The Japanese Verb *Itasu* and its Kin: Dishonorifics (*Kenjōgo* II) vs. Courtesy Honorifics (*Teichōgo*)[*]

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1 Introduction

The treatment of the group of honorific verbs including ITASU[1] 'do'—the "*I*-class verbs" for short—has been a matter of contention in the research on Japanese honorific expressions. The *I*-class consists of the verbs listed in (1). ITASU may be used as a light verb in combination with a verbal noun. MAIRU and ORU may be used either as a main verb (MAIRU$_M$/ORU$_M$) or as an auxiliary (MAIRU$_A$/ORU$_A$).

(1) a. ITASU 'do'
    b. (i)   MAIRU$_M$ 'go, come'
       (ii) (V-te) MAIRU$_A$ 'keep (V-ing), go to (V) and come back'
    c. MŌSU 'say'
    d. ZONJIRU 'believe, know'
    e. (i)   ORU$_M$ '(for a sentient entity to) exist, be located'

[1] Expressions in small capitals refer to lexemes.

(ii)   (V-te) ORU$_A$ 'be (V-ing), have (V-ed)'

These verbs have been said to have two uses: (i) dishonorifics (*kenjōgo* II) and (ii) courtesy honorifics (*teichōgo*) (Kikuchi 1997, 2022; Oshima 2019). The two uses are illustrated below, with MAIRU$_M$.

(2) a. *Doyōbi wa {watakushi/Abe} ga **mairimasu**.* (dishonorific)
       'On Saturday, {I/(my colleague) Abe} will **come** here.'
    b. *Oya, mukō kara {kodomo/#Oda sensei} ga **mairimashita**.* (courtesy honorific)
       'Oh, {a child/#Dr. Oda} is **coming** this way.'

Building on data collected through a questionnaire survey, this work makes the following claims. First, the distinction of the two uses, which has not be unanimously accepted, is well-motivated. Second, ITASU, MAIRU$_M$, and MŌSU in their dishonorific use have richer meaning than previously acknowledged, and convey that the described eventuality has direct relevance to the addressee. Third, whereas ZONJIRU is invariably used as a dishonorific, MAIRU$_A$ and ORU$_A$ are invariably used as a courtesy honorific.

2   The Background Theory of Linguistic Honorification

Based on Oshima (2019, 2021, 2023b), I adopt the following premises regarding honorific meaning expressible with honorific expressions; the term "FIRST-person (= extended-first-person) referent", inspired by Kikuchi (1997:121), refers to "the speaker and people in his/her domain (family members, work colleagues, etc.)".

(3) a. The range of respectfulness expressible with honorific expressions is represented as the real-number interval [−1, 1]. The members of this interval are referred to as "honorific values". The values 1 and −1 correspond to the maximum degrees of honorification (elevation) and dishonorification (lowering).
    b. In any given utterance context, the interlocutors and potential referents are assigned honorific values by the context-sensitive function **HON**. "**HON**(**ken**) = 0.3", for example, means that the speaker considers Ken to be mildly honorable in the context of utterance.
    c. A FIRST-person referent cannot be assigned an honorific value exceeding 0 (i.e. cannot be elevated). Only a FIRST-person referent can be assigned an honorific value below 0 (i.e. can be lowered).

3   *Kenjōgo* I, *Kenjōgo* II, and *Teichōgo*

Dishonorific (*kenjōgo* II) verbs and courtesy-honorific (*teichōgo*) verbs are subsumed by what has traditionally been called *kenjōgo*, or humbling forms

(see Kikuchi 2022 for a literature review). This section overviews the defining characteristics of the two classes, as well as how they contrast with another class called *kenjōgo* I (ARG2 honorifics).

3.1 *Kenjōgo* I Predicates, or ARG2 Honorifics

A *kenjōgo* I predicate (verb or adjective), or an ARG2 honorific, conveys that the referent of its second most prominent complement (after the subject) is honorable, both in absolute terms and in comparison to the referent of the subject (Oshima 2021:118). (4a) involves an ARG2 honorific verb MŌSHIAGERU 'say' and conveys an honorific meaning along the lines of (4b). "0.6" is a tentative threshold value meant to capture the fairly high degree of respectfulness conveyed by MŌSHIAGERU.

