

Making Offers, Accepting and Turning Down Offers: Doing It Politely in English and Japanese

Noriko Iwamoto

概要

待遇表現の中の「提供表現」に焦点を当て、受ける場合、断る場合といった返答の仕方を含め、日本語と英語における共通点ならびに相違点を比較し、英語教育および日本語教育への応用を考察した。英語の場合、自由意志を尊重する対等的人間関係に基づく文化的基盤ゆえ、相手の希望や意向を問う表現法がこのまれる。これは、たとえば「借りる」—「貸す」、 「見る」—「見せる」、 「売る」—「買う」といった同一事態を異なった観点からみる逆意関係 (converse) がある場合に顕著に表れる。*Would you like to borrow ...?, You can borrow, Would you like to see ...?* のように、相手の意向や希望を直接問いたり、相手に許可を与え、受益者 (beneficiary) である相手を主題化して、相手側の動作として表すのが丁寧とされている。日本語の場合は、親しくない関係で相手の意志、希望、要求を直接問うことは、失礼となり、「ありますが、いかがですか?」「お使いになりますか?」のように自分側に用意があり、相手の行為が自然に起こりやすいように表現することが丁寧さにつながる。自由意志を問うことよりも、曖昧性が好まれる文化的土壌ゆえ、相手に利益がある場合でも話し手が行うという行為性 (agency) を見せないようにする方が配慮とされる。また日本語の場合、敬語の果たす役割が大きく、その体系や用法も複雑で多岐にわたっているため、単にスピーチ・アクトや話し手側の行為か、相手側の行為かといった枠組みだけでは、ひと括りに対処できず、個々のケースを吟味する必要がある。最後に教育への応用として、ここでの英語特有の表現をもちこんだ会話例を挙げ、また言語差の根底にある文化的なものへの意識を高めるため、どのように話題を導入したらよいか、提案してみた。

1. Introduction

This study on cross-linguistic pragmatics investigates the speech act of making offers. English and Japanese will be contrastively examined on the basis of differences in speech act patterns, points of view, and sociocultural systems. Later sections on pedagogical implications suggest how the findings can be applied in educational settings.

This study is primarily intended for language instructors engaged in teaching English to Japanese students and also for those involved in teaching Japanese to non-Japanese students. In some teaching environments in Japanese schools, teaching polite offer formulae has traditionally been limited to teaching politeness expressions on the basis of formal grammatical categories. Students are told, for instance, that “using subjunctive modals such as *Would you like to come to dinner?* or courtesy subjuncts (explained in (ii) of section 2) such as *Please help yourself*, adds politeness in making offers.” However, such a formal category-based approach has not been enough to produce the degree of communicative competence needed in English-Japanese cross-cultural encounters.

Teaching how to be polite in English should go beyond the mere expressions and be based on comprehensive cross-cultural studies of politeness *systems*, incorporating elements of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and formal linguistics. To illustrate this point, this paper will contrast English and Japanese politeness systems and realization patterns in making offers (especially when associated with converse verbs — e.g., *borrow-lend*, *see-show*) and responses to them in a manner as comprehensive as possible, including the differences of the point of view to be adopted (depending on whether it is a speaker’s act or a hearer’s act).

After presenting some differences and similarities in speech act realization patterns between English and Japanese, I analyze the cultural reasons for the differences in surface grammatical structure. I base my analysis on Tsuruta, Rossiter, and Coulton (1990) but raise questions about their investigation, and expand it within a framework of speech act theory, point-of-view analysis, and cultural studies involving Japanese politeness systems. Lastly, I draw out the pedagogical implications and suggest how these ideas can and/or should be used in a classroom. In the acquisition of politeness formulae and strategies, students should also be encouraged to develop their cultural awareness.

2. About politeness: its universal dimensions and its culture-specific aspects

One of the basic challenges in the study of politeness is understanding the different *interpretations* that different cultures make of certain kinds of behaviour. What constitutes a proper request or offer in Japanese culture can seem very rude in English-speaking societies, and vice versa. In a highly detailed and exemplified analysis, Brown and Levinson (1978) have provided a useful framework for understanding how politeness may be interpreted by different cultures in different ways. According to their analysis, all people have strong desires to preserve *face*, which has two aspects: 1) *positive face*, or the self-image and self-respect that a person has; and 2) *negative face*, or the need for privacy, freedom of action, and other elements of personal autonomy. Brown and Levinson describe a large number of strategies that can be used to minimize the impact of a Face Threatening Act (FTA); most of them are strategies of either **positive** or **negative politeness**, or strategies that minimize threats to positive or negative face. A **positive** politeness strategy represents a strategy of making the hearer feel good and feel that his or her values are shared. **Negative politeness** strategy includes *hedging*,

apologizing, and *offering options* to avoid interfering with the hearer's freedom of action.

