functions of the bare plain form different from the ones of the plain form with affect keys?
4. How do the pragmatic functions of the plain form help to negotiate the students' stance?

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY. The data⁶ for this study are comprised of approximately six hours of interviews with twenty-two Japanese college students, recorded on cassette tapes. The interviewer, the author, led each interview session with fixed questions to elicit the interviewees' attitude towards the Japanese language. During the course of the interview, the interviewer's sentence ending was dominated by the plain form, especially the plain form with affect keys. The choice of plain form-based sentences by the interviewer was intended to relax the college students,⁷ who were to converse with an older woman who was introduced by their college instructors. The social expectation in Japan prescribed them to be polite, but the interviewer tried to establish the friendlier environment for the purpose of sociolinguistic interview. The interviews took place in small classrooms or in offices at the interviewees' campuses in the Kanto area. No other people were present at the interviews. The length of each interview session ranged from 5 to 17 minutes. The interviewees of the study were Tokyo Japanese speakers—14 men and 8 women. The interviewees' ages were in the range of 19 to 23, and all were from the Kanto area (Kagawa, Tokyo, and Saitama).

For each student, sentence-ending forms were collected and categorized into either the *desu/masu* form or the plain form.⁸ The ratios of the *desu/masu* form and the plain form were compared to determine the dominant forms each speaker used. In addition, the plain form was further categorized into two types: with and without affect keys. In this study, they are called the "plain form with affect keys" and the "bare plain form," respectively. Affect keys for this study are the following: (1) sentence-final particles, (2) prosody (rising intonation, high pitch, prolonged vowels, and louder utterances), and (3) form variations (coalescence and right dislocations). In the present data, students used the plain form for the following functions, listed in Table 2.

4. FREQUENCIES OF *DESU/MASU* AND PLAIN FORMS In general, the *desu/masu* form was more common than the plain form in this data (the *desu/masu* form 76.3%, the plain form 23.7%). The ratio of two forms used in the data varied among individuals. In order to focus on their plain-form use, ten interviewees who used the plain form more than five times were selected among all interviewees. These ten interviewees comprise the focus group (FG).⁹ The FG consists of six male interviewees and four female interviewees, who are listed under Table 3 with the ratio of the *desu/masu* form and the plain-form endings. The ratio of the plain-form use among FG interviewees was higher than twenty percent.¹⁰

⁶ It is a part of a larger study on gender research, and it was conducted after the completion of an experiment. The experiment includes role-playing activities: asking interviewees to read Japanese sentences as themselves and as a person of the opposite gender, and translating sentences from English to Japanese in polite and casual settings.

⁷ The interviewer's frequent use of the plain form may have encouraged students to use the plain form more; however, as in example (2), the students were not always motivated to use the plain form simply because the interviewer used the form.

⁸ Incomplete utterances, such as *te* endings of verbs, were excluded from the analysis.

⁹ Non-members of FG had an average of 1.8 tokens.

¹⁰ The next highest use of the plain form among interviewees who did not belong to the focus group was 12.5%.

TABLE 2. CATEGORIES FOR THE BARE PLAIN FORM.

Category	Content
(1) Direct Quotation	Repeating the interviewer’s utterance or readings sentences provided.
(2) Inner Speech	Self-addressed speech
(3) Listing	Providing examples in a form of list
(4) Evaluation	Main points of speech
(5) Feedback	Responding to the listener, or <i>Aizuchi</i>
(6) Empathy	Utterances to indicate the “sense of oneness” with the listener

TABLE 3. *DESU/MASU* FORMS VS. PLAIN FORMS.

Code#	desu/masu forms		plain forms	
	Tokens	%	Tokens	%
F6	25	28.4%	63	71.6%
M7	35	38.5%	56	61.5%
M2	24	61.5%	15	38.5%
F1	15	62.5%	9	37.5%
F8	16	64.0%	9	36.0%
M12	24	66.7%	12	33.3%
M10	58	74.4%	20	25.6%
F4	23	76.7%	7	23.3%
M4	62	77.5%	18	22.5%
M14	23	79.3%	6	20.7%
TOTAL	305	62.9%	215	37.1%

The FG’s plain form tokens are further categorized into the bare plain form and the plain form with affect keys. TABLE 4 compares the frequency of the bare plain form and the plain form with affect keys, and it illustrates that the FG interviewees used the plain form with affect keys slightly more often (56.6%) than the bare plain form (43.4%), even though each interviewee’s ratio of the bare plain form and the plain form with affect keys use varied. While M7 used heavily the plain form with affect keys (96.4%), F1 and M4 used the bare plain form more frequently than others (77.8% and 72.2% respectively). Four interviewees (F4, M12, F8, and M10) used the bare plain form and the plain form with affect keys with almost equal frequency.

