What Happened to the Honorifics in a Local Japanese Dialect in 55 years: A Report from the Okazaki Survey on Honorifics

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1 Introduction

Honorifics, the grammatical and lexical means of showing the speaker's respect or politeness to the addressee and/or the person or things referred to in the sentence/utterance, are one of the most salient grammatical characteristics of the Japanese language. As a linguistic device that directly ties the language into the social structure of the speech community, change and variation in honorifics are of special interest to sociolinguists working on the empirical study of the dynamics of language.

This paper is intended to be a report on the latest analysis of the Okazaki Survey on Honorifics (OSH), an ongoing project on change and variation in the use and awareness of honorifics in a Japanese dialect. More specifically, we will analyze trend (random) samples taken from the three surveys since 1955, and demonstrate that while the speakers are moving toward more polite forms, there have been systematic changes in the social factors controlling the use of the honorifics. Furthermore, we will demonstrate that those changes can be accounted for by the *Democratization of Honorifics* hypothesis by Inoue (1999), a hypothesis originally proposed as an explanatory tool for variation and change in honorifics in other Japanese dialects.

2 Okazaki Survey on Honorifics (OSH)

2.1 What is OSH?

The Okazaki Survey on Honorifics (OSH) is a longitudinal survey by the National Language Research Institute[1] on the use and the awareness of honorifics in Okazaki city (Aichi Prefecture), which is a mid-sized, traditional local city in the middle of Honshu Island, with a population of 60,000 (as of 2008). The survey was first launched in 1953 (OSH I, reported in NLRI 1957), then followed by OSH II in 1972 (NLRI 1983), and by OSH III in 2008 (Abe 2010, Nishio et al. 2010, Sugito 2010a, 2010b).

Although each OSH includes various types of survey methods, its main components are the linguistic section and the social life section. The linguistic section has a series of 18 questions on the use of honorifics in specific situations, an honorifics recognition test, and a section asking about opinions on the use of honorifics. This section is conducted in a face-to-face interview with the respondent. Each question is intended to solicit a respondent's utterance in a specific situation. Most of the questions also have a picture-aid to facilitate the interview. The responses were written down (OSH I & II) or recorded on an IC recorder (OSH III).

The social life section is a separate questionnaire that is intended to collect various pieces of sociological information about the respondent related to their linguistic activities. The questions include their linguistic activities on the previous day (e.g., what kind of speech activities they engaged in at home, whom they talked to, what kind of speech they listened to, what they read/wrote), the destinations they went to in the past year and their frequencies, the ways they interact with their acquaintances or neighbors (e.g., whether they attend local meetings, whether

*I am indebted to the wonderful audience at NWAV40 for their comments and criticisms. My gratitude also goes out to all the kind respondents in Okazaki and to my colleagues on the project, including all the predecessors involved in OSH I & II. Philip Spaelti deserves special thanks for his comments on the previous version of this paper. Note that the usual disclaimers apply here. The work reported here was made possible by the Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (A) 'Socio-psychological survey of honorifics: The third survey in Okazaki, Aichi Prefecture' (No. 19202014, Principal investigator: Seiju Sugito).

[1]NLRI was reorganized and renamed as the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics (NINJAL) in 2009 as one of the Inter-University Research Institute Corporation National Institutes for the Humanities.

they like traveling together with them), etc. The social life section is distributed to respondents' homes and collected a few weeks later by the researchers.

In this paper, I will analyze 11 out of 18 questions in the linguistic section.[2] The reason behind this selection is that they are all used consistently from OSH I to OSH III with very minor changes. Although the total number of questions remained almost the same, there have been some additions and deletions of questions in the course of the half-century-long project. As we are interested in the changes in the responses to those questions, it is necessary to restrict our attention to the questions that were consistently used throughout the three surveys.

2.2 Samples

One of the outstanding features of the OSH project is its samples. The OSH has two kinds of samples: trend samples and panel samples. The former is a random sample of the Okazaki city residents, and as such, each survey has one trend sample. The panel samples are then derived from the trend samples in OSH I & II. The panel sample is a collection of respondents who were surveyed in the preceding survey(s). For the panel sample with the longest interval (55 years) in OSH III, we were able to track down 20 respondents from the original trend sample in OSH I in 1953. In this paper, however, I will focus on the analysis of trend samples, the three shaded boxes in Figure 1 below.

