

# Designing Daily Life Manner in Japan as an Effort to Understand the Japanese Culture

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## ABSTRACT

A lack of Japanese learners' understanding of the Japanese culture, in particular its habits or manners in everyday life or at work will lead to the learners' culture shock. Based on the results of the needs analysis conducted to students of Japanese language in a university, it is found that there were communication gaps and errors when communicating with Japanese people both verbally and in writing. In addition, respondents did not understand manners when dealing with Japanese people. This is due to low of understanding of Japanese cultures relating to etiquettes. To overcome these problems, it is necessary to make reference or informative text available for Indonesian students of Japanese language. Therefore, this study aims to compile a textbook with the theme of daily life manner in Japan which can be used as a reference as a strategy in understanding Japanese culture. Employing research and design method, this study is descriptive in nature. It develops a book by arranging a variety of information related to the manners, habits, from various sources of literature. The output of this research is the product textbook Daily of Manner in Japan which can be useful for Japanese language learners and Indonesian workers who work in Japan.

**Keywords:** *Daily conversation, habits, Japanese culture, manner in Japan*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Japan is a nation which highly upholds cultural values and is able to maintain these cultural values in an era of technological advancement and very complex community life. This is reflected in the life of its people, which illustrates the harmonious blend of modern and traditional practices. This harmony is implied by advances in science, technology, and industry without neglecting and still maintaining their cultural values. Currently, this unique culture possessed by Japanese society remains a part that continues to be preserved and used in everyday life.

Learning Japanese cannot be separated from how the language is used in everyday life, especially with the fact that culture influences the native speaker's language. Bennet and Allen (2003) state that someone who learns a certain language without understanding its culture has the potential to become a "fluent fool". Furthermore, Diner states that (2014) culture and language have a very close relationship, even though they are two different things. We all know that language and culture can influence each other. It can be seen that the language used by a community reflects the culture of the community (Diner, 2014).

To be able to communicate well with Japanese people learners must understand Japanese mannerism. This mannerism covers aspects of communication and behaviours. Muljana (2006) explains that in Japanese people often use indirect statements that have multiple meanings; they do this in communicating among themselves or with strangers. To learn Japanese, one should also study the cultural values that Japanese people have, because mastering the language without an understanding of their culture cannot guarantee that one will be able to communicate in said language well. In addition, it needs to be supported by a cultural understanding of the language currently being studied so as to avoid the risk of miscommunication.

However, there are still limited references that provide information or guidelines for Japanese mannerisms, so that as Japanese language lecturers, we should design a textbook called Daily Life Manner in Japan as teaching materials, which can later be useful for Japanese learners, whether students or prospective workers who are going to further study, and work in Japan. This is because not all students from Indonesia or foreign workers currently residing in Japan can easily adapt and work without knowing the culture and habits of the Japanese people.

Based on the results of the needs analysis questionnaire on 82 Indonesian respondents, it is found that there were communication gaps and errors when communicating with Japanese people both verbally and in writing. In addition, respondents did not understand manners when dealing with Japanese people. This is due to low of understanding of Japanese cultures relating to etiquettes. To overcome these problems, it is necessary to make reference or informative text available for Indonesian students of Japanese language.

Therefore, the making of this reference book will not only be presenting the knowledge about manners, customs, and habits in Japan but also the use of Japanese language related to the above topics will also be discussed. This is to anticipate people's lack of knowledge regarding the basics of socializing in Japan and also to know more about Japan as a whole before directly getting involved and living in Japan, either for further study or work.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1. Understanding Culture and Language***

Studying culture is an important part of learning a language. Moreover, the need for communication in the current era of disruption requires someone to be able to communicate with people who have different cultural and national backgrounds. This is in line with the statement of Buttjes (1991) which states that communicating with other people with different cultural backgrounds and ways of thinking is important in our daily lives. In addition, Kramsch (1993) asserts that we cannot be competent in a language if we are not sensitive to that culture, and know-how that culture relates to our language or culture. Therefore, language learning cannot be separated from learning the culture because language is part of culture and culture is part of the language. The two are intertwined so that they cannot be separated from each other. Understanding the culture of a learned language can prevent us from misunderstanding, miscommunication and unnecessary conflict.

