

# Error Analysis of Japanese Relative Clause

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**Abstract**—The aims of this study was to analyze the type and cause of error in using Japanese relative clauses (*meishi shuushoku*) by Japanese language learners based on Corder's (1975) theory. The data in this study collected through a test consists of 35 questions divided into four types of inquiry about *meishi shuushoku*. This study involved 50 Japanese language learners in STIKes (Nursing College) Cirebon, Indonesia. The results showed that there are some types of errors made by learners in using *meishi shuushoku*, including word placement errors, particle errors, writing errors, and vocabulary errors. Word placement errors mainly consist of head noun placement errors, adjective placement errors, and verb placement errors. These errors were mainly caused by student's lack of comprehension about the basic rules in using *meishi shuushoku*. However, other causes of errors in using *meishi shuushoku* were found and can be classified into over-generalization, language transfer, and transfer of training. As the implications, these results can give a reference about the types of errors and difficulty in using Japanese *meishi shuushoku* for Japanese language learners to help avoid those errors, and for the lecturers as a reference to understand learner's difficulty in learning *meishi shuushoku* and to find the most effective method in teaching *meishi shuushoku*.

**Keywords:** *error analysis, Japanese, language transfer, meishi shuushoku, overgeneralization, relative clause, transfer of training*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Learners' errors are significant to be studied for three different reasons (Corder, 1981). Firstly, for teachers, learners' errors could indicate how far learners have progressed towards learning goals, and what remains for them to learn. Secondly, for researchers, the errors could provide evidence of how language is learnt or acquired, and find out what strategies of procedures the learner is employing in his discovery of language. Thirdly, for learners, committing errors is a way of a learner testing his/her hypotheses about the nature of language he/she is learning (Corder, 1981).

In second language learning, the occurrence of errors is considered common. For example, in learning Japanese as a second or foreign language, one of the most difficult topics that have a high occurrence of error is a relative clause, or *meishi shuushoku* in Japanese. According to Yamada (2000), *meishi shuushoku* is a clause that is placed before a noun in order to highlight and put an emphasis on that particular noun. For Indonesian learners, modifying a noun in a relative clause is often found difficult. This difficulty is considered partly

because there is a grammatical structure difference between Indonesian (SVO) and Japanese (SOV).

Studies about *meishi shuushoku* in a second language learning context have been conducted (Manshu, 2017; Chen & Fukuda, 2017; Mohri & Tei, 2017, etc.). Manshu (2017) studies Japanese relative clause acquisition by Germany learners studying Japanese, and identified that Germany learners tend to use relative clauses very often as attributives, because they translate the Japanese adnominal phrases (*rentai-kei*) into relative clauses as the corresponding equivalences automatically. Moreover, learners tend not to use the attributive forms such as appositions, prepositional attributives, and noun derivations, since they do not exist in their mother tongue. Chen and Fukuda (2017) studied Chinese learners of Japanese, and they concluded that the Chinese learners are able to make a distinction between Japanese and Chinese concerning the interpretation of the anaphor within relative clauses. Mohri and Tei (2017) also studied Chinese learning Japanese, and they explained that many languages including English have two kinds of comparative constructions: phrasal and clausal comparatives. However, Chinese only allows the standard of comparison to be phrasal, while Japanese has only a phrasal comparative in adjectival predicates. When adjectival predicates are used both in the matrix and embedded clauses, the sentence is utterly ungrammatical in Japanese. The next study of relative clause conducted by Kanno (2007) who studied Japanese-Chinese-Sinhalese-Vietnamese-Thai-Indonesian language learners and the results indicate that relative clauses are too difficult for learners to process, including the head direction, word order, and the relative order of filler and gap which affect the manner they are interpreted. Ozeki and Shirai (2007) studied about Japanese-Chinese-English-Korean language learners. They analyzed relative clause used by learners and revealed that even lower proficiency learners used Direct Object (DO) and Oblique (OBL) relatives, suggesting that Subject (SU) relatives are not easier than DO or OBL relatives for second language learners of Japanese. The learners (except Korean NSs) also made strong associations between SU and animate heads, also between DO/OBL and inanimate heads. Meanwhile, Ishizuka (2005) studied Japanese-English-French language in the form of a self-paced reading study that compares the processing difficulty between object-gap and subject-gap of relative clauses (RCs) in Japanese. The higher complexity of object-gap RCs compared with subject-gap RCs in SVO languages with

post-nominal relatives, such as English and French, is a well-established phenomenon in sentence processing. And the results show that subject-gap relative clauses are easier than object-gap relative clauses in Japanese. The results are compatible with the depth-of-embedding theory. Other possible accounts are considered besides the depth-of-embedding theory. Lastly, Murasugi (1991) studied the over-generalization occurrence of *no* particle in Japanese, and how English speakers of Japanese learners retreat from this phenomenon. The results showed that the over-generalization of *no* used by learners including the genitive Case marker, *no* as N, and *no* as Clause. The learners tend to compare the structure of Japanese relative clause with their own language and this is the main reason why learners feel difficulties in learning relative clause.

