

DOI: [doi.org/10.21009/ISLLAE.01127](https://doi.org/10.21009/ISLLAE.01127)

Received: 5 June 2018  
Revised: 10 June 2018  
Accepted: 14 August 2018  
Published: 31 January 2019

## ***Uchi and Soto Culture of Business Letters in Japanese***

Yuniarsih<sup>1,a)</sup>, Okada Yasunori<sup>1)</sup>  
Universitas Negeri Jakarta<sup>1)</sup>  
[yuni2004jp@yahoo.co.jp](mailto:yuni2004jp@yahoo.co.jp)<sup>a)</sup>

### **Abstract**

A lot of misunderstandings occur within Indonesians studying Japanese regarding the manners in verbal forms, for example the use of *keigo* (honorifics). *Keigo* consists of *sonkeigo* (honorifics to raise the position of the interlocutor), *kenjougo* (honorifics that lower ourselves), and *teineigo* (regular honorifics by using *desu/masu*). When learners write business letters in Japanese, they use manners in written forms. The usage of verbal forms when writing is a mistake. Opinions like this aren't exactly correct because writing letters in Japanese is not the same as writing a scientific article that uses written forms. On the other hand, the culture of *uchi* (in-groups) and *soto* (out-groups) have impacts on the use of language. Different from Bahasa Indonesia, writing letters in Japanese is heavily influenced by the culture of *uchi* and *soto* that will affect the diction in the business letters. When writing letters to people and companies who are *soto*, then *keigo* and some special phrases should be used. There are different words and phrases used when talking about people included in the *uchi* to the other person who is considered as *soto*. This is a characteristic in Japanese language. The reason for this research is to understand how applications of the culture of *uchi* and *soto* in Japanese letters, specifically Japanese business email. This research uses the descriptive qualitative method. The technique used to gather data is through literature review. The source of data is from documents of letters and textbooks from the *Tegami no Kakikata* (correspondence in Japanese) and *Bijinesu Nihongo* (Japanese for Business) course. Based on the data analyzed it is known that we can determine that there are some similarities and differences in a Japanese business email. The similarities are that both letters use the formal form for *uchi* and *soto* and have a clear purpose. While the differences are that in the email for *uchi* a long formal opening, body, and closing text is not needed. In addition, being too formal is not needed like in the *soto* letter, they also have special phrases used in both emails. This research is shown that *soto* emails, in the beginning the receiver's name is written in full, their position, as well as the name of the company which, in Japan, is written in reverse. However letters for *uchi* writes the name as *Yamamoto San* or *Katou Buchou*, this is not allowed when writing emails for *soto*. Emails for *soto* should first mention the department and then the name of the receiver, *Yamamoto sama* or *Kikakubuchou Katousama*. When speaking to someone who is a *soto* regarding someone who is a *uchi*, they would normally not use *keigo*. Email addressed to *uchi* within the company whether it was to a superior or a

subordinate, the opening will use *otsukaresamadesu*. However the above email for *soto* writes with the opening *itsumoosewaninatteorimasu*.