Having good intercultural sensitivity is very important to be able to communicate with different people from various languages and cultures without losing their own cultural identity. This statement is supported by Brislin and Yoshida (1994) quoted in Wang (2006) who state that being aware of culture and cultural differences will help people to monitor their ethnocentrism, to respect and be sensitive to others who are culturally different, and also to be comfortable with the difference. It is also concerned with appropriate cross-cultural communication, by studying situations in which people from different cultural backgrounds interact with each other. Apart from language, cross-cultural communication focuses on the social attributes, mindset, and culture of a nation. It also involves

understanding the different cultures, languages, and customs of people from other countries. Language is often seen as a product of culture. On the other hand, the formation of culture cannot be separated from the dominant role of language.

Fishman (quoted from Risager, 2006) formulates three close relationships between language and culture by stating that language is a "part", "index" and "symbolic" of culture. As a "part" of culture, language plays an important role as a bridge in understanding culture, especially to those who want to learn about a culture deeply. As an "index" of culture, language reveals a way of thinking or organizing experiences in a particular culture. As a "symbolic" of culture, language movements and conflicts use language as a symbol to mobilize populations to defend (or attack) and support (or reject) the cultures associated with it.

In seeing the relationship between language and culture, Kramsch (1998, quoted from Risager 2006) sees language in its function of expressing, displaying, and symbolizing cultural reality. By using language, humans not only articulate experiences, facts, ideas, and events to one another, but also convey behaviors, beliefs, and points of view. Language also represents cultural reality by helping humans to create experiences. These experiences become meaningful when language becomes the medium. Once again, according to Kramsch (1998, quoted from Risager 2006), cultural experience is also symbolized by language. Language is a cultural symbol because, as a sign system, language contains cultural values. Humans are able to recognize and differentiate from each other more or less through the process of observing how to use their language. Understanding the relationship between language and culture is important in teaching second and foreign languages. As expressed by Liddicoat, Scarino and Kohler (2003), language is not only structural but also communicative and social. Learning a new language, therefore, becomes more complicated in view of the complexity formed by the interrelationships between linguistic forms and their socio-cultural aspects. So that language teaching should not leave the context of the related language's culture.

### ***2.2. Japanese Mannerism***

A good understanding of a certain culture will affect the continuity of communication. It can be concluded that linguistic and sociocultural competences are closely related. Herniwati and Aneros (2018), in a previous study, stated that students should be taught with Japanese culture, which is closely related to everyday life, as this will make it easier for students to be able to apply while practicing their speaking skills including during drilling practice. Understanding the language while understanding the culture will foster trust and close the psychological distance between one another. It is only natural for us as lecturers to find out in advance, the

information and knowledge regarding traditions and habits embedded in the daily lives of Japanese people that should be known. Mistakes or inconsistencies in behaviour, attitude, or manners when dealing directly with Japanese people results in a misunderstanding while also creating bad impression. For example, when a person moves to a new place, the familiar environment turns out to be foreign, this triggers a culture shock. In conclusion, the cultural differences result in a culture shock for Indonesians living in Japan or meeting Japanese for the first time. Ignorance and a lack of understanding of customs and culture resulted in discomfort while living in Japan. Misbehaviour around Japanese people which results in receiving negative impressions from Japanese people. Thus, it is not only prospective workers that need information and knowledge regarding the manners of Japanese people but also students, and others who get the opportunity to visit and study in Japan.

Japanese learners should understand that manners in Japan includes 1) *Ojigi* (bowing heads), 2) *Meishikoukan* (exchanging business cards), 3) *Akushu* (handshake), 4) *Mensetsu* (interview), 5) *TaberuMaana* (table manner), 6) *HoumonSuru* (visiting), 7) *Temiyage to Senbetsu* (gifts and souvenirs) and so on (Meguro, M, 2006).