(4) a. *Tanaka senpai ga Kawai kyooju ni sono yoo ni **mōshiageta**.*
      'My senior collegue Tanaka **said** so to Professor Kawai.'
   b. **HON(kawai)** $\geq$ 0.6 & **HON(kawai)** > **HON(tanaka)**

3.2 *Kenjōgo* II Verbs, or ARG1 Dishonorifics

Kenjōgo II verbs, or ARG1 dishonorifics, have been characterized to convey respect toward the addressee *by means of lowering the referent of the subject* (Kikuchi 1997:270–272). Elaborating on this idea, Oshima (2019:336) posits discourse principle (5), presented here with some terminological adaptations.

(5) **Inversion Principle**: The degree of respectfulness that a lexical item i expresses toward the addressee matches the highest of (i) the (positive) honorific value range attributed by i to the addressee and (ii) the additive inverse of the (negative) honorific value range attributed by i to a FIRST-person referent.

The lexical meaning of the ARG1 dishonorific verb ZONJIRU 'believe, know' looks like (6). A logical expression of the form $\langle\phi; \psi\rangle$ (the "transjunction" of ϕ and ψ) represents the combination of at-issue (proffered) content ϕ and not-at-issue (non-proffered) content ψ (Oshima 2021).

(6) $\lambda p_1[\lambda x[\lambda e_1[\langle\textbf{believe}(e_1, x, p_1); \textbf{HON}(x) \leq -0.5\rangle]]]$

Zonjimasu in (7a) involves two honorific features, the verb ZONJIRU and the addressee-oriented honorific morpheme *mas* (which conveys a relatively mild degree of respect), and has an honorific meaning along the lines of (7b). The Inversion Principle makes (7b) practically equivalent to (7c).

(7) a. *Watashi mo sono yoo ni **zonjimasu**.*
      'I **believe** so, too.'
   b. **HON(Speaker)** $\leq$ −0.5 & **HON(Addressee)** $\geq$ 0.3

c. **HON**(**Addressee**) ≥ 0.5

An ARG1 dishonorific contrasts with an ARG2 honorific in that (i) its subject invariably refers to a FIRST-person referent and (ii) it always expresses respect toward the addressee (cf. (4)).

3.3 *Teichōgo*, or Courtesy Honorifics

Kikuchi (1997, 2022) maintains that the *I*-class verbs except for ZONJIRU have an extended use as a *teichōgo*, which (i) elevates the addressee without lowering the referent of the subject but (ii) contrasts with a "pure" addressee-oriented honorific (like *mas*) in requiring that the referent of the subject be not a person to be elevated. (2b) above and (8) below respectively illustrate the usage of MAIRU$_M$ and ITASU as a courtesy honorific.[2]

(8) (by a sports announcer)
    *300 nin no senshu ga sanka **itashimasu***.
    '300 athletes will participate (*lit.* **do** participation).' (Kikuchi 1997:264)

In Oshima (2019), the honorific meaning conveyed by (8) is taken to be along the lines of: "**HON**(**the-athletes**) ≤ 0 & **HON**(**Addressee**) ≥ 0.5".

It is noteworthy here that, given that a FIRST-person referent cannot be assigned an honorific value exceeding 0 (see (3c)), the prerequisites for the use of a courtesy honorific verb are weaker than those for the use of the corresponding dishonorific verb. One may thus sensibly suspect that putative dishonorific verbs are merely instances of courtesy honorific verbs which happen to have a FIRST-person subject (cf. Ikawa and Yamada 2022).

It appears that the received wisdom that courtesy honorifics are to be distinguished from ARG1 dishonorific has been motivated by the supposition that the former are marked and less typical in comparison to the latter, in terms of frequency and register of use. To my knowledge, however, little empirical data have been put forth in existing studies to endorse this point.

4 Survey

A web questionnaire survey was administered using the platform Questant[3] in June, 2022. The respondents were men and women in their 30s or 40s residing in Japan. 150 valid responses, 75 each from men and women, were obtained, after 66 responses were screened out that were suspected to be insincere.

The survey included 28 questions of the form given in (9), which shows the

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[2] Kikuchi uses the term *teichōgo* to refer to an atypical *use* of *kenjōgo* II verbs. His "*kenjōgo* II verbs" thus do not exactly match my "ARG1 dishonorifics", which specifically refer to verbs that dishonorify (lower) the referent of the subject.

