Language Socialization in Japanese

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Abstract

This chapter reviews the major research on Japanese language socialization across the lifespan, involving child first-language (L1) speakers and adult second-language (L2) learners. It begins by discussing research in Japanese language socialization starting in the mid-1980s and the early influences on this research from psychology and anthropology, and then discusses major contributions from the 1990s to the present. In relation to L1 socialization, the discussion deals with affect, honorifics and politeness, gender, narrative and literacy, and participation in classroom interaction; in relation to L2 socialization it primarily deals with pragmatic particles, speech styles (honorifics), and identity. The chapter also points out problems and difficulties in conducting Japanese language socialization and offers some solutions. The final section discusses potential directions for future research in this area.

KeywordsEmpathy Affect Honorifics Politeness Gender role Participation structure Pragmatic particle Interactional routine

Introduction

This chapter reviews the major research on Japanese language socialization across the lifespan, involving child first-language (L1) speakers and adult second-language (L2) learners. It begins by discussing research in Japanese language socialization starting in the mid-1980s and the early influences on this research from psychology and anthropology, and then discusses major contributions from the 1990s to the present. In relation to L1 socialization, the discussion deals with affect , honorifics and politeness , gender, narrative and literacy, and participation in classroom interaction; in relation to L2 socialization it primarily deals with pragmatic particles, speech styles (honorifics), and identity. The chapter also points out problems and difficulties in conducting Japanese language socialization and offers some solutions. The final section discusses potential directions for future research in this area.

Early Developments

The theoretical perspective of language socialization grew out of linguistic anthropology and was developed by Ochs and Schieffelin and their colleagues in the mid-1980s. In Japan, however, due to the fact that there has been no tradition of ethnography (cf. Shibamoto *1987*), language socialization research has not been promoted there. To date, most studies on language socialization in Japanese have been conducted by scholars who were trained in the United States, yet Japanese is perhaps an ideal language in which to investigate how novices are socialized into society through the use of language, for it has a rich morphology that encodes a great deal of social information (e.g., honorifics, pronouns, and sentence-final particles). For example, even a simple utterance such as "today is Saturday" has several variants with different degrees of politeness, formality, and other aspects of social information (cf. Matsumoto *1988*). In this sense, the acquisition of Japanese "goes hand-in-hand with acquiring sociocultural knowledge" (Ochs and Schieffelin *1995*, p. 74).

The 1970s saw several influential publications on Japanese culture and psychology that discussed Japanese communication patterns in contrast with those of the West (e.g., Doi *1973*; Lebra *1976*). For example, *omoiyari* "empathy " (Lebra *1976*) and *amae* "dependence on others" (Doi *1973*) were claimed to be Japanese ways of communication. These publications had a great impact on the formulation of theories of Japanese behavior and communication in the fields of anthropology, psychology, sociology, and linguistics in Western society.

The goal of the early studies was to investigate how caregivers' discursive practices socialize children into Japanese cultural patterns of behavior. Clancy's (*1986*) study was the first major contribution to Japanese language socialization research. It pursued the question of how young Japanese children learn to be indirect and empathize with others. Based on naturally occurring conversations between Japanese mothers and two-year-old children in Japan, she found that the mothers' discursive practices were characterized by a mixture of indirect and direct commands and were aimed at training children in empathy and conformity. In particular, the mothers' juxtaposition of indirect and direct commands conveyed to children how direct commands could be paraphrased in an indirect manner. One of the significant contributions of Clancy's study is that it demonstrates that Japanese mothers deemphasize their role as authority figure and that empathy training is part of making children behave well without foregrounding the mother's authority. Mothers' control of the child's behavior by pointing out a third party's feelings accomplishes at least two things [1]: One is to make the child behave without the mother evoking cold or negative affect and the other is to make the child empathize with others (i.e., *omoiyari* training). Cook (*1990*) also found that mothers' use of the sentence-final particle *no* helped to deemphasize their personal will and appealed to social norms in order to control the child's behavior. For example, the sentence final *no* in a caregiver's utterance such as *teeburu o tatakanai no* evokes the

social norm that people do not hit the table when having a meal rather than asserting the caregiver's personal authority (i.e., *I tell you not to hit the table*.)