### 3. METHOD

This study used a design of research and development (R & D) (Borg & Gall, 2003; Sukmadinata, 2005; Sugiyono, 2009) which operationally, contains several stages of research. First, the researchers prepared a needs analysis instrument for students. In this step, a questionnaire given to 82 students of the Japanese language education department in the third and fourth year. From the questionnaire data obtained, it then became the basis for the preparation of the book "Daily Life Manner of Japan". Second, the questionnaire is analysed to identify the problematic Japanese manner and customs for the students. Third, the researcher planned the topic materials according to the manners and habits customary in Japan referring/related to the results of the analysis. Then, a series of processes in developing the reference book "Daily Life Manner of Japan" was conducted.

The book was planned according to the result of the questionnaire. As such, it was designed to include 1) How to show respect towards Japanese people (*ojigi*), 2) Exchanging gifts and souvenirs (*temiyage*), 3) How to sit on tatami, 4) Shaking hands with Japanese people, 5) Exchanging business cards, 6) How to get on and off transportation in Japan, 7) Communicating with Japanese people either in person or by telephone, 8) How do Japanese people eat, 9) The customs when visiting Japanese people.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Questionnaire Analysis

The following is a questionnaire instrument distributed to students of the Japanese Education Department in the third and fourth year, regarding a needs analysis regarding problems and misunderstanding of manners in Japan. The questions in the questionnaire are in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Questionnaire

No	Questions
1	Do you know how to show respect towards Japanese people ( <i>ojigi</i> )?
2	Have you ever made a mistake when bowing ( <i>ojigi</i> ) at Japanese people?
3	Have you ever received gifts from Japanese people when they just came or arrived from Japan?
4	Do you know any customs associated with handshaking and exchanging business cards with Japanese people?
5	Have you ever made a mistake when communicating with Japanese people both in person and on the phone?
6	Do you know the manners and habits of visiting Japanese people?
7	Do you know the rules, regulations, manners on how Japanese people eat?
8	Do you know the rules, procedures, and manners of interview with Japanese people?

Based on the questionnaire, the following data were obtained. 97.7% of respondents knew about matters related to the Japanese way of showing respect (*ojigi*), respondents generally did *ojigi* when they meet, saying thank you, apologizing, and when going their separate ways or saying goodbye. In addition, they use it when asking for something from others, greeting elders, teachers/lecturers, parents, superiors, or when visiting family. However, based on these data, it is also known that 62.8% have made mistakes including errors such as the degree of bowing, not bowing/performing *ojigi* when introducing oneself, using the wrong sentence, and still using the incorrect honorific form. These mistakes can be understood as the habit of *ojigi* is unusual for Indonesians.

The next data were obtained from questions related to exchanging gifts/souvenirs commonly done by Japanese people. A 51.2% stated that they had received gifts/souvenirs, but 67.4% never gave gifts/souvenirs to Japanese people. From this data, it is known that 41.9%

of respondents do not know the habits of Japanese people about exchanging gifts/souvenirs.

Japanese people have the habit of sitting on tatami (mat), this is known by 97.7% of respondents. 81.4% of respondents state that they are able to follow the same habit. This may be due to a similar habit of sitting on a mat in Indonesia. Only 30.2% of the respondent knew about the habit of shaking hands in Japan, while 69.8% answered that they did not know about the habit.

However, even so, 86% of the respondents did not shake hands with Japanese people. Respondents only shook hands when meeting a Japanese person who have already been acquainted or have met/known personally before; when meeting close ones; or when a Japanese person asked to shake hands. In terms of handshaking, it is very important to pay attention to the habit of handshake in Indonesia; as it is seen as a sign of politeness in interacting with other people; while for Japanese people, shaking hands with other people is an unusual thing except during international or professional interactions.

Regarding the habit that is identical to the Japanese custom of exchanging business cards, 83.7% of respondents acknowledged it. However, only 4.7% of respondents have ever done it. This is understandable due to the fact that the current respondents are still undergraduate students who generally do not own a name card. Likewise, respondents did not answer any questions regarding the rules, manners, and procedures for getting on and off of vehicles or public transportation in Japan as respondents claim to never have experienced it before.

Japanese has certain rules and manners for communication that are unique and different from other countries. Based on the questionnaire data obtained, 81.4% of the respondents know the rules and manners of communicating with Japanese people. It shows that the majority of Japanese learners already have knowledge regarding the said topic and only a small proportion (18.6%) do not know about the rules and ethics of communicating with Japanese people.