How are the bare plain form and the bare plain form with affect keys used by the FG interviewees? Each instance of the plain form was grouped into function categories presented in TABLE 2. Then the bare plain form and the plain form with affect keys were compared. In order to examine how the bare plain form and the plain form with affect keys were used in the interview, the two forms were investigated separately in terms of their function.

TABLE 4. THE BARE PLAIN FORM VS. THE PLAIN FORM WITH AFFECT KEYS.

Code#	Bare Plain	%	Plain & affect keys	%	TOTAL
F1	7	77.8%	2	22.2%	9
M4	13	72.2%	5	27.8%	18
F4	4	57.1%	3	42.9%	7
M12	6	50.0%	6	50.0%	12
F8	4	44.4%	5	55.6%	9
M10	8	40.0%	12	60.0%	20
M14	2	33.3%	4	66.7%	6
F6	18	28.6%	45	71.4%	63
M2	4	26.7%	11	73.3%	15
M7	2	3.6%	54	96.4%	56
TOTAL	68	43.4%	147	56.6%	215

5. FUNCTIONS OF BARE PLAIN FORMS. Table 5 shows the distribution of bare plain form functions for each the FG interviewee.

TABLE 5. FUNCTIONS OF BARE PLAIN FORM ENDINGS.

Name	Direct Quotation		Inner Speech		Listing		Evaluation		Feedback		Empathy		TOTAL
F6	1	5.6%	2	11.1%	4	22.2%	8	44.4%	3	16.7%	0	0.0%	18
M4	1	7.7%	1	7.7%	0	0.0%	2	15.4%	9	69.2%	0	0.0%	13
M10	2	25.0%	1	12.5%	0	0.0%	5	62.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	8
F1	1	14.3%	0	0.0%	3	42.9%	3	42.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	7
M12	2	33.3%	0	0.0%	1	16.7%	3	50.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	6
M2	1	25.0%	0	0.0%	2	50.0%	1	25.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4
F8	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	25.0%	2	50.0%	1	25.0%	0	0.0%	4
F4	1	25.0%	0	0.0%	1	25.0%	2	50.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4
M7	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	50.0%	1	50.0%	0	0.0%	2
M14	1	50.0%	0	0.0%	1	50.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2
TOTAL	10	14.7%	4	5.9%	13	19.1%	27	39.7%	14	20.6%	0	0.0%	68

Overall, the number of tokens in total indicated that 39.7% of the all instances of bare plain forms were used for evaluation, 20.6% for feedback, and 19.1% for listing. While the focus group’s use of listing and evaluation were broadly distributed among interviewees, feedback and inner speech were used among only a few. For example, feedback was not used among six interviewees at all. M4’s higher frequency of feedback use contributed to his higher number of bare plain form use in Table 4. Direct quotation¹¹ was broadly distributed among many FG interviewees. The use of inner speech was limited to three

¹¹ Instances of direct quotation were sentences the speaker quoted from the provided script during the interview. Below is an example of direct quotation by M2. M2 had the script below.

Script: ‘Goroo ga warui yo ne.’ ‘Goroo is bad, right?’
 Goroo NOM bad P P Script:
 ‘Goroo ga warui.’ ‘Goroo is bad.’
 Goroo NOM bad

When the interviewer asked if he used two written phrases in the script above in daily conversation among friends, M2 replied as following. (Two underlined parts, *warui yo ne* and *warui* are in plain forms.)

FG interviewees, and its overall frequency was low. No interviewees used the bare plain form for empathy.

In the next section, I will discuss instances of three most frequent functions of the bare plain form—evaluation, feedback, and listing.

5.1 EVALUATION. In the data in this interview situation, the most common use of the bare plain form was evaluation, which provided the speaker’s main point of the story. The frequent use of the bare plain form for evaluation supports the earlier findings that the bare plain form can mark the speakers’ opinion (Megumi 2002). Excerpt (1) is an example of such instances by M10, who became very passionate about the topic of how younger children nowadays were “wilder” than his own generation, based on his own experience dealing with his younger brothers. His use of the bare plain form was concentrated in this episode. M10’s episode began when the interviewer asked for his opinion of younger speakers’ speech. After M10 shared his critical observation that elementary school kids used vulgar language, the interviewer asked if younger speakers’ vulgar styles would be “fixed” when they grew older. Below is his response. For this paper, I underline instances of the bare plain form, and double-underline instances of the plain form with affect keys, and I use bold fonts for the *desu/masu* form.

