‘I’m Rich, You Know?’: Self-Praise as Performance and the Role of First Person Singular Forms in Japanese Conversation

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1 Introduction

Watashi-wa atama-ga totemo ii-kara nandemo dekimasu ‘Because I’m so smart, I can do anything’. This was a statement made by one of my students during an oral interview test in my Japanese language class. Though it was a grammatically ‘correct’ utterance, it left me with something like a cultural bad aftertaste. I felt a little annoyed. At the time, not knowing how to respond appropriately on the spot, I just said, *soo desu ka* ‘Is that right?’, and moved on to the next question. This little incident was the beginning of my journey to explore linguistic practices and perspectives on bragging. How do people brag in everyday talk? How do people react to bragging? Are there some ways in which one can brag without annoying others? What does the act of bragging accomplish in everyday talk?

Bragging is a stereotypical act of self-praise. Self-praise itself is an act of self-disclosure that has been defined as a ‘speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to the speaker for some “good” (possession, accomplishment, skill etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the potential audience’ (Dayter 2016: 65). Despite this ‘positive valuing’, self-praise can be understood as problematic or inappropriate social behavior in light of politeness theories (e.g. Leech 1983, Brown and Levinson 1987). However, several self-praise studies on both online (e.g. Dayter 2016, 2018; Matley 2018, Tobback 2019, Ren and Guo 2020, Jin et al. 2022, Han et al.

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2024) and offline contexts (e.g. Wu 2011, 2012, Kim 2017, Maíz-Arévalo 2021, Itakura 2022) have challenged this view, identifying various pragmatic interactional strategies to mitigate the potential face threat created by self-praise.

Building on these past findings, the current study examines 53 hours of Japanese conversation (257 phone and face-to-face interactions between family members, close friends, or people who are meeting for the first time). Our attention focuses on the role of first person singular (1SG hereafter) forms in self-praise episodes. A close analysis of the self-praise episodes occurring with 1SG in the data shows that the speakers deliver positive favorable evaluations of themselves as 'staged' performances (Goffman 1959) and make deliberate use of specific language resources available to them to perform private and public discursive acts of self-praise. 1SG is one such linguistic resource and is instrumental in shaping and managing the self-praisers' identity construction and image projection.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 summarizes the findings of linguistic research on self-praise and Japanese 1SG in conversation. Section 3 states the study's goals and describes the database. Section 4 comprises the analysis and describes the patterns that emerged from the data, and Section 5 concludes the study with a summary and a discussion of the major findings.

2 Background

2.1 Self-Praise

Prior works on self-praise in the field of linguistics roughly comprise two groups—investigations of self-praise in online discourse or offline discourse (e.g. natural talk, interviews, TV programs, field observations). The vast majority of self-praise studies have focused on online communication and English. These studies also point out that self-praise is both more frequent and seen as more acceptable in online contexts than in offline contexts (Dayter 2016, 2018, Ren and Guo 2020, Jin et al. 2022). Dayter (2018: 184), for example, based on an examination of private WhatsApp chats and some offline conversations, asserted that 'self-praise is an unmarked speech behavior that is part of an everyday speech act repertoire'. This unmarkedness is demonstrated in her other study on 11 ballet-related Twitter accounts (Dayter 2016), which found that 31 percent of tweets in the dataset were self-praise statements, and that self-praise was 'the second most widely used pragmatic strategy' for all but one of the participants (Dayter 2016: 131).

Past studies also have reported on 'self-praise avoidance' (Pomerantz 1978) strategies to reduce the illocutionary effect of such speech acts. A key recurrent notion concerning what makes self-praise possible and appropriate is 'objectification' (Speer 2012, Wu 2012). Objectification is an overarching concept that covers many strategies to minimize/downgrade the impact of self-praise, such as self-praise delivered through a reported third party compliment (e.g. Underwood 2011, Wu 2012, Rüdiger and Dayter 2020); self-praise framed as a complaint (Dayter 2016, Jin et al. 2022), 'ostensible complaint' (e.g. Ren and Guo 2020, Lin and Chen 2022), or 'humblebragging' (Luo and Hancock 2020, Han et al. 2024); self-praise with a disclaimer (e.g. Speer 2012, Dayter 2016, Maíz-Arévalo 2021); self-praise plus shift of focus (e.g. Matley 2018, Tobback 2019, Jin et al. 2022); self-praise presented as an announceable fact (Speer 2012) or news report (Kim 2017); and the praising of a whole group of people including oneself (Ren and Guo 2020, Maíz-Arévalo 2021, Jin et al. 2022).