**Keywords:** Uchi, Soto, Business Letters, Keigo, Japanese Culture

### Abstrak

Banyak kesalahpahaman terjadi dalam diri orang Indonesia yang mempelajari bahasa Jepang mengenai tata krama dalam bentuk verbal, misalnya penggunaan *keigo* (penghargaan). *Keigo* terdiri dari *sonkeigo* (kehormatan untuk menaikkan posisi lawan bicaranya), *kenjougo* (kehormatan yang merendahkan diri kita sendiri), dan *teineigo* (kehormatan biasa dengan menggunakan *desu / masu*). Ketika pelajar menulis surat bisnis dalam bahasa Jepang, mereka menggunakan sopan santun dalam bentuk tertulis. Penggunaan bentuk verbal saat menulis adalah kesalahan. Pendapat seperti ini tidak tepat karena menulis surat dalam bahasa Jepang tidak sama dengan menulis artikel ilmiah yang menggunakan formulir tertulis. Di sisi lain, budaya *uchi* (dalam kelompok) dan *soto* (kelompok luar) berdampak pada penggunaan bahasa. Berbeda dari Bahasa Indonesia, menulis surat dalam bahasa Jepang sangat dipengaruhi oleh budaya *uchi* dan untuk itu yang akan mempengaruhi diksi dalam surat bisnis. Saat menulis surat kepada orang dan perusahaan yang *soto*, maka *keigo* dan beberapa frasa khusus harus digunakan. Ada berbagai kata dan frasa yang digunakan ketika berbicara tentang orang yang termasuk dalam *uchi* kepada orang lain yang dianggap sebagai *soto*. Ini adalah karakteristik dalam bahasa Jepang. Alasan penelitian ini adalah untuk memahami bagaimana aplikasi budaya *uchi* dan *soto* dalam huruf Jepang, khususnya email bisnis Jepang. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Teknik yang digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data adalah melalui tinjauan pustaka. Sumber data berasal dari dokumen surat dan buku teks dari kursus *Tegami no Kakikata* (korespondensi dalam bahasa Jepang) dan *Bijinesu Nihongo* (Bahasa Jepang untuk Bisnis). Berdasarkan data yang dianalisis diketahui bahwa kita dapat menentukan bahwa ada beberapa persamaan dan perbedaan dalam email bisnis Jepang. Persamaannya adalah bahwa kedua huruf menggunakan bentuk formal untuk *uchi* dan *soto* dan memiliki tujuan yang jelas. Sementara perbedaannya adalah bahwa dalam email untuk *uchi*, pembukaan formal panjang, tubuh, dan teks penutup tidak diperlukan. Selain itu, terlalu formal tidak diperlukan seperti dalam surat *soto*, mereka juga memiliki frasa khusus yang digunakan di kedua email. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa email *soto*, pada awalnya nama penerima ditulis secara penuh, posisi mereka, serta nama perusahaan yang, di Jepang, ditulis terbalik. Namun surat untuk *uchi* menulis nama sebagai *Yamamoto San* atau *Katou Buchou*, ini tidak memungkinkan saat menulis email untuk *soto*. Email untuk *soto* pertama-tama harus menyebutkan departemen dan kemudian nama penerima, *Yamamoto sama* atau *Kikakubuchou Katousama*. Ketika berbicara dengan seseorang yang merupakan *soto* tentang seseorang yang *uchi*, mereka biasanya tidak menggunakan *keigo*. Email yang ditujukan kepada *uchi* dalam perusahaan apakah itu ke atasan atau bawahan, pembukaan akan menggunakan *otsukaresamadesu*. Namun email di atas untuk *soto* menulis dengan membuka *itsumoosewaninatteorimasu*.

**Kata Kunci:** Uchi, Soto, Surat Bisnis, Keigo, Budaya Jepang

## INTRODUCTION

A strong awareness for the importance of understanding the culture of *uchi* (in-groups) and *soto* (out-groups) came about when the writer noticed a misunderstanding occurred when interacting with Japanese people. This misunderstanding comes from the lack of understanding about the culture of *uchi-soto* when doing business with Japanese people.

On the other hand, a lot of misunderstandings occur within Indonesians studying Japanese regarding the manners in verbal forms, for example the use of *keigo* (honorifics). When learners write letters in Japanese, they use manners in written forms. The usage of verbal forms when writing is a mistake. Opinions like this aren't exactly correct because writing letters in Japanese is not the same as writing a scientific article that uses written forms.

Different from Bahasa Indonesia, writing letters in Japanese is heavily influenced by the culture of *uchi* and *soto* that will affect the diction in the letter. When writing letters to people and companies who are *soto*, then *keigo* and some special phrases should be used. *Keigo* consists of *sonkeigo* (honorifics to raise the position of the interlocutor), *kenjougo* (honorifics that lower ourselves), and *teineigo* (regular honorifics by using *desu/masu*).

The reason for this research is to understand how applications of the culture of *uchi* and *soto* in Japanese letters, specifically Japanese business email.

The result is to describe cultural literacy in Japanese, in this research which is to describe cultural literacy of *uchi* and *soto* in email.