(1) Evaluation #1 (M10)

- 1 M10: *Maa, ato, shooraiteki ni kuroo suru to omou¹² shi, ima no*
 um and future-wise P hardship do that think and now GEN
 ‘Um, and in the future, current elementary kids will experience more
- 2 *shoogakusee no hoo ga. Oretachi no hoo ga,*
 elementary school pupils GEN than NOM we GEN than NOM
 hardship than us. Comparing to them, we, um, at first, were, um,
- 3 *nanka, saisho wa nanka futsuu dat ta shi, dandan nanka,*
 um at first TOP um ordinary COP PAST and gradually um
 ordinary, but gradually, um,
- 4 *kotoba konna kanji ni natte ki ta kedo, sorede,*
 language this impression P become come PAST but then
 [our] language became like this [vulgar]. Then,
- 5 *maa nanka kekkyoku baito toka shitee, iroiro oboeru*
 um some after all part-time job or something do various remember
 um, after all, through part-time job or others, we remember,
- 6 *ja nai desu ka, keego toka. Ima no*
 P NEG *desu* P polite expressions for example current GEN
 you know, things like polite expressions [during school days], **right?**
 Since current

M2: ... [LOOKING AT THE SHEET] *Tomodachi ni, ‘Goroo ga warui yo ne,’*
 friend DAT Goroo NOM bad P P
tomodachi dooi o motomeru n da yo ne, ‘Goroo ga warui’...
 friend agreement ACC seek NMN DT P P Goroo NOM bad

‘To friends, ‘Goroo is bad right?’ to friends, I am supposed to ask for an agreement with this sentence, right? ‘Goroo is bad’...’

¹² Instances as this *omou* ‘think’ are considered an incomplete utterance; thus, they are excluded from the plain form instances.

- 7 *shoogakusee* *wa moo sude ni nanka areteru kara,*
 elementary school pupils TOP already already P um wild because
 elementary school pupils are already, um, wild,
- 8 \longrightarrow *zettai taihen da to omou.*
 absolutely tough COP that think
 [I] think it will be absolutely tough [to fix them].’
- 9 Interviewer: *Shakai ni najinde iku no ni?*
 society DAT adjust come NMN P
 ‘You mean, when they adjust to [adults’] society?’
- 10 M10: *Un, to omoi masu kedo.*
 yeah that think *masu* but
 ‘Yeah, I **think** so.’

M10’s opinion of the future direction of language use among the children was that it would be “absolutely tough” to learn polite expressions (line 8) even through job experience, because their language was “wild” (line 7). At the end of the M10’s first utterance in line 8, he concluded his opinion with the plain form *omou* ‘[I] think’. Note that his opinion had an absolute tone with an intensifier *zettai* ‘absolutely’ (line 8). In contrast, other sentence-ending forms were in the *desu/masu* form. Prior to this evaluative comment, his description of his own generation was in the *desu/masu* form, *ja nai desu ka* ‘right?’ (line 6). Finally, he responded to the interviewer with another *desu/masu* form, *omoi masu kedo* ‘I think’ (line 10). This is a self-repair, embedding the former plain verb, *omou*, as a subordinate clause (line 6).

Although it seems possible that the interviewees’ use of bare plain forms was triggered by the interviewer’s use of such forms, it was not necessarily the case in this data, based on the examination of two instances of interaction below between an interviewee and the interviewer.

(2) Evaluation #2 (M2)

- 1 Interviewer: *Jaa, soo iu chigai tte iu no wa, at ta hoo ga*
 well then that say difference P say NMN TOP exist PAST than NOM
 ‘Well then, do you think it is better to retain these differences [between men’s
 and women’s language]?’
- 2 *ii to omou? Soretomo naku naru nara naku natte mo*
 good that think or disappear become if disappear become P
 Or, is it OK if it disappears?’
- 3 *kamawa nai toka?*
 bother NEG P
- 4 M2: *Iya at ta hoo ga ii to omoi masu sore wa.*
 oh exist PAST than NOM good that think *masu* that TOP
 ‘Oh, it’s better to retain them, I **think**. It is’.
- 5 Interviewer: *Doo shite deshoo.*
 how do wonder
 ‘Why is it, [I] **wonder**?’
- 6 M2: \longrightarrow *Iya, joojin na kanji ga suru.*
 oh refine COP feeling NOM do
 ‘Oh, I sense refinement.’
- 7 Interviewer: *Aa.*
 a-ha

- ‘A-ha’.
- 8 M2: **Hai.**
yes
‘Yes’.