While these mitigation strategies are quite common in both online and offline interactions, there are some strategies specific to offline conversation and thus more relevant to the current study. One such strategy is to deliver self-praise in a multiturn format, which allows for coconstructed mitigation (Wu 2011, Kim 2017, Itakura 2022). Similarly, self-praise initiated by a coparticipant's compliment, question, or statement (Kim 2017) is another little discussed mitigation strategy. Another tactic to defuse the problematic potential of self-praise is to present a positive self-evaluation in the form of a joke, or a humorous or ironic comment (e.g. Wu 2011, Dayter 2016, 2018, Jin et al. 2022).

Though Dayter (2018: 188) pointed out the paucity of evidence to support any correlation between self-praise and specific linguistic features, a few studies have investigated linguistic features or lexical patterns of self-praise. Hedges are one of the common linguistic features mentioned in past literature. Tobback (2019), analyzing 91 LinkedIn summaries in French and English, found that hedges played a crucial role as 'downgrading devices'. For example, *certain* 'certain' and *assez* 'rather', as well as *je pense* 'I believe' and *il me semble* 'it seems to me' are used to 'signal the lack of full commitment to the assertions they modify' (Tobback 2019: 658). The role of hedges in mitigating the impact of self-praise is also mentioned in research on Japanese, such as *chotto* 'a little', *tabun* 'probably', *toka* 'like', and *nanka* 'uhm' (Itakura 2022: 84, 87).

Another type of lexical item that cooccurs with self-praise is first person singular pronouns (Dayter 2016, Maíz-Arévalo 2021, Jin et al. 2022). Dayter (2016: 145–6) reported that first person pronouns (e.g. *I, my, me*) and constructions (e.g. *I'm, I've*) occurred frequently in her ballet-related Twitter data. Jin et al. (2022: 3947) used first person singular pronouns in their keyword sampling (e.g. [*I, proud*] or [*I, amazed*]) to automatically identify self-praise in Twitter, and found that personal pronouns and words related to time were the top words in their data on self-praise episodes (Jin et al. 2022: 3951). Incidentally, they found that a personal pronoun often occurs with a past tense verb (e.g. *I forgot what it's like to be good at school. Today I finished a thing we were doing so fast that everyone around me started asking ME for help instead of the prof*; Jin et al. 2002: 3951). Maíz-Arévalo (2021: 117) pointed out that in Spanish (a pro-drop language), when a speaker praises a whole group of people (including the speaker), the subject pronoun is omitted, as in *... pero qué bien cantamos. Somos los mejores* '(we) do sing really well, (we) are the best'. This stands in stark contrast to self-praise with a realized first person singular pronoun, as in *Yo es que soy muy bueno en esto del PowerPoint* 'I am really good at this PowerPoint thing' (Maíz-Arévalo 2021: 114).

In sum, the recent interest in self-praise has led to important contributions to the fields of linguistics and pragmatics. While many pragmatic and interactional strategies are used to minimize/downgrade the illocutionary force of self-praise, the role of 1SG in self-praise episodes has not been fully investigated. Before tackling this unexplored issue, let us lay out what has been said about Japanese 1SG in naturally occurring conversations.

2.2 Japanese 1SG in Conversation

Japanese 1SG, typically translated as 'I', has multiple forms, which are often said to 'differ in such features as politeness, rank, intimacy, and gender' (Jorden 1987: 59). The following list of 1SG forms is based on Noda et al. (2021: 18–9):

- *watashi*: 'I' (gentle)
- *watakushi*: more formal than *watashi*
- *atashi*: more informal than *watashi*
- *boku*: used primarily by boys and men; can also be used to address little boys (meaning 'you')
- *ore:* a rougher form used by older boys and men

Watashi is the most frequently mentioned 1SG form in language textbooks and linguistic research. It can be used by adult speakers in formal situations regardless of gender. However, according to Ono and Thompson (2003: 325), it is relatively infrequent in natural conversation. In an analysis of 21 everyday talks, they found many more tokens of *atashi* (84 occurrences out of 171) and *ore* (58 out of 171) than *watashi* (18 out of 171). Besides the forms already listed, *uchi* 'house' or 'inside' is another 1SG form, which is 'more informal and less feminine than *atashi*' (Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith 2004: 16). *Jibun* 'self' can also be used as 1SG and is characterized as 'the most gender-neutral and hierarchy-neutral 1SG pronoun available' (Yee & Wong 2021: 151).