*Meishi shuushoku* is one of the basic level topics in learning Japanese. In accordance with the findings of the previous studies, Fathia (2015) stated that there are several errors that occur when students learn about *meishi shuushoku*. However, the study only explained about the type of errors but not about the cause of the errors.

According to the findings of the previous study, the error in forming and using *meishi shuushoku* could cause a fatal error in delivering an implication of a sentence, making this a very intriguing topic to study. Therefore, this research will elaborate on the errors committed by Japanese language learners in forming *meishi shuushoku* sentences. Setyawati (2010) states that the cause of errors in using other languages can be categorized into three: the learners are influenced by the language they already fluent in; the learners lack understanding of the new language; and that the learners have applied an unsuitable learning method.

This research aims to discover the type of errors and the cause of errors. The cause of the errors based on Selinker's theory that has been elaborated by Sakoda (2002) are as follows: 1) *Gengo Ten'i* (Language Transfer); 2) *Kajou Ippanka* (Overgeneralization); 3) *Kunrenjou no Ten'i* (Transfer of Training); 4) *Gakushuu Sutorateji* (Learning Strategy); and 5) *Komyunikeshon Sutorateji* (Communication Strategy).

**II. METHOD**

**A. Research Participants**

The participants in this research are 50 students of Gerontology Program in STIKes Cirebon, Indonesia. The reason for choosing these participants was due to the fact that they will be sent to Japan as caregivers, and the competence in using and comprehend *meishi shuushoku* in daily conversation in Japanese is highly required.

**B. Data Collection**

The data collection was conducted using a test about *meishi shuushoku*. The test consists of 35 questions which divided into 4 parts, namely: 1) 'Sentence arrangement' (15 questions); 2) 'Translation' (10 questions); 3) 'Definition' (5 questions); and 4) 'Description' (5 questions). In 'Sentence arrangement', students were required to arrange sentences containing *meishi shuushoku* into the correct order. In 'Translation' part, students were required to translate sentences with *meishi shuushoku* into Indonesian or Japanese. The 'Definition' part consists of a

command to answer a question with one word about a person, a place or an item using *meishi shuushoku*. Lastly, 'Description' is the opposite from 'Definition' part, where the students need to describe a person, a place or an item using *meishi shuushoku*.

**C. Research Procedures and Data Analysis**

Research procedures and data analysis in this study were conducted according to Corder's (1975) error analysis procedures as follows: 1) Collection of learner language; 2) Identification of errors; 3) Description of errors; 4) Explanation of errors; and 5) Evaluation of errors.

To identify the type of errors, the collected data were classified into 4 types based on Selinker's theory that has been elaborated by Sakoda (2002). The types of errors found in this study were: 1) Word placement error, b) Particle error, c) Writing error, and d) Vocabulary error. The cause of errors also identified based on Selinker's theory elaborated by Sakoda (2002), which are: 1) *Gengo Ten'i* (Language Transfer); 2) *Kajou Ippanka* (Overgeneralization); 3) *Kunrenjou no Ten'i* (Transfer of Training); 4) *Gakushuu Sutorateji* (Learning Strategy); and 5) *Komyunikeshon Sutorateji* (Communication Strategy).

**III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**A. Test Results**

Based on the data obtained from 50 students who had given a test about *meishi shuushoku*, no student got a perfect score. The average score from 50 students was 51/100, with 78 points as the highest score and 12 points as the lowest score. The overall results error of *meishi shuushoku* is shown in Table I.

TABLE I. THE OVERALL TEST RESULTS ABOUT MEISHI SHUUSHOKU

Answer	Data	Percentage
Correct	687	44%
Incorrect	998	56%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1685</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 1 shows that from the overall test result, the total data collected were 1685 answers. The correct answers were 687 answers (44%), while the wrong answers were 998 answers (54%). These results showed that the number of the wrong answers was higher than the right answers, which indicated that students' comprehension about *meishi shuushoku* is still low, and needs to be investigated further. Therefore, to understand this result further, the 'incorrect' data then classified by based on its' type of error as shown in Table II.

