

Ojigi: The Ethics of Japanese Community's Nonverbal Language

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Abstract—This paper discusses about *Ojigi*: the ethics of Japanese community nonverbal language. Bowing (*Ojigi*) is the ethics to greet each other Japanese culture which is part of nonverbal communication by respecting the other person during the interaction. The interaction can be mean directly facing the interlocutor or vice versa, such as during phone call. *Ojigi* almost always done everyday by kids to adults. Therefore, learning *Ojigi* is a must for Japanese language learners. In other words, this ethic has popularized in almost all of Japanese community. Even foreigners who are learning Japanese will not be separated from *Ojigi* when interacting with others. The methodology used to achieve the target was through data collection by document study. The specific target in this study is cultivating *Ojigi* as a target language culture for Japanese language learners. *Ojigi* has life's values since a long time ago which is believed by Japanese as one of the effective nonverbal communication. The result of this study is obtained information about the values contained in *Ojigi* and that is the *Ojigi*'s secret which was explored in depth in this research. *Ojigi* consists of several types namely simple *Ojigi* (*Eshaku*), common *Ojigi* (*Futsuu no Ojigi*), and the *Ojigi*'s innermost actions (*Saikeirei*). In Japan, there are two kind of *Ojigi* commonly found in Japanese daily life, namely *Eshaku* and *Futsuu no Ojigi* which use levels of bow depth as a rule.

Keywords—*ojigi*; *eshaku*; *saikeirei*; nonverbal language

I. INTRODUCTION

Japanese nonverbal communication, *Ojigi* (bowing the body during the interaction), seems still lack of serious attention from Japanese language learners. This is proven by less numbers of research about *Ojigi*. Whereas *Ojigi* is the foundation of Japanese politeness. Its function, sometimes, can replace verbal communication. Amri [1] stated that if Japanese expressed their gratitude through action, there will not be any other things to do except *Ojigi*. Japanese will bow to show gratitude. This is meant by politeness foundation of Japanese. In other words, the act of bowing head is called *Ojigi*.

Ojigi means Greetings by bowing head. Of course the definition of bowing head above is not parallel with the our way to bow. The importance of *Ojigi* in Japanese non-verbal communication clearly illustrated in the Japanese Language Education Guidebook (*Nihongo Kyooiku Handobukku*) by Sugito [2], as follows:

The education of nonverbal communication nowadays almost never conducted structurally, such as *Ojigi* in greetings. In Japan, *Ojigi* is very important. *Ojigi* is a typical

culture of Japanese. It is Japanese national identity which is implemented massively, solemnly, meaningful, purposively, and valueable. Therefore it is very important for Japanese language learners to understand *Ojigi* and know how to implement it appropriately.

The research problem of the study is to find out the functions of *Ojigi*, the types of *Ojigi* and the verbal sentences that accompany *Ojigi* as well as the reasons why Japanese people do *Ojigi*.

A. The nature of *Ojigi*

Ojigi is Japanese nonverbal language to communicate each other. It is Japanese national identity. The word *Ojigi* etymologically came from the word *jigi* which means a good hope while doing something. *Ojigi* in Kokugo Jiten [3] means bowing head and giving salutation. Fukuda [4] explains that *Ojigi* is (1) greeting and bowing head; (2) rejection. In another dictionary, Daijisen [5] mentioned that *Ojigi* is (1) salutation by bowing head; (2) greeting by bowing head; (3) rejection, resignation, (4) reluctant (5) greeting. While in Kojien [6] explained that *Ojigi* is (1) salutation (*keirei*) by bowing head, (2) objection, resignation; (2) reluctant.

Based on those definitions, it can be concluded that *Ojigi* is salutation by bowing head. Bowing head in *Ojigi* is an expression to obey or reject. In other words, *ojigu* means expression to respect each other and remove the adversary wall.

This culture has been practiced by Japanese since Yayoi (10th century BC). In a text mentioned that people at that era unite two hands when wishing to Gods. This phenomenon still can be seen when Japanese pray in the temples. Before praying, they will clap their hands and bow. In daily life nowadays, they no longer clap their hands because each person carries an innate in their hands. Therefore, it is simplified by only bowing or bowing head.

Ojigi has been a tradition passed through generation since Japanese were a kid. They get used to bow to show respect, apology, and pray. The movement sometimes practices repeatedly with different tilt.

II. METHODS

This type of research is included in a qualitative descriptive study by conducting library research and interviews with Japanese people in Surabaya as informants.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Kinds of *Ojigi*

1. *Ritsurei* and *Zarei*

There are two kind of *Ojigi*, those are *Ritsurei* and *Zarei*. *Ojigi* which is done by standing up called *Ritsurei*, while it is done by sitting called *zarei*. The rules of *Ojigi* are also varies based on gender. For males, *ritsurei* is practiced by bowing and press hips and buttat the same time to maintain balance. While for females, *ritsurei* is practiced by bowing and putting two hands with all fingers close in front of the body.