A number of scholars have discussed the distinctive features of Japanese 1SG from typological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and sociocultural perspectives (e.g. Kuroda 1965, Shibatani 1990, Ono and Thompson 2003, Carpi and Iacus 2020, Yee and Wong 2021). For example, Ono and Thompson (2003: 325–7) reported the following features of Japanese 1SG, based on their conversation data:

- 1SG is relatively long. (First-person pronouns are typically one syllable long in many languages, but Japanese 1SGs are two or more syllables long.)
- 1SG is rare (fewer than one instance per page of transcript, or approximately one in every 22 clauses in their data).
- 1SG often occurs in a separate intonation unit from the predicate (58% of the time in their data).
- 1SG hardly occurs with the subject marker *ga* or the direct object marker *o.* (Over one-third of the tokens occurred with no particles.)
- 1SG is usually not semantically required to indicate the referent (70% of the time in their data).

As for the functions of 1SG, Ono and Thompson (2003) found that about 50 percent of 1SG forms in their data appeared in examples where 1SG is semantically required for referential clarity, and most of these were accompanied by a grammatical particle with a clear function, such as the contrastive marker *wa*. The other half, however, were not used for referential considerations, but instead had discourse-pragmatic functions, serving emotive and frame-setting purposes. Emotive 1SG occurs with a predicate expressing the emotion/feeling of the speaker and is not marked with any particle; it tends to occur in the same intonation unit as the predicate, sometimes appearing after the predicate (e.g. *sugoi-warukute-watashi* terrible-bad-1SG 'I (feel) terrible'; Ono & Thompson 2003: 330–1; see also Ono and Suzuki 1992, Ono 2006). In contrast, frame-setting 1SG tends to occur in a separate intonation unit from the predicate and to appear with particles and/or conjunctions, forming formulaic expressions (e.g. *atashi nanka* 'I um', *dakara atashi* 'so I', *de ore wa* 'and I', *demo ore wa* 'but I'; Ono & Thompson 2003: 338). Ono and Thompson (2003: 340)

argued that frame-setting 1SG 'provides a subjective framework for, or stance towards, the rest of the utterance'.

1SG is the most frequently reported cooccurring lexical feature in self-praise episodes in English and Spanish (Dayter 2016, Maíz-Arévalo 2021, Jin et al. 2022). However, unlike hedges and fillers, whose use for mitigation purposes is well documented, the role of 1SG in self-praise remains unexplored. The current study takes up this issue and demonstrates how 1SG is deployed as one of the linguistic resources available to self-praisers for staged performances (Goffman 1959).

3 The Present Study

3.1 Goals

In the current study, the unit of analysis is referred to as a 'self-praise episode'. As will be demonstrated, the majority of self-praise episodes in my data constitute sequences of two or more turns.

The analytical framework the study employs is the 'self-praise iceberg', which was originally proposed by Rüdiger and Dayter (2020), and Dayter (2021), and further developed and customized for the analysis of naturally occurring conversation by Aronsson and Rindstedt (2023). See Figure 1.

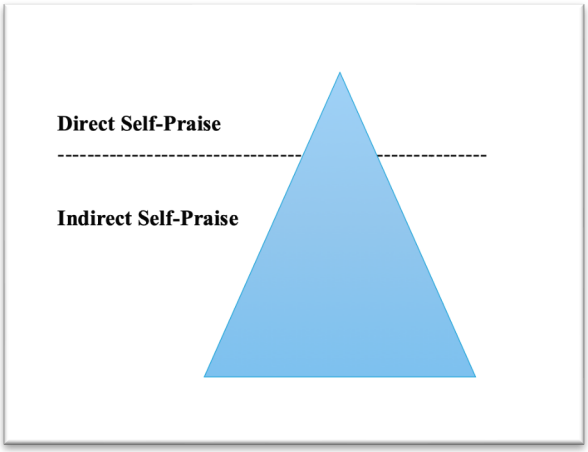

Figure 1: The Self-Praise Iceberg

Slightly modified from Aronsson and Rindstedt (2023: 85, Figure 1). See also Rüdiger and Dayter (2020), Dayter (2021)

Icebergs typically show only a small portion of their mass above the waterline, with the bulk of an iceberg remaining invisible underwater. In Figure 1, the dotted line represents the waterline; the tip of the iceberg, above the dotted line, represents the relatively rare act of direct self-praise or 'explicit brag statements' (Dayter 2021: 30), such as example (1) from my data. In a discussion with a graduate student about cheating at school, speaker K, a junior high school student, is bragging that his cheating method always works.