In a very rough categorization, the Japanese interactional style in a formal context, or the style towards *soto* people, seems to be characterized by a negative, or “deferential”, politeness based on the assumption of reciprocal social distance, whereas the English style seems to be a more positive, or “solidarity”, politeness based on seeking a more democratic social relationship. This generalization will be explained in the following sections.

Brown and Levinson (1978) introduce a number of strategies we can use to minimize the feeling of an imposition on the hearer or the impact of FTA. In the area of making offers, the following strategies may be described as universal phenomena.

Positive politeness strategies:

- (a) **Implying that the speaker and the hearer are cooperators**
- Including the hearer in the activity of the speaker: the hearer wants what the speaker wants
 - The use of the inclusive “we” emphasizes in-group membership because it assumes social similarity and reciprocity, by calling upon the cooperative assumptions. This way the speaker can avoid or minimize the debt implications of FTAs in making offers.
 - “Let’s have another cookie then.”
 - “Let’s get on with dinner, eh?”
 - “Why shouldn’t we go to London?” (conveys “Let’s go.”)

“Let’s” in English gives the feeling of an inclusive “us” even when the speaker really means “you” or “me” instead. The example below shows a case in which “Let’s” is used; the

speaker and the hearers know it really means “Let you” or “I want you” (to do...), but the feeling conveyed is that of an inclusive “us”.

“All right, let’s knock it off.”

(or in US idiom, “All right, let’s stop [making noise, yakking].”)

This may be used in a classroom situation, where the students are making noise, or talking, or otherwise misbehaving, and the UK teacher might say “All right, let’s knock it off!” while the US teacher might say in the same situation, “All right, let’s stop making noise / let’s stop the chatter / let’s stop the yakking!” Even though the form is “let’s”, the teacher is not including himself / herself in the physical activity of noisemaking / misbehaving, but is sort of including himself / herself in spirit in the group response requested (becoming quiet).

(b) Pseudo prior agreement with *then* or *so* : cooperative agreement association

There are examples of apparent or pseudo-agreement markers found in English in the use of *then* or *so* as conclusion markers or agreement markers, to indicate that the speaker is coming to a conclusion cooperatively with the hearer.

“How about a cookie, *then*?”

“I’ll meet you at the station, *then*.”

“*So* when are you coming to see us?” (invitation)

“I’ll be seeing you, *then*.”

(c) Bald-on-record imperatives to make offers

Offers made in imperative forms, such as in offering a meal, outweigh face concerns.

“Come in.” “Come eat.” “Eat !”
 “Enter. Sit down.”
 “Come in, don’t hesitate. I’m not busy.”
 “(You must) have some more cake.”
 “Don’t bother. I’ll clean it up.”
 “Leave it to me.”
 “Have another drink.”

These bald-on-record imperatives are aimed at preventing the hearer’s reluctance to encroach upon the speaker’s negative face.

(d) Presupposition manipulations: Presupposing knowledge of the hearer’s wants and attitudes.

The speaker presupposes that an idea is mutually presumed; this way is used for positive-face redress. The speaker manipulates such presuppositions where something is not really mutually agreed upon, but the speaker speaks as if it were mutually taken for granted.

Questions in negative form, which presuppose a “yes” answer, are broadly used as a way to imply that the speaker knows the hearer’s desires, tastes, habits, etc.

“*Won’t* you have a drink, too?”
 “*Wouldn’t* you like a drink?”
 “*Don’t* you want some lunch now?”
 “*Don’t* you think it’s brilliant?”

(e) Point-of-view manipulation, point-of-view distancing

- Use of the subjunctive form
- “*Would* you open the window?” is more polite than
- “*Will* you open the window?”

- Avoidance of addressee

“When could *I* see you?” is more polite than “When could *you* see me?”

Negative politeness strategies:

Not coercing the hearer

(f) **Minimizing an imposition by adding *just, little, only***

“I *just* dropped by for a minute to ask if you are interested in...”

“Don’t hesitate, *just* go on in.”

(used to offer to lend the speaker’s house)

“*Nothing, just a little.*” “*Nothing.*” “It’s *nothing.*”

This phrasing can minimize a favour asked and reduce the imposition of the FTA.

(g) **Not indebting the hearer**

A polite offer can be made by minimizing or rejecting any indebtedness on the part of the hearer, by means of expressions such as the following.

“I could easily do it for you.”

“It wouldn’t be any trouble; I have to go there by four anyway.”

(h) **Relevance hedges**

Relevance hedges, by suggesting the topic in a sensitive way, minimize imposition on the hearer. They can be conveniently used to soften offers or suggestions.

“I don’t know whether you’d be interested in it, but how about ...?”

“This may be out of place, but would you consider ...?”