[3] https://questant.jp/ (checked on May 1, 2023)

respondent a pair of (i) a sentence with an *I*-class honorific verb ("H-item") and (ii) one minimally contrasting with it in having a corresponding non-honorific verb—e.g. SURU 'do' for ITASU—instead ("N-item"). Some stimuli sentence pairs were accompanied by a brief explanation of the context. The questions and stimuli sentences were shown to each respondent in a different randomized order.

(9) **Instructions**: For each of the following two sentences, please select all of the options that you believe to hold true. "A person to be honored" refers to, for example, a superior at one's workplace, a senior colleague, a customer, a teacher, or an examiner. Please evaluate whether the sentence "might be uttered" in terms of wording, rather than in terms of topic/content.

Sentence Pair (example):

1. *Shūkeisagyō wa, watashi ga **itashimasu***. (H-item)
2. *Shūkeisagyō wa, watashi ga **shimasu***. (N-item)

Options:

A **You** might utter this sentence when talking to a person to be honored.
B **People around you** might utter this sentence when talking to a person to be honored.
C Neither applies.

The proportion of the respondents who chose option A or B (or both) can sensibly be taken as an indicator of the degree of unmarkedness/typicality of the item. This proportion will be referred to as the "acceptability rate (AR)". "The AR of an H-item minus the AR of the corresponding the N-item" will be referred to as "relative acceptability (RA)" of the H-item.

Some of the stimuli sentence pairs are discussed in some detail in the next section, but for reason of space, most of them are presented only in Appendix, along with their ARs/RAs. A fuller presentation can be found in Oshima (2023a).

5 Analysis

5.1 ITASU, MAIRU$_M$, and MŌSU and the Relevance Condition

The H-items with ITASU in (10a,b) exhibited high ARs (over 80%) and RAs (over +15p.p. (percentage points)).

(10) a. *Shūkeisagyō wa, watashi ga {**itashimasu**/**shimasu**}*.
   'I will do the tallying.'
   H: 81.3%, N: 60.0%, H−N: +21.3p.p.

b. *Kizai wa watashi ga kinō tenken {**itashimashita**/**shimashita**}.*
'I checked the equipment yesterday.'
H: 81.3%, N: 63.3%, H−N: +18.0p.p.

The H-items in (11a,b), where the subject does not refer to a FIRST-person entity (so that ITASU cannot be interpreted as a dishonorific), had significantly lower ARs/RAs.

(11) a. *Donna ni chūibukai hito demo toki ni wa misu o {**itashimasu**/**shimasu**}.*
'Even very careful people sometimes make mistakes.'
H: 47.3%, N: 82.0%, H−N: −34.7p.p.
b. *1964 nen no Tōkyō Orinpikku ni wa 94 no kuni/chiiki no senshu ga sanka {**itashimashita**/**shimashita**}.*
'Athletes from 94 countries and regions participated in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.'
H: 48.0%, N: 74.7%, H−N: −26.7p.p.

This lends empirical support to Kikuchi's (1997) supposition that the courtesy-honorific use of ITASU is perceived to be atypical/marked in comparison to the dishonorific use.

Interestingly, the H-items in (12a,b) had fairly low ARs/RAs, despite their subject referring to the speaker.

(12) a. *Watashi wa konshūmatsu, yūjin no hikkoshi no tetsudai o {**itashimasu**/**shimasu**}.*
'I will help my friend move to a new house in the weekend.'
H: 54.0%, N: 68.0%, H−N: −14.0p.p.
b. *Watashi wa 8 ji no tokkyū ni jōsha {**itashimashita**/**shimashita**}.*
'I took the express train at 8 o'clock.'
H: 59.3%, N: 73.3%, H−N: −14.0p.p.

I propose that ITASU as a dishonorific conveys that the described eventuality has direct relevance to the addressee. The semantic representation in (13a) integrates this feature, which will be referred to as the "Relevance Condition" hereafter; R stands for a contextually prominent relation that counts as direct relevance.

