

The Use of Politeness Strategy in Criticizing Speech Acts in Japanese

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ABSTRACT

Although Japanese language is one of the most quoted examples in speech acts and politeness research, current publications focus on distinct areas of criticism speech acts and politeness. Very few of them enquire into the varied aspects of politeness strategy in criticism speech acts. Furthermore, politeness strategies of Japanese criticism speech acts via movie media are minimally explored. This study aims to show how the Japanese criticism strategies are represented in the media. Using a qualitative approach involving note-taking methods, the study analyzed dialogues containing criticism in *Boruto: Naruto Next Generation* by Noriyuki Abe. The data were then recorded and analyzed using criticism of speech acts and politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (1987). The findings revealed that direct and indirect criticism speech acts were the most commonly used strategies in the movie. Several politeness strategies displayed in the movie also included bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record politeness strategies.

Keywords: *Criticism speech acts, face-saving, Japanese, movie media, politeness strategy*

1. INTRODUCTION

The subject of speech acts has been a significant interest of pragmatics, especially in cross-cultural pragmatics (Shoshana, House, & Kasper, 1989). The current study explores the meaning of utterances that carry the speech acts of criticism in various conditions, such as criticism in the context of educational process (Al Kayed & Al-Ghoweri, 2019; Nguyen, 2013), online interactions (Hosseinizadeh & Rassaei, 2019), teacher-student relationship (Peng, 2020), speech criticism feedback (Marlow, 2016), criticism in the TV program (Asih, 2014), media interview (El-Dakhs, 2020), book reviews (Itakura & Tsui, 2011), novel (Nofrita, 2016).

Marlow (2016) stated that when people are put in a situation where they critique the talk of others, they are engaging in the means of criticism speech acts. Criticism may be conveyed directly or indirectly (Nguyen, 2008). One point that is appropriate to criticism speech acts processes is the process of face-work. When individuals communicate with others, they portray face. Brown and Levinson (1987) showed that criticism creates a face-threatening act. Specifically, when one person criticizes another, they are impeding the other person's need for a positive face (social approval) and constructing their need for a negative face (autonomy).

It is known to all that the aim of criticism is to reveal the shortcoming, mistakes, or errors of someone objectively to enable them to identify their errors, correct them, and learn from them. Levinson (1987) noted that criticism is a face-threatening act that can damage the real face of others. However, direct criticism easily hurts the self-esteem of someone because most of them see direct criticism as a personal attack, which would put them down or make them embarrassed, disappointed, or annoyed rather than a help. Someone becomes less motivated, tends to be offensive or dislikes the speaker while indirect criticism can reduce their face-threatening and would not hurt their self-esteem.

Previous relevant studies have dealt mostly with criticism of speech acts. For instance, Marlow and Giles (2010) raised issues regarding self-reported criticism speech acts in Hawai'i and found that multi-ethnic locals criticized others and were criticized themselves, for not adapting speech appropriately during employment, educational, social, family, and community interactions. Besides, Alfesia (2016) found that English learners in Indonesia preferred to use more greetings in criticizing than Australian native speakers did. The form of differences was caused by the word choices, the use of sentence types, the number of strategy combinations, the

way criticisms are delivered, and the strategy types and modifiers used while criticizing others.

Furthermore, Marlow (2009) varied race and power in a hypothetical experimental vignette among diverse ethnic groups in Hawai'i and found that people evaluated criticism speech acts from perceived in-group members more favorably than out-group members. The study introduced and validated the Receiver Criticism speech acts Response Scale, which ranged from avoidant to aggressive. Though useful in understanding the ways in which people may respond when faced with criticism speech acts, hypothetical and retrospective accounts do not provide the same validity as face-to-face criticism data, given the self-enhancement bias inherent in self-reported data.

In their study on the context of the relationship between teachers and junior high school students using Leech's politeness principle, Peng (2020) noticed that politeness strategies are more effective and acceptable. Therefore, in order to save the negative face of the hearers and reduce the painful impact of the criticism to a minimum, speakers always criticize the hearer in a much more indirect way to make the criticism effective and easy to be accepted without arousing hostility.