According to Brown and Levinson (1978), these concerns for politeness are universal. House and Kasper (1981), however, caution that

a universal scale of politeness must always be interpreted in *language-specific terms*. In other words, even though a universal scale will determine the range of points on the politeness scale in every language, individual speech communities determine the specific points on the scale that mark deference, neutrality, imposition, and so forth. (italics are mine; discussed by Odlin 1989: 51-2)

In sections 3-4 below, I shall explore examples of how the “universal strategies” presented by Brown and Levinson manifest themselves differently in English and Japanese. In addition to these functional expressions given by Brown and Levinson, there are other offer expressions based on formal grammatical categories to be found in Quirk et al (1985). The following are some examples.

(i) The subjunctive past form of verbs

The uses of *could*, *might*, and *would* simply add a connotation of tentativeness and thus politeness.

“*Would* you open the window?”

“I’d rather we *had* dinner now.”

(ii) Courtesy subjuncts

Courtesy subjuncts are mainly expressed by a small group of adverbs, such as *please*, *kindly*, or *cordially*, used in rather formulaic expressions of politeness.

“*Please* help yourself.”

“Will passengers *kindly* refrain from smoking?”

“May we *cordially* invite you to our party?”

(iii) Subordinate clauses

“I would *suggest that* you see Dr. Johnson.”

“I *wonder* if you could help me.”

(iv) Use of *some* rather than *any*

“Would you like *something* to drink?” is more polite than “Would you like *anything* to drink?” since the former sentence presupposes and anticipates a positive response. In Leech’s (1983: ch.7) terms, the negative polarity form *anything* indicates non-factuality, and the positive polarity form *something* presumes factuality.

In the teaching of expressions to do with offers, these grammatical categories and the functional strategies suggested by Brown and Levinson can be exploited to improve the communication skills of students.

In general, these different strategies are rather easy to teach, and learn, because of their universal characters. However, what I present below are aspects of politeness expressions that are somewhat challenging for Japanese students. The perspective I present has so far been more or less neglected in teaching despite its importance in real communication. I deal with some examples of how the universal strategies advocated by Brown and Levinson will manifest themselves differently in English and Japanese. I base my treatment on the analysis given by Tsuruta, Rossiter, and Coulton (1990). To their analysis, I have added the concepts “point of view,” “speech act,” “converse verbs,” and “Japanese honorific expressions.” The presentation of their existing study in

sections 3.1. and 3.3. is followed by my critique, raising questions about and offering expansion to their analysis.

3. Making offers: Issues of point of view, speech act, and honorific expressions in English and Japanese

Although “point-of-view manipulation” (speaker-oriented, hearer-oriented acts; referred to briefly in (e) of section 2) is a universal device to increase degree of politeness, different cultures sometimes employ opposite point-of-view strategies and different speech acts, in order to express the same propositional contents. This can cause problems in cross-cultural settings. In offers made in English, the hearer-oriented speech act of “offer of permission” is likely to be used, as in “**You** can **borrow** the computer” or an expression asking about the willingness, desire, or free will of the speaker, as in “**Would you like to** come to lunch?” In Japanese formal discourse, direct translations from these sentences can be rude and even offend (as we shall soon see below). Largely because of the complexity of honorific expressions in Japanese, one can have very diverse judgements regarding which speech act, or which point of view to be adopted, is more polite than another. It is necessary to specify which utterance one is attempting to compare and also address the different mechanisms — such as honorific functions — that seem to play some important role in speaker- and hearer-oriented speech acts. For example, the hearer-oriented speech act of offer of a favour by the speaker, as in “Would you like to borrow my computer?” is possible in Japanese. Its version without honorific coding for use in an informal context is always possible (“*Kari-tai?*”), but it is not always possible in formal contexts, as we shall see in section 3.4.

Implicit rules are at work in Japanese offer sentences.

- (1) When a person makes offers, it is considered rude to ask

about the willingness or desires of the hearer in a direct manner; this is different from the case of English. A beginner in Japanese sometimes makes the mistake of inviting someone to come along by saying “*Ki-tai desu ka?*”

- (2) When a person makes offers, it is considered rude to use a speaker-oriented sentence involving helping verbs such as *-shite-sashiageru/ageru*¹; this is especially true when speaking to one’s senior, because such a pattern implies that the act will bring benefit to the hearer, and this manner of expression maximizes a sense of indebtedness on the part of the hearer.
- (3) When a person makes offers in Japanese, it is more polite to adopt the traditional Japanese way of suggesting that the hearer’s act will take place in the natural course of events, without reference to any activity on the part of the speaker; this comes across as more modest. This idea is expressed in the honorific expression *o...naru*. Thus, *Kono pen kashite-agemashoo ka?* is not as polite as *Kono pen o-tsukai ni narimasu ka?*

3.1. Making offers: When a verb has a converse

This section presents example sentences indicating cross-cultural differences in making offers that Japanese learners of English or learners of the Japanese language should be taught to bear in mind. What is a proper offer in English is not always appropriate in Japanese **when the verb in question has a converse** (e.g., *lend-borrow*, *see-show*). Tsuruta, Rossiter, and Coulton (1990) do not use the linguistic term *converse*; they just use the term *pair* for the verbs in sentences (1)-(6) here and (7)-(8) in section 3.3, treating them collectively. I am subdividing them into *converse* here in (1)-(6) and *interactional opposites* in sentences (7)-(8) (the term will be explained in 3.3).

