

# 琉球大学学術リポジトリ

## 敬語行動における英語学習者の誤用分析

メタデータ	言語: 出版者: 琉球大学法文学部 公開日: 2010-01-26 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Onaha, Hiroko, 小那覇, ひろこ メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12000/15207">http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12000/15207</a>

## A Study of Politeness with Special Reference to Requests and Overpoliteness<sup>1</sup>

Hiroko Onaha

### 1. Introduction

This paper attempts to examine pragmatic failures by Japanese EFL (English as a foreign language) learners with special reference to requests and over-politeness. The theoretical framework for analysis has been developed on the basis of previous studies on politeness strategies which are considered to be universal. This paper will outline previous studies on politeness and examine pragmatic failures from data reported in the literatures and data collected in the Japanese EFL classroom.

### 2. Previous studies on politeness

Over the past few decades numerous studies have been carried out on politeness with focus on its actual language usage (Lakoff 1973, 1975; Leech 1983; Ide and others 1986; Brown and Levinson 1987). The primary motivation for using politeness behavior is, as Lakoff (1975 : 64) describes, "to reduce friction in personal interaction". In order for politeness behavior to function, Lakoff suggests three fundamental politeness rules as follows (p. 65):

- (1) Formality: keep aloof
- (2) Deference: give option
- (3) Camaraderie: show sympathy

By using Formality such as jargon or academic terms, academic passive, or academic-authorial "We" (in Japanese, use of honorific forms, for example), Formality establishes psychological distance between the

speaker and the addressee. Furthermore, the speaker maintains superiority over the addressee by using the Formality strategy. In most cases, however, the speaker's social status is usually superior to that of the addressee. Deference, on the other hand, allows for the superiority of the addressee. The speaker tries not to decide how to behave, but rather leaves that up to the addressee. Camaraderie suggests that the addressee feels that he/she belongs to the speaker's group. American society seems to place a higher value on this rule than on the other two. This is well characterized in the stereotyped nature of American people, which implies that Americans are generally friendly.

Brown and Levinson (1987:70) categorize politeness as a pair, "positive politeness" and "negative politeness". Positive politeness is a strategy in which the speaker tries to act or speak according to what the addressee wants. When we congratulate someone, we are pleased that something happy or fortunate has come to him/her. We know that he/she wants us to do so. Leech (1988: 133) summarizes it as "seeking concord". Negative politeness, on the other hand, is a strategy in which the speaker tries not to interfere with the addressee's freedom of action. Hence, the speaker does not force the addressee to do something for the speaker, but instead gives him/her a choice. Negative politeness includes ordering, asking, demanding and begging by a speaker who needs strategy to mitigate disagreement between what the speaker wants and how the addressee feels. Leech sums this activity up in terms of "avoidance of discord". Leech, however, explains that politeness is placed on a "cost-benefit scale" and on "a relationship between two participants, self and other". He has, furthermore, developed maxims of politeness based on these pairs as follows (p. 132):

- (1) TACT MAXIM : Minimize cost or maximize benefit to other

- (2) GENEROSITY MAXIM : Minimize benefit or maximize cost to self
- (3) APPROBATION MAXIM : Minimize dispraise or maximize praise of other
- (4) MODESTY MAXIM : Minimize praise or maximize dispraise of self
- (5) AGREEMENT MAXIM : Minimize disagreement or maximize agreement between self and other
- (6) SYMPATHY MAXIM : Minimize antipathy or maximize sympathy between self and other

The strategy of the Tact Maxim applies to negative politeness, since negative politeness requires minimizing the cost to the addressee. Illocutionary acts [Sadock (1974: 9) defines as speech acts that we accomplish by communicating our intention to accomplish them] of ordering, asking, demanding and begging inherits incivility because we ask or request someone to do something for us (Leech 1983; Minami 1987). Thus, the strategy of the Tact Maxim is required in order to reduce friction. The Tact Maxim says that "Could I borrow this electric drill?" is slightly more polite than "Could you lend me this electric drill?" The former illocutionary act minimizes cost to the other by omission of the addressee as a receiver of the imposition. The latter illocutionary act, on the other hand, minimizes the cost to the other compared to the former because it acknowledges the presence of the addressee, "you". In the Generosity Maxim, the relationships of cost and benefit between the speaker and addressee is reversed. That is, the speaker maximizes the cost to self. For example, "Could I have some more X?" for a second helping is slightly less polite than "Is there some more X?" The Generosity Maxim claims this because the benefactor is present in the former illocution. The strategy of the Approbation Maxim applies to

situations in which the speaker should not say unpleasant things about the addressee.