TABLE II. FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF THE TYPES OF ERROR

Type of Error	Frequency	Percentage
Word Placement Error	708	71%
Particle Error	140	14%
Writing Error	111	11%
Vocabulary Error	39	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>998</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2 shows that there are four types of errors were found in this study, namely word placement errors, particle errors, writing errors, and vocabulary errors. From *Table 2*, it is known that the most frequent errors occurred is word placement errors, which reached 708 incorrect answers or 71% of overall errors. Other errors such as particle error, writing error and vocabulary error were fewer than word placement error and only indicated 290 incorrect answers combined or 29% combined.

### B. Types of errors in using *meishi shuushoku*

Based on the test results as described in previous section, we know that the type of error found in this study can be classified into four types of errors. Those types are Word Placement Errors, Particle Errors, Writing Errors, and Vocabulary Errors. In this section, each type of error will be explained and analyze further as follows.

#### 1) Word Placement Error

Word placement error found in this research mainly occurred because the students were not able to arrange the words to be a *meishi shuushoku* sentence correctly. Word placement errors occurred frequently and can be classified into 3 categories, namely a) head noun placement Error, b) head noun description error, and c) errors in using verb or adjective as head noun.

##### a. Head Noun Placement Error

Head noun placement errors are the error caused by student's inability to place the head noun correctly and arrange the head noun reversely. *Example (1)* is the most common error in the placement of a head noun.

#### *Example (1)*

- (誤) 試験は午後來週の木曜日です。  
 (F) *Shiken wa gogo raishuu no mokuyoubi desu.*  
 (The test is on afternoon next Thursday)  
 (正) 試験は来週の木曜日の午後です。  
 (T) *Shikenwa raishuu no mokuyoubi no gogo desu.*  
 (The test is on next Thursday afternoon)

The head noun from this question was 'gogo' (afternoon) not 'mokuyoubi' (Thursday). However, 36 students answered this question incorrectly. 15 of 36 students answered 'mokuyoubi' (Thursday) as head noun as seen in *Example (1)*.

In Japanese grammar that students have learned, noun which indicating time such as 'gogo' (afternoon) or 'gozen' (morning) always placed before adverb of time (i.e *gogo ichi ji* or '1 p.m.'). Therefore, when 'gogo' (afternoon) paired with another noun of time in a sentence, learners kept thinking that 'gogo' (afternoon) should be placed before the other noun of time. However, in Japanese, if we want to use more than 2 adverbs of time, we need to arrange it from the biggest unit of time. For example, when we want to write date and time in Japanese, we need to arrange it from year first, then month, date, and lastly the time. Thus, the right sentence arrangement in *Example (1)* should be 'raishuu' (next week), 'mokuyoubi' (Thursday), and 'gogo' afternoon. However, in Bahasa, the time arrangement is started from the smallest unit of time. For

example, in writing date and time in Bahasa, it needs to be arranged from time first, then date, month, and last year. This reason could be considered one of the factors that caused students' error in head noun placement error that includes the adverb of time placement as a head noun. However, from overall head noun placement errors that occurred, it could be identified that the learner mostly made the error because they did not understand the basic rules in arranging an adverb of time, especially in a sentence that contains *meishi shuushoku*. Based on Selinker's theory that has been elaborated by Sakoda (2002), this error happened because of learners' lack of understanding about the structure of target language (overgeneralization).

##### b. Head Noun Description Error

This error is an error when a learner failed to describe a word or arrange a sentence to explain a head noun correctly. *Example (2)* is the most common error in describing a word or arranging sentence describing a head noun.

