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The Role of Style Shifting in the Functions and Purposes of Storytelling: Detective Stories in Anime

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anime is a style of animation, commonly referred to as Japanese animation, that is popular not only in Japan but around the world. This popularity is in part due to the intriguing stories and the interesting roles played by anime characters. Using a discourse-based microanalysis, this chapter examines the role of speech styles in the context of storytelling, especially focusing on the role of style shifting in Japanese. Using anime as data, I attempt to show how people choose certain linguistic resources to present various images of themselves or others to fulfill various communicative goals. More specifically, I investigate a very popular Japanese anime, Detective Conan, to depict the intricate mechanisms of style shifting between the two verb ending forms, the plain da and desu/masu, by analyzing their use in the discourse of a particular character.

Norrick (2000) indicates that in storytelling every story can be told in different ways to achieve different communicative purposes and that such purposes may be achieved by deploying particular linguistic devices. For example, fantasy stories may display their unreality using conditional clauses and verb phrases with the modals would and could. Jokes or humorous stories can be displayed with linguistic tones or structure like “build-up-pivot-punch lines” (Norrick 2000, 131, 171). What about other types of stories, such as detective stories, where mystery solving is the key element of the narrative? How can the storyteller’s objective of solving a mystery and convincing the audience of his or her deduction be achieved? How can the realistic and yet hypothetical nature of mystery stories be displayed linguistically? This study seeks to explore the interpersonal and discourse functions of the plain da and desu/masu forms in a detective anime.

The plain da and desu/masu forms in Japanese appear in the main clause predicative position (e.g., Cook 2002) and are recognized as the dominant verb ending forms. Desu forms mark morphologically nouns and adjectives, as in gakusei desu, “am/is a student,” or takai desu, “is/are expensive”; masu forms mark verb stems, as in ikimasu, “(someone) goes.” The desu/masu and the da forms are generally identified as indexing different social contexts, such as social distance and relative social
status between interlocutors, determined by their different status and/or their degree of intimacy (e.g., Ikuta 1983; Maynard 1993). For instance, the desu/masu form marks socially formal and polite contexts; the da form marks socially informal and casual contexts.

However, recent discourse-based studies indicate that such characteristics as polite, formal, informal, casual are insufficient to explain various functions of the two forms in ongoing discourse or diverse contexts, where the style shifting of the desu/masu and the da forms occurs (Cook 1996, 1998, 1999, 2002; Makino 2002; Maynard 1993; Okamoto 1997, 1998, 1999). Instead of characterizing the style shifting as associated with the sociocultural features, these studies identify motivations for the style shifting in dynamic, ongoing discourse. Moreover, Cook (2002) characterizes two uses or styles of the plain da forms, (1) the informal (IF) and (2) impersonal (IP), depending on the contexts where the da form is used. She illustrates how interpretations of da forms can be distinguished by the absence or the presence of “affect keys,” such as final particles, rising intonation, and the like. Cook maintains that “if the plain form co-occurs with affect keys, it foregrounds the speaker’s affective stance towards the addressee or the referent” such as intimacy or in-group relationship of the speakers; when the form occurs with no affect keys, it then foregrounds the content of the information or the referential meaning (Cook 2002, 162).

Although previous studies have advanced the understanding of style shifting, these studies have focused on the shift from the formal (F) to the informal speech style (IF). Little attention has been paid to the role of style shifting between the F and the IP. Drawing on Cook’s characterizations of the plain da forms, this study seeks to identify the discourse functions associated with the style switching between the desu/masu/formal and da/IP through the unfolding of interaction in the detective anime series Detective Conan. I became interested in this series because in all episodes I saw, there was a predictable scene where the switching takes place from the desu/masu verb ending form to the da form at the climax of the episode. I found it interesting to investigate style shifts as resources for the participants to build shared images or information in the unfolding of the mystery. By briefly reviewing previous studies, I describe the characteristics of the two forms da and desu/masu in some detail.

Studies on Style Shifts and the Two Functions of the Plain Forms

It is generally held that speech styles are represented by two verb ending forms in Japanese. These are desu/masu form (which is also known as the polite form) and da form (known as the plain form, the abrupt form, the naked form), and their variations. The shift between the desu/masu and the da verb ending forms is one of the most interesting linguistic phenomena in Japanese and has been studied by many linguists. The style represented by desu/masu forms and its variations is often characterized as “polite,” “formal,” or “desu/masu style”; the style represented by da forms is known as “informal,” “casual,” or “da style.”