(13) The two senses of ITASU
a. $\lambda e_2[\lambda x[\lambda e_1[\langle \mathbf{do}(e_1, x, e_2); \mathbf{HON}(x) \leq -0.5 \ \& \ \exists R[R(e_1, \mathbf{Addressee})]\rangle]]]$ (dishonorific)
b. $\lambda e_2[\lambda x[\lambda e_1[\langle \mathbf{do}(e_1, x, e_2); \mathbf{HON}(x) \leq 0 \ \& \ \mathbf{HON}(\mathbf{Addressee}) > 0.5\rangle]]]$ (courtesy honorific)

(10a,b) are naturally taken to describe an eventuality (action) that benefits—and thus has significant relevance to—the addressee. The eventualities described in (12a,b), on other hand, are likely understood not to have direct relevance to the addressee. Accordingly, ITASU is more plausibly interpreted as a courtesy honorific, which is stylistically marked. It bears noting here that the eventuality described by dishonorific ITASU need not be one that benefits the addressee; that a sentence like (14) is utterly natural evidences this point.

(14) *Sumimasen, shitsurei na koto o **itashimashita**.*
    'My apologies, I was rude (*lit.* did a rude thing).'

The items involving MAIRU$_M$ and MŌSU exhibited patterns similar to those involving ITASU (see [7–11, 13–17] in Appendix).[4] Thus, they can be regarded as patterning the same as ITASU, typically being used as a dishonorific, which is subject to the Relevance Condition, and less typically as a courtesy honorific.

(15) The two senses of MAIRU$_M$
    a. $\lambda y[\lambda x[\lambda e_1[\langle \textbf{move-to}(e_1, x, y); \textbf{HON}(x) \leq -0.5 \,\&$
       $\exists R[R(e_1, \textbf{Addressee})]\rangle]]]$ (dishonorific)
    b. $\lambda y[\lambda x[\lambda e_1[\langle \textbf{move-to}(e_1, x, y); \textbf{HON}(x) \leq 0 \,\&$
       $\textbf{HON}(\textbf{Addressee}) > 0.5\rangle]]]$ (courtesy honorific)

(16) The two senses of MŌSU
    a. $\lambda u_1[\lambda x[\lambda e_1[\langle \textbf{say}(e_1, x, u_1); \textbf{HON}(x) \leq -0.5 \,\&$
       $\exists R[R(e_1, \textbf{Addressee})]\rangle]]]$ (dishonorific)
    b. $\lambda u_1[\lambda x[\lambda e_1[\langle \textbf{say}(e_1, x, u_1); \textbf{HON}(x) \leq 0 \,\&$
       $\textbf{HON}(\textbf{Addressee}) > 0.5\rangle]]]$ (courtesy honorific)

5.2 ZONJIRU

The survey data ([18–22]) were consistent with Kikuchi's (1997:313) claim that ZONJIRU lacks a use as a courtesy honorific, and thus invariably requires that their subject be a FIRST-person entity.

The data furthermore revealed that the effect of the Relevance Condition is rather mild for ZONJIRU (as a dishonorfic) in comparison to ITASU, MAIRU$_M$, and MŌSU. This suggests that, for a good number of speakers, the relatively simple semantic representation of ZONJIRU along the lines of (6) above is appropriate (see Oshima 2023a:30 for further discussion).

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[4] An H-item involving MŌSU as the main-clause predicate, namely [13], exhibited an AR and an RA that are relatively low; why this may be the case is discussed in Oshima (2023a:31).

5.3 ORU$_M$

There is a great deal variation in the usage of the verb ORU, across speakers and dialects (Kikuchi 1997:318–322). In Standard Japanese and its close variants, however, ORU occurring (i) in a finite form and (ii) in combination with the addressee-oriented honorific morpheme *mas* (e.g. *orimashita*) can sensibly regarded as an *I*-class honorific. With Kikuchi (1997), I consider that ORU conveys a milder degree of respect than other *I*-class verbs.

The survey data ([23–26]) suggest (i) that ORU$_M$, like ITASU, etc., has both dishonorific and courtesy-honorific uses, with the latter being marked, and furthermore (ii) that ORU$_M$ as a dishonorific is not subject to the Relevance Condition. The two senses of ORU$_M$ as an *I*-class verb thus look like (17); note that the verb conveys, as a not-at-issue content, that its subject refers to a sentient entity.