In sum, early studies pointed out that the Japanese cultural values of *omoiyari* and *amae* are socialized as a result of Japanese mothers' deemphasis of their authority. Japanese mothers' particular discursive style simultaneously makes the child more sensitive to others and more dependent on the mother.

Major Contributions

Japanese L1 Language Socialization Research

Since the 1990s, L1 socialization research in Japanese has expanded its scope to include both home and school settings in order to examine the following issues: (i) affect; (ii) honorifics and politeness; (iii) gender; (iv) narrative and literacy; and (v) participation in classroom interaction.

First, as language encodes affect through lexicon, phonology, and grammatical structure among other linguistic devices, learning to express affect in culturally appropriate ways is an important part of language socialization (Ochs and Schieffelin *1989*), because affect is a building block of a range of social dimensions including identity and politeness routines. As noted in the previous section, research provides evidence that Japanese caregivers use a number of affective expressions to control children's behavior and that children are socialized into appropriate affective expressions quite early in life. Clancy (*1999*) found that by 2 years of age, Japanese children were exposed to an extensive affect lexicon. In particular, the mothers' use of *kowai* "be scary/be afraid (of)" in relation to children's actions helps children see themselves as the objects of others' evaluative affect. Suzuki (*1999*) also found that Japanese mothers taught children appropriate behavior through the use of the aspectual suffix – *chau*, which indexes the speaker's negative affect concerning the event or action soon to be completed (or just completed). Burdelski and Mitsuhashi (*2010*), who studied the use of *kawaii* "cute/adorable/lovable" in interactions at a Japanese preschool, discuss how children come to understand things in the social world as *kawaii*. They found that teachers use *kawaii* with verbal and nonverbal resources to make assessments of children's things and behaviors and to gloss children's actions towards peers. They showed that by the age of three, children were using *kawaii* to make assessments of toys and animals. Thus, through teachers' assessments, children seemed to acquire understanding of the cultural value of *omoiyari* "empathy" (discussed earlier) towards things assessed as *kawaii*.

Second, since the Japanese language has extensive honorific forms, scholars have investigated how Japanese children learn to use honorifics. Japanese honorifics are divided into two main categories: referent and addressee. While referent honorifics raise the status of referents and/or their group and lower that of speakers and/or their group, addressee honorifics (*masu* form) index the affective stance of self-presentation (Cook *2008*). This is a stance that presents an on-stage display of a positive social role to the addressee. It is a particular affective stance of presenting oneself to others when one is literally or figuratively "on-stage" and aware of being watched by others. Referent honorifics are morphologically complex and rarely occur in family conversation except for some formulaic phrases, such as *itadakimasu* "I humbly accept this food/drink" and *itte mairimasu* "I will go and come back" (Burdelski *2013a*; Nakamura *1996*). For these reasons, except for formulaic expressions, children do not develop competence in using referent honorifics until much later in life. In contrast, caregivers at times use the *masu* form when talking to children. Researchers investigated when caregivers and

children shift to the *masu* form (Burdelski *2013a*; Clancy *1985*; Cook *1997*; Nakamura *1996*). These studies found that Japanese caregivers tend to shift to the *masu* form in several well-defined contexts: when reading a story book, quoting people outside the home, engaging in a role play, issuing directives, and carrying out parental responsibilities such as correcting children's behavior and serving food. By the age of three, Japanese children learn to use the *masu* form appropriately both in real life situations as well as in imaginary play (Burdelski *2013a*; Cook *1997*; Fukuda *2005*). For example, in interaction with caregivers at home, young children shift to the *masu* form in role play (Burdelski *2013a*; Fukuda *2005*) as well as when they indicate that they are a responsible, good child (Cook *1997*). Preschool children shift to the *masu* form to index a heightened (negative) affective stance, such as when making objections and providing a reason for refusing a request in interaction with peers (Burdelski *2013a*).

