

# Pragmatic Transfer in Japanese University Students' Requests

Diana Rizki Oktarina\*, Nuria Haristiani

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

\*Corresponding author: [diana.r.oktarina@upi.edu](mailto:diana.r.oktarina@upi.edu)

## ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate the pragmatic transfer of Japanese language learners' request expressions and its comparison with expressions conveyed by Japanese native speakers. In this study, a qualitative descriptive method was used with the DCT instrument to collect data on the expression of requests for students and native speakers. The respondents were 33 university students of Japanese learners in Bandung and 10 native speakers. Interviews were also conducted on 5 Japanese learners and 3 native speakers. The comparison between the expressions of the learners and native speakers is seen based on the use of words or phrases that make the learners' expressions can be categorized as pragmatic transfers. Pragmatic transfer in the learner's expression is analyzed by using the pragmatic transfers' theory adopted from Hitomi's (2017) research. The results demonstrate that pragma-linguistics is seen in the learner's error in using the combination of *kureru/morau* with Japanese sentence patterns. The errors were due to the differences between the giver and recipient of the request in Indonesian and Japanese. Meanwhile, socio-pragmatics can be seen in the similarities between Japanese and Indonesian cultures by using the word sorry in their expressions of request.

**Keywords:** Japanese learners' request expression, pragma-linguistic, pragmatic transfer, socio-pragmatic.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In language learning, pragmatic competence will affect the learner's communication. In line with this, Yoshida (2014) explains that communication may not work well due to the lack of pragmatic competence of the speaker which can be led to pragmatic transfer. Many studies have been carried out on the expressions of request, such as comparisons between the expressions of request in Korean and Japanese by their native speakers' (Yuichi, YongHee, JuEune, & EunNam, 2007), between Chinese and Korean speakers who study Japanese (Yurie, Kaoru, & Kei, 2010), and between Japanese language learners who are Indonesian speakers and native Japanese speakers (Putra, 2014), which is related to politeness. There are also several studies which focused more on pragmatic transfer, one of which is Rosiah's (2013) research which examined the pragmatic transfer of praise responses delivered by Japanese language learners who are Indonesian speakers. From this study, there are pragma-linguistic transfer related to expressions that are not in accordance with the structure of the expressions of native Japanese speakers, and socio-pragmatic transfer which indicates the existence of cultural influences from Indonesian

expressions. Noda (2013) also carried out a pragmatic transfer of request expressions sent via email by American who studying Japanese. The research shows that learners need to understand more deeply about forms of politeness and pragmatic transfer is influenced by the lack of opportunities to use the target language. Those previous studies only focused more on other Japanese expressions (praise) and request expression conducted by American, and less attention has been given to pragmatic transfer on the request of Japanese language learners who are Indonesian speakers.

There are many variations of the Japanese expression of request. In line with Sakiko (2019), the expressions of request can be conveyed in the form of orders (*shiro* and *shite* forms), and requests and their variations (*shite kureru/morau/itadaku* forms). This number of variations can also change over time, even related to the functions contained in the expression (Hayashi, 2016). Therefore, research on the expression of request needs to be carried out to ensure the latest conditions for the use of the expression.

Different from what can be seen from the previous studies, this study aims to examine the pragmatic transfer that occurs in the request expressions used by

Indonesian Japanese language learners at levels N4, N3, and N2, and their comparison with the expressions of request used by native speakers. This research can be a small part of the picture that there is a possibility of the emergence of pragmatic transfer in the expression of requests for Japanese language learners, both positive and negative transfers.