(17) The two senses of ORU$_M$

    a. $\lambda x[\lambda e_1[\langle \textbf{exist}(e_1, x); \textbf{sentient}(x) \, \& \, \textbf{HON}(x) \leq -0.4\rangle]]$
       (dishonorific)
    b. $\lambda x[\lambda e_1[\langle \textbf{exist}(e_1, x); \textbf{sentient}(x) \, \& \, \textbf{HON}(x) \leq 0 \, \&$
       $\textbf{HON}(\textbf{Addressee}) > 0.4\rangle]]$ (courtesy honorific)

5.4 MAIRU$_A$ and ORU$_A$

The ARs and RAs of the H-items with MAIRU$_A$ or ORU$_A$ were generally high, regardless of whether their subject is FIRST-person or not ([12, 27, 28]). This suggests that these items only have a use as a courtesy honorific, which, in the absence of the competing use as a dishonorific, is perceived to be unmarked.

6 Conclusion

It was discussed that it is sensible to admit two distinct uses of the *I*-class verbs (except for ZONJIRU): ARG1 dishonorifics and courtesy honorifics. It was furthermore argued (i) that some dishonorific verbs—ITASU, MAIRU$_M$, and MŌSU, to be specific—convey that the described eventuality has direct relevance to the addressee, and that (ii) while ZONJIRU is a "pure ARG dishonorific", MAIRU$_A$ and ORU$_A$ are "pure courtesy honorifics".

It is noteworthy that the Relevance Condition posed on some ARG1 dishonorifics may reflect the historical connection between ARG1 dishonorifics (*kenjōgo* II) and ARG2 honorifics (*kenjōgo* I). It is said that at least some ARG1 dishonorifics historically developed from ARG2 honorifics (Kikuchi 1997:323–324). With an ARG2 honorific, the target of honorification must be involved in the described eventuality as a participant; in other words, the eventuality must be *relevant* to the honorified individual in a rather strong sense. It seems reasonable to hypothesize that the Relevance Condition is a weaker version, or perhaps a residue, of the stronger "Involvement Condition" for ARG2 honorifics.

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Appendix: The Stimuli Sentences in the Survey and the Results Obtained

- $n\%$ = the AR of the item; np.p. = the RA (of the H-item) of the item pair
- Feature [±f] specifies whether the subject of the item refers to a FIRST-person entity; feature [±r] specifies whether the item is naturally understood to meet the Relevance Condition.

ITASU: **[1]** *Shūkei sagyō wa watashi ga* {*itashimasu* [81.3%] / *shimasu* [60.0%]}. (+21.3p.p., [+f,+r]); **[2]** *Kizai wa watashi ga kinō tenken* {*itashimashita* [81.3%] / *shimashita* [63.3%]}. (+18.0p.p, [+f,+r]); **[3]** *Watashi wa konshūmatsu, yūjin no hikkoshi no tetsudai o* {*itashimasu* [54.0%] / *shimasu* [74.7%]}. (−20.7p.p., [+f,−r]); **[4]** *Watashi wa, 8 ji no tokkyū ni jōsha* {*itashimashita* [59.3%] / *shimashita* [73.3%]}. (−14.0p.p., [+f,−r]); **[5]** *Donna ni chūibukai hito demo, toki ni wa misu o* {*itashimasu* [47.3%] / *shimasu* [82.0%]}. (−34.7p.p., [−f,−r]); **[6]** *1964 nen no Tōkyō Orinpikku ni wa, 94 no kuni/chiiki no senshu ga sanka* {*itashimashita*