#### *Example (2)*

- (誤) 生活するテレビなしに人は少ないです。  
 (F) *Seikatsu suru terebi nashini hito wa sukunai desu.*  
 (Live without television people is a few)  
 (正) テレビなしに生活する人は少ないです。  
 (T) *Terebi nashini seikatsu suru hito wa sukunai desu.*  
 (There is a few people who live without television)

In *Example (2)*, the head noun is placed correctly, but the sentence arrangement which explains the head noun is incorrect. The correct head noun in this sentence is 'hito' (people), and 17 of 50 students were unable to identify this head noun correctly. From 41 students that answered this question incorrectly, 24 of them answered with the correct head noun, but failed in arranging explanation sentence as seen in *Example (2)*. Moreover, the students who answered as *example (2)*, mainly mistook the position of verb 'seikatsu suru' (live) and phrase of 'terebi nashini' (without television). 'Terebi nashini' (without television) should explain about 'seikatsu suru' (live), but some students answered the opposite and use 'seikatsu suru' (live) to explain 'terebi' (television). This answer mean that 'there is a few live without television people' and became meaningless in either Japanese or Bahasa. The learners who made these types of errors were considered as lack of understanding about grammar structure in the target language, also knowledge in placing a word in order to make a correct sentence. This is the same as Selinker's theory that error can occur because the learner's ability is not enough to understand the structure of the target language (overgeneralization).

##### c. Errors in using Verb or Adjective as Head Noun

This type of error including error in placing a verb or adjective as a head noun. This error occurred because learners did not understand the basic rules of constructing *meishi shuushoku*. One of the basic rules in constructing *meishi shuushoku* is that a verb or an adjective cannot become the head

noun. *Example (3)* is one of the most common examples of an error in placing adjective as a head noun.

*Example (3)*

- (誤) 姉に日本語の辞書が便利を貸しました。  
 (F) *Ane ni nihongo no jisho ga benri wo kashimashita.*  
 (I lent Japanese dictionary is practical to my sister)
- (正) 姉に便利な日本語の辞書を貸しました。  
 (T) *Ane ni benri na nihongo no jisho wo kashimashita.*  
 (I lent a practical Japanese dictionary to my sister)

The correct head noun in this question is ‘*jisho*’ (dictionary), not ‘*benri*’ (practical). However, 32 students answered this question incorrectly, and 13 of 32 students answered ‘*benri*’ (practical) as head noun as seen in *Example (3)*. ‘*Benri*’ (practical) is an adjective, and cannot be used as a head noun in *meishi shuushoku* sentence. From the data obtained, this type of error occurred because the students did not understand the basic rules in creating *meishi shuushoku*, especially regarding the rule in placing adjective or verb in *meishi shuushoku* sentences a head noun. This error happened because the learner’s ability is not enough to understand the structure of the target language (overgeneralization).

2) *Particles Error*

Particle error is an error that occurred when learners are able to answer the question with the right head noun and sentence arrangement, but incorrect in using particle. There are many particles in Japanese, but the most common error in using particle found in this study was error in using particle ‘*no*’. The function of particle ‘*no*’ are to indicate possession, to connect nouns, topic marker, etc. 7 of 50 students used ‘*no*’ in a *meishi shuushoku* sentence incorrectly, and 4 of them used ‘*no*’ as shown in *Example (4)*.

*Example (4)*

- (誤) 神社の前にはこにお金をいれます。  
 (F) *Jinja no mae ni hako ni okane o iremasu.*  
 (Put the money the box in front of Jinja)
- (正) 神社の前のはこにお金をいれます。  
 (T) *Jinja no mae no hako ni okane o iremasu.*  
 (Put the money in the box in front of Jinja)

The false sentence in *Example (4)* has an ambiguous meaning. The phrase ‘*Jinja no maeni*’ can be translated into ‘In front of *Jinja* (shrine)’, and the false sentence ambiguously indicated that the subject put the money ‘in front of the shrine’, but not necessarily ‘in the box in front of the shrine’. However, if this sentence translated into Bahasa, it becomes ‘*memasukkan uang di kotak di depan kuil*’ (put the money in the box in front of the shrine) and shows a correct sentence with a correct meaning. In Bahasa, particle ‘*di*’ is similar to に (*ni*) in Japanese, which used to indicate destination or place. While the right particle in this sentence is ‘*no*’, learners tend to apply their knowledge about ‘*di*’ in their native language, and use ‘*ni*’ instead of ‘*no*’. This tendency showed that this type of error was

occurred due to the students were influenced by their native language (negative language transfer).

3) *Writing Error*

Writing error is rather insignificant compared to the other errors. This error mainly occurred because learners cannot remember Japanese vocabulary very well.