In example (2) above, the interviewer started with the plain form (*omou?* ‘Do you think’ in line 2 and *kamawa nai toka?* ‘Is it OK?’ in line 3), and the interviewee M2 replied in *desu/masu* (*omoi-masu* ‘I think.’ in line 4). Then, the interviewer switched to *desu/masu* (*deshoo*. ‘I wonder’ in line 5), which is followed by the M2’s bare plain form, *ki ga suru* ‘I feel’ (line 6). This excerpt indicated that, in this case, M2’s shift was not directly motivated by the interviewer’s choice of speech style. It is more likely that the speaker chose the bare plain form because of the content of the speech—that is, an evaluative comment.¹³

5.2 FEEDBACK. There was only one kind of feedback in the bare plain form—that is, *soo* ‘right’. Four FG interviewees, M4 (9 tokens), F6 (3 tokens), M7 (1 token), and F8 (1 token), used the bare plain form *soo* ‘right’ when they provided feedback to the interviewer. Among them, M4 was by far the most frequent user of *soo*. In the following excerpt, the interviewer summarized M4’s previous utterance, and M4 agreed with the points the interviewer was making by inserting his response, *soo*.

(3) Feedback #1 (M4)

[M4 mentioned how difficult it would be if the Japanese people were to set a new, universal rule of how men and women supposed to talk.]

- 1 M4: ... *minna hitotsu ni matomete zenbu tooitsu suru shika nai n*
... everyone one P gather all integrate do only NEG NMN
‘The only way **is** that they group everybody together in one place and set
- 2 *ja nai desu ka ne.*
P NEG *desu* P P
out an ultimate rule, I wonder.’
- 3 Interviewer: *Ja, ruuru ga gaa tto atte,*
well then rules NOM many P exist
‘Well then, there are bunch of rules,’ and
- 4 M4: —————→ *Soo*
right
‘Right’.
- 5 Interviewer: *Minna kyoo kara kore o mamoru n da tte kanji?*
everyone today from this ACC keep NMN COP P feeling
‘tell them that everyone should keep these rules from today, like that?’
- 6 M4: —————→ *Soo*
right
‘Right’.

¹³ Some bare plain form utterances for evaluation resemble inner speech in function. Asked when people used “men’s/women’s language,” M10 had a hard time recalling instances in which such language styles were used, and uttered *muzukashii* ‘it’s difficult’ followed by a pause. After that, M10 continued that “I haven’t really noticed such instances of men’s and women’s language.” In this instance, the interviewee expressed how difficult it was to think of examples of ‘men’s/women’s language.’ However, it was not clear to whom the expression was addressed. It could be interpreted as the evaluative comment to the interviewer that the question is difficult, or it could be a self-addressed comment about the question. I consider it as a borderline case of evaluation and inner speech.

- 7 Interviewer: *Naruhodo nee. Nn, omoshiroi.*
 [I] see P hm interesting
 ‘I see. Hm, interesting.’

While the interviewer interpreted M4’s former utterance, M4 inserted his feedback *soo* twice (lines 4 and 6) to provide his positive feedback to the interviewer.

Other instances of *soo* from M7, F6, and F8 also provided positive feedback to the interviewer in a similar fashion. However, M4’s frequent use of *soo* is unusual, because *soo* was not frequently observed in the speech of the others.¹⁴

5.3 LISTING. One of the most common usages of the bare plain form was listing, or providing examples or evidences in a form of list, of which there are seven instances.

(4) Listing #1 (M2)

- Interviewer: *Onna no hito ga tsukatte hoshiku nai kotoba tte,*
 female GEN person NOM use want NEG language P
 ‘Languages that you don’t want women to use are,

tatoeba donna...
 for example what kind
 for example, what kind of...’

- M2: *Tatoeba ogehin na kotoba.*¹⁵
 for example vulgar COP language
 ‘For example, vulgar language.’

(5) Listing #2 (F1)

[In response to the interviewer’s question on what styles of language training she received at work]

- F1: *Naoshite morau to iu katachi.*
 fix receive a favor that say style
 ‘A style in which they correct my language use.’

Characteristically, their answers were short and direct to the point of the questions that were asked. The fact that listing was more commonly used with the bare plain form is in line with Cook’s (1998a) finding—that is, bare plain forms index content-base utterances.