### Literature Review

#### Written and Verbal forms in Japanese

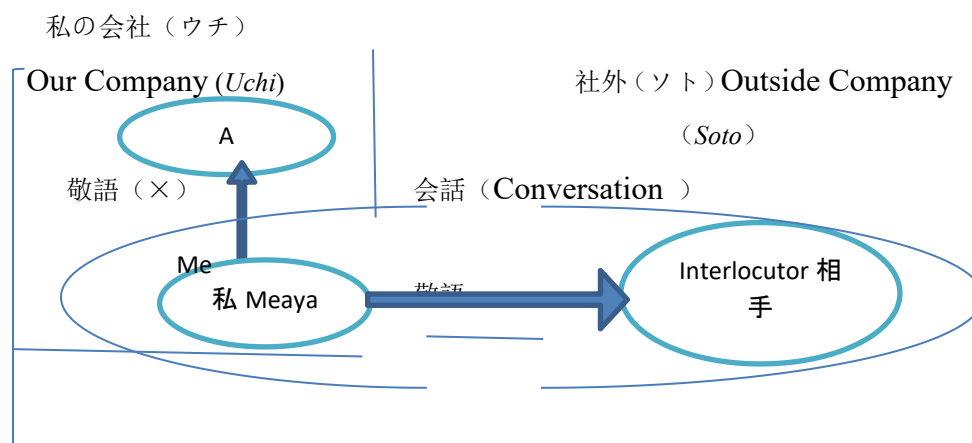
Nagara (1989, p.44) has stated that some characteristics in the spoken form are that sentence structure is relatively shorter, often not in order, and ends with *da*, *desu*, *masu*, and *de arimasu*. In the spoken form, the disappearance of certain elements in a sentence often occur, the usage of *joseigo* and *danseigo* (Male and Female tendencies in language) and *keigo* often occur but the usage of *kango* (The vocabulary which refers to that portion of the Japanese vocabulary that originated in Chinese or has been created from elements borrowed from Chinese) is less likely to occur. At the end of sentence Verbal forms will often use particles such as, *yo*, *ne*, *sa*, and *wa*, and substitute words like *kore*, *sore*, and *are*.

Regarding the characteristics of written forms, Nagara (1989, p.44) explains that sentence structure used are relatively long, in order, and ends with *de aru*. In the written form, the disappearance of certain sentence elements seldom occur, *joseigo*, *danseigo*, and *keigo* are also not used, but *kango* will often be used. Particles at the end of sentences such as *ne*, and *yo* are not used except for *ka*.

#### Japanese Culture *Uchi* and *Soto*

Hiroyuki (2012, p.24) explains the concept of *uchi* and *soto* within Japanese companies as so.

**Scheme 1. The Concept of *Uchi* and *Soto* (Company)**



Based on the scheme above, the concept of *uchi* and *soto* has an effect towards the usage of language. There is a difference of words and expressions when speaking to someone who falls into *uchi* when speaking to someone who falls into *soto*. When speaking to someone who is a *soto* regarding someone who is a *uchi*, they would normally not use *keigo*.

Within the Japanese community, the influence of *shudanshugi* (Collectivism) is shown through the fact that Japanese people are very group oriented, often prioritizing the commons rather than the privates. In this case, Japanese people would rather accentuate the company rather than themselves. This is shown in how they introduce themselves. To Japanese people, the company is regarded as *uchi* and the opposite as *soto*. The connection between the concept of *uchi* and *soto* with language, particularly happens in the usage of *keigo*.

**RESERACH METHOD**

This research uses the descriptive qualitative method. The technique used to gather data is through literature review. The source of data is from documents of letters and textbooks from the *Tegami no Kakikata* (correspondency in Japanese) course and *BijinesuNihongo*(Japanese for Business).

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

When writing emails in Japanese, *uchi* and *soto* will greatly affect the word usage and expressions used within the email. When writing email to someone or a company that's regarded as a *soto*, then *keigo* must be used like this example of a letter.

