The Use and Interpretation of Addressee and Referent Honorifics in Japanese: Diversity, Multiplicity, and Ambiguity

Shigeko Okamoto, University of California, Santa Cruz

Wednesday, May 8, 2013 - 3:30pm to 5:00pm

Savery 130

The general public as well as scholars often subscribe to claims that there are socially agreed-upon rules of honorifics and that the use of honorifics is simply a matter of observing those rules. We will look at a few examples that illustrate such beliefs (as seen in both academic and popular-culture materials like self-help books on honorifics), then discuss the diversity in native speakers’ opinions concerning honorific use. For this, Okamoto will draw on existing survey results regarding honorific use and also examine opinions posted on an online blog-site. Using survey results and audio-taped conversations, Okamoto will show that the use of honorifics is not simply a matter of following rules, and that such rules cannot be taken for granted, showing that the relationship between honorific forms and their meanings is neither unitary nor fixed, but diverse, multiple, and ambiguous.

Shigeko Okamoto is a professor in the Language Program at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She received her PhD in Linguistics from University of California, Berkeley (1985.) Her research interests include sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, pragmatics, and Japanese linguistics. She has published extensively in these areas, including one co-authored book and one co-edited anthology *Japanese Language, Gender, and Ideology: Cultural Models and Real People* (Oxford University Press 2004). She has also published nearly 50 papers and delivered many papers at conferences and symposiums.

Sponsored by the UW Japan Studies Program

For more information contact japan@uw.edu