(1) Direct Self-Praise [Face-to-face conversation; ingroup] (Sadler 2024: 74)[1]
K: ... ora= bareta-koto-nanka-nai.
1SG exposed-NMLZ-DM-exist:NEG
'I have never been caught (cheating at school).'

The vast majority of self-praise corresponds to the part of the iceberg that is underwater: indirect self-praise or self-praise with mitigation. These are instances of either explicit or implicit positive self-disclosure where the speaker's 'intention or illocutionary force is reduced or mitigated by modification strategies' (Itakura 2022: 83). As discussed in Section 2, there are various types of modification strategies, such as delivering self-praise framed as a complaint or humor/joking; expressed with a disclaimer; presented in a multiturn sequence allowing reformulation, and so forth. In addition, the use of some lexis can minimize the effect of self-praise (e.g. *toka* 'like', *nanka* 'uhm'; Itakura 2022). As pointed out by Itakura (2022: 86), 'self-praise can be modified by different strategies in multiple layers in the conversational contexts' in which it occurs, and many self-praise episodes involve multiple turns and exchanges with coparticipants. Example (2), from my data, shows the occurrence of indirect self-praise in a bipartite turn format. U and M (both in their mid-20s) are childhood friends. Here, U is bragging about how he used to be good at sports.

(2) Indirect Self-Praise [Face-to-face conversation; ingroup] (Sadler 2024: 75)
U: ... datte-ore i- -- ... X- betsuni
but-1SG particularly
... jimanshiteru-wake-janai-kedo,
brag:PROG-NMLZ-COP:NEG-but
'… but I--, am not bragging but,'
M: un.
'Uh-huh'
U: ... chuugakkoo-wa-tomokaku ... kookoo-wa
middle school-CON-apart from high school-CON
... suggee-supootsu-dekita-n-da-yo.
extremely-sports-do:POT:PST-NMLZ-COP-SFP
'excluding (my) middle school years, (I) was very good at sports during high school.'
@@@[@@@@@]
M: [@@@@@]@@

In example (2), speaker U uses a turn-taking strategy to express his positive evaluation of himself. At the same time, he utilizes a couple of linguistic features to mitigate his self-praise, first, by presenting it with a disclaimer (*betsuni jimanshiteru-wake-janai-kedo* 'am not bragging but …'), which is followed by the coparticipant M's assent 'uh-huh', and second, by framing it as humorous, as evidenced by his laughter, in which the coparticipant joins.

[1] Transcription conventions are adapted from those of Du Bois et al. (1993). The equals sign means lengthening, and the brackets mean overlap. The @ sign indicates laughter. A sequence of dots represents a pause. Abbreviations follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules with the following additions: CON = 'contrastive'; CONT = 'continuative'; DM = 'discourse marker'; FILL = 'filler'; GER = 'gerund'; HED = 'hedge'; HUM = 'humble polite'; NOM = 'subject marker'; POL = 'polite'; POT = 'potential'; SFP = 'final particle'; TEN = 'tentative'; TOP = 'topic marker'; and VOL = 'volitional'.

It must be emphasized that many of the self-praise episodes found in my data are what Goffman (1959: 192) called 'guarded disclosure', which he explained thus: '[W]hen individuals are unfamiliar with each other's opinions and statuses, a feeling-out process occurs whereby one individual admits his views or statuses to another a little at a time'. The guarded disclosure can be an implicit type of self-praise, where the 'surface meaning of the textual discourse is different from the intended illocutionary act' (Ren & Guo 2020: 185), and thus the praise 'is not explicitly expressed but hinted at' (Matley 2018: 117). The gradual process of guarded disclosure can be performed by framing self-praise as an (ostensible) complaint (e.g. Wu 2011, Matley 2018, Ren and Guo 2020) or as humor/joking/irony (Wu 2011, Dayter 2016, 2018, Jin et al. 2022), or by responding to the other conversation participant's compliment or question (Kim 2017), and so forth.

The current study explores the ways in which conversation participants—both the self-praisers and the recipients of self-praise (i.e. the self-praisers' addressees)—jointly engage in self-praise episodes in different types of conversation. The study seeks the answers to the following questions:

1) How and how frequently is 1SG used when speakers present positive favorable evaluations of themselves in Japanese conversation?
2) What is the role of 1SG in self-praise episodes in Japanese conversation?