Japanese children are socialized into politeness routines from a young age. While politeness routines are important in communities around the world, "they are highly amplified" (Burdelski *2012*, p. 290) in Japanese society. Caregivers and older siblings teach young children what to say and how to say it to a third party through prompting, directives, and speaking for the child (Burdelski *2012*). According to Burdelski (*2012*), more than half of caregivers' prompts are formulaic expressions, and before the age of three, children are able to say these expressions in performing social actions such as greeting, offering, thanking, and apologizing. This ability reflects the Japanese cultural practice that highly values using formulaic expressions in the appropriate context. Burdelski (*2012*) also notes that most prompting was done by elicited imitation ("say X"), which provides a model utterance to children. This practice is in line with the cultural theory of learning and socialization in Japan, which places an emphasis on mastery of *kata* "prescribed forms." Burdelski (*2013b*) closely examined how children are socialized into expressions of apology (*gomen ne*/ *gomen-nasai* "I'm sorry"/"I'm sorry-polite") in and around households and a preschool. He found that caregivers and teachers use these expressions and prompt children to do so not only to other people but also to animals and objects in the environment, such as a stone and flower, and concluded that through the act of apology, children learn *omoiyari* "empathy" towards others, including animals and inanimate objects. Politeness is expressed not only verbally but also nonverbally. Burdelski's (*2010*, *2012*) studies shed light on how Japanese caregivers encourage children's embodied performance. Modeling, verbal instruction, and tactile guidance are commonly used to teach children what to do. For example, Burdelski (*2012*) reported that when a child received a toy from a peer, his father instructed him to say "thank you" while pressing on his back to encourage him to bow. Morita (*2003*) also observed direct teaching in her study of bilingual Japanese-English speaking children in the United States. In particular, she discussed how a mother prompted her child to greet and use appropriate terms of address (e.g., *oneesan* "older sister") to a third party adult (cf. Clancy *1986*). These studies and others suggest that children's socialization into politeness, empathy, and other culturally meaningful dispositions occurs through engagement in courses of social action with others (Burdelski *2015*; Takada *2013*; Takada and Endo *2015*). For instance, Takada and Endo (*2015*) show how caregivers encourage sibling relationships by directing an older sibling to give an object (e.g., toy) to a younger sibling, by using the construction V– *te ageru* "give (something to another)," which implicitly conveys that the recipient (younger sibling) is a beneficiary and the giver (older sibling) is a benefactor who should be kind to the younger sibling.

Third, while gender roles are in general more distinct in Japanese society than in Western societies, one of the myths about the Japanese language is that there are many linguistic forms that are exclusively used by one gender. In reality, however, both men and women share a wide range of speech styles in many social contexts. Differences in speech between genders largely depend on social context. Studies have found that gender differences are socialized in interaction between preschool

teachers and children as well as in peer interaction, and children as young as 3 years old have knowledge of how gender differences are indexed by linguistic forms. Burdelski and Mitsuhashi (*2010*) observed that teachers made gender-specific assessments of children, their personal items and toys, mainly using *kawaii* "cute/adorable/lovable" for girls and *kakkoii* "cool" for boys. These assessments teach children different ways of constructing feminine and masculine selves. One of the questions is how boys are socialized into rough speech when the mother normally does not speak to the child in a rough manner. Nakamura (*2001*) contends that peers are the main source of socialization of so-called "gendered speech." In her study, boys used a wider range of rough-sounding linguistic forms during same-sex peer play than when they spoke with their mothers. She also found that compared with other gentler play, when engaging in rough-and-tumble play with the same-sex playmate, girls increased their use of rough-sounding linguistic forms as well. From these observations, Nakamura concluded that "gendered speech" is not used exclusively by one gender and that young children are socialized by peers into the use of gendered speech in appropriate contexts. Fourth, a question explored is how children make the transition from home to school. In Western societies, researchers consider that middle-class interactional style at home is a precursor to decontextualized language use (i.e., literacy) at school (e.g., Bernstein *1971*). In Japan, there is relative continuity between language use at home and at school, but the kind of continuity differs from that found in Western societies. Minami (*2002*), who examined the narrative structures of Japanese children (ages 4 and 5) and their mothers, illustrates that Japanese narratives that children participate in involve short turns with incomplete sentences and frequent turn changes. This characteristic of oral narratives is carried over to the literacy activity of storybook reading in the sense that the mother's questions and child's answers in book-reading activities are short and often use incomplete sentences. Minami also argues that this book-reading activity at home is a precursor to school literacy in Japanese society in that a typical sequence in book-reading activities is a three-part sequence that resembles the I(nitiation)-R(esponse)-E(valuation) sequence typically found in classroom interaction in other educational cultures (cf. Mehan *1979*).