6. FUNCTIONS OF PLAIN FORMS WITH AFFECT KEYS. The results for the plain form with affect keys summarized in Table 6 show clear contrasts with the results for the bare plain form (Table 5) in terms of the distribution pattern, especially in functions of inner speech, listing, and feedback.

TABLE 6. FUNCTIONS OF PLAIN FORM ENDINGS WITH AFFECT KEYS.

Name	Direct Quotation		Inner Speech		Listing		Evaluation		Feedback		Empathy		TOTAL
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	
M7	1	1.9%	11	20.4%	2	3.7%	26	48.1%	7	13.0%	7	13.0%	54
F6	1	2.2%	27	60.0%	8	17.8%	4	8.9%	3	6.7%	2	4.4%	45
M10	1	8.3%	5	41.7%	0	0.0%	6	50.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	12
M2	3	27.3%	4	36.4%	0	0.0%	3	27.3%	0	0.0%	1	9.1%	11

¹⁴ More commonly, FG interviewees used *desu/masu* form equivalents with affect key *ne* (sentence-final particle), as *soo desu ne* ‘right’ in this case.

¹⁵ I consider the noun ending as bare plain form, after Cook 2006, due to the common omission of the copula *da* in speech.

M12	1	16.7%	2	33.3%	0	0.0%	3	50.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	6
M4	0	0.0%	4	80.0%	0	0.0%	1	20.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	5
F8	0	0.0%	4	80.0%	0	0.0%	1	20.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	5
M14	0	0.0%	4	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4
F1	1	50.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	50.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2
F4	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1
TOTAL	8	10.6%	62	55.2%	10	2.1%	45	27.4%	10	2.0%	10	2.6%	145

The common use of the plain form with affect keys among the FG interviewees was for their inner speech (55.2%) as well as evaluation (27.4%). For listing and feedback, the plain form with affect keys was used only by two speakers, M7 and F6, both of whom also used the form for the empathy function. Because the empathy function is unique to plain forms with affect keys, this pattern deserves to be analyzed.

Affect keys used with the plain form in this data are coalescence (76 tokens) and sentence-final particles (82 tokens), especially *kana* ‘I wonder’ (48 tokens). Commonly used sentence-final particles for interactional data, *yo ne* ‘right?’ and *ne* ‘right?’, were lower in frequency: 3 tokens and 10 tokens, respectively. Below is the summary of affect keys.

TABLE 7. DISTRIBUTION OF AFFECT KEYS.

	Coalescence	Sentence-final Particles								Long Vowels	Intonation/Loudness	Right Dislocation
		<i>yo</i>	<i>yone</i>	<i>Ka</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>kana</i>	Subtotal			
Direct Quotation	1	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	5	2	2	0
Inner Speech	44	0	0	1	8	0	0	16	25	6	0	0
Listing	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	5	0	0	0
Evaluation	24	0	0	0	2	7	0	27	36	6	3	8
Feedback	2	0	0	1	0	3	0	2	6	3	1	1
Empathy	4	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	5	1	3	3
TOTAL	76	4	3	4	12	10	1	48	82	18	9	12

6.1 INNER SPEECH. The plain form with affect keys was used most frequently for inner speech. In M14’s instances of the plain form with affect keys ending in the coalescence form *daroo*, a longer vowel of *oo* in the original form *doo daroo* ‘[I] wonder’¹⁶ was significantly shortened in perception, which is a sign of coalescence. It is a very common pattern used by many FG interviewees.

(6) Inner Speech #1 (M14)

- 1 Interviewer: ... *keego tte iu to donna ree ga, donna*
 ... polite language that say P what example NOM what
 ‘... If you hear the word *keego* [polite language], what kind of
- 2 *hyoogen ga atama ni ukabu?*
 expressions NOM head P appear
 examples, what kind of expressions come to your mind?’

¹⁶ In careful speech, *doo daroo* means ‘I wonder how it is’. But with a rapid speech rate and coalescence, the original meaning was not prevalent, and it became the equivalent of English ‘I wonder’.

- 3 M14: *Nn, doo daro () donna hyoogen.*
 uhm how [I] wonder what expressions
 ‘Uhm, I wonder (), what kind of expression.’
- 4 Interviewer: *Tatoeba, desumasu toka.*
 for example *desumasu*-ending etc.
 ‘For example, *desumasu*-ending, etc.’
- 5 M14: *Aa, hai, desumasu wa demo doo daro,*
 oh yes *desumasu*-ending TOP but how [I] wonder
 ‘Oh, yes, *desu/masu*-ending, but I wonder
- 6 () *keego da kedo, ...*
 polite language COP but
 (), it is *keego*, but...’