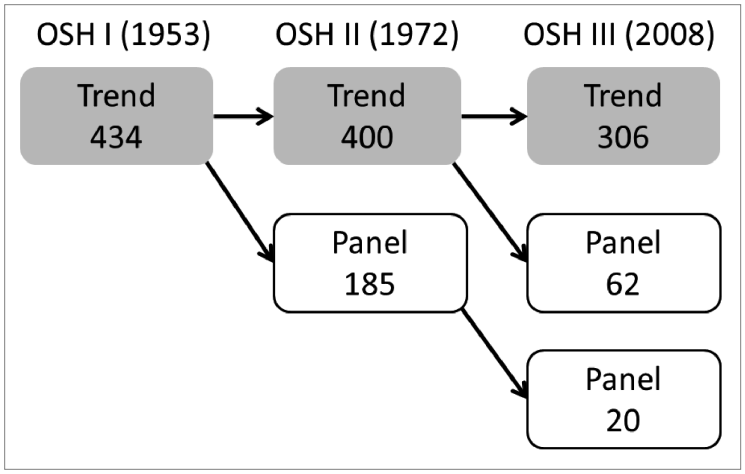


Figure 1: OSH samples.

2.3 Quantification of the Politeness Level

Because the responses are just written versions of respondents' utterances, they need to be quantified in an objective and coherent manner. Here I follow the three-rank method of quantification of honorifics developed by Nomoto (NLRI 1957, 1983), a method that has been followed in previous reports of the OSH. According to this method, all utterances are given one of the ranks from 1 (highest) to 3 (lowest) depending on the words/expressions used there. Special attention is given to the word-final elements (verbs, copulas, or sentence-final particles) because they usually carry the main tone of the level of politeness of the utterance.

For example, utterance (1) is given a politeness level 1 (highest), because of its use of the most polite (humble) form of the verb *aru* 'to exist.' On the other hand, utterance (2) is the most casual way of requesting a remittance form from a post office clerk, with no honorific element attached to the verb *kureru* 'to give.' Hence it is coded as 3 (least polite). With a copula of regular politeness *desu*, utterance (3) is coded as 2.

[2]See the Appendix for actual questions analyzed and the picture aids used in OSH III.

(1) *Kono miti massugu ikareru-to hasi -ga gozaimasu. Sore-ga Myoodaizibasi-desu*
this way straight go.POL-then bridge-SBJ exist.POL that-SBJ Myoodaizibasi-COP.POL
'If you go straight along this street, you'll see a bridge. That's Myoo-daizibasi.'
[II-T-101-128-F25][3]

(2) *Raisinsi -o kure*
remittance.slip -ACC give
'Give me a remittance slip.' [I-T-102-56013-M34]

(3) *Taranai -desu -yo*
lacking -COP.POL -FP
'The change is short.' [III-T-110-0614-M37]

All the responses were coded in this way with a politeness score, and they were averaged by the social variables for each question and survey for analysis, to which I will turn below.

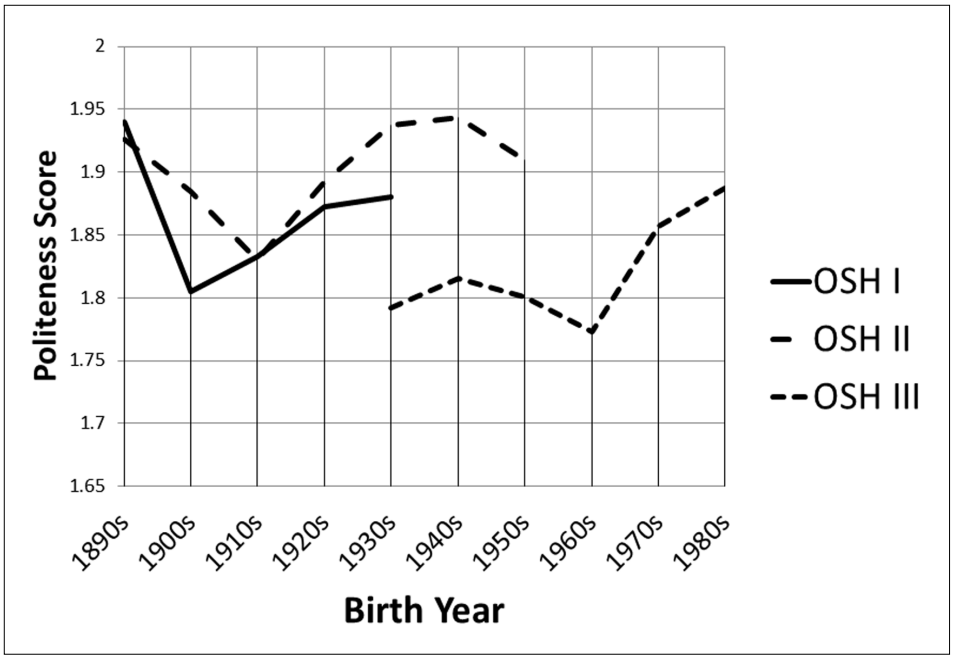


Figure 2: Politeness score by the respondents' birth year.