### 1.1. Pragmatic Transfer

Pragmatics knowledge in a language, can affect the expression conveyed. If pragmatic knowledge of a language is lacking, it will cause misunderstandings in communication (Cai & Wang, 2013). It can lead to pragmatic transfer. Pragmatic transfer is the delivery of the target language (L2) with linguistic or cultural influences from the speaker's mother tongue (L1) (Dzakiyah, 2016). Pragmatic transfer can be categorized into two types, namely pragma-linguistics and socio-pragmatics. Pragma-linguistic transfer occurs when the learner conveys expressions in the L2 with a linguistic system that is different from native speakers, and socio-pragmatic transfer occurs when the expressions in the L2 are conveyed with the assumption that the social conditions of the use of the L1 or previous language knowledge from the speaker (Rahman, 2019; Hitomi, 2017). Although socio-pragmatics can also be categorized into pragma-linguistics because it also affects the linguistic aspect (Rosiah, 2013). In line with Yoshida (2014), negative transfers shows that there are misunderstandings that can occur when there are differences in the pragmatic functions of the mother tongue and the target language. However, positive transfer appears when there are similarities between L1 and L2 related to culture and pragmatic aspects of language use (Hitomi, 2017).

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. Research Design

The study employed a descriptive qualitative research design as it aimed to examine and describe the pragmatic transfer of Japanese language learners' request expressions.

### 2.2. Research Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 33 Japanese language learners who were Indonesian and 10 native speakers. Indonesian respondents are Japanese language learners at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels who study Japanese, with JLPT levels N4 (11 people), N3 (10 people), and N2 (12 people). Meanwhile, Japanese respondents are students or workers aged 19-25 years, who are considered to have the same expression use environment or communication environment as the learner. Information regarding the

**Table 1.** Request Situation

Bamen (Situation) Number	Rank of Imposition	Bamen (Situation)	Relative power (J) and social distance (K)
1	Low	Borrowing a book	Not so close lecturer (J+ K-)
2			Close lecturer (J+ K+)
3			Not so close friend (J- K-)
4			Close friend (J- K+)
5	Medium	Drop off to airport	Not so close friend (J- K-)
6			Close friend (J- K+)
7		Requesting a letter of recommendation	Not so close lecturer (J+ K-)
8			Close lecturer (J+ K+)
9	High	Borrowing money	Not so close friend (J- K-)
10			Close friend (J- K+)
11		Requesting an extension of the time for submitting assignments	Not so close lecturer (J+ K-)
12			Close lecturer (J+ K+)

level of study or work, JLPT level, and age was obtained from the Google Form along with the use of data collection instruments.

### 2.3. Data Collection

The data were collected using DCT (Discourse Completion Tasks) to obtain request expressions based on 12 situations which can be seen in Table 1. Table 1 is the distribution of the situation of the expression of the request which is distinguished based on the rank of imposition and the interlocutor related to social distance (K) and relative power (J). In situations where the rank imposition is medium and high, the expression is adjusted to the interlocutor based on the relative power of the interlocutor. Interviews were also conducted on 5 Japanese learners and 3 Japanese native speakers for the willingness of each respondent by first responding through conversations on social media. Due to the relatively short research time, respondents for interviews were selected based on the respondents who could provide the fastest response and were willing to take part in the interview.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

The first thing to do is to interpret the expressions conveyed by the respondents into Indonesian and see if the sentences are acceptable in Indonesian as well as in Japanese. Furthermore, it will be seen based on the presence or absence of pragmatic transfer in the data. The theory adopted from Hitomi's (2017) research used

to analyze the pragmatic transfer and will be categorized into pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic transfers which can be categorized as positive transfers or negative transfers (Yoshida, 2014; Fatah, 2015; Dzakiyah, 2016; Hitomi, 2017; Rahman, 2019).

### 3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The pragmatic transfer of Japanese language learners' request expressions can be seen from pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic. The detail explanations for each finding is discussed in the following section.

#### 3.1. Pragma-linguistic

##### 3.1.1 Positive Pragma-linguistic

###### (1) B11-RI24

*"Sensei, shukudai no shimekiri o nagaku shite moraemasenka?"*

(Sensei, will (you) be able to extend the limit of collecting the tasks?)