2. Based on the intensity of bowing

Amri [7] rejects Ogoshi [8] statement which mentioned that there are many words fro *Ojigi*, such as *kootoo*, *rei*, *keirei*, *saikeirei*, *eshaku*, *ichirei*, *toori*, *mokurei*, *chinrei*, and so on. According to Kanemoto, *kootoo*, *rei*, *keirei*, *saikeirei*, *eshaku*, *ichirei*, *toori*, *mokurei*, and *chinrei* are not part of *Ojigi*. Another opinion stated by Horiuchi [9], that in fact there are three kins of *Ojigi*, namely *Eshaku* (simple bow), *Ojigi* (common bow), dan *Teinei na Ojigi* (polite bow). While Amri [7] divided it into *Eshaku* (simple bow), *Ojigi* (respect bow), dan *Fukai Ojigi* (deep bow). In line with Horiuchi, Fukuda [4] said that it is normal that *Ojigi* has many levels because *Ojigi* is practiced in different situation. He argued that basically *ojigi* has three categories which are distinguished from the bending angle. *Eshaku* (little bow, bowing head), *Keirei* (total bow), dan *Saikeirei* (bow very deep to worship).

However, those statemnet do not in line with Rahmat [10], because according to him *saikeirei* and *keirei* are not *Ojigi* because they are only used in military and the differences are shown by different kanji characters in *saikeirei* and *ojigi*. *Ojigi* means bowing, while *saikeirei* means respecting deeply.

The difference of *Ojigi* terms dividen into bowing intencity which can be assumed by different degree.

a. Nodding quitely, five degrees

It is a little nod which is done when meeting neighbors or old friends, or it is also used by the supervisors to their employees.

b. Bowing to greet (*Eshaku*), fifteen degrees

This one is formal *Ojigi* which is done while meeting unintimate colleagus or acquaintances .

c. Bowing to give respect (*Keirei*), thirty degrees

An *Ojigi* which is given to the superiors or elders.

d. Bowing to give highest level of respect (*Saikeirei*), fourty five degrees.

It has a meaningful significance. It is usually done to apologize after making a big mistake. It also given while meeting people in high position such as the emperor.

e. Bend on knees

It means deeper than *saikeirei*. It is done if someone make a fatal mistake such as endanger other people's life. This was also an old way to respect Japanese emperor in the past.

However, *Ojigi* which are commonly known are *Eshaku*, *Futsuu no Ojigi*, dan *Teinei na Ojigi*. *Eshaku* in this context even explained as fifteen degrees bowing and done when meet acquaintances or friends. More common *Ojigi*, like employees

greet their customers, greet acquaintances in the streets, or replay employees' bows by the superiors. It is normally used by any level of commuities as a daily greeting.

Moreover, there is *Futsuu no Ojigi*. It is another form of bows which is usually given to the oponent in formal ceremonies or deep apologizes. *Futsuu no Ojigi* has thirty degrees of angle. According to Nomura [11], it is difficult to do precisely thirty degrees and because there is no pressure in doing *Ojigi*. It is just a simple bowing the head or it could be bending the body twice or three times while standing out and exhaling hardly

The last is *Teinei na Ojigi*. It is the most polite and respectful *Ojigi*. It has fourty five degrees acute angle or more. It is usually practiced while apologizing or meeting important people and in other formal situations. Besides, it is also used while praying in the tamples because this kind of *Ojigi* previously only given to the Gods or Emperors Fukuda [4].

B. Procedures in performing *Ojigi*

As what has been stated by Ogoshi [8] that *Ojigi* in Japanese daily life is not only a mere practice such as flicking hair everywhere, but it shows noble character which is taught as a manner of courtesy. The procedures to do *Ojigi* is standing up perfectly as in a line before a person or group of people and then straighten the back. Both feet tighten and both hands aligned on both sides of the body or interlocked in the front. Bow in earnest, without hurry. If you don't know what to say when bowing, say *doumo* unless when paying the last respects before corpse. In this case, there is no need to say anything. There is also bow to touch the ground, called *dogeza*. Usually used to apologize extremely or as a highest respect.

C. Functions and roles of *Ojigi*

The function of *ojigi* in Japanese communication systems is a means to respect the other person, such as respect given tor friends will be different to respect for the superiors. Another function of *Ojigi* is related to the form of courtesy. In Japan, *ojigi* serves as a tool to facilitate communication. If *ojigi* is done well, it will create a good situation among speakers. The role of *ojigi* in interaction is also very important as a supporter oto support verbal communication, for example when saying thank you or apologizing it will be less if not accompanied by bowing. The role of *ojigi* is very significant to initiate communication. By doing *ojigi*, it will facilitate the discharge of verbal communication, and if *ojigi* is not done then the conversation that occurs will feel unnatural.

In addition, the function of *ojigi* in a communication system can also be summarized as follows:

1. *Ojigi* in the Japanese public communication system has a significant position to respect the other person.
2. The type of salutation in *ojigi* differs depending on the situation and the interlocutor.
3. In a higher level, *ojigi* is not just respect but it is a form of gratitude, thank you, apologies all of which are part of respect for the other person.
4. *Ojigi* is a form of Japanese courtesy.