Tsuruta, Rossiter, and Coulton (1990: 140-1) list the following pairs of sentences (modified from their original examples) in which

verbs are converse to each other, and they posit that an English speaker would find the (a) formulations more polite than the (b) formulations. A major problem with their analysis is that they do not give Japanese translations of the English sentences they present. Now, the English sentences they present can be translated into Japanese in various ways, with different honorific expressions. Depending on the honorific expression and the translation one uses, the degree of politeness will be different. Although various translations are possible, I give only those that are considered to be the most appropriate Japanese polite-form translations. Underlined elements in the Japanese translations represent honorific codings.

- (1a) Would you like to **borrow** my computer?
 (*Kompyuutaa o o-tsukai ni narimasu ka?*²)
- (1b) Shall I **lend** you my computer?
 (*Kompyuutaa o o-kashi itashimashoo ka?*)
- (2a) Would you like to **look at** my pictures?
 (*Shashin o o-goran ni narimasu ka?*)
- (2b) Shall I **show** you my pictures?
 (*Shashin o o-mise itashimashoo ka?*)
- (3a) Would **you** like to **buy** this vase?
 (*Kono kabin o o-kaiage/o-motome ni narimasu ka?*)
- (3b) Shall I **sell** you this vase?
 (*Kono kabin o o-yuzuri/o-wake itashimashoo ka?*)
- (4a) Would **you** like to **have** this pamphlet?
 (*Kono pamfuretto o o-mochi ni narimasu ka?*)
- (4b) Shall I **give** you this pamphlet?
 (*Kono pamfuretto o sashiagemashoo ka?*)

- (5a) Would **you** like to **stay** at our place?
 (*Uchi ni o-tomari ni narimasu ka?*)
- (5b) Shall **we** **put** you **up** at our place?
 (*Oyado o teikyoo itashimashoo ka?*)
- (6a) Would **you** like to **have** another cup of coffee?
 (*Moo ippai koohii o meshiagarimasu ka?*)
- (6b) Shall **I** **pour/bring/make** you another cup of coffee?
 (*Moo ippai koohii o o-mochi/o-tsugi itashimashoo ka?*³)

The reasons the (b) formulations are less polite in English are, for instance, that sentence (1b) implies the speaker's superiority over the hearer; "I possess a thing that you don't. I am above you." Something similar can be felt in (3b) and (4b). And in (5b) and (6b) it might sound as if the speaker feels slightly inconvenienced.

In English, (a) formulations sound more polite, natural-sounding, and "unmarked" than (b) formulations.

I think I should explain here the meanings of the terms "speaker-oriented" and "hearer-oriented," as used in this paper. Put simply, "speaker-oriented" means mainly the act of the speaker and, similarly, "hearer-oriented" means mainly the act of the hearer. I point this out here because in a strict sense, the (1a) sentence, for example, *Would you like to borrow my computer?* has two orientations — those of both speaker and hearer. In the sentence, the hearer is borrowing the computer; in other words, the speaker is lending the computer. (Logically, it is saying the obvious; since borrowing is the complement or the converse of lending.) Hence the sentence has two orientations. However, "borrow" is mainly an act of the hearer, while "lend" is basically an act of the speaker in such an offer sentence. In other words, the main focus or the Subject of "borrow" is really the hearer in this offer sentence, and the speaker is obliquely referred to again by the pronominal adjective *my*. In the (1b)

sentence *Shall I lend you my computer?*, however, the focus or the Subject of “lend” is the speaker while *you* takes a backseat position as an Indirect Object. For these reasons, I call (a) formulations hearer-oriented sentences (i.e. mainly the act of the hearer) while (b) formulations are speaker-oriented sentences (i.e. primarily the act of the speaker), even though both the speaker and the hearer are naturally involved in each of them. The difference is determined by the prominence given to one or the other as the initiator of the action.

3.2. Cultural reasoning

The reasons for the linguistic difference mentioned above are related to cultural differences. I will add some cultural explanations to Tsuruta, Rossier, and Coulton (1990) to account for the above-mentioned linguistic manifestations. To the English speaker, (a) sentences are more desirable than (b) sentences because it is considered to be polite to ask about a person’s willingness or desires in a direct manner when a benefit will be given to that person. In English-speaking societies in general, “offers are not very threatening FTAs, but in Japan an offer as small as a glass of ice-water can occasion a tremendous debt, and may be accepted as heavy as a mortgage in a Western society” (Benedict 1946 cited in Brown and Levinson 1978: 247). This is succinctly put by Coulmas, who says, “even the smallest favour makes the receiver a debtor” in the traditional Japanese way of looking at things. Social relations are conceived as forming a network of mutual obligations, indebtedness, and gratitude (1981: 88).