###### (2) B12-RJ5

*"Sumimasen. Repooto o teishutsu shimekiri made ni dasesou ni naku, shimekiri o nobashite itadakitai no desuga, shimekiri o nobasu koto wa kanou deshouka?"*

(Sorry. It looks like (I) will not be able to submit assignments until the deadline, (I) hope (you) can extend the time, is it possible if the deadline is extended?)

In accordance with Data 1 used by Japanese language learners, the word *nagaku shite moraemasenka* is an expression of request that shows that the speaker expects the listener to be able to extend the schedule. This is different from the expressions conveyed by native speakers, who use *enchou suru* or *nobasu* with variations of *te morau/itadaku*, or the use of the words *kanou*, *uketoru*, and *uketsukeru* with the burden of request placed on the listener. The expression of native speakers can be seen in Data 2, with the use of the word *nobasu*. Based on the data obtained from DCT and interviews with R2 (respondent 2), native speakers do not use this expression in general, but R1 (respondent 1) adds that this expression is acceptable in Japanese, and the meaning of the expression is also conveyed, that the speaker wants the time to be extended and does not cause misunderstandings of differences use of this word. So, this expression can be categorized into positive transfer (Hitomi, 2017). It is because, if interpreted in Indonesian, "*shimekiri o nagaku suru*" means "to make the time limit longer (extend the time limit)", which has the same meaning as the words "*nobasu*" or "widen/stretch" and "*enchou suru*" or "extend". This shows that differences in the use of words or phrases by

learners, which are not used in general by speakers, can still be accepted if the intent is still conveyed.

###### (3) B12-RI2

*"Sensei, sumimasen, rei no shukudai wa jikan doori ni ma ni aisou mo nai desu, moshi yoroshiikereba, ato ichinichi jikan o itadaite mo yoroshii deyouta?"*

(I'm sorry Sensei, it looks like my assignment won't be on schedule, if I may, can I request a day?)

###### (4) B11-RI15

*"Juuza sensei, shimekiri hiki nobashite kudasai~ ashita wa muri desuyo."*

(Juuza sensei, please extend the submission deadline~ If it's tomorrow of course it's impossible.)

The positive transfers that appear in the learner's expressions are all related to differences in the use of word choices with native speakers but can be accepted by native speakers. Another example is the use of the phrase "*jikan doori ni mani aisou mo nai*" (see Data 3), or in Indonesian it can be interpreted as "not on time", where native speakers usually use "*shimekiri*" or "deadline", or it can be replaced with "*jikan ni ma ni awanai*" which has the same meaning. Expressions that have different choice of words or different phrases are also found in the choice of variations in the request form (see Data 4), like the use in the sentence "*shimekiri hiki nobashite kudasai~ ashita wa muri desuyo*" in the same situation, which is not commonly used for opponents. speak with relative power, in this context the lecturer. However, R1 added that this can be accepted by native speakers, if the interlocutor is a lecturer who is close and familiar with the speaker, this kind of situation can arise sometimes. Even though, the learner should be careful in using this expression. It is because as stated by Yoshida (2014) it can cause misunderstanding, if it is used against the interlocutor in an inappropriate situation (when speaking to the lecturer who is not so close).

##### 3.1.2 Negative Pragma-linguistic

###### (5) B9-RI2

*"Ne ne, kondo kaesu node okane kashite mo i?"*

(Hey hey, I'll return it later, so can (I) lend you some money?)

###### (6) B9-RJ4 + B10-RJ4

*"Sugoi mōshiwakenaai ndakedo, ima dōshitemo okane ga hitsuyōde, sugu kaesukara kashite kurenai? Gomen ne!"*

(I'm really sorry, now (I) really need money, (I) will return it soon later so can I borrow it? I'm sorry!)