M14 uttered *doo daro* ‘[I] wonder’ twice (line 3 and 5), both of which instances were in rapid speech with coalescence, a shortened form of *doo daroo*, followed by short pause. After that, M14 continued his utterance by repeating a part of interviewer’s question, *don na hyoogen*¹⁷ ‘what kind of expressions’ and *keego* ‘polite language’. This indicates that the *doo daro* indexed that he was in the process of thinking—internalizing the question and searching for his answer.

Another common affect key for inner speech was a sentence-final particle *kana* ‘I wonder.’

(7) Inner speech #2 (F6)

- F6: *Kawatte kiteru no kana, kawatte kite masu. ((laugh)) Wakara nai.*
 change come NMN P change come *masu* understand NEG
 ‘It has been changed, I wonder. It **has been changed.** ((laugh)) I don’t know.’

Here, F6 responded to the interviewer’s question, which was whether men’s and women’s language use has changed lately. Her first reaction was with the *kana* ending, *kawatte kiteru no kana*, followed by her answer in the *desu/masu* form, *kawatte kite masu* ‘it has been changed.’ But her laugh followed by an utterance *wakara nai* ‘I don’t know’ indicated her uncertainty about her decision on her response. *Kana*, again, indexed that the speaker presented her tentative answer to the question with reservations. If not for the *kana* ending, the utterance *kawatte kiteru* ‘It has been changed’ might have been taken as a bold statement, a plain form with coalescence.¹⁸ Instead of making a bold statement, F6, while searching for an answer, gave a tentative response with the *kana* ending, followed by a *desu/masu* answer, *kawatte kite masu*.

6.2 EVALUATION. M7, the most frequent user of evaluation with affect key, used a sentence-final particle *kana* ‘I wonder’ for 14 out of 26 evaluation tokens. Similar to excerpt (7), where the sentence-final particle *kana* was used to provide a tentative response in a form of inner speech, M7 used *kana* to make the evaluative statement less definite, as in (8) below. The task mentioned here was to translate English sentences on the list into Japanese in a formal context. The interviewer asked M7 to point out expressions from the list written on a sheet that were not commonly used among his generation. He pointed sentence (3), ‘Could you carry my bag?’

¹⁷ As for repetitions of a part of question like this instance, I classified them either in inner speech or feedback, depending on to whom the utterance was directed. In this case, the utterance was not accompanied by rising intonation, which indicates to the listener that it was not a question. Therefore, I classified it as inner speech.

¹⁸ The expression *kawatte kiteru* is a coalesced form of *kawatte kite iru* ‘has been changed’.

(8) Evaluation #3

- 1 M7: *Ato, san- ban mo ne.*
and three-number also P
'And, the number three, also.'
- 2 Interviewer: *Un, san- ban, muzukashii yo ne.*
yeah three-number difficult P P
'Yeah, the number three is tough, right?'
- 3 M7: *N, a, nanka, kaban motte, kore, ichiban teenee ja nai.*
yeah oh um bag hold this the most polite P NEG
'Yeah, um, carry my bag, this one, it is the most polite [situation], right?'
4. *xxx dakara, motte kure mase n ka mitai na*
so hold receiving a favor *masu* NEG P like COP
xxx So, it's like '*motte kure masen ka* (could you carry my bag?)',
5. *kanji nan da kedo, e,*
nuance NMN COP but er
but, er,
6. → *demo () amari () tanoma nai n ja nai kana* ((laugh))
but not often ask NEG NMN P NEG P
but, [pause] often times, [pause] they may not ask, right? I wonder [laugh].
7. *shita, tokuni doosedai, a, doosedai wa*
younger especially same generation oh same generation TOP
Younger, especially the same generation, oh, the same generation
8. *dame ka, nanka*
not good P um
is not relevant. Um,'
9. Interviewer: *N, teenee na toki wa sonna ni tanoma nai no?*
yeah polite COP time TOP that P ask NEG P
'Yeah, when it's a formal situation, you won't ask?'
10. M7: *Tanoma nai kamo ne.*
ask NEG maybe P
'We may not ask.'
11. Interviewer: *N, so da ne.*
yeah right COP P
'Yeah, that's right.'