In contrast with the Japanese traditional tendency to maximize mutual debts, gratitude, and social distance (**deferential politeness**) in a formal context, the English system operates to minimize the aspects of debt and to strike an equilibrium in the process of giving and receiving (**solidarity politeness**). On the Japanese side, it will be

impolite to ask directly about the willingness or desires of the hearer. In making offers, it is also considered rude to adopt a speaker-oriented sentence using helping verbs such as *-shite-sashiageru/ageru*, which connote a sense of indebtedness, especially towards one's seniors; the reason is that this pattern indicates that the act will bring benefit to the hearer and thus emphasizes the hearer's indebtedness. Therefore, in making offers in Japanese, it will be polite to adopt the traditional Japanese way of suggesting that the hearer's act will take place in the natural course of events, without reference to any agency on the part of the speaker. This idea is expressed in the honorific expression *o...naru*.

3.3. Cases of interactional opposites

There are pairs of words that are not converse to each other in a strict sense but still exhibit the reversal of a relationship between the speaker and the hearer. This is because, in human interaction, one person's behaviour or action presupposes or anticipates another's. For example, in the classroom, a teacher *puts on* a video for his/her students to *watch*. Or in a train station, one *leaves* one's luggage temporarily and asks a friend to *watch* it. I would call these pairs of words interactional opposites; what matters here is their essentially complementary features in human interaction. Interestingly, in these cases also the same rules as the above are operative. The following pairs of sentences that involve a pair of verbs that are not strictly converse to each other but exhibit interactional opposites, produce (a) formulations that are more polite and natural to English speakers. For instance, sentence (8b) below can imply that the speaker is in a subordinate position to the hearer, and the speaker is by occupation in a serving role with regard to the hearer (Tsuruta, Rossiter, and Coulton 1990: 140-1). Some (a) formulations can be made very polite in Japanese by using honorific expressions, but not all; sometimes one needs to change the verbs to make the offers acceptably polite in Japanese, as we shall see in section 3.4.

(7a) Would **you** like to **watch** the video again?

(*Moo ichido bideo o **goran** ni narimasu ka?*)

(7b) Shall **I** **play** it again?

(*Moo ichido bideo o **o-kake** itashimashoo ka?*)

(8a) Would you like to **leave** your luggage here?

(*Onimotsu o koko ni **o-karemasu** ka?*)

(8b) Shall **I** **look after** your luggage for you?

(*Onimotsu o **miteimashoo** ka?*)

Certain helping verbs (*shiteageru, shiteagemasu*) can be appended to main verbs in Japanese, to imply the superiority of, and the inconvenience caused to, the speaker, and to make it clear, or at least to imply, that the hearer is receiving a favour from the speaker, e.g. (8b) *Miteite-sashiagemashoo ka?* This is, however, considered to be an imposition on the hearer and impolite, especially when said to one's superior, so it is not mentioned here as an appropriate translation (see rule (2) in section 3).

3.4. Beneficiary foregrounded as Subject in English and obscured in Japanese

There is an implicit rule at work behind linguistic manifestations: the one who will be benefited, i.e., the **Beneficiary**⁴, is grammaticalized and made explicit as Subject in English (as in “Would **you** like to borrow ...?” “Can **I** watch the game?”). This is because the English tradition values a person's free will, desires, or volition (Tsuruta, Rossiter, and Coulton 1990). Whereas Japanese social values stress mutual responsibilities and indebtedness in doing favours for others, English social values place more emphasis on free will (Tsuruta, Rossiter, and Coulton 1990: 136-7) in doing things for others. In Japanese the Beneficiary is not placed in a prominent position as Subject but placed in the background in an Indirect

Object position or in a subordinate position, or even effaced in daily conversation. Discussion of what the hearer wants has not traditionally been as uppermost in Japanese culture as in Western culture. It is part of the Japanese idea of politeness to obscure or even efface reference to those who will be directly given benefit, as in

(1b-1J) (*Anata ni*) *kompyuutaa o o-kashi shimashoo ka?*
 you to computer AC HON-lend do-will-POLITE Q

See the following translations for (2a).

(2a) Would you like to look at my pictures?

