

STYLE-SHIFTING IN THE JAPANESE TV SHOW “GEINOUIJIN KAKUZUKE CHECK 2025 OSHOUGATSU SUPESHARU”

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to examine the phenomenon of style-shifting in a Japanese television program, *Geinoujin Kakuzuke Check 2025 Oshougatsu Supesharu*. In this program, the host's often move from formal form (*masu-kei*) to informal form (*futsuu-kei*) and vice versa when having a conversation. This study employs a qualitative descriptive discourse analysis approach, drawing on the theoretical framework of social distance and situational factors, to explore how shifts in speech patterns reveal social dynamics and shape conversational interactions. According to the findings, the host employs *Futsuu-kei* (-Distant) to adjust to the environment and *Masu-kei* (+Distant) to maintain professionalism when introducing, summarizing, and posing questions. In this program, style-shifting is utilized as an adaptive communication approach to match the conversational situation while also indicating social position.

Keywords: Style-Shifting, Host, Formal, Informal

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a means of communication between individuals, enabling them to understand ideas and speech in social interactions (Salsabila, 2023). Language also exhibits various forms. According to Sarumaha and Yuliana (in Ambarwati et al., 2023), language variation refers to the way individuals use language, which differs depending on the topic of discussion, the interlocutor, the person being referred to, and the medium of communication. The use of language variation influences the meaning or intent conveyed by the speaker to the listener based on the given context. One country with a highly structured language variation system is Japan. Japanese has a well-organized system of politeness and formality, particularly in the use of formal and informal

language. Formal language is typically used in introductions, official events, or interactions with individuals of higher status or those deserving respect. In contrast, informal language is used in conversations with close friends or family members (Pramandhani, 2021). The distinction between formal and informal language is reflected in the use of *masu-kei* and *futsuu-kei* in conversations. *Futsuu-kei* represents the most basic level of verb conjugation and is used by speakers when interacting with familiar interlocutors (Happiness et al., 2020). Meanwhile, *masu-kei* is a polite form of speech (Najoan, 2024). For instance, *hana-da* and *hana-desu* both mean "This is a flower," but *hana-da* indicates social closeness, whereas *hana-desu* conveys politeness and formality (Cao, 2024).

According to Maynard (in Tobaru, 2024), shifts in speech style within *masu*-forms are strongly influenced by the speaker's awareness of their interlocutor. Speakers use the *masu* form when they perceive their interlocutor to have a higher social status or when there is a psychological distance between them. Conversely, the plain form is used in casual conversations with close friends, reflecting psychological closeness and a lower degree of awareness of the interlocutor.

The use of formal and informal speech forms can occur within a single conversation, a phenomenon known as style-shifting. According to Labov (in Mulyadi et al., 2021), style-shifting is defined as the shift from a formal to an informal style or vice versa. In general, style shifts occur due to external factors, as "style-shifting within a fixed context is seen as a result of speakers envisioning different audiences." This phenomenon is not limited to daily conversations but also appears in entertainment media.

Understanding style-shifting is essential in the study of sociolinguistics, as it reveals how speakers adapt their language to various social dynamics and conversational settings. One example can be observed in the annual Japanese television program *Geinoujin Kakuzuke Check 2025 Oshougatsu Supesharu*, where the host spontaneously shifts their speech style between formal and informal depending on the situation, interaction, and emotions they experience.

Previous studies have widely examined the phenomenon of style-shifting. *Ikuta* (in Tobaru, 2024) found that in talk shows and interviews, the use of informal speech reflects interpersonal "distance" rather than merely indicating "politeness" or "formality." Another study by *Ikuta* (2021) revealed that shifts in speech style are not necessarily related to gender identity but are more influenced by conversational context, topic changes, and communication needs, such as creating humor or conveying a particular attitude.