3.2 Data

A total of 257 audio recorded conversations (approximately 53 hours in total) constitute the database for this study. The first data source is a private collection of informal telephone and face-to-face talks. It has 40 audio recorded conversations (approximately 4 hours in total), which were recorded in private homes and restaurants in Japan and the United States. It includes same-sex and mixed-sex groups with 2 to 5 participants ranging in age from 15 to 50 years old. The second dataset comes from an open-to-the-public corpus called CallHome Japanese Speech (Canavan & Zipperlen 1996). This corpus consists of 120 audio recordings (about 19 hours in total), which are all dyadic phone conversations between friends and family. The third source is the Basic Transcription System for Japanese or BTSJ (Usami 2020). This audio recorded face-to-face conversation corpus has more than 300 transcripts, most of which are accompanied by audio files. Out of those, 97 audio recorded dyadic conversations between university students were selected for this study (29 hours); 55 of them are between friends, and 42 are between people meeting for the first time. The latter set—that is, the interactions between nonacquaintances—is included in this research to see the role of relationships between the speaker and coparticipants. As mentioned by Itakura (2022: 83), the BTSJ corpus includes some 'task-based (e.g., rejecting a request, invitations, and debates on given topics)' talk but the majority of the conversations are free talk. Note also that, because Itakura (2022) employed data from the same corpus, although it was a different version (Usami 2018), some of my data coincides with her data.

All 257 talks are categorized depending on the conversation type: 121 telephone conversations (about 20 hours); 94 ingroup face-to-face conversations (i.e. talk between friends or family members; about 20 hours); and 42 nonacquaintance face-to-face conversations (about 13 hours).

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Frequency of 1SG in Self-Praise Episodes

An examination of the database yielded 150 self-praise episodes—54 in the telephone data, 71 in the ingroup face-to-face conversations, and 26 in the nonacquaintance conversations. Out of the 150 self-praise episodes in the data, 44 percent (66 instances) appeared with 1SG. The occurrence of 1SG in the self-praise episodes was most frequent in the ingroup (53.5%, 38 out of 71), followed by the nonacquaintance (48.0%, 12 out of 25), and then the telephone data (29.6%, 16 out of 54).

In terms of 1SG types, there were six different forms. The most frequent 1SG form was *ore* (23 tokens), followed by *atashi* (18 tokens), and then *watashi* (11 tokens, including one instance of *watakushi*). While *ore* and *atashi* were preferred forms in both the telephone and the ingroup talk, *atashi* was completely absent in the nonacquaintance data. Another notable observation is the relatively infrequent use of *boku* (2 in the ingroup, and 2 in the nonacquaintance data) compared to *ore*. *Uchi* appeared only in the ingroup data, often followed by *no* 'of' as in *uchi-no-papa* (1SG-of-papa 'my papa') or *uchi-no-kareshi* (1SG-of-boyfriend 'my boyfriend'). *Jibun* was very rare and found only in the nonacquaintance data.

The results also support the premise of the self-praise iceberg in Figure 1 (Rüdiger and Dayter 2020, Dayter 2021, Aronsson and Rindstedt 2023): Direct self-praise was extremely rare (7.6%, 5 out of 66), and indirect self-praise was overwhelmingly preferred (92.4%, 61 out of 66) in my data. A closer look at these indirect types reveals how 1SG as a linguistic resource is utilized to perform self-praise in Japanese conversation.

4.2 The Role of 1SG in Self-Praise Episodes

As Itakura (2022: 83) pointed out, self-praisers employ a number of 'different strategies in multiple layers' in the context of a given conversation. Framing self-praise as humorous or playful is one of the most common strategies in the self-praise episodes occurring with 1SG in my data, as illustrated in example (3).

Satoru (S) and Maya (M), who are in a romantic relationship, are talking on the phone. Satoru lives in the United States and Maya in Japan. Prior to this excerpt, they were being flirtatious, poking fun at each other while also checking on each other's commitment. The topic gradually shifted to something more specific, and they started discussing how they would need another car for Maya if she joined Satoru in the United States. Immediately before line 1, Satoru said that he had been saving as much money as he could for Maya to come. In line 1, Maya counters Satoru's statement that he is saving money for her sake by pointing out that he is actually saving money to get himself a green card.[2]

(3) Indirect Self-Praise [telephone, ingroup]

1	M: ... <sniff> e chigau-yo	sore-are-deshoo?
	um wrong-SFP	it-that-COP:TEN
	guriin-yoo-deshoo?	
	green-for-COP:TEN	
	'Um (that)'s not correct. Isn't it for that one? For (getting your) green (card)?'	