(2a-J1) *Watashi no shashin o mi - tai desu ka? (literal)*
 my pictures AC look at want COP-POLITE Q

(2a-J2) (?) *Watashi no shashin o goranninari - tai desu ka?*
 my pictures AC look at HON want COP-POLITE Q

(2a-J3) *Watashi no shashin o goranninari - masu ka?*
 my pictures AC look at HON POLITE Q

(2a-J1) can be used only between close friends, and is not acceptable in a formal context. It is too blunt because it expresses the hearer as Beneficiary very directly and no honorific form for *look at* is used. (2a-J2) is somewhat odd and not polite enough, despite the use of the honorific form for *look at*, *goran ni naru*. This is because the auxiliary verb denoting the desire or wishes of the hearer *-tai*, is used. Hence this is not acceptable, either. The way in which the hearer as Beneficiary is expressed is not acceptable in a Japanese formal context. If we delete *-tai* and translate it as in (2a-J3), it becomes acceptable as a polite offer form because it does not present the hearer as Beneficiary. This supports the assumption that, unlike what happens in English, who will receive the benefit (the

Beneficiary) is better effaced or obscured if one wants to be polite in Japanese discourse. As mentioned earlier in rule (3) in section 3, in making offers in Japanese, it will be polite to adopt the traditional Japanese way of suggesting that the hearer's future act will take place in the natural course of events. This idea is expressed in the honorific expression *o...naru/nari* (become). This way avoids expressing the hearer as Beneficiary and hides the agency of the future act.

If we look closely at Japanese translations of offers, we find that some verbs allow only literal translations and no honorific coding. Among the (a) formulations, only a literal translation without honorific coding is possible in sentence (1a). This means that the Japanese equivalent for this (a) formulation is available only within in-group discourse, in which direct question can be used. A literal translation of (1a) "Would you like to borrow my computer?" is

(1a-1J) *Kompyuutaa o kari-tai desu ka?*

This is without honorific coding and naturally not acceptable in a formal context or when directed towards *soto*-group people.⁵ So the verb itself needs to be changed into a different verb, to provide polite-form Japanese translation, such as *Otsukai ni narimasu ka?*

Polite-form translations for (3a) *Kono kabin o o-kaiage ni narimasu ka?/o-motome ni narimasu ka?* and (8a) *Onimotsu o koko ni o-karemasu ka?* are commonly used only when the speaker is by occupation in a serving role with regard to the hearer, and hence in a subordinate position to the hearer (e.g., as a hotel staff member or a clerk at a shop). For sentence (2a), both a literal translation and a polite-form translation with honorific coding as a broadly-used polite form, are available.

- (2a) Would **you** like to **look at** my pictures?
 (2a-J1) *Watashi no shashin o mi-tai desu ka?* (literal)
 (2a-J2) *Watashi no shashin o goran ni narimasu ka?* (polite)

By contrast, (b) formulations are available in Japanese in all sentences in both literal and polite forms. Polite-form offer sentences in (b) formulations in Japanese can be made mainly by attaching the polite-form expression *o* to the verb stem. Translations for (a) formulations can be made by using the expression *o... naru*.

In summary, some (a) formulations can be available in polite form but some cannot, hence the verb has to be changed to another one. Thus, because of the complexity and wide range of honorific expressions in Japanese, one needs to avoid rough categorization and to look at each formulation. For instance, in the sentence (1a) formulation, only a literal translation without honorific coding is possible. This means that the Japanese equivalent for this sentence is possible only within in-group discourse, in which direct language can be used. Some polite form verbs can be restrictedly used only when the speaker is by occupation serving the hearer, and hence in a subordinate position to the hearer, while other honorific-form translation is available as a commonly used politeness register. In general, the formulations in which the ideas of giving and receiving, and of indebtedness, are obfuscated, are conventionally favoured expressions in Japanese polite discourse. Also, Japanese formal discourse is averse to a sentence in which Beneficiary is clearly made the Subject or in which Beneficiary is implied by the use of the auxiliary verb *-tai*.

What have been discussed to this point are offers in which the verb in question has a converse or an interactional opposite, such as *borrow-lend*, *give-have*, and *see-show*. The principle of a speaker-oriented strategy in making a polite offer in English is applicable basically when the verb in question has such a converse. For cases in

which the verb in an offer does not have a converse, recall the various other strategies (such as point-of-view distancing or presupposition manipulations) to reduce the impression of imposition on the hearer, that were explained in sections 2 and 3.

4. Making responses

4.1. Accepting offers

We have briefly seen that the traditional Japanese manner of making offers, is characterized by a negative, “deferential” politeness based on an assumption of reciprocal social distance in a formal setting, as opposed to the positive “solidarity” politeness rules assumed by English speakers. Japanese students in a formal context consequently often feel averse to adopting a positive politeness pattern based on egalitarian principles seeking solidarity. When making polite offers and requests and responding to them, English speakers tend to use certain nouns, adjectives, and adverbs that express positive feelings, such as *kind*, *happy*, *pleased*, *glad*, *kindly*, *graciously*, *appreciate*, *pleasure*, etc. Examples are: “Will you *graciously* consent to our proposal?” “They request the *pleasure* of your company at their party,” “I’d be very *happy/delighted/pleased/willing* to be of help (to you),” “May we *cordially* invite you to our party?” “Sure, with *pleasure*.” (Admittedly, there are expressions such as “Do you *mind* opening the window?” and “Could I *trouble* you?”) Japanese speakers, however, tend to use expressions that describe negative feelings in a very formal occasion. In general, Japanese traditionally tend to enhance politeness by using deprecation or toned-down expressions in formal settings. Here, direct language transfer from Japanese to English can cause cross-cultural problems. If a Japanese host says to an English guest at a party, “Thank you for taking the trouble of coming all the way to our humble party,” as senior Japanese people tend to do, this may sound somewhat

sarcastic to an English hearer, since it implies that the guest actually was not willing to come. Japanese students therefore need adequate instruction and practice so they can use positive expressions even in a formal context, such as, for example, "Thank you very much for coming to our party. We are *glad* to have you here!"