Fifth, while Minami's (*2002*) claim of a similarity between the three-part sequence of book-reading activities at home and the I-R-E sequence assumes that the I-R-E sequence is a normative practice in classrooms in Japan, Anderson (*1995*) observed differences between Japan and North America in the participation structure in elementary school classrooms. Anderson's ethnographic study of first- and second-grade classrooms showed that in the Japanese classrooms he examined the preferred participation structure was a multiparty interactional pattern (the I[initiation]-P[resentation]-R[eaction]-E[valuation] sequence) instead of the I-R-E sequence. In the I-P-Rx-E sequence, the P and R turns were distributed to students. In P, a student gave a presentation, and in R, other students reacted to the student's presentation. Anderson (*1995*) pointed out that whereas the I-R-E sequence promoted dyadic interaction between the teacher and student, the I-P-Rx-E sequence increased peer interactions in the classroom and left the teacher's role to be that of supporter of the peer interaction among students. The encouragement of peer interactions and the supporting role of the teacher in a Japanese nursery school were also documented by Tobin et al.'s (*2009*) ethnographic study. Peer cooperation in elementary school classrooms was also noted in other studies (Cook *1999*). Students were reported to listen to their peer's presentations carefully so that they could give reactions. The I-P-Rx-E sequence that Anderson found is part of training for peer cooperation and peer classroom management, an important Japanese cultural value.

Studies on Japanese language socialization at home suggest that there is a continuity of multiparty participation structures between home and school. Multiparty participation structures are widely observed in and around the home in Japanese society. Through prompting, for instance, young children are encouraged to interact with co-present third parties such as siblings, peers, and visitors

(Burdelski *2012*, *2013a*, *b*; Clancy *1986*). Multiparty participation structures used in and around the home are perhaps an important precursor to the I-P-Rx-E sequence observed in Japanese elementary schools.

Japanese L2 Language Socialization Research

Since the mid-1990s, there has been an increase in the number of publications on Japanese L2 language socialization research. The central question asked in these studies is how learners of Japanese as a foreign language (henceforth JFL learners) are socialized into the appropriate use of Japanese and cultural expectations in Japanese society. L2 socialization studies have been conducted both in classrooms in North America and the study-in-Japan context.

Classroom research in JFL socialization deals mostly with issues of pragmatic particles and speech styles, interactional routines, and the teacher's status. Pragmatic particles and honorifics are difficult to learn solely through classroom instruction (cf. Gumperz *1996*). In contrast to Japanese children, JFL learners have difficulty in learning to use pragmatic particles and speech styles appropriately (e.g., Sawyer *1992*). Studies by Ohta (*1994*) and Yoshimi (*1999*) suggested that difficulties may stem from the paucity of pragmatic particles in the teacher's talk as well as differences in grammar and morphology between Japanese and English. Ohta's study (*1994*), which investigated pragmatic particles in first-year Japanese language classrooms in the United States, revealed fewer types and lower frequencies of the particles used in the classroom than in ordinary conversations and the impact of the teacher's teaching philosophy on their use. Drawing on Kamio's (*1994*) theory of territory of information, Yoshimi (*1999*), who analyzed JFL learners' incorrect uses of the pragmatic particle *ne,* argued that a difference in Japanese and English epistemic constraints led to the learners' improper uses. According to Kamio, in English newly received information is immediately considered shared information between the interlocutors, but in Japanese such information takes time to become the hearer's information, and, furthermore, information on others' internal states is not accessible to the hearer. American JFL learners tended to incorrectly assume that newly received information was shared information and used the particle *ne*, which is usually taught as a shared information marker, but such information is not considered as shared in Japanese.

Another important pragmatic feature in Japanese is speech style shift. Some studies examined how JFL learners are socialized into speech style shifts between the *masu* and plain forms in classrooms. Rounds et al. (*1997*), for example, studied teachers' style shifts in a Japanese language immersion school in the United States. Their study noted that while the teachers mostly used the *masu* form in teacher-fronted instruction, they occasionally shifted to the plain form when they spoke to students in a more intimate manner, paraphrased complex sentences, scaffolded the content matter, and gave feedback on the students' answers. This study suggests that these learners were exposed to style shifts similar to those that occur in Japanese elementary school classrooms (Cook *1996*).