The negative pragma-linguistic transfers that appear in the learner's expressions are mostly errors caused by the unclear subject of the giver and recipient, as well as sentence patterns that indicate the subject that do not exist in Indonesian. One of them is in data 5, which uses the phrase "*kashite mo ii*" which means "may I lend" and causes misunderstandings. In the expression of this request, native speakers use the form "*karite mo ii*" or "*kashite morau/itadaku/hoshii/kureru*" as in data 6. Transfers related to the same thing occur because of the use of the word "*karite hoshii/kureru/morau/itadaku*", and "*kashite mo ii*". This can be due to the many variations of expressions in Japanese (Sakiko, 2019) and combinations of Japanese words and sentence patterns that difficult to compared with expressions in Indonesian.

(7) B1-RI4

*"Sensei sumimasen, sensei no hon o karitai ndesuga, kari sasete itadakenaideshou ka"*

(Excuse me sensei, I want to borrow sensei's book, can sensei allow me to borrow it?)

(8) B1-RJ3

*"Sankousho o okari dekiru to ureshii no desuga."*

(I would be happy if I could borrow a reference book.)

Another thing related to the incompatibility of sentence patterns used by speakers can be seen in Data 7, the form "*karisaseteitadakenaideshouka?*", comes from the form "*saseteitadaku*" namely "please let me" and "*kariru*" which is "borrowing", so if it is interpreted it will be "could you please let me borrow it?" and can be used in Indonesian rules. This can also be included in socio-pragmatics because it is a culture of the learner. However, in Japanese it is not acceptable according to R1 and R2, because this form is simply explained by "*karite mo ii*" or "*kashite morau*" as described previously, or by variations in the use of the word *kanou*, or *dekiru* as in Data 8.

Transfers related to incorrect sentence pattern phrases such as being an invitation phrase, namely "*mashouka*", calling the subject incorrectly "*oi anta*", also using questions such as "*tasuke wo motomete ii desuka?*" which means "may I ask for a favor?" in Indonesian, it should use "*tasuke o itadakemasenka?*" which is an accepted phrase in Japanese. There is also the word "*omakase shite*" which is conveyed to the interlocutor with inappropriate relative power used, and explanations of reasons such as "I came here, to ..." using "*watashi wa koko ni kite, ...*" which is not used in the linguistic system in Japanese when explaining the reason for making a request. This shows that there are culture differences when expressing the target language,

with the influence of the mother tongue (Cai & Wang, 2013).

### 3.2. Socio-pragmatic

#### 3.2.1 Positive Socio-pragmatic

(9) B1-RI19

*"Sumimasen, sensei. Sankousho karitaidesuga, yoroshidesuka?"*

(Sorry, sensei. I want to borrow a reference book, is that okay?)

(10) B5-RJ4

*"Moushi wakenaindakedo, kuukou made nokkotte tte kurenai?"*

(Sorry, can (you) give (me) a ride to the airport?)

Positive transfer from the socio-pragmatic category, relates to the cultures of learners and native speakers in their L1. As in Data 9 on the use of the word "*sumimasen*" or "sorry". This word is widely used by students in expressing their requests to the interlocutor in Indonesian, such as "sorry/excuse me", "sorry to interrupt the time", "sorry if it is a bother", "I'm so sorry", and others commonly used in requests. Likewise with native speakers who use it both at the beginning and at the end of sentences such as "*sumimasen*", "*gomen*", "*moushi wake arimasen*", and others as in Data 10. This shows that there is a cultural similarity between learners and native Japanese speakers in the use of the word "sorry" when expressing their requests. This cultural similarity shows a positive transfer in the expression (Yoshida, 2014).

Sentence patterns such as asking about the ability, showing the speaker's desire directly which implies that a request will be made, as well as an explanation of the speaker's identity which is quite often used when talking to a lecturer who is not well known, can be included in the positive transfer. This is because this word or phrase can be accepted by native speakers which is also a culture of the expressions expressed by the learner in his L1. So, the existence of cultural similarities from L1 causes a positive transfer (Dzakayah, 2016).