[48.0%] / *shimashita* [74.7%]}. (−26.7p.p., [−f,−r]); **MAIRU**$_M$: **[7]** (denwa de) *Ima kara watashi mo sochira ni* {*mairimasu* [87.3%] / *ikimasu* [50.7%]}. (+36.7p.p., [+f,+r]); **[8]** (taichō ga sugurenai yōsu no jōshi ni taishite) *Kyō no ginkō to no uchiawase ni wa, watashi ga dairi de* {*mairimasu* [76.0%] / *ikimasu* [62.0%]}. (+14.0p.p., [+f,+r]); **[9]** *Watashi wa, ya-sumi no hi wa yoku ekimae no ōgata shoten ni* {*mairimasu* [41.3%] / *ikimasu* [83.3%]}. (−42.0p.p., [+f,−r]); **[10]** *Kore kara haha no tokoro ni* {*mairimasu* [58.0%] / *ikimasu* [71.3%]}. (−13.3p.p., [+f,−r]); **[11]** *Sono kissaten wa sorenari ni ninki ga ari, kyaku ga mainichi 100 nin kurai* {*mairimashita* [29.3%] / *kimashita* [80.0%]}. (−50.7p.p., [−f,−r]); **MAIRU**$_A$: **[12]** *Saikin wa daibu samuku natte* {*mairimashita* [69.3%] / *ki-mashita* [66.7%]}. (+2.7p.p., [−f,−r]); **MŌSU**: **[13]** *Sumimasen, yokei na koto o* {*mōshimashita* [66.0%] / *iimashita* [65.3%]}. (+0.7p.p., [+f,+r]); **[14]** *Senshū* {*mōshimashita* [87.3%] / *iimashita* [42.0%]} *yō ni, raigetsu kara shichōsha no kaichiku kōji ga hajimarimasu.* (+45.3p.p., [+f,+r]); **[15]** *Watashi wa chichi ni sō* {*mōshimashita* [52.7%] / *iimashita* [74.7%]}. (−22.0p.p., [+f,−r]); **[16]** *Watashi wa sono toshokan'in ni "Sono hon wa senshū henkyaku shita hazu desu, kakunin shite moraemasen ka" to* {*mōshimashita* [61.3%] / *iimashita* [71.3%]}. (−10.0p.p., [+f,−r]); **[17]** *Pa-sukaru wa "Ningen wa kangaeru ashi de aru" to* {*mōshimashita* [32.7%] / *iimashita* [84.7%]}. (−52.0p.p., [−f,−r]); **ZONJIRU**: **[18]** (Satō toiu jin-butsu ni taishite) *Satō san ga kurashikku ongaku o osuki na koto wa, watashi mo* {*zonjite* [78.7%] / *shitte* [60.0%]} *orimashita.* (+18.7p.p., [+f,+r]); **[19]** (Suzuki toiu jinbutsu ni taishite) *Suzuki san ga nyūin sarete ita koto wa, watashi wa mattaku* {*zonjimasen* [76.0%] / *shirimasen* [64.7%]} *deshita.* (+11.3p.p., [+f,+r]); **[20]** *Kinnen, Hokkyoku no kōri ga genshō shite iru koto wa, watashi mo* {*zonjite* [66.7%] / *shitte* [69.3%]} *orimashita.* (−2.7p.p., [+f,−r]); **[21]** *Eki no chikaku ni atarashiku shoppingu mōru ga dekita koto wa, watashi wa mattaku* {*zonjimasen* [66.0%] / *shirimasen* [74.7%]} *deshita.* (−8.7p.p., [+f,−r]); **[22]** *Yononaka no taitei no hito wa, raitā wa mochi-ron, matchi no tsukurikata mo* {*zonjimasen* [29.3%] / *shirimasen* [85.3%]}. (−56.0p.p., [−f,−r]); **ORU**$_M$: **[23]** *Nanika toraburu ga okoru kanōsei mo arimasu node, 6 ji made wa watashi ga koko ni* {*orimasu* [72.7%] / *imasu* [63.3%]}. (+9.3p.p., [+f,+r]); **[24]** *Watashi wa, kinō wa toku ni gaishutsu wa shinaide jitaku ni* {*orimashita* [77.3%] / *imashita* [64.7%]}. (+12.7p.p., [+f,−r]); **[25]** *Kyōto ni wa daigakusei ga takusan* {*orimasu* [57.3%] / *imasu* [79.3%]}. (−20.0p.p., [−f,−r]); **[26]** *Mukashi wa, kono atari ni mo kuma ya shika ga takusan* {*orimashita* [52.7%] / *imashita* [75.3%]}. (−22.7p.p., [−f,−r]); **ORU**$_A$: **[27]** *Watashi wa, saikin wa 10 ji mae ni shūshin suru yō ni kokorogakete* {*orimasu* [79.3%] / *imasu* [64.0%]}. (+15.3p.p., [+f,−r]); **[28]** *Koko sūnen, tōnan jiken no kensū wa kanari genshō shite* {*orimasu* [74.7%] / *imasu* [64.7%]}. (+10.0p.p., [−f,−r])