The language socialization model contends that novices acquire sociocultural knowledge through participation in routine language-mediated activities. From this perspective, classroom activities involve important routines for many foreign language learners. Japanese L2 socialization research has explored how interactional routines in the classroom help socialize learners into Japanese sociocultural norms (e.g., Kanagy *1999*; Ohta *2001*). Kanagy (*1999*) observed that young children in a Japanese immersion kindergarten were gradually socialized by means of the teacher's scaffolding into three culture-specific interactional routines, namely *aisatsu* "greeting," *shusseki* "attendance," and *jiko-shookai* "personal introduction." Her study contributes to our knowledge of the importance of the predictability of routine activities for language socialization.

Routine activities are also socialization tools in college-level JFL classes. Ohta's (*2001*) longitudinal study of a first-year Japanese language class in an American university showed how one classroom routine – an extended assessment activity – was a powerful tool for socializing learners into the Japanese cultural norm of the active listener role described above. Her study, which was framed in terms of Vygotskian socio-historical theory, analyzed how peer interactions and private speech helped learners acquire Japanese. For example, Ohta showed that peers with different language proficiencies helped each other through collaborative talk. In sum, Ohta's study is a major contribution to L2 classroom research in that it points out that a foreign language classroom is a much richer environment for language acquisition and socialization than was previously thought.

Language socialization research in Japanese study-abroad contexts explores issues of learners' social identity in Japanese society, speech styles, and bi-directional socialization processes. These studies mostly deal with Caucasian American students' linguistic behavior in interaction with Japanese people. Ethnographic studies by Siegal (*1996*) and Iino (*2006*) documented Japanese social expectations of different standards of behavior for Japanese and foreigners. For example, Siegal (*1996*) reported that a professor of Japanese commented that he would not correct learners' inappropriate use of Japanese because foreigners do not understand Japanese customs. In contrast, another study found that JFL learners staying with a Japanese host family learned to participate in the telling of a folk belief in Japanese society and jointly constructed a shared perspective and emotion with the host family (Cook *2006*).

Study-abroad contexts provide learners with opportunities to interact with L1 speakers outside of the classroom. Researchers have found that JFL learners on a study-in-Japan program were socialized into appropriate uses of the *masu* and plain forms in interactions with their homestay hosts (Cook *2008*; McMeekin *2006*). McMeekin's study, which examined the speech styles of five pairs of learners and their host families, demonstrated that learners were socialized to gradually increase their use of plain forms by participating in daily interactions with host family members who mostly spoke to them in the plain form. Cook (*2008*), who analyzed speech style shifts in dinnertime conversations between eight JFL learners and their host families, found that learners were implicitly and explicitly socialized into the norms of style shifts in family conversation. However, Iwasaki's (*2011*) study of four male learners' retrospective evaluations of their study-in-Japan experiences suggests that there are individual variations and that learners are active agents who choose a particular speech style by assessing a social identity they might want to project based on their own sociolinguistic knowledge and their individual personalities, ideologies, and identities.

Language socialization is a life-long process, and the novice is not the only party who is socialized. In this sense, socialization is a two-way process. Cook (*2006*) analyzed how learners' challenges encouraged Japanese host families to shift an existing folk belief that drinking *sake* goes with cherry blossom viewing to a new version, which replaces drinking *sake* with reading a book. Thus, due to interactions with the JFL learner, the Japanese host family members had opportunities to reflect on and modify their own belief systems.

The contribution of L2 socialization studies in the study-in-Japan context is that they point out that one of the problems that learners encounter in Japan is the difficulty of establishing and expressing their social identities (other than that of "foreigner"). In contrast to L1 socialization in which the end point of socialization is normally the novice's attainment of the linguistic and cultural competence of established members of the community, the end point of L2 socialization varies according to learners' goals and opportunities as well as the target community's expectations about foreigners and their language use. These studies remind us that JFL learners are not robots who simply emulate the L2 norms of speaking but are active agents who choose to display who they are in Japan utilizing the Japanese language as a resource but who may also be constrained by their social contexts.