Mulyadi et al. (2021) highlighted that style-shifting occurs not only in spoken communication but also in written texts, such as instructions for food, beverages, and pharmaceutical products. These language shifts are influenced more by the content of communication than by the audience's status or situation. Smith (2013) also found that in interactions between native and non-native Japanese speakers, most pairs tended to use one dominant speech style. Interestingly, all speakers, including non-native speakers, engaged in style-shifting based on conversational context. Furthermore, Raudyatzahra and Arianingsih (2024) also conducted a study on style-shifting, focusing on *yakuwarigo* in the game *Ensemble Stars!! Music*. They identified three types of *yakuwarigo*: *danseigo* (masculine speech), *joseigo* (feminine speech), and *onee-kotoba*. The use of *yakuwarigo* is predominantly characterized by *danseigo* (123 data), followed by *onee-kotoba* (42 data), and *joseigo* (29 data), out of a total of 194 data.

This study aims to examine the adaptive use of *masu-kei* and *futsuu-kei* by hosts in television programs, focusing on how they strategically shift speech styles to engage participants and audiences effectively. The difference in this study lies in its data source, as it specifically focuses on the television program "*Geinoujin Kakuzuke Check 2025 Oshougatsu Supesharu*" (芸能人格付けチェック 2025 年お正月スペシャル), with Masatoshi Hamada as the primary subject of analysis.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the speech style shifts employed by the host in *Geinoujin Kakuzuke Check 2025 Oshougatsu Supesharu*, particularly how the alternation between *masu-kei* and *futsuu-kei* serves as a strategy to balance professionalism with interactive engagement. This study also aims to investigate how external factors such as conversational context, participant interactions, and emotional expressions influence these shifts. To

achieve these goals, this study uses a qualitative descriptive approach. Data is collected through the “*Simak Catat*” technique by observing and recording selected conversations between the host and three different teams.

The findings of this study indicate that the host in *Geinoujin Kakuzuke Check 2025 Oshougatsu Supesharu* strategically shifts between *masu-kei* (+Distant) and *futsuu-kei* (-Distant) to adjust social distance with participants. These results highlight the flexibility of speech style adaptation in media discourse.

This study highlights the role of style-shifting in TV discourse and how it shapes audience perception. It also helps Japanese language learners understand the flexibility of formal and informal speech. Additionally, these findings can benefit media professionals by improving communication strategies to better engage audiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Style-shifting plays a significant role in communication, particularly in shaping social relationships and interaction dynamics. By understanding style-shifting, we can gain deeper insights into how speakers adjust their speech to navigate social interactions more effectively. In Japanese, style-shifting is often observed through the alternation between *masu-kei* (formal) and *futsuu-kei* (informal) speech styles. This study examines how speech style shifts occur in the Japanese television program *Geinoujin Kakuzuke Check 2025 Oshougatsu Supesharu*, focusing on how the host adjusts their speech to manage social distance and engagement with participants. According to Jones & Ono (2008), Style-shifting refers to the switching between two or more language styles, even if it looks contrast, in a conversation or written text. This shift is typically influenced by factors such as the level of formality, social status between speakers, and the degree of social distance. However, these factors generally remain stable throughout a conversation or within a text.

Ikuta (in *Shinkuma*, 2014) stated that the shift from a formal to an informal style reflects "distance" in interpersonal relationships rather than merely indicating "politeness" or "formality." Furthermore, style-shifting occurs even when social factors such as age, social status, and formality remain unchanged. *Ikuta* categorized these shifts into two levels of distance: [+Distant] and [-Distant]. [+Distant] is used when the speaker employs a formal style to maintain distance from the interlocutor, while [-Distant] signifies closeness through the use of informal language.

Additionally, *Ikuta* identified two primary situations in which speakers tend to shift their speech style:

1. When expressing empathy toward the interlocutor, shifting from [+Distant] to [-Distant] to reinforce agreement. For example, changing from "*zuibun ii n desu ne*" to "*zuibun ii no ne*."
2. When asking personal questions, speakers tend to shift from [-Distant] to [+Distant] to respect the interlocutor's privacy.

These findings indicate that speech style shifts are not solely based on social hierarchy but also function as a communicative strategy to adjust relationships with interlocutors.

