

Asking questions in Japanese: Between politeness, impoliteness and communicative interaction

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Asking questions in Japanese can be discussed not only as a problem of syntax and grammar but as a phenomena of pragmatics and communication culture. There are numerous examples of interrogative sentences which, apart from question markers or interrogative pronouns, comprise such components as honorific markers, signals of phatic function, a degree of interaction and asking force. The most striking feature of Japanese is a multi-layered system of oppositions within honorific marking of both pronouns and question markers. Therefore, even asking most basic questions like the Japanese equivalents of *Who are you?* involves a complex communicative ritual which includes proper identification of the rank of the person in question, situational adjustment and selection of asking force. The simple form like *Anata wa dare desu ka?* sounds very impolitely (regardless of the fact that there are even less polite forms *Anata wa dare?* or *Dare anta?*), while the proper forms like *Dochira-sama desu ka?* or *Dochira-sama deshō ka?* are strongly connected with several communicative aspects of Japanese social culture. This cultural background reveals the existence of many conversational maxims which have not yet been taken into account in the pragmatic theory.