The data also show the mistakes respondents did in communicating with Japanese. Although most respondents have already known about the rules and manners of communicating with Japanese people and respondents have received lectures on the basics of communication, especially regarding the topic of ethics and communication procedures, many often make mistakes when communicating with Japanese people both on when communicating directly or when communicating by telephone. 62.8% of the respondents answered that they had made mistakes when communicating with Japanese people, both when communicating directly (face-to-face) and when indirectly communicating (i.e by telephone). These mistakes are caused by language and non-language

mastery factors. Among them are errors caused by language factors, namely when saying something. Respondents did not know their vocabulary or due to grammar or expressions that were not understood. In addition, the use of various formal and non-formal languages often made it difficult to communicate.

During the learning process, standard Japanese is generally used. But under certain conditions, it requires lecturers to use a variety of honorific speech and form according to the situation and context. The Japanese language that is taught is usually standard in nature, but in reality, in everyday life, a language speaker must be able to transfer said variety of honorific speech and form from standard to formal or vice versa, using casual or non-formal language. This is not easy as the difference between standard language, formal and non-formal language, and politeness lies not only in the vocabulary aspect; but politeness in Japanese is closely related to grammar. Most mistakes are mistakes related to politeness, which involve the use of *kenjogo* (polite language for oneself), *sonkeigo* (polite language for others), and the use of formal and casual language.

Non-language factors that could cause errors are due to psychological factors when talking to or interacting with Japanese people. Vocabulary, phrases, and grammar that usually would not be an issue could even trigger mistakes, when a physical or psychological condition is disturbed, appearing in the form of shame, fear, or insecurity. In addition, mistakes were also caused because one's lack of knowledge regarding various customs in Japanese society. Customs like when one is eating, calling, using honorific forms, and so on. Table manners or eating etiquette in Japan are important in both daily life and during an interaction with a Japanese person, as meals are often seen as a media for communication. And eating is seen as the medium for communication, negotiation, and business. If we do not know the etiquette and customs of eating/table manners, this can lead to a disruption of good relations, as well as grave misunderstandings. Small and trivial things that most do not deem important are often the opposite of Japanese society. Knowledge of Japanese table manners, Japanese eating etiquette, and Japanese eating customs are issues that should receive special attention. As much as 83.7% of the respondents answered that they are familiar with the etiquette, customs, and manners of how Japanese people eat. Despite the acknowledgment, many respondents admit to making mistakes. (90.0%) of the respondents have made mistakes, this shows that topics related to eating customs and etiquette are so numerous and detailed that even many respondents who claimed already understanding and familiar with it, still have a hard time understanding and getting accustomed to it.

The manner of hospitality when one is visiting a Japanese person's home is no less important. In social life, even though most Japanese people often do not visit

other people's homes, ignorance of manners related to hospitality (especially when visiting someone's home) will lead to fatal problems, apart from making a bad impression; it could also reduce trust between one another. 58.1% of the respondents responded that they are familiar with the customs and manners of/when visiting a Japanese person's home. This is because knowledge about customs and manners when one is visiting a person's home is included in one of the Japanese lectures (*Nihon Jijo*). Due to most of the respondents live in Indonesia and due to most having never been to/visited Japan, 93% of the respondents stated that they had never been to a Japanese person's home. So, for questions related to mistakes or errors when visiting Japanese homes, 100% answered never.

Based on the data above, problems related to Japanese customs and habits that are not commonly practiced in Indonesia are acknowledged. To solve this problem, this study discusses references to customs, manners / social procedures in Japanese life that both learners and people who will work in Japan need to know.