3 Analysis & Discussion

3.1 Okazakians are Getting More Polite over the Years

A simple comparison of average politeness score for the three OSHs over the questions and respondents indicates that, as a general trend, the Okazakians are moving to a more polite version of honorifics forms (Figure 2). The graph suggests that there was a major change in the speech community during the 36 years after OSH II in 1972.[4]

But the most interesting part of Figure 2 is the difference between the OSH II and III for those cohorts born between the 1930s and 1950s. Although the samples here are random samples and we are not looking at the same individuals, they nevertheless show that those respondents changed their honorifics behavior during the 36-year interval. In particular, those born during the 1930s

[3]The utterance ID reads as follows: survey ID (I-III)-question no.-respondent ID-sex-age. The special glosses used are: FP (final particle) and POL (polite).

[4]Recall that a lower politeness score means a more polite utterance, because of the quantification method.

were over 30 years old at the time of the OSH II (1972), but still moved drastically toward the polite end. This is a clear indication that speakers modify the politeness level of the honorifics they use in their life course.

3.2 Social Leveling of Honorifics

Analyses of previous OSH surveys demonstrated that the politeness levels of the responses nicely correlate with such social variables as respondents' age, sex, educational background, etc. (NLRI 1957, 1983). Surprisingly, the effect of these variables has decreased significantly during the last 36 years since OSH II. Table 1 summarizes the result of the series of ANOVA tests which examined the significance of the three social variables for the average politeness scores for each question for OSH I to III. Thus, in OSH I, for example, the sex factor turned out to be significant for seven questions out of eleven, while the number decreased to two in OSH III in 2008. Clearly, we are witnessing a diminishing of social factors as an explanatory variable for the politeness score. That is, honorifics are now less differentiated in *who* uses them than they used to be.

Such a social leveling of honorifics in Okazaki is also evident when sex and age are combined together. Figure 3 displays a distribution of the politeness score by the respondents' birth year and sex. As the OSH progresses, the male-female difference decreases to the point that there is virtually no difference among the young age groups in OSH III. Again, it is evident that what used to be a good predictor of respondents' honorifics behavior is losing its predictive power.

	SEX	AGE	EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND
OSH I 1953	7	2	7
OSH II 1972	7	5	9
OSH III 2008	2	1	2

Table 1: Number of questions where each social factor was significant (out of 11 questions).[5]

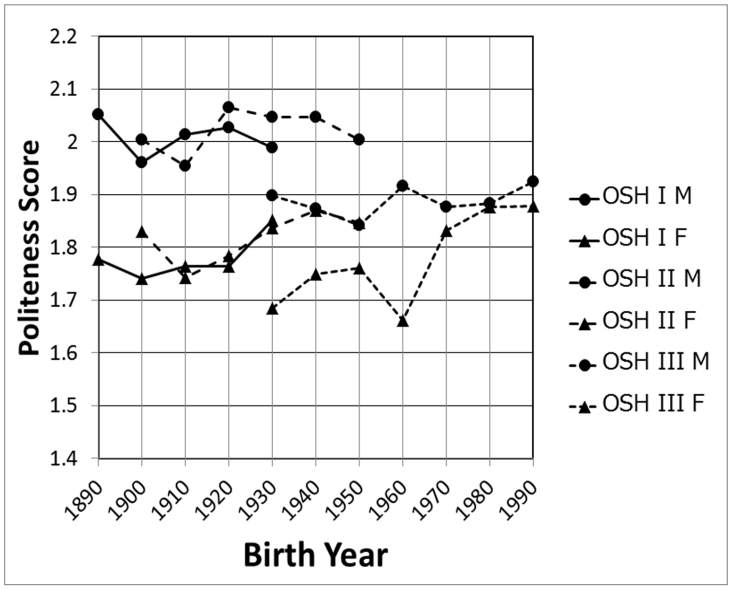


Figure 3: Politeness score by the respondents' birth year and sex.