Cook (1998, 2002) characterizes desu/masu as representing deference toward the addressee or as representing the speaker “on stage” or “playing in social role.” Re-
Regarding the *da* plain form, Cook (2002, 162) characterizes two uses or styles of the plain *da* forms as IF and IP. The IP is depicted as “devoid of affect” or lacking in “affect keys,” such as final particles, postposed information, rising intonation, or a lengthened vowel. She claims that “if the plain form co-occurs with affect keys, it foregrounds the speaker’s affective stance towards the addressee or the referent,” such as “intimacy” or in-group relationship of the speakers; when the form occurs with no affect keys, it then foregrounds the content of the information or the referential meaning. According to Cook, the IP occurs mainly in three different contexts, (1) inward communicative direction; (2) certain written genres, such as newspaper articles, textbooks, and academic writing; and (3) specific turns in institutional talk, such as summary or evaluation turns. These descriptions of IP and IF are useful; however, there is still an issue as to how the foregrounding function of the impersonal style works in interactional activities such as storytelling.

**Motivation for Style Shifts: Discourse-Based Studies**

Cook’s classifications suggest that there are two possible orientations of style shifting. One orientation is from the F to IF style. The other orientation is from the F to the IP style. Because both the F and IF styles index social or interpersonal meanings, it is reasonable to assume that the shifting from F to IF may represent some changes in social or interpersonal meanings, which are often characterized by terms such as “distant” to “intimate,” “formal” to “casual,” and “public face” to “private face.” What then motivates the shift from F to IP? What sort of communicative end does this switch serve?

Previous studies also dealt mainly with turn-by-turn conversations taken from works of fiction or natural conversations or from written essays where one recalls personal stories. In this study I extend Cook’s (2002) classification to the analysis of speech style shifting in the broader context of storytelling. In contrast to previous studies, where IP was characterized as representing “backgrounded” or “appended” information (e.g., Makino 2002), I show that style switching from F to IP has an active effect on engaging the participants in story-building activity.

**The Data: Overall Characteristics**

*Detective Conan*, known as *Case Closed* in the United States, has been one of the most popular Japanese TV anime series since 1996, and as such should be considered as reflecting naturally occurring conversation.2 There are more than 500 anime episodes and more than 50 manga volumes. The anime-wiki summarized the synopsis as: “The anime is about a 16-year-old high school detective Shin’ichi Kudo, who while investigating some suspicious activity, was poisoned and left for dead. But instead of killing him, the poison had the unexpected effect of physically shrinking him back to the form of a 6-year-old. He is hiding his identity and living with Ran Mouri and her private investigator father Kogoro, under the new name of Conan Edogawa.”3 In a recurring feature of the anime, Conan uses a tranquilizer made by his gadget expert friend, Professor Asaga, to knock the inept investigator Kogoro unconscious. Conan uses Professor Asaga’s voice-changing bow tie to speak in the unconscious Kogoro’s voice to prove his theory and solve the case. For this reason
in the examples below, I use “C/K” to indicate when Conan speaks by mimicking the voice of the unconscious Kogoro.

In this anime series, Kogoro is presented as a funny but “hotheaded” middle-aged man, and he speaks in an animated way using the *da IF* style, together with a variety of affect keys. Conan, as a typical six-year-old child, also speaks using the *da IF* style combined with various affect keys. However, in a particular scene, C/K dominantly uses the *desu/masu* and switches back and forth to the *da IP* style. This is the scene where C/K solves the mystery in front of an audience, which includes the culprit of the crime. I became curious as to why the switching from *desu/masu* to *da* always occurs in this particular scene, what effects are generated by the switch, and how the switch contributes to achieving the storyteller’s purpose.

The data set shows a dominant use of the *masu* form, with a considerable number of shifts to the *IP*. The use of *desu/masu* in this particular scene can be explained by the characteristics of the speech setting: C/K’s mystery solving in front of a public audience. The dominant use of the *masu* in this setting agrees with the interpretation in previous studies of the form as public presentation of self (Cook 1996, 1998, 1999), because C/K needs to present himself as a person of authority, as a capable private detective. Speaking in the capacity of an authority figure in front of a group of people is a kind of public speaking. This also corresponds to Makino’s (1983) claim that the *masu* form is predominantly used in utterances addressed to others, whereas the plain form is used in self-addressed utterances (e.g., when the speaker mutters to himself or herself). So when and how does the style shift to *IP* take place?