Additionally, *Shinkuma* (2014) explained that style-shifting can occur within a single conversational context, even when social factors remain constant. He identified six factors that influence shifts between formal and informal speech styles:

1. Introducing a new topic (informal to formal)
2. Closing a topic (informal to formal)
3. Expressing emotions (formal to informal)
4. Using self-referential expressions (formal to informal)
5. Asking questions for confirmation or inference (formal to informal)
6. Adjusting to the conversational context (formal to informal or vice versa)

This study will adopt the theories of *Ikuta* and *Shinkuma* as the foundation for analyzing speech style shifts between *masu-kei* and *futsuu-kei* in the *Geinoujin Kakuzuke Check* TV Show. By examining the speech pattern

changes used by the host, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of style-shifting in Japanese media.

Previous studies have examined style-shifting in various contexts, highlighting its role in both social and contextual interactions. Ikuta (2021; in Tobaru 2024) investigated speech style shifts during interviews, while Mulyadi et al. (2021) analyzed language style changes in written texts. Similarly, Smith (2013) explored how native Japanese speakers and learners adjust their speech styles based on different contexts, and Raudyatzahra and Arianingsih (2024) examined *yakuwarigo* in the game *Ensemble Stars!! Music*, identifying three types: *danseigo* (masculine speech), *joseigo* (feminine speech), and *onee-kotoba*. However, these studies primarily focused on everyday conversations, interviews, and written discourse, leaving a gap in understanding how television hosts employ style-shifting to adapt their communication. Given the performative nature of interactions in television programs, where hosts must balance professionalism and engagement, little research has explored how they strategically shift between formal (*masu-kei*) and informal (*futsuu-kei*) speech styles. This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing the speech adaptations of the host in *Geinoujin Kakuzuke Check 2025 Oshougatsu Supesharu*, contributing to a deeper understanding of language variation in media communication and its implications for sociolinguistics.

METHODOLOGY

The research method employed in this study is a qualitative descriptive method. Moelong (in Dinizar & Haryanti, 2023) states that qualitative research focuses on observing the research object by gathering descriptive information in the form of written or spoken data from individuals or groups involved in the study.

Additionally, the data collection technique used is the "*Simak Catat*" technique. According to Sudaryanto (in Candra et al., 2023), the "*Simak*" method is a linguistic research method that involves observing the use of language being studied. Meanwhile, the "*Catat*" (note-taking) technique is used to document data by recording information obtained through the observation method. After recording, the data is then classified according to its type (Sari, Pramudiyanto, & Dhamina, 2024).

First, the researcher will collect conversational data focusing on speech style shifts that occur during interactions between the host and the participants. Then, the researcher will classify which speech style is used more frequently, adjusting the analysis based on distance and communication context. The data source for this study is the television program *Geinoujin Kakuzuke Check 2025 Oshougatsu Supesharu* (芸能人格付けチェック 2025 年お正月スペシャル), where the study will specifically examine the host's speech style shifts when introducing and interacting with the three teams. The first team, *Actor*, consist of *Toshiaki Karasawa* and *Yukiyoshi Ozawa*. The second team, *Forest*, is represented by *Manami Higa* and *Takanori Iwata*, meanwhile the third team, *366 Days*, includes *Eiji Akaso* and *Moka Kamishiraishi*.

DISCUSSION

The research findings presented below constitute the results of this study.

Table 1. The use of *Masu-kei* and *Futsuu-kei* in *Geinoujin Kakuzuke Check 2025 Oshougatsu Supesharu*

Type	Distance	Frequency of Use	Function
<i>Masu-kei</i>	+Distant	11	Opening a topic of conversation, Closing a topic of conversation, Asking a question, Adjusting to the context
<i>Futsuu-kei</i>	-Distant	8	Adjusting to the context, Asking a question

Total	19	-
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Source : author's work

Table 2. Style-shifting Based on Situation in *Geinoujin Kakuzuke Check 2025 Oshougatsu Supesharu*

Situation	Formal	Informal	Frequency
Opening a topic of conversation	1	-	1
Adjusting to the context	3	6	9
Asking a question	5	1	6
Closing a topic of conversation	3	-	3
Total	12	8	19

Source : author's work

Based on table 1 and 2 above, it is evident that the style-shifting performed by the host in *Geinoujin Kakuzuke Check 2025 Oshougatsu Supesharu* is predominantly characterized by the use of informal language to adjust to the conversational context. Meanwhile, formal language is more frequently used in situations involving questioning, closing a topic, and opening a topic. The host tends to maintain social distance (+Distant) from the participants, particularly when employing formal styles during question-and-answer sessions. Conversely, informal language (-Distant) is utilized when the host seeks to adapt to the conversation's context, creating a more familiar atmosphere and reducing the social distance between the host and the participants.