Nguyen (2013) addressed that Vietnamese EFL learners tended to oppose their peers' criticism more often than Australian English NSs, who were more likely to accept constructive criticism from peers. Conversely, Hiraga and Turner (1996) found that Japanese ESL learners tended to recognize teachers' criticism more regularly than British students, who look to show more to their own face, and thus resisted the criticism as much as they acknowledged it.

In addition, Marlow (2016) constructed the communication responses that participants exhibited following an incident where they were criticized for their speech in a face-to-face video recorded dyadic encounter. Individuals responded to criticism speech acts with avoidant, apologetic, humorous, accommodative, assertive, and aggressive approaches. The results suggest that people demonstrated more acceptance and accommodation when responding directly to a critical person, yet exhibited more assertiveness and aggressiveness when responding indirectly.

Although there are many studies showing criticism speech acts strategies and responses used by receivers, research has not specifically evaluated criticism speech acts of Japanese in the movie. It is important to explore criticism speech acts in movie media because it provides a potentially immediate learning opportunity. Armour and Iida (2016) stated that media is the resource that appears to trigger enchantment in many consumers and it may become the stimuli for out-of-school curriculum and public pedagogy. Furthermore, movie media is one of the Japanese popular cultures (hereafter JPC), and it can

motivate individuals to learn the Japanese language and about Japan (Armour & Iida, 2016). Based on the current trend of recent learners of Japanese language, The Japan Foundation (2011) addressed that the motivation to learn Japanese language comes more from their interest in JPC than say linked to any future career prospects.

The present study is motivated by the fact that there is a need to explore more about the cultural values and norms in non-western cultures such as the Japanese one. The study contributes to the field of cross-cultural pragmatics in that it discerns that pragmatics is crucial for strategies of Japanese as they perceive and produce the speech act of criticism. Additionally, there are minimally explored the politeness strategies of Japanese criticism from the angle of Brown and Levinson's framework in the context of media.

Therefore, in order to fill the gap, the author seeks to investigate such a topic in different contexts. This study focuses on investigating the following questions: what kind of criticism speech acts strategies used by Japanese via movie media? And how is politeness strategy applied in Japanese criticism speech acts via movie media as seen from Brown and Levinson's theory?

2. METHOD

A qualitative descriptive method was employed to analyze the verbal data containing and functions of criticism speech acts in anime *Boruto: Naruto Next Generation* episodes 1-200. The study used this movie as data sources with the consideration that it contains certain scenes and abundant criticism speech acts. Also, according to the streaming platform Crunchyroll, this movie is one of the most popular movies around the world. Rahmawati et al. (2020) stated that a movie is considered one of the media for linguists to study speech acts deeply, and also function as an effective medium of message delivery and communicative interaction as well.

Data for the present study were collected via movie, and transcribed and categorized according to a classification of criticism realization strategies and modifiers adapted from Nguyen (2008). Based on the results of the analysis, 113 data of criticism speech acts from 200 episodes were found which consists of direct and indirect criticism speech acts' strategies. After that, the author examined the politeness strategies of criticism speech acts using Brown and Levinson (1978) framework. The analysis required identity method and techniques as follows: 1) uninvolved conversation observation, 2) data record, 3) data transcription, and 4) note-taking. Data card was used to record the results of the listening process of the anime dialog. The data were then validated with scrutinized observation.

