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論文題名

A Comparison of Japanese, Chinese, and Korean EFL Learners'

Recognition and Production of Conventional Expressions

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to examine whether there are differences in how Japanese, Chinese, and Korean EFL learners recognize and produce “conventional expressions” and explore possible factors that cause differences. The results of this study would contribute to mutual understanding in intercultural communication between English speakers with different first languages, cultural backgrounds, and educational environments. These insights can also foster tolerance for communication with diverse English speakers and raise awareness that pragmatic differences naturally occur.

## **Literature Review**

This section reviews key concepts, including “pragmatic competence”, “pragmatic failure”, “pragmatic transfer” and “pragmatic resistance”, to understand learners’ use of conventional expressions.

### **Pragmatics and Pragmatic Competence**

Crystal (1997) defines pragmatics as “the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication” (p.301). Leech (1983) divides pragmatics into two areas: pragmalinguistics and socio-pragmatics. Pragmalinguistics is related to “the

more linguistic end of pragmatics – where we consider the particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions.” On the other hand, “socio-pragmatics is the sociological interface of pragmatics,” which is culture-specific.

Taguchi (2009) defines pragmatic competence as “the ability to convey and interpret meaning appropriately in a social situation”. It is an important ability to become a competent communicator or language speaker in the international community (Taguchi, 2017; Kecskes, 2015).

### **Pragmatic Failure**

Thomas (1983) refers to pragmatic failure as “the inability to understand ‘what is meant by what is said’”. She shows two areas of pragmatic failure: pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure. According to Thomas (1983), “pragmalinguistic failure occurs when the pragmatic force mapped onto a linguistic token or structure is systematically different from that normally assigned to it by native speakers”. In contrast, sociopragmatic failure occurs when speakers fail “judgements concerning the size of imposition, cost/benefit, social distance, and relative rights and obligations”.

### **Pragmatic Transfer**

Takahashi & Beebe (1987) define pragmatic transfer “as transfer of first language (L1) sociocultural communicative competence in performing L2 speech acts” (p.134).

Kasper (1992) defines pragmatic transfer as “the influence exerted by learners’ pragmatic knowledge of languages and cultures other than L2 on their comprehension, production and learning of L2 pragmatic information” (p.207).

### **Pragmatic Resistance**

In most L2 classrooms where pragmatics is taught, native-speaker language is often presented as the model, under the assumption that learners should conform to this model and that they are willing to do so. However, L2 learners sometimes diverge from native speakers’ norms and make choices based on their L1 norms purposely (Ishihara, 2008). Ishihara (2008) calls this kind of phenomenon “pragmatic resistance”. According to Ishihara (2019), learners are known to sometimes elect to depart from what they perceive as typical target-community behavior. This phenomenon of pragmatic resistance underscores the centrality of subjectivity in pragmatic language use and development.

### **Conventional Expressions**

This study focuses on ‘conventional expressions’, such as *Nice to meet you* and *Thank you for having me*. Using conventional expressions appropriately is an important element of pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). Bardovi-Harlig et al. (2022) states that learning conventional expressions is not just a matter of expanding one’s vocabulary or lexicon and the corresponding morphosyntax, but also a matter of learning

the social rules of the second language(L2) as well.

Roever (2012) states that using conventional expressions facilitates immediate understanding in conversation and eliminates the cognitive burden of processing, making it considered beneficial for second language learners' pragmatic performance. As these two researchers suggest, acquiring conventional expressions is thought to enhance learners' pragmatic competence and to lead to more effective communication.

### **Instruction**

To foster learners' pragmatic competence, explicit instruction is essential. Previous studies have shown that pragmatic knowledge is not easily acquired because learners in EFL contexts have fewer opportunities for interaction with NSs. Many conventional expressions are formulaic and culture-specific. Explicit instruction can raise learners' awareness of these forms and their appropriate contexts of use.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: Are there any differences among conventional expressions that Japanese, Chinese, and Korean EFL learners recognize? If so, what kinds of differences are there?

RQ2: Are there any differences among conventional expressions that Japanese, Chinese, and Korean EFL learners produce? If so, what kinds of differences are there?