5. As the time goes by, *ojigi* does not always mean submitting and obeying the other person, but also the demands of work.
6. *Ojigi* under certain conditions is able to take the role as verbal communication.
7. In performing *ojigi* there are two parties involved. In the context of gratitude, a private apology which is he deeper the feeling, the deeper the bow of his head. Conversely, actions shown to the others such as congratulating, *Ojigi* is not needed.

D. Sentences spoken in *Ojigi*

There are various situations that require someone to do *ojigi* and say certain the words, such as (1) when meeting, or being aware of the other person presence, and initiating interaction, one will do *ojigi* while and say greetings (*konnichiwa*, *konbanwa*, etc.); (2) when attracting the attention of the speaker and saying sorry at the same time or excusing oneself (*sumimasen*, *anoo*, *chotto*, and so on); (3) shows the intention of separation and saying goodbye or bye at the same moment (*sayonara*, *jaa mata*, etc.); (4) showing gratitude and apologies and saying thank you and sorry at the same time (*arigatou*, *doumo*, *sumimasen*, *shitsureishimashita*, *moushiwakentai*, and so on); (5) Owing something to the other person (*doutashimashite*); (6) saying hope to always keep he good relation between each other (*yoroshiku onegaishimasu*); (7) showing acknowledgement on someone in a conversation (*yoroshiku*, etc.); (8) expressing gratitude for someone's kindness a few days ago (*senjitsu wa doumo*, *itsuzoya wa arigatou*, *kono mae wa doumo*, and so on); (9) expressing a joy of a meet up (*ohissashiburi*, *ogenki desu ka*, etc.).

E. Reasons why Japanese do *Ojigi*

There are various reasons why Japanese do *ojigi*. Based on a study, it is summed up a number of reasons why Japanese people do *Ojigi*. First, they have gotten use of *Ojigi* since they were kids. Japanese have known *ojigi*, since they are in the kindergarten, especially when they arrive and leave the schools. Second, *Ojigi* is part of the home and school education. Teachers and parents always pay attention and teach them *Ojigi* in front of the kids as a part of the politeness education. Sometimes, their parents could get angry just because their son do not do *ojigi*, in a situation where they are supposed to. Third, *Ojigi* has become a habit that is a must in the surrounding environment. Among students, when meeting with seniors *Ojigi* is a must. Fourth, it is a discipline and gratitude. When receiving anything from other people, *Ojigi* should be done with saying thank you. Fifth, an individual copies *Ojigi* from his surrounding, especially during a family new year which there are some visits. Sixth, it is done to maintain harmony and to keep the conversation in as part of respecting each other, not insulting.

Besides those seventh reasons, there is one main reason which is according to Kindaichi [12], Japanese are supposed to say little since in some situations they prefer less verbal

communications, for example when apologizing instead of say sorry they will just do *Ojigi* to show their regrets.

F. Implications of Japanese Teaching

Japanese language education must be integrated with Japanese cultural education. Both lecturers and students need to understand this matter together so that lecturers not only teach linguistics, but also its culture. Similarly, students are more open to the culture of the target language.

The ability to speak Japanese will be even better if it is balanced with the ability of cultural knowledge. As a result, when someone speaks and acts in Japanese language and culture, they do not use their own cultural framework, but instead use the Japanese language and culture framework, so that misunderstandings with speech partners can be avoided.

Even though in Japanese teaching there is a lesson in *Nihonjijo* (Japanese situation), which tells about the condition and the intricacies of Japan from the viewpoint of society and its nature, and *Nihonbunka* (related to Japanese culture). However, specifically for nonverbal communication lessons, it seems that it is still less touched. This is indicated by the lack of nonverbal communication lessons in certain subjects in the Japanese Language Department.

IV. CONCLUSION

Ojigi is a Japanese culture that has become a national identity. The etymological word of *ojigi* is from the word *jigi* which means good hope when doing something. *Ojigi* is interpreted as an expression of respect and removes the conflicts. This custom has been practiced by Japanese since the Yayoi era (10th century BC).

There are two types of *ojigi*, namely *ritsurei* and *zarei*. *Ojigi* done by standing is called *ritsurei*, while *ojigi* done by sitting is called *zarei*. The procedure for *ojigi* also varies based on gender.

Common recognized *Ojigi* are *Eshaku*, *Futsuu no Ojigi*, and *Teinei na Ojigi*. *Eshaku* in this context actually has a description of bending fifteen degrees and is done when meeting acquaintances or friends. *Futsuu no Ojigi*, which is a form of bowing the body to the interlocutor at official ceremonies or moments of deep apology. It has thirty degrees angle. *Teinei na Ojigi*, which is the most polite and most respectful *ojigi* has forty-five degrees of bend angle or more.

The function of *ojigi* in Japanese people's communication systems is to respect the other person, such as respect given to friends will be different to respect given to superiors. Another *Ojigi* function is related to the form of courtesy.

There are various reasons why Japanese do *Ojigi*. One of which is because they get used to *Ojigi* since childhood.

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