M7 knew that the script was prepared by the interviewer, and it was generally not considered very polite for younger speakers to criticize what the older interviewer wrote. Therefore, he showed some hesitation in claiming that people in the same generation 'won't ask' (line 5). His hesitance was apparent in two pauses prior to the sentence with *kana*, as well as the hedge *amari* 'not so much'. The central part of the sentence *tanoma nai* 'won't ask' also contained *ja nai* 'right?' After the interviewer asked for confirmation about what M7 stated in line 8, by saying, "when it's a formal situation, you won't ask?" M7 repeated *tanoma nai* 'won't ask' (line 9), accompanied by two more segments, and the particles *kamo* and *ne* 'may'. Therefore, the function of *kana* was to avoid the definite tone of the statement. This use of *kana* here exemplifies the difference between the bare plain form and the plain form with affect keys. By using affect keys—a sentence-final particle *kana* and a coalescence *n ja nai* (originally *no de wa nai*)—M7

could add additional meaning to the bare plain form *tanoma nai* ‘won’t ask’. If it had been in the bare plain form, which indexes content-based information, the statement would have been too direct, and thus interpreted as a critique of the older interviewer. This example (8) contrasts with other evaluation examples (1) and (2) in the bare plain form, which state the speakers’ own opinions to the exclusion of the interviewer’s stance.

What was common in the use of affect keys *doo daro* ‘what is it?’ and *kana* ‘I wonder’ was a sense of reservation. In the former case, the participants were not yet ready to make comments; therefore, they tentatively uttered *doo daro* as inner speech before their comments. In the latter case, the affect key *kana* was used to indicate the participants’ reservation to the statement content.

6.3 EMPATHY. There were three interviewees who used the plain form with affect keys to express empathy. M7 was the only one who had been an amateur actor during his high school days. Prior to the interview, interviewees participated in a performance experiment in which they role-played the opposite gender. M7 was fully engaged in the experiment to the extent that he asked the interviewer what sort of female character was wanted, providing some choices. After the experiment, the interviewer asked him if it was hot in the room, and his response was the following in a loud voice:

(9) Empathy #1 [M7’s opening words of the interview].

M7: ATTSUI ATTSUI, YABBEE, *kookoo* irai da yo, konna
hot hot man high school since COP P this kind of
‘It’s HOT, HOT! MAN, it’s been a while doing such things since my
koto yaru no.
thing do NMN
high school days!’

M7 appeared to enjoy the experiment, because this was the kind of activity he felt enthusiastic about. Moreover, his background put him in a more powerful position during the performance experiment. Although it was the interviewer who had the power to control the interview session as an initiator of the conversation, the role of the interviewer sometime resembled an audience to M7’s performance. M7’s first utterance, *ATTSUI*¹⁹ *ATTSUI* ‘It’s HOT, HOT!’ in a loud voice with a big confident smile, indicated how committed he was to the performance, as well as how confident he felt during the performance. This was followed by a louder utterance *YABBEE* ‘MAN’, which is a coalescence form of *yabai* ‘man’. In this expression, the younger generation often expresses that he/she is in trouble. His “trouble” in this context was that he was too strongly committed to the performance, which was not intended. For him to say that he was too committed to the performance meant that he acted like a professional actor. In other words, it was the expression of his confidence in his performance as well. The sequence of two coalescence forms, *ATTSUI ATTSUI* and *YABBEE*, indicates the further deviation from the *desu/masu* form, which was a common opening of the other interviewees. The experiment situation gave M7 more power to the relationship between the interviewer and himself, which, as a result, provided him a space for negotiation in terms of the relationship in the scene during the follow-up interview, evidenced by the frequent use of affect keys in general.

F6 did not have as many instances with affect keys for empathy as M7, but her extensive use of both the bare plain forms and the plain form with affect keys stood out from the other FG interviewees. During the interview, F6 mentioned, in extra-high pitch, *HAWAI kara ki ta n desu yo ne. CHOO III!* ‘You are from Hawai‘i, right? Super nice!’ As she explained after the interview, she was motivated to attend the interview session after hearing that the interviewer was a Japanese person who lived in Hawai‘i. F6 was the only interviewee who overtly expressed a strong interest in Hawai‘i. She was also very committed to the interview, frequently interjecting inner speech into her speech in order to find the best response to the

¹⁹ *Attsui* is a coalescence form of *atsui* ‘hot’.

interviewer. In short, both F6 and M7 were very enthusiastic participants of the interview; thus they took a closer stance in relation to the interviewer during the interview.