[2] The speakers use only the word *guriin* 'green', but from the context of the conversation, I interpret this to refer to a green card, also known as a permanent resident card.

2 S: chigau-yo.
wrong-SFP
guriin-nanka-he-de-mo-nai-mon.
green-DM-fart-COP:GER-also-NEG-SFP
... kanemochi-nan-da-kara-**ore**.
rich-NMLZ-COP-because-1SG
'(That)'s not correct. A green (card) is like nothing. Cuz **I**'m rich you know?'

3 M: hontoo?
'Really?'

4 S: un jitsuwa.
'Yup actually.'

5 M: ja Maya-mo-isshookenmei-ganbaroo.
well then Maya-also-hard-try (my) best:VOL
'Well then, I'm also going to try as hard as (I) can.'

6 S: un.
yeah
honto-ne.
really-SFP
kurooshi-nagara-okane-tamete-n-yo-ore.
have a hard time:CONT-while-money-save:PROG-NMLZ-SFP-1SG
'Yup, really, I'm painstakingly saving money.'

7 M: un sorya-wakaru.
yeah that-understand
'Yeah, that, (I) understand.'

Satoru corrects Maya's assumption right away in line 2 ('(that)'s not correct'), and then jokingly and nonchalantly presents a bragging statement: 'A green (card) is like nothing (lit. not even a fart) cuz **I**'m rich you know?'. After Maya's initial response, 'Really?', in line 3, Satoru starts downgrading his self-praise by adding 'actually' in line 4. Maya, then, expresses her determination to save as much money as she can in line 5. Satoru continues to minimize his self-praise in line 6, saying how painstakingly he's been saving money for Maya. Maya acknowledges that her boyfriend is indeed saving money for her in line 7.

At first glance, Satoru's *kanemochi-nan-da-kara-**ore*** 'cuz **I**'m rich you know?' in line 2 looks like an explicit bragging statement. A closer analysis of the whole sequence, however, demonstrates that, rather, it is an instance of gradual guarded disclosure (Goffman 1959), evidenced by his efforts to mitigate the bragging effect. First, Satoru's self-praise occurs as part of his attempt to correct Maya's assumption regarding the true reason for his saving money. Second, his use of *jitsuwa* 'actually' in line 4 as well as his subsequent pleading about how hard he works to save money for Maya in line 6 seem to help defuse the boldness of his self-praise. Third, but perhaps most importantly, the whole sequence of Satoru's self-praise performance is framed as humorous or playful. According to Norrick (1994: 410), a 'play frame' can cue 'a perception of the interaction as friendly exchange for fun, rather than as deadly serious business'. Satoru creates a play frame with his assertion of *guriin-nanka-he-de-mo-nai-mon* 'a green (card) is like nothing' (or 'getting a green card is not even a fart') in line 2. He also reinforces the play frame by his repeated usage of the 1SG form *ore*, in lines 2 and 6, as in (4a) and (4b):

(4a) kanemochi-nan-da-kara-**ore**
rich-NMLZ-COP-because-1SG
'cuz **I**'m rich you know?'

(4b) kurooshi-nagara-okane-tamete-n-yo-**ore**
have a hard time:CONT-while-money-save:PROG-NMLZ-SFP-1SG
'**I**'m painstakingly saving money'

In both (4a) and (4b), the 1SG *ore* is not marked with any particle, and it occurs after the predicate with no prosodic break. Ono and Suzuki (1992), Ono and Thompson (2003), and Ono (2006) characterized this type of 1SG as the 'emotive' type, where the predicate and 1SG 'are produced with a prosodically coherent contour, making them sound as if they are planned and produced together' (Ono 2006: 147). (4a) and (4b) also illustrate 'repetition with slight variation', of which 'humor is a common function' according to Tannen (2007: 71). Here, the use of similar intonation contours as well as the repeated overt pronoun at the end of both utterances makes them sound similar, which Satoru uses as a resource for humor. Moreover, humor can function as 'a hedging strategy', minimizing the illocutionary force of a face-threatening act, and also as 'a positive politeness strategy expressing solidarity' (Holmes 2000: 167). We see both functions of humor in Satoru's playful self-praise performance, where it not only helps tone down his bragging statement but also helps build rapport and involve Maya, the recipient of his self-praise. His repeated use of the 1SG *ore* in a structurally and phonologically coherent manner helps create and manage the play frame here.