Table 1. The classification of criticism speech acts strategies

Direct Speech Act Criticism	Amount	Percentage	Indirect Speech Act Criticism	Amount	Percentage
Negative evaluation	33	29.2%	Correction	18	16.0%
Contradictory expression	2	1.8%	Indicating standard	5	4.4%
severe criticism	11	9.7%	Demand of change	5	4.4%
Identification of the problem	5	4.4%	Request for change	6	5.3%
Difficulty statement	4	3.5%	Advice about change	5	4.4%
consequences	4	3.5%	Expression of uncertainty	9	8.0%
			Asking/presupposing	6	5.3%
Total	59	52.2%	Total	54	47.8%
Total direct and indirect strategies				113	100%

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Strategy of Criticism Speech Acts

From the analysis findings related to the characteristics of speech acts strategies, it was found that the majority of the characteristics of speech acts strategies in the data used direct speech acts as many as 59 data (52.2%), and indirect speech acts as many as 54 data (47.8%). Sub categories for each classification are described in Table 1.

3.1.1. Direct Speech Act Criticism

A direct criticizing speech act is a criticizing speech that conveyed explicitly, frankly, without further ado regarding the choices, actions, words or other things made by the speech partner (Nguyen, 2008). There are six direct criticizing speech acts found in this study comprising negative evaluation (33), contradictory expressions (2), severe criticism (11), identification of the problem (5), and consequences (4).

Negative Evaluation

In this strategy, the critic expresses his or her disapproval of what the hearer says or does by using evaluative adjectives with negative meaning or evaluative adjectives with positive meaning plus negation (Nguyen, 2005). The majority of speech acts of criticism found in the data are negative evaluation (33 data). Negative evaluation is a speech act criticizing the opponent speaking directly and explicitly.

The tendency of using negative evaluation in this film because there are many close relationships between the speaker and the hearer. So, when one sees something that is not appropriate or someone's incompetence, they do not hesitate to cast a negative evaluation on the other person. This is consistent with study conducted by Aini, Wijayanto, and Hikmat (2019), which found that negative evaluation was a common strategy to deliver someone's inability, and it was acceptable, especially when the speaker has a close relationship with the hearer. Examples on this strategy are given as follows:

- (1) "*heta kuso da nee... youji ii ka jya nai?*"
 "It's really bad... This is even worse than a picture of a kindergarten child."

(040/Episode33/DS)

In this example, the speaker, who is a painter, criticizes the drawings made by the hearer. The speaker thinks the drawings painted by the hearer are worse than his paintings. The criticism conveyed by the speaker above is included in the speech act strategy of direct criticism, because the speech is expressed clearly and without further ado.

The direct criticizing speech act above is classified as a criticizing strategy in the negative evaluation. The negative evaluation spoken by the speaker is indicated by the lingual marker "*heta kuso da nee... (it's really bad...)*". Through this speech, the speaker openly criticizes the hearer's drawing and compares it with his good drawing.

Identification of the Problem

In this strategy, people state directly the mistakes or the problem found with the hearer's actions, work, appearance, words, etc. (Nguyen, 2005). Identification of the problem is a concise description of an issue to be addressed or a condition to be improved upon. This strategy found in the data is as much as 4,4 % (5 data). Consider the following example:

- (2) "*ie, chigau ne. Miteru yo. Kakusei to nai mono, yowakute dasekenai otoko datte, sonna otoko ni dare ga koi kakeru katten?*"
 "No, you're wrong. They're watching you. But I don't think you can hide from the fact that you're a weak and pathetic person. Who would want to talk to a man like that?"

(017/Episode07/DS)

This previous speech appears when the speaker criticizes the hearer's cowardly attitude and always hides when challenges and problems come, and he assumes that no one acknowledges his existence. Including the strategy of direct criticism because the speech is delivered clearly and easy to understand. The utterance gives an illocutionary power to the speech partner and can be easily understood the meaning to be conveyed.

The speaker expressed the real problem that causes other people not to see the hearer's existence and power. This is in line with Kurji and Shamiri's (2020) findings, which described the tendency of using identification of the problem is due to using this strategy. People point out directly the mistakes or the problems found with the hearer's actions, work, appearance, or words.