Next, the discussion on style-shifts will be presented by analyzing three selected conversations between the host and three different teams in *Geinoujin Kakuzuke Check 2025 Oshougatsu Supesharu* below.

Table 3. Conversation between Host and Team Actor(*Toshiaki Karasawa, Yuki Yoshi Ozawa*)

Name	Japanese	English
Host	<i>Saa, ichiryuu geinoujin no mina-sama, akemashite omedetou gozaimasu. Kotoshi dou naru ka, Kirei ni kiete iku no ka, Ichiryuu de nokoru no ka</i>	<i>"Well, to all top-tier celebrities, Happy New Year. What will happen this year? Will you fade away? Or will you remain the best celebrity?"</i>
Karasawa	<i>Mou, yappari zenkai wakattande.</i>	<i>"Well, I think I understood it from the last time."</i>
Host	<i>Maa, anata no saigo no wa saikou ni yokatta. Jishin manman de baan dashite.</i>	<i>"Well, your last performance was truly excellent. You presented it with full confidence."</i>
Karasawa	<i>Are hontou ni honki deshita.</i>	<i>"I was really serious about that."</i>

Host	<i>Karasawa-sama ga aikawatta to omou.</i>	"I think Karasawa-san has really changed."
Karasawa	<i>N, tsuyoi mikata to omoimasu.</i>	"Yes, I think I have a strong ally."
Host	<i>Dou desu ka jishin?</i>	"How do you feel? Confident?"
Ozawa	<i>Mochiron arimasu yo.</i>	"Of course, I am."
Host	<i>Hontou desu ka?</i>	"Really?"
Ozawa	<i>Hai, hai.</i>	"Yes, yes."
Host	<i>Hyouhyou toshite dotsukitain te.</i>	"You look so calm; it makes me want to punch you."
Ozawa	<i>Dotsuitara eeyan, oshougatsu kara dotsuitara eeyan!</i>	"Go ahead, punch me! Start punching from the New Year!"
Host	<i>Iya, mou saigo made yappari ichiryuu de itadakereba to omoimasu.</i>	"Well, I really hope you remain top-class until the very end."

Source : author's work

Table 3 presents a conversation between the Host and Team Actor, consisting of *Toshiaki Karasawa* and *Yukiyoshi Ozawa*, both of whom have previously participated in this program in past years. In this interaction, the Host asks Team Actor about their readiness to take part in *Geinoujin Kakuzuke Check 2025 Oshougatsu Supesharu*. Meanwhile, the shifts in speech style (*style-shifting*) employed by the Host when interacting with Team Actor are outlined in Table 4.

Table 4 : The results of the style-shift in Table 3

Style-shift	Sentence	Context
Formal (Masu-kei), +Distant	<i>"Saa, ichiryuu geinoujin no mina-sama, akemashite omedetou gozaimasu."</i>	Opening a topic
	"Well, to all top-tier celebrities, Happy New Year."	
	<i>Dou desu ka jishin?</i> "How is your confidence?"	Asking a questions
	<i>Hontou desu ka?</i> "Is that true?"	Asking a questions

	<i>Iya, mou saigo made yappa ichiryuu de itadakereba to omoimasu.</i> "Well, I hope you remain top-tier until the end."	Closing a topic
Informal (Futsuu-kei), -Distant	<i>Kotoshi dou naru ka, Kirei ni kiete iku no ka, Ichiryuu de nokoru no ka</i> "What will happen this year? Will you fade away beautifully? Or will you remain the best celebrity?"	Adjusting to the context
	<i>Maa, anata no saigo no wa saikou ni yokatta. Jishin manman de baan dashite.</i> "Well, your last performance was amazing. You confidently showed up!"	Adjusting to the context
	<i>Karasawa-sama ga aikawatta to omou.</i> "I think Karasawa-san has really changed."	Adjusting to the context
	<i>Hyouhyou to shite dotsukitain te.</i> "You look so calm, I just want to hit you!"	Adjusting to the context

Source : author's work

As shown in Table 4, the host employs formal language when opening and closing a topic, as well as when asking personal questions, to maintain a respectful distance from the participants (+Distant). Conversely, informal language is used to align with the participants' context and foster a sense of familiarity (-Distant).