[5]All the data was analyzed by three-way ANOVA, and the significance level was set at 5%. The counted cases were those where each factor was significant as a main factor.

3.3 Clustering of Questions: OSH I & II vs. III

So far we have been looking at the changes of Okazakians' honorific use from the side of social variables, by checking their correlations with the average value of the politeness scores for the 11 questions over the three surveys. Another way of observing the changes in the Okazakians' honorific behavior in the last 55 years is to start with the respondents' raw scores and classify the questions by the way they were responded to through a statistical manipulation of the question x respondent matrix. Here we used Principle Component Analysis (PCA), one such form of multivariate statistical analysis, to analyze the eleven questions for each survey separately.

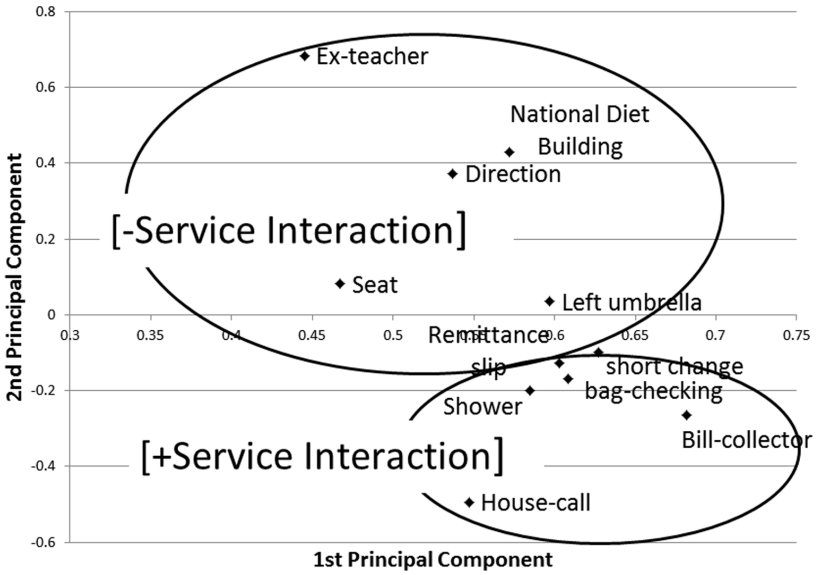


Figure 4: PCA plot of 11 questions (OSH I).

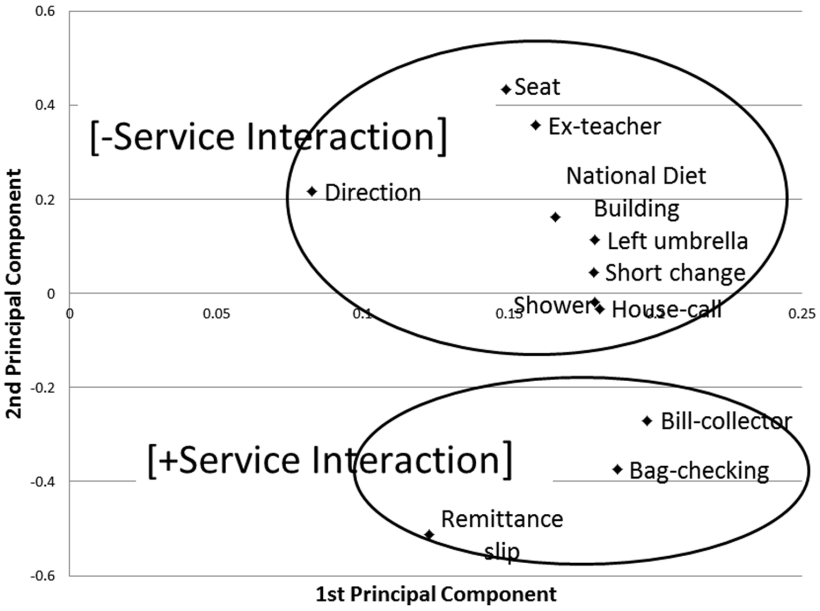


Figure 5: PCA plot of 11 questions (OSH II).