#### 3.2.2 Negative Socio-pragmatic

(11) B2-RI23

*Sensei taimu misu o jama shite sumimasen, watashi wa R desu. Hon o karitaidesu. Arigatougozaimasu.*

(Sensei, sorry to interrupt, I am R. I want to borrow a book. Thank you.)

(12) B12-RJ9

*"Hontou ni moushiwake arimasen. Teishutsu kigen made ni repooto ga ma ni aisou mo naku, kijiitsu yori mo ato ni teishutsu shitainodesu ga, uketsukete moraemasudeshouka?"*

((I'm) so sorry. It doesn't seem like it will be able to make it to the collection limit in time, (I) plan to collect it tomorrow, is it still acceptable?)

In Data 11, the expression "*taimu misu jamashite sumimasen*" is interpreted as "sorry for disturbing the time" which is not a native speaker's culture. Native speakers can simply say "*moushi wake arimasen*" or "sorry" (see Data 12), or it can also be "*jikan saite itadaite sumimasen*" which means "sorry for taking the time". Therefore, this can be categorized into a negative transfer related to the culture of the L1, which can be led to misunderstanding in communication (Cai & Wang, 2013).

(13) B9-RI33

*"Pia san, anata kara okane o karitemo ii desuka?"*

(Pia, can I borrow money from you?)

Other similar transfers also relate to the subject of giver and receiver, using the word "...kara" or meaning "from ..." (see Data 13) to denote the giver which is usually not explicitly explained by native Japanese speakers. It is because, by using the pattern of "*te mo ii/te morau*" and others, it shows the position of who is the giver and who is the recipient. The culture of learners in other L1 expressions is the use of the words "I will return", "I borrow first", "I will definitely pay tomorrow" in Indonesian, with inappropriate delivery, are expressions that are not commonly used by native speakers due to different cultures of L1 and L2 which can cause negative transfer (Hitomi, 2017).

(14) B12-RI33

*"Assalamu'alaikum sensei, kadai shuushuu sukejuuru no enchou o onegaishitai nodesuga. Dekimasuka? Daijoubudesuka?"*

(Assalamu'alaikum sensei, I would like to ask for your help in extending the schedule for submitting assignments. Can it? Is it okay?)

In addition, there is a custom that is a greeting from a Muslim's culture, namely the use of the word *assalamu'alaikum*, as a prefix in the expression of a learner's request (see Data 14). This can be a negative transfer for native speakers who are not familiar with Muslim culture. In contrast to Indonesian culture, whether a Muslim or not, if you hear a greeting like this, you will immediately understand it as a greeting. However, this is one of the shortcomings in this study because it does not explain the background of the

interlocutor when conveying the expression. Thus, it is possible to appear in the data. In fact, learners may not say the following greetings to Japanese people when speaking in person. On the other hand, the end of this request sentence is the word "*dekimasuka? daijoubudesuka?*" is not a culture of native speakers, because if translated into Indonesian it can mean "Is it possible? Is it okay?" which may be used by learners, but not by native speakers which can be categorized to negative transfers due to differences in the pragmatic function of the learner's mother tongue and the target language Yoshida's (2014).

Overall, the findings indicate that in the learner's expression there are positive and negative transfers, in terms of pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic. This can be caused by differences in the habits or culture of the learner's mother tongue and the target language (Japanese).