A play frame is often achieved by laughter as well; as Holmes (2000: 163) asserts, 'laughter is an auditory cue for humor'. About 70 percent (46 out of 66) of the self-praise episodes in my data are accompanied by laughter, as in example (5), as well as the earlier example (2). In example (5), two close friends, Asami (A) and Chika (C), are talking on the phone. Asami lives in the United States and Chika in Japan. During this conversation, they talked about things like the wellbeing of their children, college entrance examinations, and tuition.

(5) Indirect Self-Praise [telephone, ingroup]
1 C: ... anmari-sonnnani-shikkarito-suujide-dru-to,
HED-but-not much-like that-precisely-in numbers-appear-if
sukoshi-kanashii-mono-ga-aru-wane.
a little-sad-thing-NOM-exist-SFP
'… uhm but if you see the exact numbers (of tuition for colleges), it makes (us) feel a bit sad, doesn't it?'
2 A: <@ soo soo soo @>
'Right, right, right' (laughing)
3 C: (0)@[@]
'LOL LOL'
4 A: [a]tashi-ano,
1SG-HED
juugatsu-kara-ne,
October-from-SFP
'Well, I, from October,'
5 C: [un].
'Uhuh'

6 A: [Yama]da Kasai-de-honkakutekini-furutaimude-etch,
Yamada Fire-at-formally-as a full-time worker-FILL
'as a full-time worker at Yamada Fire,'
7 C: [2 a! 2]
'Wow!'
8 A: [2 ha 2]tarakasete[3 itadaiteorimasu-no @@@@@ 3]
work:CAUS:PROG:HUM:POL-SFP
'have been employed, LOL LOL.'
9 C: [3 kongurachureishonzu 3].
'Congratulations!'
10 A: [etch]?
'What?'
11 C: [da]tte-furutaimu-tte-muzukashii-deshoo-imademo?
because-full-time-TOP-hard-SFP-even now
'Cuz getting a full time job is hard even now, isn't it?'
12 A: [etch]?
'What?'
13 C: [mitsu]keru-no-furu[2 taimu-no-poji]shon-tte,
find-NMLZ-full-time-of-position-TOP
'Finding a full time position'
14 A: [2 i= i= 2]
15 C: nakanaka-muzukashii-deshoo
quite-hard-SFP
'is quite hard, isn't it?'
16 A: .. un soo-ne.
yeah right-SFP
maa-maa-shooganai-kara @@
FILL-FILL-can't help it-because LOL LOL
soo-ne-maa-ano,
right-SFP-FILL-FILL
ano-arubaitodewa-zutto-yattekita-kara,
FILL-as a part-time worker-for a long time-have worked-because
'Yeah, right, well nothing can be done so LOL LOL right, well, um, (I) have been working [there] as a part-time worker so'

Prior to this excerpt, Asami informed Chika of the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition fees for colleges and universities in the United States. Chika reacts to that information, expressing her feeling of dejection at the cost of college in line 1. Chika's sentiment is reciprocated by Asami in enthusiastic agreement ('Right, right, right'), which is produced with a nervous laugh in line 2 and which prompts Chika to laugh with Asami in line 3. This joint laughing seems to signal a topic shift. Partially overlapping with Chika's laughter, Asami reveals her latest achievement, which is that she has been working at Yamada Fire as a full-time worker since October, in lines 4, 6, and 8. Interspersed with Asami's self-praise here is Chika's overlapping uptake—first her minimum acknowledgment in line 5, then her response cry 'Wow!' (Goffman 1978, Aronsson and Morgenstern 2021, Aronsson and Rindstedt 2023) in line 7, and finally her enthusiastic praise ('Congratulations!') in line 9.

Asami's self-praise performance illustrates the process of gradual guarded disclosure (Goffman 1959), as she makes use of several interactional strategies to minimize her self-praise's illocutionary effect. It is delivered in multiple turn sequences, which include Chika's overlapping uptakes. Asami also delivers her self-praise as an announceable fact (Speer 2012) or news report (Kim 2017), which seems to help her objectify and distance herself from the possibly face-threatening act. It must be emphasized as well that her delivery is hesitant, which also mitigates her self-praise; she speaks at a considerably slower tempo and in a softer tone, carefully and cautiously, in lines 4, 6, and 8. After Chika's positive uptake ('Congratulations!') in line 9 and her attempt to upgrade Asami's achievement by commenting on the difficulty of finding a full-time job in lines 11, 13, and 15, Asami laughingly downgrades her self-praise in line 16, informing Chika that she had already been working part-time at the same company before she was formally appointed as a full-time worker.