Data derived from one-on-one interviews revealed that the interviewees used affect keys as resources of negotiation between the interviewer and themselves, ranging from no use to dominant use.²⁰ The degree of “closeness” with the interviewer parallels the frequency of the interviewees’ use of affect keys, not the plain form by itself. The “closer” the relationship became, the more frequently the interviewees used affect keys in listing, feedback, and empathy, all of which were not prevalent among other FG interviewees. The one-on-one interview made the relationship between the interviewer and an interviewee relatively negotiable. Indeed, two interviewees, M7 and F6, were different from other interviewees in three ways: (1) they were the only interviewees who used the plain form more often than the *desu/masu* form (TABLE 2); (2) they were also the only interviewees who used affect keys for listing and feedback (TABLE 6); and (3) they were two out of three interviewees who used affect keys for empathy (TABLE 6).

7. CONCLUSION. This study illustrates how students utilized the social meaning of the plain form for different pragmatic functions to achieve different stances in relation to the interviewer during the course of a sociolinguistic interview. As for the social meaning of the bare plain form and affect keys, the study supports the previous claim, i.e., the bare plain form foregrounds informational content, while affect keys serve for interactional meanings. The study exemplified how the social meaning of forms assists in achieving conversation goals of the interview effectively for different pragmatic functions. Analyses of the FG interviewees’ data indicate that one of the most common pragmatic functions of the plain form, both with and without affect keys, was in the speakers’ evaluative comments. Since the purpose of the interview was to learn about the interviewees’ attitudes toward Japanese “men’s/women’s” language, the most important point of the interviewees’ response was what their opinions were, i.e., “evaluation.” Their own opinions were expressed in the bare plain form, while their opinions pertaining to the interviewer were accompanied by affect keys. The examples they provided to support their opinions were a function of “listing,” which was expressed in the bare plain form. Both cases, evaluation and listing, were consistent with the findings of the earlier studies: that the bare plain form foregrounds information content; i.e., opinions in case of “evaluation” and examples in case of “listing,” and affect keys present interactional meanings. The affect keys—the sentence-final particle *kana* and coalescence *doo daro*—are a case in point. As for “evaluation,” the sentence-final particle *kana* ‘I wonder’ was used to avoid direct criticism towards the interviewer. Similarly, in “inner speech,” the sentence-final particle *kana* ‘I wonder’ was used to indicate that the statement before *kana* was tentative. Another common example of “inner speech,” *doo daro* ‘I wonder’, foregrounds the meaning that participants have reservations about their statement. In both “evaluation” and “inner speech,” affect keys added a sense of reservation to the sentences, in addition to the content expressed in the bare plain form. In other words, affect keys used in inner speech provide cues to differentiate the informational content (an answer) and unelaborated thoughts. Affect keys also add a sense of “closeness” towards the listener, the interviewer, as we have seen from the instances of “empathy.”

How did the students use the social meaning of the plain form and affect keys to adjust the stance in relation to the interviewer? Among the twenty-two interviewees, two (F6 and M7) were distinctive because of their extensive use of the plain form in general, especially in their use of the plain form with affect keys for empathy, the most effective tool for negotiating the distance between interactants. This reveals that the empathy function of affect keys by both F6 and M7 showed a stronger commitment to the interview activity, negotiating a closer stance to the interviewer. The two FG interviewees contrasted sharply with the other twelve non-FG interviewees, as they did not use the plain form during the interview. During the one-on-one interviews, interviewees had the choice of how close their stances would become in relation to the interviewer. The use of affect keys, especially among the ones for the empathy function, indicated a sense of closeness.

²⁰ Conversely, it is also possible to interpret that students use the *desu/masu* form to adjust the “closeness.”

Significantly, former claims of social meanings of the bare plain form, i.e., foregrounding informational content (Cook 1998a), can account for the differing distribution patterns of inner speech and listing between bare plain forms and plain forms with affect keys. Thus, this study provides supporting evidence for previous studies on the social meanings of the bare plain form and affect keys, and it is the first to exemplify, with a larger data set, how speakers can achieve different stances in the same situation by utilizing various linguistic forms relating to the plain form.

APPENDIX

Transcribed parts with underline or in bold fonts are not intended to show aspects of conventional delivery. Words enclosed in parenthesis in the English gloss are unexpressed in the original Japanese.

Other transcriptions conventions are:

...	pauses of increasing length
xxx	parts of the conversation that were not decipherable
[overlap in conversation
()	short pause
CAPITAL	loud utterance

The following are abbreviations used in the gloss:

ACC	accusative marker	NEG	negative	PAST	past tense marker
COP	copula	NMN	nominalizer	TOP	topic marker
DAT	dative marker	NOM	nominative marker		
GEN	genitive	P	particle		

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