Table 5 : Conversation between Host and Team Forest(Manami Higa, Takanori Iwata)

Name	Japanese	English
Host	<i>Iwata-sama dou desu ka?</i>	"Mr. Iwata, how are you feeling?"
Iwata	<i>Iya wa mou, jishin shika inai desu.</i>	"Well, I'm full of confidence!"
Host	<i>Ochitara ee nen! Enryo sen de ee kara!</i>	"It's fine if you fail! Don't hold back!"
Iwata	<i>Iya iya!</i>	"No, no!"
Host	<i>Higa-san wa dou desu ka? Zenkai wa.</i>	"And how about you, Mr. Higa? Last time..."
Higa	<i>Hai, yonen mae, sanku sasete itadaita n desu kedo, 2020-nen ni ryuujin deshita. Nanode, kyou wa ichiryuu de kaeritai to omoimasu.</i>	"Yes, four years ago, I had the opportunity to participate, but in 2020, I was a failure. So, today I want to go home as a top-tier celebrity."

Host	<i>Wakarimashita.</i>	"Understood."
Higa	<i>Dorama wo seotte ru node.</i>	"I'm carrying the weight of the drama on my shoulders."
Host	<i>Okawarimashita.</i>	"I see."
Higa	<i>Hai.</i>	"yes"

Source : author's work

Table 4 presents a conversation between the Host and Team Forest, consisting of *Manami Higa* and *Takanori Iwata*. Among them, *Higa* has previously participated in this program in past years. In this interaction, the Host asks Team Forest about their readiness to take part in Geinoujin Kakuzuke Check 2025 Oshougatsu Supesharu. Meanwhile, the shifts in speech style (style-shifting) employed by the Host when interacting with Team Forest are outlined in Table 6.

Table 6 : The results of the style-shift in Table 5

Style-shift	Sentence	Context
Formal (Masu-kei), +Distant	<i>Iwata-sama dou desu ka?</i> "How are you, Mr. Iwata?"	Asking a questions
	<i>Higa-san wa dou desu ka? Zenkai wa.</i> "How about you, Ms. Higa? How was it last time?"	Asking a questions
	<i>Wakarimashita.</i> "Understood."	Closing a topic
	<i>Okawarimashita.</i> "Noted."	Closing a topic
Informal (Futsuu-kei), -Distant	<i>Ochitara ee nen! Enryo sen de ee kara!</i> "It's okay if you fail! No need to hold back!"	Adjusting to the Context

Source : author's work

As shown in Table 6, the host employs formal language when asking personal questions and closing a topic, to maintain a respectful distance from the participants (+Distant). Conversely, informal language is used to align with the participants' context and foster a sense of familiarity (-Distant).

Tabel 7 : Conversation between Host and Team 366 Days(*Eiji Akaso, Moka Kamishiraishi*)

Name	Japanese	English
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Eiji	<i>Nanka hontou ni detemitai to omotteta node.</i>	"I really wanted to participate in this show."
Host	<i>Totsuzen hora ima made no nagai aida gorannatta koto aru wake deshous.</i>	"Suddenly, you've seen this show for a long time, right?"
Eiji	<i>Hai.</i>	"Yes."
Host	<i>Nande wakaranai nda</i>	"Why don't you understand?"
Eiji	<i>Tte omottari mo suru toki mo arun janai desu ka? De, simulation toka shite kore nara ikesou da na mitaina.</i>	"Sometimes I think that, don't you? So, I did some simulations, thinking 'I might be able to do this.'"
Host	<i>Kamishiraishi-san wa dou desu ka? Jishin no hodo wa.</i>	"Ms. Kamishiraishi, how about you? How confident are you?"
Moka	<i>Arimasu.</i>	"I am confident."
Host	<i>O, aru!</i>	"Oh, you are!"
Moka	<i>Watashi takoyaki ippai tabechatta n desu yo ne, zesshoku sarete iru no ikaga tte chotto watashi wa manpuku yue no kankaku wo ikashitai to omoimasu.</i>	"I ended up eating a lot of takoyaki. While others are fasting, I'd like to make the most of my full stomach."
Host	<i>Docchi ga yuuri ka desu ne.</i>	"I see, I wonder which one will have the advantage?"
Moka	<i>Watashi da to omoimasu.</i>	"I think it will be me."
Host	<i>Wakarimashita. Ganbatte itadakimashou.</i>	"Understood. Let's do our best!"