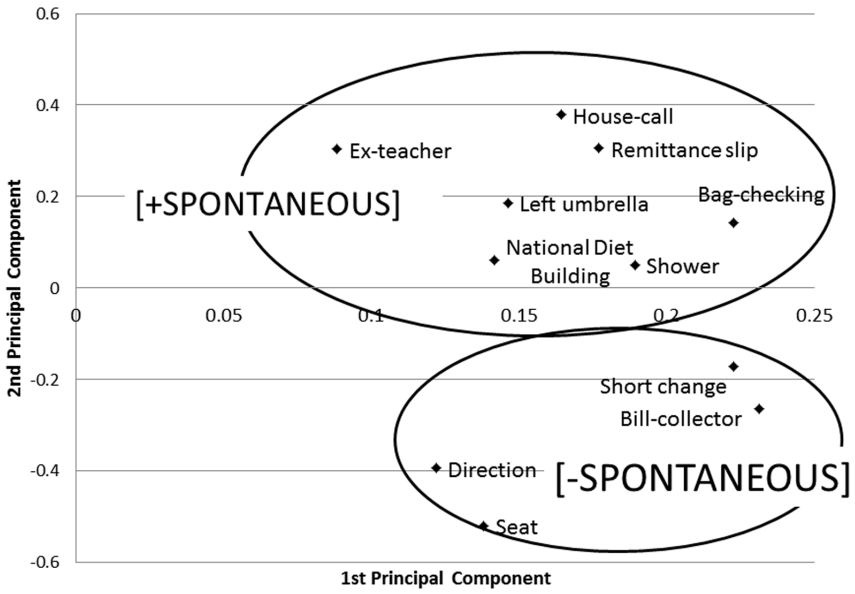


Figure 6: PCA plot of 11 questions (OSH III).

Figures 4 and 5 show the result of the PCA analysis for the OSH I and II, with each question plotted on the 1st x 2nd component plane. The 11 questions are distributed in two major clusters, each circled in oblongs. In Figure 4, the larger cluster includes questions that, one way or other, relate to a situation involving *service interactions*, while the smaller one has questions that do not. The service interaction questions are those where the respondent is supposed to interact with an employee while he or she is working. For example, Q106 (Bill-collector) involves a situation where the respondent is supposed to interact with a newspaper bill-collector, who is obviously speaking as a part of his job. Similarly, the doctor in the House-call question (Q108) interacts with the respondent as a doctor (hence in service). The same applies to the post office clerk in Q102 (Remittance slip), Q103 (Bag-checking), or Q110 (Short change). OSH II also displays a similar distribution by this feature [±Service Interaction]. It is clear, then, at least until 1972, the distinction as to whether the interaction involves a service-related situation or not was a vital one for the Okazakians in deciding how polite they should be in talking to the interlocutor.

But Figure 6 shows that OSH III does not follow this trend anymore. Here, the questions are divided into two clusters by whether the utterance (of the respondent) was a spontaneous one or not. The feature [±spontaneous] simply means that the respondent's expected response to the question is not a response to a verbal/non-verbal action from others in the situation depicted in the question. Thus, for such questions as Q101 (Direction), Q102 (Remittance slip), Q108 (House-call), Q111 (Shower), etc., the responses are not reactions from someone else; for example, in the house-call question, they run to the doctor's office and ask for a house-call for their neighbor out of their own will, not because forced or asked by anyone else. Similarly, the respondents are asking for a remittance slip simply because they need it, not because they are coerced by someone else. In contrast, Q106 (Bill-collector), Q109 (Seat), or Q110 (Short change) are all situations where the respondents are asked to respond to a verbal action from other people, and hence are deemed as [-spontaneous].

The fact that the same questions cluster differently 36 years after the OSH II survey strongly suggests that Okazakians now perceive the same situations differently with regard to how polite they should be in those situations. In other words, there has been a systematic shift in their value system from one centering on the service interaction to one where spontaneity counts as important. In the next section, we will propose a hypothesis that would explain not only this shift but also the social leveling of the honorifics we saw above.

3.4 Democratization of Honorifics

Inoue (1999) proposed the *Democratization Hypothesis* (DH) for honorifics as an explanatory tool to account for the historic trend of Japanese honorifics. Traditionally, Japanese honorifics have been used based on the power relationship (social status, age, etc.) between the speaker and the interlocutor. But as post-war democratization brought a leveling of social structure to Japanese society, people began to adopt the psychological distance between the interlocutor and themselves as a guideline to decide how polite they should be in using honorific forms. Thus, if you are not close to the interlocutor or you do not feel close to them, you would use the most polite form instead of the casual (less formal) form, which is reserved for friends and family. The change can also be characterized as from the vertical to the horizontal, just as democratization can be characterized as the political process of replacing the vertical (power) relationships between members of a society with horizontal ones among them.

