

Semantic Analysis of Horenso Communication Pattern by Virtual Assistant Intern in Japanese Corporation

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Abstract. Despite *horenso* playing an essential role in Japanese corporation communication, not to mention in digital corporations, there is a tendency for junior local staff to need help to implement the *horenso* pattern. Furthermore, in digital Japanese corporations, staff interact through specific chat applications, which tends to cause misunderstandings. Therefore, this study aims to examine semantically the *horenso* communication patterns conducted by interns working as virtual assistants in Japanese corporations. This research conducted a qualitative method research with a content analysis approach. This research concludes that the tendency of the *horenso* patterns applied by virtual assistant interns is *hokoku* and *renraku* with distinctive Japanese dictions and sentence patterns.

Keywords: *horenso*, Japanese communication pattern, virtual assistant intern, Japanese corporation, semantic analysis

1 Introduction

Japan is well-known for upholding cultural values in daily life, including business. Japanese workplace culture is thought to encourage communication amongst employees in order to reduce mistakes. As a result, the output quality of the business can be improved to its highest level [1]. A work culture that is widely applied in Japanese companies is *horenso*. *Horenso* is a term for the management system in Japanese companies that refers to 報告 (*hokoku*), 連絡 (*renraku*), and 相談 (*sodan*) [2], [3], [4]. Kameda (2013) [5] mentioned that *horenso* is the basis of business communication in Japanese companies. In addition, according to Rungruang et al. (2019) [6], *horenso* methods of communication may improve employee and business performance simultaneously.

The meanings of the three concepts of *horenso* I previously mentioned are connected. According to Kameda (2013) [5], the following explanation are the characteristics of *horenso* in the Japanese business world. *Hokoku* means to reports to superiors on work progress, changes, and results, whereas *renraku* (contacting) transmits valuable information to others. On the other hand, *sodan* (consulting) discusses problems with superiors regarding receiving opinions and advice.

Furthermore, *hokoku* is regular reporting from subordinates to their supervisors on the work progress to inform them of the status of the task, including items such as how a job is going, when a job is completely done, or whether there are any issues. *Renraku* is free sharing of critical information amongst all ranks. For instance, if there are any project delays, the staff should communicate this information to all affected colleagues so they can adapt accordingly to the new work situation and minimize disruptions as much as possible. Lastly, *sodan* is simply consulting with senior colleagues and asking for advice to lessen the burden of dealing with the situation alone [7].

One application of *horensō* that shows in [8] research is that employees are accustomed to updating work-related information in order to maintain a shared understanding among coworkers. Beside, as the fundamental method of communication in Japan, *horensō* additionally values group consensus in decision-making [8]. According to study of Cahyadi et al. (2023) [9], the ability of staff members to apply *horensō* in their everyday work is the outcome of ongoing training and implementation, which helps staff understand and assimilate the *horensō* culture. Despite the awareness to apply *horensō* might be gained through practice and habit, potential mistakes can still occur. Limatibul (2016) [9] research in the travel agency field pointed out the consequences of a staff member's negligence in implementing *horensō*. The staff member failed to verify the customer's email regarding schedule change before purchasing the flight ticket that ultimately contributing to the company's disadvantage.

Research also found that maintaining a solid *horensō* is crucial for effective professional communication, particularly in remote working or virtual workspace [8], [9]. Even though the employees don't meet in person and they trust each other, good communication is still necessary for them to complete their tasks effectively [8]. Moreover, according to Sundawa et al. (2022) [11], what is essential in *renraku*, besides the information being delivered well, is that both parties have the same thoughts and understanding. Therefore, this study aims to examine semantically the *horensō* communication patterns applied by virtual assistant interns in a Japanese company.

2 Method

The study conducted the content analysis method. The data were collected from internship activities at a Japanese virtual assistant company from August 1 to September 30, 2023. The data used are conversational expressions that indicate *horensō* between interns, Indonesian staff, and Japanese staff. The collected data is then classified according to the definition of *horensō* [5] by determining the category of the expression and relating the expression to the recipient's understanding of the message's meaning. The data were analyzed by examining the diction and sentences used in the *horensō* expression pattern, which then concluded the category of expression.

3 Results and Discussion

The daily communication with virtual assistant staff was established using a particular application. It is a messaging application that connects all staff and interns in real-time. The application is also allows staff to organize their workspace according to topics and communities.