Statement of Difficulty

The speakers use this strategy to express how difficult it is to understand what the hearers have done or said (Nguyen, 2005). This strategy is usually manifested by means of some structures like *wakaranai* "it's difficult to understand". Statement of difficulty was used four times (3.5%) in this data. This strategy illustrated in the following example:

- (3) "*Wakaranai hanashi wa yamete kuremasuka.*"

"Can you stop saying things that are difficult to understand?"

(077/Episode73/DS)

In response to the example above, the speaker criticizes the hearer because in that speech the speaker was confused by the hearer's previous statement which was difficult to understand. The speaker's statement of difficulty is indicated by the lingual marker "*wakaranai hanashi...* (that's difficult to understand...)" This speech act also indicated a sense of resentment with the other person's sayings. This result is also consistent with the research conveyed by El-Dakhs (2020), which showed that criticizing often aims to show the speaker's dissatisfaction with the hearer's behavior and to urge the hearer to improve his/her behavior in the future.

3.1.2. Indirect Speech Act Criticism

Indirect criticizing speech acts are utterances that state problems with the choices, actions, and performance of the speech partner (Nguyen, 2008). Table 1 shows that the most frequent indirect strategy manifested in the film is 'correction' (18 instances, 33.3%) followed by 'expression of uncertainty' (9 instances, 8.0%), 'request for change' and 'asking/presupposing' (6 instances, 5.3%), 'indicating standard', demand of change', and advice about change (5 instances, 4.4%).

Correction

Using this strategy, speakers provide alternatives or solutions to the hearer's choice with intention to fix errors (Nguyen, 2005). The data showed that correction occurred in the speech of the film in 18 situations. Consider the following illustrative example:

- (4) "*Aho ka? Nisshukan mo kinshin shobu ukete datsu ga nani itte agaru, omae no uwasa de mouchikiri dattanda. Sukoshi wa jincho shite.*"

"Are you stupid? You've just been suspended for two weeks. People are already talking about you. You should correct your behavior."

(005/Episode02/IS)

The sayings above appear when the speaker prevents the hearer from planning to cause trouble again after being suspended for several weeks.

Indirect criticism sub-strategy *correction* offers the repair as face-saving strategies which allow the hearer to take corrective action by her/himself. The findings above are confirmed by Peng (2020), which stated that indirect criticism can reduce the hearer's face-threatening and would not hurt his/her self-esteem, therefore, it is more effective and acceptable.

Request for Change

In this strategy, the speaker usually asks the hearer to do something (Nguyen, 2005). It is usually expressed by the use of some structure like the verb of causative "*~saseru, ~te kudasai, ~e*" (could you). The data showed that the "request for change" strategy was used in 6 instances (5.3%). This strategy illustrated in the example below:

- (5) "*Kao ga zenzen hansen shitenaizo. Ato, kyou kara wa sensei to yobe!*"

"You don't even look sorry at all. And from today on, call me, Sensei!"

(003/Episode01/IS)

This saying appears when the hearer is scolded by his teacher for causing trouble when he comes to school. However, the hearer doesn't feel guilty at all and calls his teacher as big brother (*Oniisan*) when he is in school. The 'request for change' strategy can be seen in the speech "*kyou kara wa sensei to yobe!* (From today on, call me, Sensei!)" The speaker conveyed the criticism in the form of an order for the hearer to call him 'Sensei', not 'brother'.

Asking/Presupposing

According to this strategy, the speakers tend to use rhetorical questions/statements to raise the hearer's awareness of the inappropriateness of his or her actions (Nguyen, 2005). The results of the study revealed that the film employed it in 6 instances (5.3%). Examples on this strategy are given below:

- (6) "*Nenjuu hitori de kyanpu shiteru youna mondashi, nani shiteru kanaa tte wakaranaiyo.*"

"It felt like he had been camping for a whole year, who knew what he was doing."

(094/Episode120/IS)

This strategy appears in the words “*nenjuu hitori de kyanpu shiteru youna mondashi*” (it felt like he had been camping for a whole year). Included in the category of indirect criticizing speech acts of “asking/presupposing” because the speech uses rhetorical expressions.