The Modesty Maxim is exactly parallel to the strategy of humility in Japanese as Leech shows in the conversation between two Japanese women (p. 137). He points out, however, that in an English-speaking society, it is more polite to accept a compliment rather than to deny it. Once in a while the present writer will use this strategy when she is in a hurry, by saying "thank you" to someone who compliments her repeatedly. Then she can carry forward the conversation. Even in this situation, however, she would deny his/her compliment to herself at first. In this sense, the writer agrees with what Leech has said that in Japanese society the Modesty Maxim takes priority over other maxims, while in an English-speaking society the Tact Maxim takes priority over the others.

In order to avoid conflict with other people, the strategies of the Agreement Maxim and the Sympathy Maxim are certainly necessary. The Agreement Maxim tells us to try not to disagree with the opinions of others and the Sympathy Maxim tells us to show our sympathy to the misfortunes of others or congratulate them in their good fortune.

Ide and others (1986) have studied the comparison of politeness behavior of Japanese college students (525 students) and American college students (490 students). They have studied variations of the illocutionary act in a situation where an informant wants to borrow a pen from people whose social status varies from that of strangers to that of family members. Occupations included a salesclerk, a workplace supervisor, and a physician and a professor; and family members were a spouse, a lover and the like. As this study shows, the use of politeness by Japanese students varies more distinctly than that of American students, depending on the status of the people from whom they wanted

to borrow a pen.

Japanese politeness is characterized into *wakimae* strategy and *hatarakikake* strategy: *wakimae* strategy is motivated by the perceived distance between the speaker and the addressee which is determined by the society and its culture. And *hatarakikake* strategy is used according to the speaker's personal feeling for the addressee; that is, the speaker tries to avoid conflict and show deference to the addressee. In linguistic forms of Japanese, *wakimae* strategy is observed in the honorific systems of verbs, and *hatarakikake* strategy is used in the illocutionary act of requests in Japanese (for further explanation see section 3). The study of Ide and others has concluded that *wakimae* strategy is characterized as the politeness behavior of Japanese students and *hatarakikake* strategy as the politeness behavior of American students in their own languages respectively.

Politeness strategies I have discussed so far, can be applied to both English and Japanese politeness strategies, which support the universal notion.

### 3. Pragmatic failures of requests and over-politeness by Japanese EFL learners

Japanese EFL learners might fail to communicate effectively due not only to the lack of grammatical and lexical command but also to the lack of acquiring the pragmatic strategies of the target language, referred to in the literature as "pragmatic failures" (Blum-Kukla and Olshtain 1984). Pragmatic failures might also originate either in the misunderstanding of the native language, Japanese, or in the failure to understand the pragmatic strategies of Japanese.

I would like to discuss below some of the pragmatic failures in requests and some of the over-politeness by Japanese EFL learners. I

would like to carry forward my discussion based on the theory that politeness strategies support the issue of universality. Japanese EFL learners fail to express illocutionary acts of request due not only to a failure in acquiring request forms in the target language but to the failure to understand a request in the native language as well. That is to say, the learner does not realize the discrepancy in politeness behavior between the target language and the native language. For example there are pragmatic differences between "Type this" and "*Taipu-shite...*" in Japanese. "Type this" is not an English request but a command while "*taipu-shite*" is a Japanese request. In Japanese requests, forms vary depending on formality; thus, "Can you type this?" can be "*Taipu-shite kudasai*", "*Taipu-shite kureru?*" or "*Taipu-shite*". "*Taipu-shite kudasai*" is addressed to superiors or to out-group members while "*Taipu-shite kureru?*" and "*Taipu-shite*" are to inferiors or in-group members. Therefore, I believe that pragmatic failures are caused not only by the lack of acquisition of the pragmatic strategies of the target language but also by misunderstanding the illocutionary forces in the native language, Japanese. I would like to develop this point of view in the following discussion.