3.1 Hokoku Implementation in Virtual Assistant Company

According to Kameda, *hokoku* means to immediately reports your superior about the work progress, changes, and results whenever and if superiors give instructions [5]. In a virtual assistant company, staff and interns report the work's progress, changes, and results by mentioning the specific opponent staff. Anyone can mention other staff in the application by writing @staff's name. When mentioned, the opponent staff will immediately see the incoming notification. So when reporting something, interns are always encouraged to mention the opponent staff.

The following is one of the expressions interns use when reporting work progress to supervisors.

- (1) お疲れ様です！本日は2時間にて50件ぐらい作成いたしました。明日もよろしくお願いたします。

“Otsukaresamadesu! Honjitsu wa 2 jikan nite 50 ken gurai sakusei itashimasu. Asu mo yoroshiku onegaiitashimasu.”

Thank you for your hard work! Today I already created about 50 data in 2 hours. Please look forward to working with us again tomorrow.

Situation :

The intern was assigned two work hours for that day and the next two days later. Two hours later, the intern reported that he had worked on about 50 data and would continue tomorrow.

When many tasks are completely done, interns need to report the progress and obstacles of the work to the supervisor. The purpose is so the supervisor can monitor and estimate the completion time of the work. The data was categorized as an expression that reports progress because the sentence "*asu mo yoroshiku onegaiitashimasu*" implies the impression that the work has not been completed yet.

Below is an expression used by interns when reporting about changes to supervisors.

- (2) 昨日不在だったことを事前に連絡せずに大変申し訳ございませんでした。ご迷惑をかけましたが、フォローいただきありがとうございます。本日より作業に戻りますので、対応させていただきます。引き続きどうぞよろしくお願いいたします。

“Kinou fuzai datta koto wo jizenni renraku sezuni tauhen moushiwake gozaimasendeshita. Meiwaku wo kakeshimashitaga, foroo itadaki arigatou gozaimashita. Honjitsu yori sagyou ni modorimasunode, taiou sasete itadakimasu. Hikutuduki douzo yoroshiku onegaiitashimasu.”

I am very sorry for not informing you that I was absent yesterday. I apologize for the inconvenience, and thank you for the follow-up. As I return to work today, I will respond to your request. Thank you for your continued support.

Situation :

The intern apologized for his absence yesterday, which led to a change of responsibility to another staff member. Since he has returned to work today, he reports that he is back in charge of his duties.

When applying for an absence, interns and staff must find someone who can back up their daily tasks and ensure that the replacement knows how they will do the backup work the next day. The person willing to take responsibility will replace the previous intern or staff. If the intern or staff needs to remember to report, they should still report the condition to decide who takes on the task.

Below are examples of expressions conducted by an intern when reporting the results of their work.

(3) お疲れ様です！9月分 Y 様のご報告スレッドを作成させていただきました。引き続きどうぞよろしく申し上げます。

“Otsukaresama desu! 9gatsu bun Y sama no gohokoku sureddo wo sakusei sasete itadakimashita. Hikitsuduki douzo yoroshiku onegaitashimasu”

Thank you for your hard work! We have created a September report thread for user Y. Thank you for your continued support.

Situation :

The intern reported to the Japanese assistant that he had created the September reporting thread for user Y.

Despite the availability of a storage location provided by the client to submit the task, interns still have to report when they have completed the task to other staff. Interns must immediately report, even before being asked by co-workers or supervisors. In addition to knowing the total use of time used while working, reports to supervisors also let supervisors know the progress of intern work.

This expression is conducted by intern and staff when reporting their current condition to the team.

(4) 離席します。

“Riseki shimasu.”

I will be away from the place for a while.

Situation :

Before stepping away from the keyboard, for example, to go to the restroom, interns report to the team.

The data above is a fascinating insight that differs from the implementation of *horenso* in ordinary Japanese companies. As virtual assistant companies do not meet in person, informing team leaders and co-workers of recent conditions or activities is very important. They need to know the recent conditions to facilitate work-related communication. For example, when staff A takes a break or away from the keyboard, other staff can understand why he is late replying to messages.

3.2 Renraku Implementation in Virtual Assistant Company

Renraku refers to transmitting helpful information of one's own will to those who may need it [5]. In addition, *renraku* is sharing of critical information amongst all ranks [7]. Hence, *renraku* is contacting others to deliver information and also follow up on the information.

In addition to sharing the latest information in a virtual assistant company, *renraku* is often conducted to ask questions and confirm things before continuing the task. When providing information to others, interns will mention opponent staff and other staff related to a task. When mentioning someone in their posts, that person should be mentioned so they are also aware of the changes.

The following expressions are used by interns when sharing important information with supervisors.