エスカレーション (Email for *uchi*)  
 件名: リーダー研修の担当者について

エスカレーション (Email for *soto*)  
 件名: 就職〇〇フェア 08 担当の件

山本様

(1)

おつかれさまです。

(2)

いただいたメールの「リーダー研修」についてですが、  
担当者が田中さんなので、そちらに転送しておきました。

(3)

追って田中さんからご連絡があるかと思えます。

(4)

以上、よろしくお願ひします。

(5)

松山

(6)

(sumber: Okumura & Kamabuchi, 2016:135)

遠藤様

( C C : 企画部佐々木 )

(1)

いつも大変お世話になっております。

(2)

弊社主催予定の「就職〇〇フェア 08」について、  
ご関心をお持ちいただきありがとうございます。

(3)

今回、企画部の佐々木が窓口になっておりますので、  
お問い合わせいただいたメールを転送しておきました。

(4)

追って佐々木より直接連絡させていただきますので、  
どうぞよろしくお願ひいたします。

(5)

取り急ぎご連絡まで。

(6)

株式会社 A B 人材 吉田

(7)

(sumber: Okumura & Kamabuchi, 2016:135)

According to the email above, we can determine that there are some similarities and differences in a Japanese business email. The similarities are that both letters use the formal form for *uchi* and *soto* and have a clear purpose. While the differences are that in the email for *Uchi* a long formal opening, body, and closing text is not needed. In addition, being too formal is not needed like in the *soto* letter, they also have special phrases used in both emails.

Details within the email also have differences such as the receiver's name, in the *soto* email (1) is further polite by adding cc for Sasaki. Sasaki is *uchi*, when mentioning *uchi* to *soto*, then “*Sama*” is used instead of “*San*”, the equivalent of “Sir” or “Ma’am”

In other emails, it is shown that *soto* emails, in the beginning the receiver's name is written in full, their position, as well as the name of the company which, in Japan, is written in reverse. However for letters for inside the company or *uchi* writes the name as *Yamamoto Sama*(山本様). Even in other emails, receivers are addressed as *KatouBuchou*(加藤部長), this is not allowed when writing emails for *soto*. Emails for *soto* should first mention the department and then the name of the receiver, for example *KikakubuchouKatousama*(企画部長 加藤様).

Email addressed to *uchi* within the company whether it was to a superior or a subordinate, the opening will use (2) *otsukaresamadesu* (お疲れさまです). However the above email for *soto* writes with the opening (2) *itsumoosewaninatteorimasu* (いつもお世話になっております). Which is an even more polite inserting the writer's name before or after it. In the *uchi* email above (5) *Douzoyoroshikuonegaishimasu* (どうぞよろしくお願ひします) and does

not use *kenjougo*, different from the *soto* email uses *kenjougo* (5) *DouzoYoroshikuOnegaiitashimasu* (どうぞよろしく願いいたします) and ends with the added phrase (6) *toriisogigorenrakumade* ( 取り急ぎご連絡まで) which is further polite.

In other emails, it is shown that *soto* emails are not very different from a superior *uchi*, especially in the usage of *sonkeigo* and *kenjougo*. So, in *uchi*, *jougekankei* (Superior-Subordinate Relationships) remains a thing to be aware of.

### CONCLUSION

There is a correlation between *uchi-soto* and *keigo*. *Keigo* has ties too with *jougekankei*. This research has shown clearly the usage of *uchi-soto* in Japanese business emails. The number of sentences in *soto* emails are greater than *uchi* emails, this shows that there's a correlation between sentence length and politeness in language.

### REFERENCES

- Kaneko H. (2012). *Shokyuuga Owattara Hajimeyou: Nihongo Keigo Toreninggu*. Tokyo: Asuku Shuppan.
- Nagara, S. (1989). *Buntai*. Tokyo: Aratake Shuppan.
- Okumura, K. (2016). *Shigoto no Nihongo: meeru no kakikata*. Tokyo: Aruku Shuppan.
- (2018). [email.chotto.net/example/in-office/wabi.html](http://email.chotto.net/example/in-office/wabi.html).
- (2018). [email.chotto.net/example/out-office/wabi.html](http://email.chotto.net/example/out-office/wabi.html).
- (2018). [email.chotto.net/example/in-office/thanks.html](http://email.chotto.net/example/in-office/thanks.html).
- (2018). [email.chotto.net/example/out-office/thanks.html](http://email.chotto.net/example/out-office/thanks.html).