Neustupny (1974) has reported pragmatic failures committed by a Japanese businessman using the following example. The businessman asked his American secretary to type out a rough draft of a letter, saying, "Type this". Then Neustupny witnessed that the secretary felt offended at the way the businessman had made his request. Neustupny has analyzed this failure because the businessman meant "*Taipu-shite kudasai*" for "Type this". We should observe this illocutionary act more carefully. "*Taipu-shite kudasai* (Can you type this please?)" and "*Taipu-shite...* (Can you type this?)" have the same illocutionary forces of requests in Japanese. In this situation, however, "*Taipu-shite...*" is

likely to be used often. Since this sentence expresses a request, it cannot be translated as "Type this!" (it could be an impolite order, "*Taipu-shiro*", in Japanese), but "Can you type this?" or "Please type this". If the request loses its politeness, it becomes a demand as discussed above. The Japanese language often drops "... *kudasai*" when Japanese people make requests to in-group members. We can, therefore, assume that the businessman treated his secretary as an in-group member when he said, "Type this!", for what he actually meant, "*Taipu-shite...*" This pragmatic failure seems to be the businessman's misunderstanding of the illocutionary force, the request, of his native language. This is not a peculiar phenomenon since native speakers do not analyze their own language. Such misinterpretations might quite often occur. The question is, then, how can we avoid these pragmatic failures? I will discuss this problem in a later section.

Mizutani (1985:194) introduces an illocutionary act in English between a 14-year-old girl and her younger brother. The sister asks her younger brother to pass her the salt in the following way:

"Could you pass me the salt, please?"

Politeness in English-speaking society is well manifested in the illocutionary act of the request as shown in the above example, since English politeness strategies, compared to Japanese politeness strategies, place a higher value on negative politeness. The Tact Maxim and *hataraki-kake* strategy both focus on requests. This phenomenon is well supported by a number of empirical studies on requests: Blum-Kulka, Danet and Gheron 1985; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984; Clark and Schunk 1980; Davidson 1984; Gibbs 1979; Walters 1979. This illocutionary act toward the younger brother as shown above follows the typical politeness system of English.

Japanese politeness is said to focus on *wakimae* strategy which is



restrained by its social or cultural hierarchy. The Japanese politeness system is well developed in its syntax, i.e. honorific system of verbs. When the addressee shows deference to a person in the subject position, the verb form is "prefix o+verb stem+ni naru", that is, "*o-kari ni naru*" for "*kariru* (borrow)". When the addressee shows deference to a person in the object position, the verb form is "prefix o+verb stem+suru", that is, "*o-kari suru*" for "*kariru* (borrow)". The honorific system is used for out-group members and the speaker's superiors, and, therefore, is not used for children, not even for someone else's children. As discussed in the section 2, the illocutionary force of the request, however, inherits incivility and thus motivates politeness strategies for use in any given language in order to mitigate its discourtesy. If this is so, then politeness strategies for requests leave other evidence for the universal notion.

Let us now examine illocutionary acts among in-group members and in speech between children and of adults. Illocutionary acts of request (including polite orders) between children and adults have often been discussed in the literature (Neustupny 1974; Mizutani 1985; Minami 1974, 1987). Minami (1987) points out that politeness features have been shown in request forms such as "*...nasai*" and "*...te choodai*" which are considered to be polite orders in Japanese. Although children are not considered targets of honorific forms, adults use a polite order, i.e. "*Tabenasai* (Eat please)" instead of "*Tabero* (Eat)" (an impolite order) because of the very nature of the request.