In Japanese formal discourse, when accepting an offer, Japanese tend to respond "*hai, ...sumimasen*," which literally means "Yes, I'm sorry." This sometimes leads a Japanese student to respond "Yes, I'm sorry" to an offer such as "Would you like a cup of tea?", instead of saying "Yes, please, thank you." Thus *Thank you* and *I'm sorry* are often used inappropriately by Japanese students of English because of incomplete matches between these English forms and analogous forms in Japanese. What is the difference between *I'm sorry* and *sumimasen*? As Coulmas said, "even the smallest favour makes the receiver a debtor" in Japan, since social relations are thought to constitute a network of mutual obligations and interpersonal commitments (Coulmas 1981: 88). However, as Coulmas continues,

not every favour can be repaid, and if circumstances do not allow proper repayment, Japanese tend to apologize. They acknowledge the burden of the debts and their own internal discomfort about it. (1981: 88)

The difference between *sumimasen* and *I'm sorry* is a difference between form and function. Japanese *sumimasen* is a ritualized, formalistic expression without real semantic content. It is, therefore, a routine expression of high frequency, whereas English *I'm sorry* is an expression of low frequency, actually functioning to *apologize* (ibid.: 87-9).

The point I wish to make here is that, to accept an offer, Japanese students should learn to use positive gratitude expressions,

such as *Thank you, It's kind/thoughtful of you, It's lovely, Yes, please, and I would really appreciate it*, and not an apologetic formula directly transferred from their L1.

Examples of a dialogue:

1. A: What about coming to dinner to our place this weekend?

(informal)

Mr. and Mrs. Johnson request the *pleasure* of your company at their party.

Could we have the *honour* of your presence at our party?

We *cordially* invite you to our party.

(formal)

B: That'll be *lovely/marvelous, thank you*.

It's very *kind/sweet/thoughtful* of you.

I'm most *delighted*. I'd really *appreciate* it.

2. Student: I wanted to take Professor Myers' history class very much. But the class was already full.

Advisor: Um, would you like me to talk to him for you?

Student: Oh, would you? I'd really *appreciate* it.

4.2. Refusing offers

In offer refusals there seems to be no great difference between English and Japanese. As Brown and Levinson claim, "*dispreferred* or [+ marked] responses are typically indirect, structurally elaborated and delayed, since disagreement is an FTA" (1978: 38). Specifically, the following strategies are adopted in both cultures (cf. Brown and Levinson 1978):

- (1) **Being indirect**, possibly by giving reasons or excuses that relate to "environmental control."

Expressions such as, *as is well known, considering the current*

situation, and as you see/know will be helpful.

A: What about this plan?

B: Well, *considering the present situation*, we should not go ahead with it.

(2) **Adding softener expressions** such as *actually, quite, to some extent, or as you see.*

(3) **Showing more hesitancy**, by indicating tentativeness or using hesitations, such as *umms and ahhs*, or *rather, sort of, quite, suppose, perhaps, guess, well, in fact, assume, believe, just or tag questions.*

(4) **Giving reasons**

(5) **Apologizing**

Adding “Sorry about that” will decrease the impact of FTAs.

In addition to the above, it is very important that students also learn to turn down offers by using such typical refusal expressions as *No, thank you, But thank you anyway, Don't worry*, and *Yes, really, No problem*, as we see in the dialogue below, rather than using some apologetic formula to express “sorry.” Here are some examples of dialogue using the expressions and strategies that are relatively difficult for Japanese students:

1. A: Would you like a ride home?

B: No, *don't worry. I can walk.*

A: *Are you sure?*

B: *Yes, really.*

2. A: I'll meet you at the airport.

B: *No, really, don't worry, I can find my own way.*

A: Are you sure? Do you know where the hotel is?

B: *Yes, fine, no problem.* The company's given me a map. *But thanks anyway.*

(cf. Tsuruta, Rossiter, and Coulton 1990: 148)

3. A: Would you like some more bread?

B: *No, thank you.* I've had enough./

I've had enough, *thank you.*

4. A: We have a job opening. Your name has been known to us through John Brown. Are you interested?

B: Unfortunately, I already have other commitments, but *thank you for considering me anyway.*

5. Pedagogical implications

It is important that the student is introduced to these expressions, including these contrastive English and Japanese expressions given in sections 3.1. and 3.3, preferably in the context of a short dialogue as shown above or like the following, and not in an isolated sentence:

A: I'll come to Tokyo for a week.