*Example (5)*

質問: インドネシアとマレーシアの間にある国  
*Shitsumon: Indonesia to Mare-shia no aida ni aru kuni*  
 (Question: Country between Indonesia and Malaysia)

- (誤) シンガブル  
 (F) *Shingapur*
- (正) シンガポール  
 (T) *Shingapo-ru*  
 (Singapore)

30 out of 50 students made an error in writing ‘Singapore’ in Japanese, and 12 out of 30 students’ answers are as shown in *Example (5)*. In this case, the student understood the question, but they did not remember how to spell ‘Singapore’ in Japanese. Instead, they wrote the answer according to Bahasa’s spell of ‘Singapore’, which is ‘*Singapur*’ and write in *katakana* into ‘*Shingapuru*’. This error was occurred because students’ answers were considered influenced by their native language (language transfer).

4) *Vocabulary Error*

This error is the least occurred type of error compared to the other errors. The type of error found in this study were mainly students’ inability to transform a verb or adjective into past tense.

*Example (6)*

- (誤) 姉に便利だった日本語の辞書を貸しました。  
 (F) *Ane ni benri datta nihongo no jisho o kashimashita.*  
 (I lent a (was) practical Japanese dictionary to my sister)
- (正) 姉に便利な日本語の辞書を貸しました。  
 (T) *Ane ni benri na nihongo no jisho o kashimashita.*  
 (I lent a practical Japanese dictionary to my sister)

In false sentence in *Example (6)*, the wrong part is the use of adjective ‘*benri datta*’. ‘*Benri datta*’ means ‘practical’ in past tense, which means that the Japanese dictionary was ‘practical’ in the past, and not in the present. Adjective ‘*Benri*’ (practical) or ‘*benri datta*’ (practical in past tense) has the same meaning in Bahasa, which is ‘*praktis*’. In Bahasa, there is no grammatical rule to transform an adjective into past tense. Thus, when the students learned Japanese, this grammatical rule in Bahasa considered gave some negative intervention (language transfer) into their target language acquisition.

C. *The Cause of Errors*

From above results and analysis, the cause of errors can be concluded as seen in Figure 1.

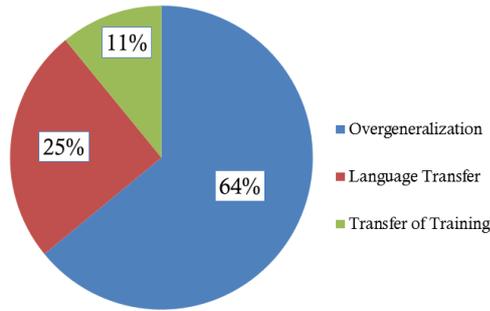


Fig. 1. The cause of errors of using *meishi shuushoku*

Figure 1 shows that from five causes of errors according to Selinker's theory elaborated by Sakoda (2002), this study found only three causes, namely overgeneralization, language transfer, and transfer of training. The highest cause of error occurrence in using *meishi shuushoku* is over-generalization, which mostly found in word placement errors such as head noun placement error, head noun description error, and errors in using verb or adjective as head noun. Moreover, the second-highest cause (25%) of errors in using *meishi shuushoku* is language transfer. Language transfer in this context mostly occurred as negative language transfer including errors in using particles, errors in writing, and errors in using the correct vocabularies. From the analysis, language transfer happens because students or learners influenced by their native language and using *meishi shuushoku* in L2 (Japanese) based on their L1 (Bahasa)'s perspective and knowledge. Moreover, transfer of training also considered to be the third cause of errors in using *meishi shuushoku* with 11% occurrence. These results are taken not only from the test results but also supported by researcher's observation results. Such as students' errors in using *na keiyoushi* (Japanese adjective *na*), it is partly influenced by the teacher which made the same error while teaching them. This indicates the importance of using correct Japanese while teaching for teachers, and that Japanese language teachers should improve their Japanese language skill to minimize the occurrence of errors in students.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

From the results and analysis, it can be concluded that the types of errors made by Indonesian-Japanese learners in using *meishi shuushoku* included word placement error, error in using particle, writing error and vocabulary error. The most common error was word placement error, which mostly caused because learners were unable to arrange phrases using *meishi shuushoku* correctly. As for the cause of the errors found in this study were

overgeneralization, language transfer, and transfer of training. These results are expected to give a reference for learner about the most common mistakes or errors in using *meishi shuushoku*, as well as for the teachers, so teachers can think about the most suitable method to teach *meishi shuushoku* to reduce or avoid errors. The results also showed that transfers of training is one of the cause of the errors. This result suggested that teacher need to be more careful in using the correct language while teaching, as well as shows the necessity for teachers to always improve their language skills to minimize the occurrence of errors in students.

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