**4.2. Reference-book design "Daily Life Manner of Japan"**

The organizational structure of the contents of the book "Daily Life Manner of Japan" is based on an analysis of the needs of Japanese language learners. The theme adapted are ones that are closely related to interactions with Japanese people in everyday life. The themes are as stated in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Themes of the book

No	Questions	Theme
1	<i>Ojigi</i>	Head bows
2	<i>Akushu</i>	Handshakes
3	<i>Meishikoukan</i>	Exchanging Business Cards
4	<i>Mensetsu</i>	Interviews
5	<i>Shiji no Ukekata</i>	Accepting Instructions
6	<i>Koutsu</i>	Transportation
7	<i>Komyunikeshon</i>	Communication manners
8	<i>Taberumaana</i>	Table Manner
9	<i>HoumonSuru</i>	Visiting Customs
10	<i>Temiyage to Senbetsu</i>	Gifts and Souvenir
11	<i>Seiza</i>	Sitting down etiquettes



**Figure 1** *Ojigi*.

As can be seen in Figure 1, *Ojigi* is explained with a picture to give student visual illustration. *Ojigi* means "to bow". Bowing is a gesture to express greetings, expressions of appreciation, apologies, respect, etc. *Ojigi* is widely used not only in the business scene but also in everyday life and in various situations as *Ojigi* is one of the habits and customs that need to be done.



**Figure 2** Table manners.

Figure 2 is a visual explanation of Japanese table manner. The Japanese eating etiquettes or table manners have their own characteristics and manners that foreigners must understand. It includes removing or taking off footwear when on the tatami, wiping your hands with a warm towel (*Oshibori*), saying "*Itadakimasu*" prior to eating, no talking while eating/chewing, making a slurping sound when eating, not pouring sake on your own, do not rub the chopsticks together, do not leave chopsticks standing upright on a bowl of rice, do not transfer foods from your chopstick to someone else's chopsticks, bring the food directly into the bowl, raise the rice bowl to chest level, eat in the right order, do not put chopsticks at the top of the bowl, say "*oishii*" when the meal is delicious, and at the end of every meal always say "*gochisousamadeshita*"

Next are the manners and customs of visiting Japanese homes as can be seen in Figure 3.



**Figure 3** Visiting Japanese homes' manners.

To be able to visit Japanese homes, you need to prepare carefully beforehand, such as making an appointment. In addition, if visiting for the first time the behaviour before entering the house is also an important point that would determine the first impression. As one passes or walks through the room, first sit in a corner, and say the opening greeting. When one has to sit down, sits on the left side of the seat and says “*Omaneki itadakimashite arigatou gozaimasu*” meaning, “Thank you for inviting me” and bow slightly.



Figure 4 Interview manners.

Besides those personal attitudes, it is also important to know the manner of interview (Figure 4). At the time of the interview, how one enters the room becomes an assessment of how well one is accepted in society. It starts from knocking on the door of the interview room (tap gently twice). After hearing “*Ohairi kudasai*” (Please enter), one may enter the room. Upon admission, first, bow his/her head to the interviewer in honor; bowing at 15 degrees and saying “*Shitsurei itashimasu*”. It is advisable to be right in front of the interviewer and to stand on the left side of the chair. Introducing oneself using this phrase, “(Seimei) to moushimasu. Yoroshiku onegaiitashimasu” (introducing name, please help). To show further respect: bow at c 30 degrees.

The examples of Japanese manners above have been regulated according to the habits and norms that have been applied in Japan for a long time, as explained by Haruhiko (1982) which divides bowing into three forms, namely regular bowing, saluting, and deeper bowing. The awareness of Japanese people towards manners and habits is very high, and the government and society still have maintained this until now. The seriousness of keeping tradition in line with the era of globalisation has become the strength of the Japanese state to shape the image of its nation.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Cross-cultural understanding is not enough to only understand the traditional culture, but the manners or customs that exist in everyday life should also be studied and understood well. Misunderstanding and conflict occur when speech acts, attitudes when interacting, and communicating experience errors or mismatches. Japanese learners and Indonesian workers in Japan must

be equipped with the proper knowledge of Japanese manners and customs, both from the Japanese language used in certain situations, as well as manners and behaviors, for example: when bowing down (*ojigi*), manners of exchanging business cards, shaking hands, table manners, interviewing, giving gifts, visiting other people's homes and so on. The result of the preparation of the reference book *Daily Life Manner of Japan* is a innovation to broaden the knowledge and understanding of students and prospective Indonesian workers to Japan. This textbook will help learners better understand Japanese manners and habits so that it will minimise errors when communicating and interacting with Japanese people in various activities in daily life in Japan.

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