I would like to introduce some of the failures committed by Japanese EFL learners. I have gathered the data, asking five Japanese EFL learners (three students from the Junior College of the University of the Ryukyus and two from the University of the Ryukyus) what they would say if they wanted to borrow a pen from a person who was

younger than the borrower. The responses were as follows: "Lend me your pen", "I use your pen", "Let me use your pen", "Do you have a pen?" and "Can I use your pen?". In the situation where the borrower would be asking a person who was his/her age or older, all six used "May I ...?", "Can I ...?", "Could I...?" or "Would you mind if...?" When she/he was making a request to children, no one, however, used the most polite request, " Could I...?", "May I...? or "Would you mind if...?" In Japanese one may say "*Pen, kashite...* (Can you lend me a pen?)" or "*Kashite....*" even to children. In English, native speakers of English would use "Could I borrow your pen?" in this case. This is the same type of pragmatic failure committed by the Japanese businessman discussed previously. Based on the data, Japanese EFL learners might say, "Pass me the salt" in the same request situation. It would rarely occur in English illocutionary acts.

One of the EFL learners said, "Could you lend me your pen?" when she was asked to make a request to an older person who was a total stranger to her. She meant to employ this illocutionary act in its most polite form, since her expressions of politeness were in the following order: "Can I...?", "May I...?" and "Could you....?" As Leech points out, however, "Could I borrow....?" to English speakers is more polite than "Could you lend me....?" Leech (1983: 134) explains this situation as follows:

"...In yet other cases, the Generosity Maxim appears to apply without the Tact Maxim: for example, a request for a second helping is slightly more polite if h's (hearer's) role as potential benefactor is suppressed: Could I have some more X? Marginally still greater politeness is achieved if reference is omitted to s (speaker) as beneficiary: Is there some more X? But the hypothesis that the Generosity Maxim is less powerful than the

Tact Maxim is supported by the observation that an impolite can be softened, and thereby made more polite, by omission of reference to the cost to h. This restricts the description of the action A to s's benefit from the transaction:

Could I borrow this electric drill?  
is marginally more polite than "Could you lend me this electric drill?"

Let us examine Japanese illocutionary acts underlying this failure. According to the study by Ide and others (1986), the most polite expression in Japanese in this situation is "*Mooshiwake arimasen ga, o-kashi itadake masudeshoo ka* (Sorry to bother you, but (lit.) could I receive the favor of your lending me....?)" or "*Mooshiwake arimasen ga, kashite itadake masendeshoo ka* (Sorry to bother you, but (lit.) couldn't I receive the favor of your lending me....?)" The expression, "*Sumimasen ga, o-kari deki masudeshoo ka* (Excuse me, but could I borrow....?)", is marginally less polite than the above expressions. The expression, "*O-kashi itadake masudeshoo ka*", has a giving-receiving verb, *itadaku*, which is the polite form of the verb, *morau* (receive a favor). The giving-receiving verb is Japanese specific and inherits intrinsic politeness in itself. "Could I receive a favor....? (....*itadake masudeshoo ka*)" supports the Tact Maxim by omission of reference to the cost to the addressee while the Tact Maxim does not apply to the expression, "Could you lend me....?", given by the Japanese student mentioned above. Thus, "....*kashite itadake masudeshoo ka* (Could I receive the favor of your lending me....?)" is marginally more polite than the expression, "*O-kari dekimasu ka* (Could I borrow....?)". The Japanese student seems to have used "Could you lend me your pen?" for the expression, "*Kashite itadake masudeshoo ka* (Could I receive the favor of your lending me....?)" This result seems to lead to the hypothesis that she has perceived the

expression to be the most polite form addressed to the older stranger.

I have referred to pragmatic failures caused by native speakers' misunderstanding or lack of understanding of requests in the native language, Japanese. Now I would like to examine some of the pragmatic failures caused by over-politeness (Neustupny 1974; Miyahira 1991).