How does the DH account for the two patterns described above? Under the DH, social leveling is expected because the power relationship is no longer a primary factor. Sex, age, and educational background, all of which used to be strong social factors in traditional Japanese society, have all but lost their power and thus cannot function as a guideline for honorifics for speakers of Japanese. That is exactly the situation indicated by Table 1 and Figure 3.

The DH also explains the difference in the clustering of questions. Where there is a service interaction, there necessarily exist service employees and customers, and the traditional power relationship would put the service employee below the level of the customer. Thus, it was natural that the [±service interaction] feature was a vital axis dividing the questions in OSH I and II, when the speech community still functioned according to the traditional status-based model of honorifics. But more recently, it is replaced by the principle of psychological distance, which dictates that the speakers use less polite forms to people close to them, and more polite forms otherwise. Psychological distance can be easily translated to spontaneity of action: if the action is for someone else, it is more likely that the actor would do it spontaneously if they are psychologically close. The two notions are almost two sides of the same coin. It is no wonder, then, that the questions would begin to cluster by the spontaneity feature as democratization progresses.

4 Conclusions

In this paper, which reported on the results of the analysis of the trend sample in three OSH surveys, we saw the following points: (1) Okazakians have been increasing their use of polite forms over the 55 years; (2) the effect of three social variables (sex, age and educational background) has been shrinking; (3) in OSH I and II, the questions show clustering by the feature [±service interaction], while the same 11 questions in OSH III exhibit clustering by a different feature, [±spontaneous]; (4) the change in (3) and (4) can be accounted for nicely by Inoue's DH.

Although the analysis of the trend samples successfully captures the overall movement of the Okazaki speech community, it would be premature to conclude that the change in the honorific system is complete. In light of the fact that a complete picture of actual language change requires both trend samples and panel samples (Sankoff and Blondeau 2007), we need to wait till the analyses of the three panel samples (Figure 1) are finalized and synthesized with the results of the current paper before we draw the complete picture of what happened in the speech community over the last 55 years.

Appendix: The 11 questions analyzed and the picture aids used in OSH III

Q101 [Direction] How would you show the way to Myodaibashi Bridge when some traveler, like myself, asks you at the north exit of the Higashi-Okazaki station?

Q102 [Remittance slip] Suppose you have to remit some money to somebody. What would you say to this man at the post office to get the remittance slip?

Q103 [Bag-checking] This is a store you often go to for shopping. You bought something

here, but now you need to go somewhere else and need your baggage checked for a moment. How would you ask this salesperson?

Q104 [Left umbrella] You are on a bus and see this man getting off with his umbrella left behind. You don't know this man. What would you say to him to let him know that he's leaving his umbrella behind?

Q105 [Ex-teacher] This boy is your son/brother/grandson. As you are walking down the street with him, you see your ex-teacher at the primary school coming up. How would you introduce your son/brother/grandson to your teacher?

Q106 [Bill-collector] This man is a newspaper bill collector. He comes to your house to collect the last month's bill, which you have already paid. How would you tell him to re-check the record, showing the receipt?

Q107 [National Diet Building] You are on a street in Tokyo. You want to visit the National Diet Building but you don't know where it is. If you ask directions from this man passing by, what would you say to him?

Q108 [House-call] Your neighbor suddenly becomes ill. You run to a doctor's house nearby and see him coming out of the house. What would you say to this doctor to get him to visit your neighbor right away?

Q109 [Seat] This girl is your daughter/sister/granddaughter. When you are on a bus with her, you see this man stand up and offer you a seat. But you need to decline the offer, as you are getting off at the next stop. What would you say to him?

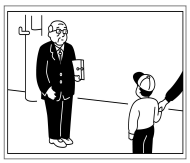
Q110 [Short change] This is a shop you often go to. Suppose you buy something here, pay the money, and find the change is wrong. What would you say to her?

Q111 [Shower] It begins to rain suddenly. You see this man walk by in front of your house. You know this man, and you want to lend your umbrella to him. What would you say?

Q102 Remittance Slip

Q103 Bag-checking

Q104 Left Umbrella


Q105 Ex-teacher

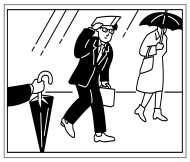
Q106 Bill-collector

Q107 National Diet Building

Q108 House-call

Q109 Seat

Q110 Short change


Q111 Shower

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