RQ3: If there are statistical differences among the three groups, what are the possible

factors that cause the differences?

### **Method**

Three types of groups participated in this study: sixteen Japanese, fifteen Chinese, and fifteen Korean EFL learners. Chinese and Korean EFL learners are currently living in Japan. Their English proficiency level was assumed to range from B1 to B2 level on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). They had no experience of studying abroad in an ESL environment for more than a month. These restrictions were set to avoid the influences of the study abroad experience and proficiency level.

A multiple-choice discourse completion questionnaire (MCDT), which investigates recognition ability, computer-animated production tasks (CAPT), which investigate production ability, and follow-up interviews were administered to participants via the Zoom application. In addition, at a later date, extra interviews were conducted for the items showing statistically significant differences, as well as those showing differences among the three countries, even though a statistical difference was not found. The data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative analysis examined whether there are significant differences in responses and selections among learners. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS (version 29.0; IBM Corp.). To analyze

the data quantitatively, the chi-squared test was employed. The qualitative analysis examined the possible factors that may have caused significant differences. All of the answers, including non-targeted expressions and non-targeted selections, were examined based on follow-up interviews and other resources.

## **Results**

The results of the chi-squared test show that two out of twenty scenarios in MDCT and four out of twenty scenarios in CAPT yielded statistically significant differences. Although the statistical differences were limited, a closer examination of the results has revealed that each group has some specific pragmatic features. The qualitative analysis suggests that four possible factors cause differences. First, pragmalinguistic transfer can be one of the possible factors. Learners tended to rely on their L1. For example, Japanese EFL learners tended to avoid choosing expressions including ‘make it’ because there is no equivalent Japanese expression. Chinese EFL learners also rely on their L1 and choose the expression that has linguistic similarity with their L1. Second, sociopragmatic transfer can also be a possible factor. For example, in Question 11, Korean EFL learners were more likely to choose casual expressions such as ‘Where are you going?’ and ‘Are you going to the film?’ when speaking to teachers than the other two groups. This may be due to Koreans’ preference for casual expressions, which align with a cultural perspective on

building closer relationships by reducing psychological distance. Third, the effect of instruction can be another possible factor. For example, in Question 14, Chinese EFL learners were more likely to choose ‘Yes, please’ when responding to ‘Do you mind if I sit here?’ They seem to choose the response ‘Yes’ because it is an affirmative answer that permits sitting. On the other hand, Japanese EFL learners did not choose ‘Yes’ because they learned at school that they should avoid saying ‘Yes’ to accept the request using ‘Do you mind if~?’ Japanese EFL learners seem to be positively affected by instruction. The final possible factor is learners’ agency. For example, in scenario B5, participants had to produce an expression to respond to ‘Can I help you?’ Korean EFL learners tended to use ‘It’s OK ~,’ although they may have known the expression ‘I’m just looking,’ which is preferred by NSs. Some Korean EFL learners appear to prioritize expressing their own feelings and thoughts rather than adhering to the target language pragmatic norms.

### **Conclusion**

The results of the data analysis indicated that Japanese, Chinese, and Korean EFL learners recognize and produce conventional expressions similarly in general. However, when examined closely, each group showed its features. Japanese EFL learners tended to use the expressions preferred by American NSs. In most scenarios, their responses were more likely to match the expressions preferred by NSs than those of Chinese and Korean

EFL learners. It may suggest that Japanese EFL learners have a strong awareness of using native-like expressions and adhere to what they have learned at school or an educational institution. Chinese EFL learners were more likely to behave courteously and prefer polite expressions in social interactions. In addition, they seemed to behave politely by making sentences longer. Korean EFL learners tended to prioritize their own feelings and cultural perspectives. Even though they notice how NSs behave and speak in the specific situations, they prioritize their cultural norms and preferences.

In this way, the findings of this study may suggest that Japanese, Chinese, and Korean EFL learners differ somewhat in how they recognize and produce conventional expressions, even though they share geographic proximity and similar EFL learning environments. This kind of pragmatic diversity among English learners should be recognized as a resource for international communication rather than a problem to be corrected. Through intercultural understanding, learners would become more flexible and tolerant communicators.

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