Much like Satoru's in Example 3, Asami's self-praise performance entails a play frame (Norrick 1994), bringing a lighthearted and nonserious tone to the ongoing interaction. Asami accomplishes this by deploying several of the linguistic resources available to her, most obviously her laughter. The use of the 1SG form *atashi* in line 5 is another resource. In Ono and Thompson's (2003) analysis, *atashi-ano* (1SG-HEDGE) would be categorized as the frame-setting type, occurring before the predicate but in a separate intonation unit to express the speaker's subjectivity or stance toward the rest of the utterance. This 1SG frame-setting pattern plays a role in initiating Asami's self-praise performance.

What sets Asami's performance apart from Satoru's, and from other instances in my data, is her speech level shifts: from the informal plain form to a formal polite form, in *hatarakaseteita-daiteorimasu-no* <laughter> (work:CAUS:PROG:HUM:POL-SFP) 'have been employed LOL LOL', and back to the informal plain form.

It has been well documented that the 'self' is multifaceted in self-presentation (e.g. Goffman 1959, van Dijck 2013). In the case of Japanese, shifts in the presentation of self are often realized grammatically in the form of speech level shift from the plain form of verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs (e.g. *koohii nomu* '(I) drink coffee') to the addressee honorific *masu*/*desu* (e.g. *koohii nomi-masu* '(I) drink coffee'). According to Cook (2011: 3663), the use of the addressee honorific *masu* form is not necessarily for politeness per se, but signals '*on-stage talk* as official and planned talk', whereas the plain form indexes '*off-stage talk* […as] unofficial and unplanned talk' (my emphasis). Although the majority of the interaction between Asami and Chika is off-stage talk that is predominantly carried out in the plain form and a casual speech style, when Asami presents a favorable evaluation of herself, she does so as on-stage talk, deliberately shifting her speech level, as evidenced by her use of the polite form ending in line 8. Note that despite Asami's rather formal language usage here, her performance brings about playfulness as evidenced by her laughter and Chika's enthusiastic uptakes, which overlap with Asami's utterances.

Asami's use of the polite form in line 8 displays 'the mode of self for public presentation, which is a mode which one employs in presenting oneself as a particular social role to the addressee(s) on stage' (Cook 1997: 709). What we are seeing here, then, is an objectification strategy: a presentation of a public self in a nonpublic space, which has the effect of 'impersonaliz[ing] the speaker by indicating the "official" (versus the "personal") nature of the imposition' (Geyer 2008: 57). Asami can be viewed as a 'disciplined performer' or 'someone with sufficient poise to move from private places of informality to public ones of varying degrees of formality, without allowing

such changes to confuse' her (Goffman 1959: 217). She achieves this by utilizing a number of interactional strategies and linguistic resources available to her. 1SG is one such resource, which plays an integral part in this staged self-praise performance.

5 Conclusion

The current study investigated how speakers engage in the socially risky speech act of self-praise in Japanese conversation. The examination of over 50 hours of everyday talk revealed that self-praise is quite rare and thus can be considered a marked speech act. When it occurred, the speakers made use of various linguistic resources available to them to mitigate its illocutionary force. Analysis of the data demonstrated the ways in which the speakers delivered positive or favorable evaluations of themselves as staged performances (Goffman 1959). 1SG is one of the resources drawn on by these speakers to *perform* social acts, and it played an important role in constructing and managing their identities and images.

Specifically, in example (3), the emotive type 1SG (Ono and Suzuki 1992, Ono and Thompson 2003, Ono 2006), which is unmarked, and which occurred after the predicate and in the same intonation unit, was an integral part of Satoru's self-praise performance. His repeated uses of the emotive type 1SG (4a–b) in a structurally and phonologically coherent manner signaled the lightheartedness and nonseriousness of his bragging statement about being rich. In contrast, in Example 5, Asami's self-praise performance consisted of the frame-setting type 1SG, occurring in a separate intonation unit from the predicate (Ono & Thompson 2003) and with a shift to onstage talk (e.g. Geyer 2008, Cook 2011), where she briefly presented a public self in the middle of a friendly personal telephone conversation.

This study's analysis demonstrates that 1SG can be used to create a play frame (Norrick 1994) and generate playfulness, lightheartedness, and nonseriousness in self-praise episodes, which helps make self-praise more possible and acceptable in conversation. In that sense, as Ono and Thompson (2003) proposed, 1SG can be considered a discourse-pragmatic marker.

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