Neustupny has reported on the impoliteness of a Japanese foreign student in an informal social situation. When the student was talking to an American friend at the party, his American professor came into the room. As soon as he saw his professor, he stopped talking to his friend and showed deference to his professor. In this situation, how would his friend, who had his conversation abruptly interrupted, feel about the Japanese student's behavior? According to the native speakers of English I have asked, all of them agreed that they would feel insulted or that their friend acted discourteously. Even if the student excused himself, they would feel slighted. Why was the student's behavior discourteous? This impoliteness can be explained by the idea of egalitarian behavior in an American society.<sup>2</sup> Situations such as parties, social gatherings, classrooms and personally involved gatherings create equality. People who are in these situations are supposed to show equal respect to everyone at the gathering. When having a conversation with a person, he/she is supposed to concentrate on the conversation the two are engaged in. By interrupting himself in the middle of the conversation, the speaker shifted his attention from the addressee. In this manner, the speaker's behavior to the addressee violates the idea of egalitarian treatment and of negative politeness. The student at the party was over-polite to the professor but impolite to his friend. In Japanese society, a person would be sensitive about this matter, but the slight would not be as serious as in an English-speaking society, for placing a higher value on the status of the professor is acceptable

behavior in most Japanese social circumstances.

Another example of over-politeness by Japanese EFL learners has been reported by Miyahira (1991: 42) who describes the activity as one that is "less-caring and distant rather than a courteous manner." One of the three rules of politeness suggested by Lakoff (1975) is "Formality: keep aloof". The function of Formality is to create distance between the speaker and the addressee. The rule, Formality, excludes the rule, Camaraderie, as Lakoff says ( p. 67): "You cannot be extending the hand of friendship and stepping back aloofly at once." If the speaker becomes over-polite in a situation where friendly and intimate manners are expected, the addressee might feel excluded. As discussed previously, the custom of creating distance between the speaker and the addressee is a function of Japanese honorific expressions. However, Japanese EFL learners sometimes seem to behave too politely. This is not because Japanese people are polite, but because they carry the feeling of being in an out-group since they are geographically and culturally outside Japan. We may, therefore, conclude that this pragmatic failure caused by over-politeness is not due to the difference of politeness systems between the English and the Japanese languages, but due to their psychological reaction when Japanese people are in an out-group.

I have examined the situation of a speaker being impolite to one side of addressee but over-polite to another. We can conclude that over-politeness often creates distance and aloofness in personal interaction.

#### 4. Conclusion

Baded on the analysis of pragmatic failures when making requests, Japanese EFL learners fail to express requests adequately when they address in-group members and inferiors such as children or social inferiors. When making requests, English speakers do not use language

that makes a clear distinction of the person's rank to whom the speaker is talking. The illocutionary acts, "Could I....?", "May I....?", "Could you....?" or "Would you mind if....?", may be made to an addressee who is younger than or socially inferior to the speaker. The illocutionary act, "Can you....?" which is less polite than "Could you....?", may be addressed to a person who is older than or superior to the speaker, depending on the situations. In Japanese, on the other hand, requests employ speech levels that make a clear distinction of the rank of the person to whom the speaker is talking. It depends very much on whether the speaker is talking to his/her superiors or to inferiors. Superiors include older people, out-group members, workplace bosses, social superiors and so on, and inferiors include younger people (younger than the speaker), in-group members, workplace colleagues, social inferiors and so on. "Could you pass me the salt, please?" can be "*Shio, totte...*", "*O-shio, totte kudasai*" or "*O-shio, totte itadake masen ka*". The first illocutionary act may be addressed to inferiors, and the last two illocutionary acts may be addressed to superiors. Japanese EFL learners seem to interpret the first act not as a request but as an order. Therefore, he/she might address "*Shio, totte...*" as "Pass me the salt" to inferiors.

In order to avoid these failures, Japanese learners should acquire the pragmatic politeness strategies of the target language and understand the illocutionary forces of the native language as well. We acknowledge the basic universal features of requests in English and in Japanese and, thus, need to pay attention to pragmatic strategies for pedagogical goals.