B: *Would you like to stay* at our place?

A1: Thank you very much. It's *generous* of you. (accepting)

A2: *Thank you, but actually, ...* (refusing)

Also, in order to develop cultural insights along with improved conversation skills, these politeness expressions should be presented not as a part of grammatical instruction but as a *topic* about a situation in which misunderstanding is caused by cultural differences in ideas about politeness. Specifically, the teacher should give a setting in which senior Japanese personnel host an international party. They have invited some English friends who are not very familiar with

Japanese customs. When the friends arrive, the hosts, directly transferring Japanese ways of greeting guests by showing excessive modesty through a rather negative tone, say to them, “Thank you very much for coming all the way to our humble party. Sorry for taking up your precious time.” For some reason the guests look perplexed and are not very pleased. Actually, the guests think that the hosts are being sarcastic, and that they did not really want the guests to come. This skit would be followed by a cultural explanation of what went wrong. Students are then instructed that using positive expressions even in a formal context, such as “Thank you very much for coming to our party. We are *glad* to have you here!” is an appropriate expression here. The benefit of an approach like this is that it strengthens overall ability in English while introducing cultural awareness, and that, by paying more attention to differences of perspectives, speech-act patterns, and cultural background, student’s real communicative ability will improve better than if the teacher relies on the direct translation and memorization methods that are so dominant.

6. Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to highlight politeness expressions in offers and their systems as related to cultural differences. It is essential for teachers to possess this knowledge, particularly in dealing with such a sensitive matter as politeness. I have emphasized that the subject should be based on interdisciplinary cross-cultural studies of linguistics, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics. In summary, the following are the main themes:

1. In making polite offers when a verb has its converse, English speakers tend to adopt the hearer-oriented act of “offer of permission”: e.g., “You can borrow” or expressions asking about the desires, willingness, or volition of the speaker. In

Japanese, it is not a simple thing to decide which speech act or point of view to be adopted is more polite than the other. This is because, depending on which honorific expressions or translations one uses, the degree of politeness varies. What differs from English is that it is considered rude in Japanese to ask directly about the willingness or desires of the hearer. In making offers in Japanese, it will be polite to adopt the traditional Japanese way of suggesting that the hearer's act will take place in the natural course of events, without reference to any activity on the part of the speaker, in order not to make the hearer feel indebted. Differences of patterns in speech-act realizations can cause problems in cross-cultural encounters. In making offers when a verb does not have a converse, various softener strategies can be adopted to reduce the impression of imposition on the hearer.

2. When making offers, and when giving responses to offers, English speakers tend to express positive feelings, whereas Japanese tend to express negative feelings. These differences derive from cultural differences: deferential politeness systems based on social obligation and mutual indebtedness in a formal context on the Japanese side, and solidarity politeness systems that operate to minimize debts on the English side.
3. Students should be given adequate instruction and exercises, possibly in a context of dialogue or conversation, to familiarize them with expressions that are quite unfamiliar to their ways of thinking, at the same time developing in them cultural awareness.

Direct translation and mechanical memorization of expressions, the traditionally dominant methods in Japanese schools, are

insufficient to engender real communicative competence in students.

NOTES

- ¹ These helping verbs literally convey the meaning of “giving and receiving,” but they are not used in the neutral way that “giving” and “receiving” are used in English. They are honorific and condescending forms of giving and receiving verbs used as auxiliaries, and they connote a sense of indebtedness and gratitude (Kuno 1973: Ch.9)
- ² The literal translation of this sentence is *Kompyuutaa o kari-tai desu ka?*, but this Japanese is not acceptable as a polite form sentence. So I change the verb to *o-tsukai ni narimasu ka?* because this is a commonly used polite offer translation for the English sentence. This is explained in more depth in section 3.4.
- ³ There are other offer expressions in Japanese besides those given here, such as *Koohii mada arimmasu ga. Ikaga desu ka?* (We still have coffee. Would you like some more?) In this paper, however, I have restricted my attention to offer expressions involving converse terms, for the purpose of a contrastive analysis with English.
- ⁴ The term Beneficiary here is used in a different sense from that of Halliday(1994:145). Halliday’s idea of Beneficiary is used in an extended sense that includes both a negative and a positive Beneficiary that is usually an Indirect Object, such as “She gave me flowers” and “She gave me pain” Here I restrict the meaning of Beneficiary to a positive meaning, and without limiting its grammatical function to an Indirect Object, I broaden it to include a Subject as long as the latter is a Beneficiary in a positive sense, such as in “Would you like to have this pamphlet?”
- ⁵ The explanation has to do with the Japanese restraints on verbs and adjectives that represent a person’s psychological state. For a detailed account of this phenomenon, see S.-Y. Kuroda (1973).

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN GLOSSES

AC	accusative
COP	copula
HON	honorific
Q	question
TOP	topic