Source : author's work

Table 7 presents a conversation between the Host and Team 366 Days, consisting of Eiji Akaso and Moka Kamishiraishi, both of whom are participating in this program for the first time. In this interaction, the Host asks Team 366 Days about their readiness to take part in Geinoujin Kakuzuke Check 2025 Oshougatsu Supesharu. Meanwhile, the shifts in speech style (style-shifting) employed by the Host when interacting with Team 366 Days are outlined in Table 8.

Table 8 : The results of the style-shift in Table 7

Style-shift	Sentence	Context
Formal	<i>Docchi ga yuuri ka desu ne.</i>	Adjusting to the Context

(Masu-kei), +Distant	"Which one has the advantage?"	
	<i>Kamishiraishi-san wa dou desu ka?</i> <i>Jishin no hodo wa.</i> "How about you, Ms. Kamishiraishi? How confident are you?"	Asking a question
	<i>Wakarimashita. Ganbatte itadakimashou.</i> "Understood. Let's do our best!"	Closing a Topic
Informal (Futsuu-kei), -Distant	<i>Totsuzen hora ima made no nagai aida gorannatta koto aru wake deshous.</i> "Suddenly, you know, you've seen it for a long time, right?"	Adjusting to the Context
	<i>Oh, aru!</i> "Oh, you have!"	Adjusting to the Context
	<i>Nande wakaranai nda?</i> "Why don't you understand?"	Asking a question

Source : author's work

As shown in Table 8, the host employs formal language when asking personal questions and closing a topic, and adjusting to the context, to maintain a respectful distance from the participants (+Distant). Conversely, informal language is used to align with the participants' context and asking a question (-Distant).

In the introduction of participants on *Geinoujin Kakuzuke Check 2025 Oshougatsu Supesharu*, the host consistently adjusts their speech style according to the context and communication objectives. The host predominantly employs a formal speech style (+Distant) to demonstrate professionalism and maintain a level of distance from the participants. This formal style is particularly evident when the host asks questions and concludes discussions. However, the host more frequently shifts to an informal speech style (-Distant) when adapting to the participants, aiming to add humor, create a relaxed atmosphere, and reduce social distance, while the host only uses an informal form once when asking a question. Overall, style-shifting in this program not only reflects social hierarchy but also serves as an adaptive communication strategy.

Additionally, this study aligns with *Ikuta's* theory (as cited in *Shinkuma*, 2014), which states that speakers tend to use a more formal style (+Distant) when asking personal questions. It also supports *Shinkuma's* (2014) theory that speakers shift their speech style when opening or closing a topic and when asking questions. Furthermore, speakers may adjust their language between formal and informal depending on the context. Furthermore, this aligns with the findings of Mulyadi et al. (2021) and Smith (2013), who stated that shifts between formal and informal speech styles occur depending on how speakers adjust their speech to their conversation partners.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings suggest that the host of *Geinoujin Kakuzuke Check 2025 Oshougatsu Supesharu* intentionally adjusts their speech style to manage social distance and foster engagement in televised conversations. This study underscores the importance of language adaptation in media and its influence on audience perception of communication dynamics. Beyond its linguistic contributions, these findings offer practical insights for Japanese language learners, particularly in understanding the appropriate use of formal and informal speech in various social contexts. As a recommendation, future research could analyze the style-shifting strategies used by participants or examine television programs with different formats and genres. Such studies could further enrich the understanding of language style shifts in Japanese public communication, particularly within media contexts.

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