First, consider the following, which is taken from an episode about a stalker. In this scene the detective Conan solves the mystery in front of the audience, and, as usual, the culprit is in the audience. A woman, who had been stalked by a man, ends up killing him by allowing him to consume a poisoned drink. Conan solves the mystery of how the woman did it. Pay attention to the verb ending forms, which come at the end of sentences. The shaded words and underlined words indicate the *da* and *desu/masu* forms, respectively, and the abbreviations used are listed at the end of the chapter:

**Example 1: “The Stalker”**

C/K tells a story of what the woman did on the day when the murder took place.

“Gattsuman” is the name of a poisoned drink.

1 C/K: *Ano asa anata wa Nagaisan ga jibun o bikooshiteiru no* that morning you TOP Mr. Nagai NOM self ACC follow NOML o shitta ue de ano jidoo-hanbaiki de Gattsuman o katta. *[da]*

**ACC knowing that vending machine by Gattsuman ACC bought** “You bought Gattsuman at that vending machine that morning, knowing that Mr. Nagai was following you.”

2 *Sore o kari ni A to yobimashoo. [masu]*

that ACC provisionally A as let’s call
“Let’s call that (the drink) A for now.”

Anata wa sore o torazuni maemotte yooi shiteoita you TOP that ACC without picking in advance prepared
betsu no Gattsuman, B o samo ima hanbaiki kara another Gattsuman B ACC as if now vending machine from
toridashita yooni Nagai-san ni misete sono ba de took out as if Mr. Nagai DAT show and on the spot
kyappu o akete arukinagara nonda no desu. [desu] cap ACC open and walking drank NOML COP

“Rather than picking that (Gattsuman A) up, you showed Mr. ‘Gattsuman’ B, which you had prepared in advance, as if you just took it out of the vending machine, and opened its cap right there and drank it while [you were] walking away.”

Soshite kyappu o shita Gattsuman o hei no ue ni oita. [da] and cap ACC did Gattsuman ACC wall on top placed

“And you left the drink on top of the fence, with the cap put on.”

Tadashi, sore wa ima nonda Gattsuman dewa naku however that TOP now drank Gattsuman being not
sarani moo ippon yooishite oita betsu no Gattsuman C further another bottle had prepared another Gattsuman C
datta no desu. [desu] was NOML COP

“However, that was not the one you just drank, but it was another Gattsuman, Gattsuman C, you had prepared.”

Tokorode sutookaa niwa sukina aite no mono by the way stalker DAT-TOP favorite person POSS thing
o atsumeru to yuu myoona kuse ga arimasu. [masu] ACC collect QT strange habit NOM exist

“By the way, stalkers have a strange habit of collecting items possessed by the person they are stalking.”

Toozen no gotoku, Nagai-san wa Gattsuman, C o te Natural like Mr. Nagai TOP Gattsuman C ACC hands
ni totta. [da] on took

“Naturally, Mr. Nagai took drink C in his hand.”

Suruto, sono bin niwa kanari no ryoo ga nokotte ita. [da] then that bottle in-TOP a lot POSS amount NOM was left

“But it turned out a lot of the drink was still left in the bottle.”

Anata ni kataomoi shite ita Nagai-san wa sore o you DAT had feelings Mr. Nagai TOP that ACC
yorokonde nonda no desu. [desu]
with pleasure drank NOML COP
“Mr. Nagai, who had feelings for you, drank it gladly.”

In this particular example, there are four da instances and five desu/masu instances out of nine. They appear almost in a pattern, as shown in table 17.1.

Here, again consider the example “The Stalker.” In this example, five utterances out of nine of C/K’s speech are marked with the F, while 4 utterances appear in the da form and represent cases of the IP. These utterances in da forms are the instances of the IP, because they occur with no affect keys such as final particles, rising intonation, contractions, and the like. Hence, the two styles in example 1 appear in this pattern: IP-F-F-IP-F-F-IP-IP-F. So what does this pattern of the repetition of a particular speech style tell us? To answer this question, it is useful to differentiate two types of events: an ongoing event, which is taking place at the moment of the speech; and a series of events, which constitute C/K’s deductions. These events are described in utterances 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8. Among them, utterances 1, 4, 7, and 8 are marked by the IP; and utterances 3 and 5 are marked by the desu F style.