For pragmatic failures in using over-politeness, Japanese EFL learners seem to violate the idea of egalitarianism which is unfamiliar to Japanese culture. Over-politeness reveals the situation where one is impolite to one side but over-polite to the other. Second language learning and

teaching should initiate strategies to close the gap between English and Japanese. The fact that Formality creates distance and aloofness, and Camaraderie creates friendships and intimacies should be added to the basic universal features of language learning

Finally, a wide range of empirical studies on politeness through cross cultural research must be arranged in order to investigate the nature of pragmatic failures, which cause native speakers of English to feel insulted or slighted and cause native speakers of Japanese to induce psychological frictions as well

#### Notes

1. I would like to thank the audience at the presentation session for their discussion of my thesis, as well as Professors Katsunobu Sunagawa, John Reid, Takatsugu Oyakawa, Anthony P. Jenkins and Kathryn Negrelli for reading and commenting on earlier versions of this paper, and Setsuko Matsuda for the information which she kindly supplied. I remain responsible for all errors of fact and interpretation.

2. According to my American colleague, Professor John Reid, egalitarian behavior in American society is the deciding factor in this situation.

#### References

- Blum-Kulka, S. and Olshtain, E. 1984. "Requests and apologies: a cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns (CCSARP)." *Applied Linguistics* 5 (3):196-212.
- Blum-Kulka, S. Danet, B and Gherson, R. 1985. "The language of requesting in Israeli society." In J. Forgas (ed.), *Language and*

- social situation*. New York: Academic Press.
- Brown, P. and Levinson, C., S. 1987. *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clark, H. H. and Schunk, D. H. 1980. "Polite responses to polite requests." *Cognition* 8:111-43.
- Davidson, J. 1984. "Subsequent versions of invitations, offers requests and proposals dealing with potential or actual rejection." In Atkinson and Heritage (eds.), *Structures of social action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gibbs, R. W. 1979. "Contextual effects in understanding indirect requests." *Discourse Processes* 2:1-10.
- Ide, S., Ogino, T., Kawasaki, A. and Ikuta, S. 1986. *Nihonjin to Amerika-jin no keigo koodoo*. [Personal interaction between Japanese and American] Tokyo: Nan'un-do.
- Lakoff, R. T. 1973. "The logic of politeness; or minding your p's and q's." In Papers from the ninth regional meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Lakoff, R. T. 1975. *Language and woman's place*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.
- Leech, G. N. 1983. *Principles of pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Minami, F. 1987. *Keigo (Iwanami shinsho)*. [Politeness] Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Miyahira, K. 1991. "Profiles of 'Ideal Communicator' in Japanese-American Student Dyads". In Paper presented at the 6th conference of the Foreign Language and Literature Society of Okinawa.
- Mizutani, N. 1985. *Nichiei hikaku; hanashi kotoba no bunpoo*. [A comparative study of Japanese and English: the Grammar of spoken language] Tokyo: Kuroshio Syuppan.
- Neustupny, J. V. 1974. "Sekai to Nihon no keii hyoogen: komyunikeeshon



no mondai." *Sekai no keigo*. ["Polite expressions between Japanese and other languages: Communication problems" Politeness in other languages] Tokyo: Meiji Shoin.

Sadock J. 1974. *Toward a linguistic theory of speech acts*. New York: Academic Press.

Walters, J. 1979. "Strategies for requesting in Spanish and English: structural similarities and pragmatic differences." *Language Learning*. 29 (2): 277-96.

### —論文要旨—

## 敬語行動における英語学習者の誤用分析

小那覇ひろこ

敬語行動 (politeness) の目的は R. Lakoff の「対人関係において、できるだけ摩擦が生じないようにすること」という言葉に代表される。英語において、敬語が顕著に表れている言語形式は依頼表現 (requests) である。依頼表現は発話行為そのものに聞き手に対して「負担を掛ける」という行為を本質的に備えているので、聞き手への負担を、「丁寧さ」で包んでしまうことにより軽くすることができる。つまり、丁寧さで包む作業が依頼表現には必然的になるわけである。又、敬語行動が過剰 (over-politeness) になった場合、アメリカ社会で諸々のひずみが出てくる。

本稿では、英語学習者が間違った依頼表現を使用したために聞き手を不愉快にしてしまった例、一方には丁寧な行為でも他方には失礼になる例、又、丁寧過ぎたために「仲間との連帯 (Camaraderie)」に反する行為の例等を英語も日本語も敬語行動は本質的には共通であるという理論の立場に立って、英語学習者の言語運用における誤用分析を試みた。