## 4. CONCLUSION

From the findings, it can be concluded that pragmatic transfer, with pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic categories, both positively and negatively, can be found in the expressions of requesting Japanese language learners who are Indonesians. Broadly speaking, positive transfer occurs when there is a similarity in the context of the use of a word, both in Japanese language norms (as L2) and Indonesian's (as L1) and the use of different words but can still be accepted and understood by native Japanese speakers. Negative transfer occurs because there are differences in the delivery of the subject, especially in the context of receiving and giving, also sentence patterns that cannot be interpreted directly in L1 cause many mistakes. The lack of explanation of the background of the interlocutor in DCT also results in misunderstandings in the delivery of expressions, so that the expression appears greetings in Muslim culture that are unlikely to be used in native situations appear. When speaking to a Japanese interlocutor, the learner's knowledge may also influence the expression he conveys, such as the extent to which the learner understands the phrase, how often the learner uses the phrase, or vocabulary owned, which in this study is not one of the discussions. However, in this study it was found that negative pragmatic transfer can also occur in learners with N2 level. By knowing that there is a pragmatic transfer possibility that appears in this learner's expression, it is hoped that it can be a concern for both teachers and learners so that they can pay more attention to pragmatic abilities, at least in understanding the meaning of words based on their context from the pragmatic aspect. Meanwhile, positive transfer is expected to provide an illustration that the similarity of cultural contexts can be considered as one way to facilitate the learning of a second language, which can also be seen from the perspective of

pragmatic development. This pragmatic transfer research can be carried out on other expressions in Japanese, and the use of natural data will also show the original situation of the use of the expressions.

## REFERENCES

- Cai, L., & Wang, Y. (2013). Interlanguage Pragmatics in SLA. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3(1), 142-147.
- Dzakiyah, A. (2016). *Pragmatik Transfer In The Request Of Suggestion Strategies By The Students Of Semarang State University*. [Master's Thesis]. Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia.
- Fatah, M. H. A. (2015). Pragmatik Transfer In Compliment Response Strategies Of The English Department Students Of State University Of Semarang. *English Education Journal*, 5(1), 1-8.
- Hayashi, K. (2016). Irai hyōgen no i bunka hikaku (Nichū) - poraitonesu no shiten kara chūkan gengo o saguru-. *Kōbe Shinwa Joshi Daigaku Daigakuin Kenkyū Kiyō*, 12, 63-80.
- Hitomi, A. (2017). The Realization Of The Apology Speech Act In English By Japanese Speakers: Cross-Cultural Differences, Pragmatiktransfer, And Pedagogical Implications. *Language, Literature, And Culture: Graduate School Of Literary Studies, Doshisha Women's College Of Liberal Arts*, 17, 71-77.
- Noda, T. (2013). *Pragmatik Transfer in Japanese Requests in Emails*. [Master's thesis]. Open Access Theses. 138. Purdue University, Indiana, Amerika Serikat.  
[https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/open\\_access\\_theses/138](https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/open_access_theses/138)
- Putra, J. (2014). *Strategi tindak tutur permohonan pembelajar bahasa Jepang tingkat mahir : Kajian komparatif dengan penutur asli*. [Master's thesis]. Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia.
- Rahman, B. I. (2019). Pragmatik Transfer In The Speech Act Of Promise Among Students. *Jurnal Vision*, 15(2), 1 – 12.
- Rosiah, R. (2013). *Transfer pragmatik pada respon terhadap pujian oleh pembelajar bahasa Jepang*. [Master's thesis]. Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia.
- Sakiko, T. (2019). Irai bamen ni okeru kyōka motome hyōgen no shiyō no dōtai. *Kuni bungaku*, 103, 468-455.
- Yoshida, M. (2014). Why Do Second-Language Learners Misunderstand Conversational Implicatures ? . *The Japanese Journal of Language in Society*, 16(2), 50–65.
- Yuichi, M., YongHee, K., JuEune, L., EunNam, P. (2007). Kankokujin Nihongo gakushūsha ni mi rareru puragumachikku toransufā: Irai-bamen ni okeru Kankoku-go no shōyū-gata ` ~ ja' no eikyō ni suite. *Ibaraki Daigaku Ryūgakusei Sentā Kiyō*, 5, 65 - 75.
- Yurie, W., Kaoru, H., & Kei, Y. (2010). Irai hyōgen ni okeru Nihon go gakushūsha no chūkan gengo: Chūgokugo bogo washa Kankoku-go bogo washa no bogo ten'i. *Tōhokudaigaku-kō nado kyōiku kaihatsu suishin sentā kiyō*, 5, 171-177.