The use of the desu/masu form to present C/K’s official role as a detective as well as a storyteller is exemplified in the suggestion, background information and evaluative comments he makes. Utterances 2 and 6 are marked by the F, and their functions are quite clear. As mashoo “let’s” (a variation of the masu form) is used in utterance 2, C/K is making a suggestion to the audience. Utterance 6 provides background information so that the audience will better understand the behavior of the stalker described in the story. In these utterances the social role of C/K as a detective is foregrounded by his use of the masu form. Then what is the difference between utterances 1, 4, 7, and 8 and utterances 3, 5, and 9? Why does the teller use the IP in some cases and the F in other cases to refer to the narrated events of the story? What is particularly noteworthy is the fact that utterances 3, 5, and 9 are marked by the same form, that is, [verb-plain] n’desu. The reoccurrence of n’desu (a variation of no desu) in this context may not be accidental, considering the meaning of the form. ~N’desu is generally characterized as a marker of “explaining,” “asking for an explanation,” “emphasizing” or “involving,” and so on. C/K uses the n’desu form to indicate that he is providing an explanation for the events mentioned in the preceding utterances.

In other words, C/K, as the teller of the story, is securing the understanding of the audience at some major points in his storytelling. Utterance 9 is also framed with the n’desu form to describe the victim’s last action. Here C/K is concluding his talk by explaining how the victim took poison and was killed. Utterances 1, 4, 7, and 8 are marked by the IP style and serve to create vivid pictures of the events. The sequential structure of the “stalker,” 1 to 9, can be demonstrated as in table 17.2.

Table 17.1
The Occurrences of the Two Forms, the Da and Desu/Masu Forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Utterances</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>da</td>
<td>desu/masu</td>
<td>desu/masu</td>
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<td>da</td>
<td>da</td>
<td>desu/masu</td>
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As table 17.2 shows, the first instance in which the IP is used is when the speaker begins to narrate the setting of the crime scene. It also describes the main actions of the culprit and victim as well as the results of their actions. Example 1 shows how the IP is used in the unfolding of the mystery. In the next section, I examine how the use of the IP invites the audience to participate in the process of puzzle solving.

Engaging the Audience in the Process of Solving the Mystery

Having said that the shift from the F to IP speech style serves to signal a shift from narrating to narrated events, one question is left unanswered. That is, how may the audience respond to such style switching; and what does the response mean in the context of storytelling? In contrast to previous studies, which focused on the type of information marked by the IP (Maynard 1993; Makino 2002), here I focus on the effect of switching to the IP. I argue that the switch to the IP functions to engage the audience in the process of story telling. Previous studies (e.g., Maynard 1993) stated that a writer uses the da style (here, IP) to express his inner thoughts in a discourse that is foregrounded by the desu/masu. Maynard (1993) explains that the use of the da style indicates the writer’s vivid recollection of what he felt as if he were present at the scene of the story. However, her study does not explain what effect the switch will have on the audience.
In a similar vein Makino (2002) characterizes the *da* form as expressing subordinate or background information such as facts and the author's personal feelings and convictions. Such information is not addressed to the listener; it is self-addressed or represents a moment where the speaker/writer’s awareness of the other is low. This study is useful for explaining the effect of the *da* IP style in *desu/masu* style dominant discourse. However, it does not answer the question of why the speaker/writer does not shift to the IP in some cases to represent facts, personal feelings, and convictions.

Makino (2002, 129) further claims that the information marked by the *da* (UCHI “in-group” forms in Makino’s sense; IP in the present study) expresses nonnegotiable information such as the speaker’s visual images, which are deeply embedded in the speaker’s/writer’s consciousness; therefore, “the listener cannot make a turn-taking while the speaker is switching from formal SOTO ‘out-group’ mode to informal UCHI mode.”

However, I found some cases that show the participation of the audience in the process of constructing deductions. This is shown in the following example, where the audience also uses the IP and participates in the storytelling. In this example, C/K and a detective, Megure (M), jointly solve a case where a man called Mr. Sawaki took revenge by killing people who caused him to lose his sense of taste. The audience includes the culprit, Sawaki, and the detective, M. Again, shaded parts and underlined parts indicate the IP and F, respectively:

Example 2: “The Sommelier”

1 C/K: Sawaki-san wa nokosareta shikaku to kyuukaku dake o tayori ni sono go mo somurie o tsudukete imashita. [masu] Depending on after that also sommelier ACC continued “Mr. Sawaki continued to be a sommelier, depending solely on his vision and smell, the only senses left to him”

2 C/K: Daga, sore wa kanpeki na somurie de aritai to yuu But that TOP perfect sommelier want to be QT “However, it injured Mr. Sawaki’s pride not to be a perfect sommelier.”

3 M: Dakara, Sawaki-san wa somurie no shigoto o sute inaka e kaeru koto ni shita... “So Mr. Sawaki decided to quit his job and go back to his hometown...”