Problems and Difficulties

As with any fieldwork-based research, problems and difficulties are invariably encountered when conducting research on Japanese language socialization. Although much of the research was conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, there have only been a few large-scale projects in the twenty-first century, including studies of L1 children's socialization (e.g., Burdelski *2010*; Takada *2013*) and L2 adults (Cook *2008*) in Japan. One reason for this may be the difficulty in gaining access to settings in which participants will consent to having their interactions audio-visually recorded over an extended period of time. In addition, children are especially sensitive subjects whose participation in research, particularly outside the home, such as at (pre)school, has to be approved by parents, which can sometimes be a daunting task for researchers. Another reason may be the great amount of time and effort required to conduct a language socialization study. And, as was alluded to earlier, language socialization theory is not well known in Japan, and thus scholars there do not often conduct research on language socialization (an exception being Takada *2013*). Researchers outside of Japan working on Japanese language socialization, on the other hand, may not have the time or resources to conduct linguistic and ethnographic fieldwork in Japan. One solution to this problem may entail working collaboratively with colleagues residing in Japan (as in Burdelski's case) or having the participants themselves set up the recording equipment at regular intervals, such as at dinnertime (as in Cook *2008*), in order to mitigate the observer's paradox (i.e., whereby the observed interactions become unduly shaped and influenced by the researcher's presence).

Despite an increase in research on Japanese language socialization over the past 15 years, there remain two main issues. One is that the aforementioned projects mainly focus on Japanese language socialization in Japan. Although in the 1990s, several studies examined children learning Japanese in an immersion school in the United States (e.g., Kanagy *1999*) and adult students learning Japanese in university classrooms (e.g., Ohta *1994*, *2001*), since that time there has been little advancement in Japanese language socialization research in communities outside of Japan. This is the case even though there has been much educational and linguistic research conducted on children and adolescents learning Japanese as a heritage language abroad (e.g., Chinen and Tucker *2005*). However, these studies tend to look at language acquisition outcomes and issues of identity using sociolinguistic interviews, rather than naturally occurring interactions using audio-visual recordings of activities in homes and classrooms that could help shed light on the dynamics of language socialization, including learner agency.

A second issue regarding the major recent projects in Japan is that they mainly focus on L1 preschool children and L2 college-aged adults from the United States. Thus, we still know very little about Japanese language socialization in relation to L1 and L2 among older children and adolescents or about adult L1-Japanese speakers' socialization in the business world and other contexts (an exception is Dunn *2011*). Moreover, as studies of Japanese children have mainly focused on monolinguals, we do not yet know much about bilingual or multilingual children, adolescents, and young adults, especially their code-switching and code-mixing practices that reflect their participation in multilingual social groups and constitute their multilingual identities (an exception is Morita *2003*).

Future Directions

To date, studies on language socialization in Japanese, including those reviewed above, have primarily focused on child L1 speakers in the home, preschool, and elementary school and on adult L2 speakers (university students) in classrooms and family homestays. Since language socialization is a life-long process that involves multiple parties and modalities, a wider range of social contexts and activities needs to be investigated. Future research could examine, for instance: (i) how junior and high school students are socialized through classroom routines; (ii) how club activities in high schools and universities socialize students into becoming, for example, a *shakaijin* "competent member of society"; (iii) how training programs for new employees in companies socialize young adults into using appropriate language (e.g., honorifics) and embodied behavior with customers; (iv) how the growing number of immigrants (children and adults) in Japan are socialized in classrooms, workplaces, and other settings; and (v) how children and adolescents in Japanese heritage language classrooms outside of Japan are socialized in ways that prepare them for returning to Japan with their families. Also, more work is needed in a range of settings on socialization into reading and writing Japanese and on the role of technology in language socialization. In terms of writing, for example, it would be useful to know how classroom teachers instruct students on how to write the two phonetic syllabaries, *hiragana* and *katakana,* and "Chinese characters" or *kanji*. In terms of technology, it would be helpful, for example, to know how families residing outside of Japan use computer-mediated technology (e.g., Skype) to socialize children in interactions with family members (such as grandparents) who are residing in Japan. Finally, more work is needed on multilingual Japanese language socialization. For example, it would be beneficial to examine how families in Japan and abroad manage two or more languages in socializing children. Such studies will not only shed insight on dynamic processes of language socialization in different social contexts in which Japanese and possibly other languages are used simultaneously but also contribute to the growing domain of research on learning Japanese as an L1, L2, and heritage language.

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Footnotes

1
The third party can be co-present participants, those who are not present in the speech context, and/or even society in general (*seken*).