- (5) はじめまして、9月よりFさんの作業を引き継ぎをさせていただくCと申します。早速ですが、アプリのログイン試して致します。チャンネルにご招待いただけますでしょうか。今後ともどうぞよろしくお願いいたします。

“Hajimemashite, 9gatsu yori F-san no sagyou wo hikitsuduki wo sasete itadaku C to moushimasu. Sassoku desuga, apuri no roguin tameshiteitashimasu. Channeru ni goshoutai itadakemasu deshouka. Kongo to mo douzo yoroshiku onegaiitashimasu.”

Hello, my name is C and I will be taking over Mr. F's work starting from September. I will log in to the application. I would appreciate it if you could invite me to your channel. We look forward to your continued support.

Situation :

The intern introduced himself to the supervisor and informed him that since September, he would be taking over the tasks that Mr. F had previously assigned.

The data above shows that Mr. C immediately followed up on his introduction by asking the supervisor to invite him to the application's channel. Virtual communication is often quite time-consuming if the introduction and follow-up process is completed at separate times. The supervisor needs to reply twice, and he worries that he is busy, so the follow-up process is delayed.

The situation shown in data (5) is in accordance with research conducted by Aurn [12] which discovered that employees tended to use their time effectively in telework or online workspaces.

3.3. Sodan Implementation in Virtual Assistant Company

According to Kameda, *sodan* is discussing and consulting a problem with superior and related parties who are involved, to ask their opinion and suggestions so that the problem could be resolved properly [5].

Since intern and staffs in virtual assistant companies use messaging applications that show real-time, discussions and consultations can be held more quickly so that solutions can be obtained quickly. When consulting with Japanese staff, in addition to mentioning the name of Japanese staff, interns also have to mention the team leader in the cc (carbon copy) section. By doing that, the team leader can monitor the process and provide additional input if needed.

The following are expressions interns conduct when asking supervisors about continuing their daily tasks.

- (6) お疲れ様です！終了後に失礼いたします。明日は新ツールを使用開始なので、Y 時間集計は必要でしょうか。何か対応に変更がありましたら是非ご教示いただけますと幸いです。どうぞよろしくお願いたします。

“Otsukaresamadesu! Shuuryogo ni shitsureitashimasu. Asu wa shin tsuuru wo shiyou kaishi nanode, Y jikan shuukei wa hitsuyou deshouka. Nanika taiou ni henkou ga arimashitara, zehi go kyouji itadakemasu to saiwai desu. Douzo yoroshiku onegaiitashimasu.”

Thank you for your time! Please excuse us after you finish your work today. Since we are using a new tool tomorrow, do we still need a time count for the Y company? We would be grateful if you could let us know if there are any changes to our response. Thank you in advance.

Situation :

Interns face new issues regarding tool changes. He asked his supervisor for a follow-up and solution to the problem before doing his task.

When consulting with supervisors, interns will usually ask core questions first. He then writes the sentence "*zehi go kyouji itadakemasu to saiwai desu*" which indicates that he is ready to get new information or directions related to his previous question. That sentence comes from a question sentence, which is then changed into a statement sentence to make it seem more humble and not rush the opponent staff.

This situation in line to Nobe as cited in Sundawa [11]. Nobe claims that every problem has a different solution, therefore it is essential to ask for advice from superiors or seniors when dealing with an issue in order to figure out the best solution.

4 Conclusion

From the analysis, there are differences between virtual communication in Japanese virtual assistant companies and virtual communication that were discussed in previous studies. One of the reasons is the different media usage. In previous research, the media used to communicate with customers was email. The email is more personalized, and it is not easy to know whether the customer has read the message.

Meanwhile, a particular messaging application is used in the virtual assistant company, which is more universal and real-time. With the mentioned feature, the recipient can immediately get a notification to respond to the message. If the message is missed, other people who also see it can remind them so that communication problems between staff can be reduced.

Despite the differences in the implementation of *horenso* in previous studies, in this study, the results show that *hokoku* in virtual assistant companies is not only conducted to report the progress, changes, and results to the superior. *Hokoku* is also conducted to inform the current condition of interns and staff.

Furthermore, interns are also expected to conduct *renraku* by follow-ups directly so that supervisors can respond immediately. The form of follow-up that is completed is asking questions, confirming something, and rechecking incoming messages or information.

From the data collected, it is known that interns very rarely make *sodan* directly to Japanese staff. When doing consultation or *sodan*, the language and diction interns use will be more polite. The sentence patterns are also generally in the form of statements that give the impression of being humble.

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