4 C/K: Sono mae ni Nana-san o fukumu jibun o mikaku shoogai ni before that Nana ACC include himself ACC loss of taste otori-ireta mono tachi e no fukushuu o shite ne... caused people to POSS revenge ACC doing SFP “But after achieving revenge on people, including Miss Nana, who caused his taste disorder...”
Here C/K switches from the F to IP in utterance 2. And here utterance 3 shows that the use of the IP by M marks the participation of the listener. Clearly, the participants engage in the cognitive activity of solving a mystery. The utterances spoken by C/K and M describe a logical sequence to explain the actions by the culprit. This sequence allows C/K and M to jointly construct a possible scenario.

Conclusion

This study has presented data that offer further insights into the discourse-organizational and interactional effects of style shifts in Japanese. Regarding the discourse organizational function, I have argued that the shift from the F to IP serves to signal a shift from the narrating to narrated events.

First, the IP style of the plain da form is used to create two distinct but interrelated functions: to mark a switch from an ongoing event to narrated events, and to create vivid images in the mind of the other participants as if they were in the narrated scene. The function of creating vivid scenes allows the speaker and the listener to participate in shared information-building activity. This function of the impersonal style works jointly with other linguistic features, such as “the lack of affect keys,” that is, the absence of interactional sentence final particles yo and ne and the presence of falling intonation.

Second, the desu/masu form is also associated with discourse-organizational and interactional effects. The speech setting of the present data—mystery solving in public—accounts for the predominant use of the desu/masu formal style. C/K constantly shows his official status as a professional detective. The use of the desu/masu F style functions to institutionalize C/K’s role and make his utterances official. By presenting himself as a person of authority—that is, a professional detective—he succeeds in dignifying what he has said and framing it as official.

Finally, the study has examined how a mixture of the da IP and the desu/masu F styles occurs in the sequential organization of the detective anime story. The setting of the storytelling (when and where the crime took place) is presented first in the da IP style. As the narrated story unfolds, C/K switches back and forth between the da IP style and the desu/masu F style. The desu/masu F style is used when the speaker engages in communicative acts, such as making a suggestion, providing supporting information or confirming the understanding of the audience. The da IP style is used for a sequence of events that describe how the crime took place.

Having stated that the IP style marks a switch between the narrating and the narrated events, how can the results of the present study contribute to analyzing style shifts in other genres? Nazikian (2005), for example, examines the use of the IP in the desu/masu dominant discourse of a TV talk show and indicates that the IP is predominantly used by the TV talk show host in at least four contexts: (1) eliciting information, (2) reformulating/recasting information, (3) extending on an internal scene, and (4) completing what the guest was saying. Among the four contexts, the second and fourth ones, that is, completing and recasting the functions of the IP, are espe-
cially relevant to and support the present study. The occurrence of the IP in such contexts marks a meaning-building activity, such as negotiation of meaning between the interactants. When the interactants are focusing on such an activity, their respective official roles as the TV interviewer and the interviewee are backgrounded. The limited samples dealt with in the present study contribute to understanding the diverse contexts where the style shifts between the desu/masu and the da occur.

List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>accusative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COP</td>
<td>copula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAT</td>
<td>dative</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOM</td>
<td>nominative</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOML</td>
<td>nominalizer</td>
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<tr>
<td>POSS</td>
<td>possessive</td>
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<td>QT</td>
<td>quotative marker</td>
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<tr>
<td>SFP</td>
<td>sentence final particle</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOP</td>
<td>topic marker</td>
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</table>

NOTES

I am very grateful for the insights and comments from Yoshiko Matsumoto of Stanford University and Shigeko Okamoto of California State University, Fresno. Special thanks to the anonymous reviewers for insightful comments and suggestions.

1. Drawing on Ochs (1988), Cook (2002, 155) characterizes “affect keys” as elements that index speaker’s attitudes, feelings, moods or dispositions towards the addressee or the referent. Such elements in Japanese include sentence final particles, postposing information, rising intonation (indexing uncertainty, request for information), vowel lengthening (emotional intensity marker), and/or coalescence (various affective states) omissions.

2. It is pointed out by Kinsui (2003) that the speech of some of the characters (e.g., Dr. Agasa) represents stereotypical images of “elderly” doctors and may not reflect the actual speech in the natural conversation.


REFERENCES


THE ROLE OF STYLE SHIFTING IN THE FUNCTIONS AND PURPOSES OF STORYTELLING