The speaker used rhetorical statements to criticize her father because of the speaker’s annoyance over the attitude of her father who never came home with the excuse of traveling the world. The speaker made an analogy with her father’s attitude that he had been camping for a whole year. It is noticed that the speaker used a rhetorical statement to make the listener feel guilty.

Hosseinizadeh and Rassaei (2019) stated that indirect communication style can also be explicated through high and low culture distinction. In an indirect communication style, direct communication of meaning is considered impolite; therefore, people tend to hide their true intention in order to be polite and save the hearer’s face. An indirect style is more prevalent among people in high-context cultures while a direct style is typically practiced in low-context cultures, which stress the importance of individualism and self-reliance. One of the cultures that implied the indirect communication style is Japanese.

3.2. Politeness strategies for criticism speech acts

According to Brown & Levinson’s politeness theory, the purpose of people intentionally reduces the harmful effects of criticism into a minimum. However, both of them are too ideal and absolute, which are “other” oriented and neglects “self”. The overemphasis on the hearer’s face, which overlooks the appropriateness in language strategy.

To establish a harmonious relationship with the hearers, made the suggestions or criticism easy to be accepted and improved the relationship quality with others. Speaker should try to give the criticism a bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off record politeness, so the criticism can be more natural to be accepted and valid.

3.2.1. Bald on record

The on-record strategy is carried out by expressing something clearly, straightforwardly, unambiguously, without further ado, and without trying to save the face of the interlocutor (badly without redress). This strategy is expressed directly without giving options to the speech partner. The speaker is more concerned with effective communication than saving the face of the interlocutor. This strategy illustrated in the following example:

(7) “*Tonikaku, kodomoppoi koto wa yamete! sou iu, sugu ni muki ni naru toko datte iteru no.*”

“Obviously don’t do anything childish anymore!” You see... your emotions are starting to rise. Totally childish.”

(014/Episode04/DS)

In this strategy, the statement appears when the speaker criticizes the hearer’s behavior which always causes problems in class so that the speaker and other class members who never act up get into trouble too. The tendency of using ‘bald on record’ strategy in this situation is because it is influenced by the social distance’s factor, which the two of them had been friends with since childhood and when they were in school, they were in the class but never got along with each other.

3.2.2. Positive Politeness

Positive politeness is associated with the positive face of the speech partner, namely the desire for the speaker to be respected and his wishes understood. Brown and Levinson offer fifteen positive politeness sub strategies. In this study, two positive politeness sub strategies were found, namely the strategy of agreement with the speaker and the strategy of asking or giving approval. Consider the following example:

(8) “*Dou demo ii kedo, anatatachi wa raisha no matomona norikata kurai oboekara? Anatatachi wa gaki jya arimasenshi*”

“It’s up to you, but can’t you remember how to get on the train the right way? You’re not a kid anymore”

(030/Episode17/IS)

The speech above showed the use of ‘positive politeness’ speaking strategy in the category of giving and asking for reasons. The speaker asked the hearer an excuse about his behavior on the roof of the train carriage that could endanger him. Sarada criticizes Boruto’s behavior when he climbs the roof of the train carriage even though it is dangerous.

3.2.3. Negative Politeness

Negative politeness is a desire associated with the face of the speech partner, namely the desire that the speaker’s rights are not violated by the speech partner. Negative politeness is essentially intended to fulfill or save some of the negative face of the speech partner. Politeness is used to show the social distance between the speaker and the speech partner. Examples on this strategy are given below:

(9) “*Sonna ni kimi nara, yuutousei sonna no naka toori aizu natte areba iin jya nai no?*”

“You are a respectable student. If you’re that worried, why don’t you talk to him straight away?”

(048/Episode35/IS)

The speaker saw the hearer who is hesitant and worried to reconcile her friends who are in conflict, even though her dream is to become the village leader like the speaker's father. The speech in the situation above is included in the critical speech act, which can be seen in the speech "*yuutousei sonna no naka toori aizu natte areba iin jya nai no?* (You are a respectable student, why don't you talk to him straight away?)".

The speaker tends to use the 'negative politeness' of the fenced statement strategy. The criticism is submitted by feelings or irritation towards the hearer's attitude, which can only watch her friends' fights without interrupting them.

3.2.4. *Off record*

Ambiguity is considered to be a way of adhering to the politeness rules of a particular culture. Speakers may use unclarity to mitigate face threats. Criticism is a face-threatening act, it can save faces, maintain harmonious interpersonal relations, then achieve the communicative goal. Teachers can sometimes use "I am afraid, I think, I would, it seems that, perhaps, maybe in the assessment of the hearers' activities. With the vague term, the request costs less, and it is more polite.

The 'off-record' is a strategy of doing FTA indirectly by letting the hearer decide how to interpret the speaker's utterance. This strategy is considered the politest and is seen as having the lowest potential to hurt the listener's heart. The speaker used the strategy of rhetorical expressions. This strategy illustrated in the following example:

(10) "*Haree... buki wa tsukawanai tte ita yo ne, ruru o yabutte shobu datte ieru no?*

"Heee, didn't you say you wouldn't use a gun? Can this be called a fair match if you break the rules?"

(005/Episode02/IS)

The sayings above occurred when the speaker criticized the hearer for violating the agreed rule that their matches must not use weapons. However, the hearer instead used it because he was desperate and almost lost. The speech act of criticizing above is a form of the application of vague politeness in the strategy category of using rhetorical questions. The speaker used a politeness of record strategy for using ethical questions because the speaker wants to criticize the hearer's behavior for violating the regulatory agreement.

The tendency of using this strategy is influenced by social distance because the speaker did not have a close social distance relationship with the hearer. This factor made the speaker feel reluctant to express criticism directly. The speaker used rhetorical questions because it allowed the hearer not to realize that the speech contains criticism directed at him.

It can be seen from all these examples above that, politeness strategy for criticizing speech acts is a powerful weapon when criticizing hearers. Speakers who criticize with politeness strategy cultivates a casual and educational ambiance, which is more attractive to the hearers. Moreover, since these speakers have a way to get along with the hearers, it is much easier for their criticism to be accepted. Furthermore, Hosseinizadeh and Rassaei (2019) suggested that whether the interaction is via media, online, or face-to-face can also play a part in determining the degree to which speakers adhere to culture schemas.

It has become increasingly difficult to ignore the important role of pragmatic competence which is considered a functionally significant communicative tool in the context of general communication (Heidari et al., 2020), and the politeness strategy of criticism speech act is no exception. It is widely represented in various media (El-Dakhs, 2020). For instance, in movie media. Several previous studies have found in film media that criticism of speech acts can offer access to a setting like the real nature of daily life (Hosseinizadeh & Rassaei, 2019).

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of the current study revealed that the two classifications of criticism speech acts strategies in Japanese include strategy of direct criticism speech acts and strategy of indirect criticism speech acts. There are 113 data from data sources that can be classified into 59 data for direct criticism speech acts strategies, and 54 data for indirect criticism speech acts strategies. The most frequently used direct criticism sub-strategy is 'negative evaluation' (33 out of 59 data). The most frequently used indirect criticizing sub-strategy is 'correction' (18 out of 54 data).

Based on Brown and Levinson's politeness strategy, there are four strategies of politeness used by Japanese in this research: (1) bald on record; (2) positive politeness with the sub-strategy 'agreement with speakers' and sub-strategy 'asking or giving consent'; (3) negative politeness with sub-strategy fenced politeness; (4) off record with sub-strategy rhetorical question.

However, there are several limitations in this study. Even though the strategies of politeness' criticism speech acts have been revealed, the data sources are only from the movie. For further research, data sources can be used from natural interactions. Additionally, this study only examines one angle of politeness strategy from a Japanese perspective. The next study also can analyze politeness strategies of criticism speech acts and contrast them using two languages or with different sub-cultures.

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