

**EXAMINING THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRAGMATICS OF CHINESE JFL  
STUDENTS**

by

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# **EXAMINING THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRAGMATICS OF CHINESE JFL STUDENTS**

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The field of interlanguage pragmatics has burgeoned since late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Requests, as a part of speech act theory, have been investigated by many scholars. This cross-sectional study explores the acquisition of pragmatics of Chinese learners of Japanese in foreign language contexts (JFL) by examining their request usages, which incorporates pragmatic transfer as a tool to interpret data. Discourse completion task (DCT) questionnaires were distributed to first-year, second-year and fourth-year Japanese learners at a university in China, as well as to native speakers in the U.S. to elicit requests. Requests were analyzed according to the following six categories: perspectives, speech levels, strategies, syntactic downgraders, semantic downgraders, and supportive moves. Based on data analysis, the preliminary findings are: 1) Significant improvement from the first-year group to the second-year group can be observed. 2) In general, the fourth-year group performed similar to or less native-like than the second-year group. 3) Regardless of the advancement, a gap still exists between learners and native speakers regarding pragmatics proficiency. The study not only sheds light on the evolution of learners' interlanguage from a perspective of pragmatics, but can also reveal part of the current teaching and learning situations of Japanese pragmatics at universities in China. By discussing learners' success and potential areas that need developing, the findings could provide some meaningful implications for Japanese pedagogy.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In a globalized society, more and more studies have concentrated on cross-language politeness and honorifics, inspecting culture similarities and differences underlying languages (e.g., Beebe & Takahashi, 1989; Haisa, 1996; Hill et al., 1986; Ide, 1986). Nonetheless, learners do not always observe cultural conventions when learning a second language, where various problems emerge. As defined by Austin (1962), the act of saying something is known as locution; the act of performing a task by saying something is known as illocution, and the implied meaning that generates from the context is known as perlocution (implicature). Extra implicature may emerge from learners' language production if they cannot express themselves in an appropriate way, which could possibly lead to misunderstanding. Occasionally, even when their grammar is native-like, unexpected implied meaning that could be unpleasant or insulting might still arise from their language usage in certain contexts. In the realm of politeness, especially in terms of the Japanese language, learners' inability to employ honorifics seems to be one aspect that indicates an inadequate mastery of language, therefore ranking among the most concerning and serious issues facing learners (Neustupný, 1987). Moscoe (1993) pointed out that, "Sociopragmatic errors can lead to severe cases of miscommunication and even prejudice and negative intergroup attitudes. (p. 1)" Canale (1983), following the term "communicative competence" coined by Hymes (1972), redefined the term and classified it into four components, i.e., "grammatical," "sociolinguistic," "discourse," and "strategic" competences. Consequently, second language learners need to obtain

knowledge not only of grammar but also of pragmatics when communicating with others in a foreign language. Therefore, interlanguage pragmatics has been receiving growing attention since the late twentieth century, and it is of indispensable importance that students grasp the suitable way to use language in contexts instead of merely learning grammar. This study adopts the definition by Kasper and Dahl (1991), where “interlanguage pragmatics” refers to “non-native speakers’ comprehension and production of speech acts, and how their L2 (second language)-related speech act knowledge is acquired. (p. 216)”

By conducting a discourse completion task (DCT), this cross-sectional study tries to depict the overall picture of how students make requests based on the coding system developed in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project directed by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989). Precisely speaking, choices of the perspectives, speech levels, and request strategies, as well as the usage of syntactic downgraders, semantic downgraders and supportive moves by Chinese learners of Japanese will be investigated. Previous research established a robust foundation for the acquisition of Japanese pragmatics (e.g., Kashiwazaki, 1991; Kodama, 1996; Kojima, 1995; Lai, 2005; Suzuki, 2013; Taguchi 2008, 2015; Takimoto, 2012; Tateyama, 2009), yet many adopted a Westernized perspective, comparing the differences between two distinctive cultures—Japanese and American. However, the current research concentrates on Chinese JFL (Japanese as a foreign language) learners, who are comparatively less examined. This study will also allocate specific attention to pragmatic transfer as a tool to explain patterns emerged from data. Hopefully, the study will reveal the success and places needing improvement in the pragmatics of current Japanese education in Chinese universities, which could further shed light on language pedagogy.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Speech acts, as an indispensable part of pragmatics, have been investigated in great depth. Examples include studies on refusals (e.g., Ebsworth & Kodama, 2011; Ge, 2007; Kojima, 1995; Meguro, 1994, 1996; Shih, 2005; Takagi, 2003a), on apologies (e.g., Kumagai, 2013), and on complaints (e.g., Lee, 2006). One of the most influential studies is the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) directed by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989), which accumulated data from various language groups from Denmark, the US, Germany, and Israel, with various target languages such as English, German, and Hebrew. The significance of their research not only lies in the results of cross-cultural speech act realization patterns but also in the theoretical and methodological framework they established, especially a comprehensive coding scheme of requests and apologies. This study mainly adopts the coding manual for requests in CCSARP. In their coding system, head act, the core of a request sequence, and supportive moves, an optional unit external to the request that modifies its impact by either aggravating or mitigating its force, are identified for each request.

### **2.1 STUDIES OF REQUESTS MADE BY JAPANESE NATIVE SPEAKERS**

Requests have been analyzed from various perspectives, such as longitudinal case studies (e.g., Ellis, 1992; Li, 2000) and the impact of task design on downgrader usage (Takimoto, 2012), to name a few. Some researchers are dedicated to discover patterns and the characteristics of Japanese requests through decades. From a sociolinguistics point of view, many studies explored the factors

that influence native speakers' language usage. For instance, Kabaya, Kawaguchi and Sakamoto (1993) explored factors that determine request expressions as well as its implication on pedagogy, and Moriizumi (2009) explored the relationship between social features, face concerns and requesting strategies. Okamoto (1992) particularly scrutinized the effects of the requester's concerns for the requestee's costs, indicating that as the scale of request increases, native speakers use less direct expressions towards both intimate peers and seniors, and that they tend to employ direct forms more frequently in informal situations regardless of the interlocutor's status. In addition, Sato (1997) evaluated gender differences in request strategies, discovering that young female students applied most mitigators, who also used most diverse devices to mitigate their requests, and that women tend to use more formulaic expressions. However, the degree of directness seemed not differ much between genders. Fathers used most indirect strategies in her data. Moreover, Lee (2003) analyzed natural conversation data between speakers of different social status in business situations, and how their requests and permission-seeking process reflect their social roles.

Many studies tackled request-making process from the perspective of politeness strategies. For instance, Shih (2006) investigated the detailed flow of request-refusal-request process by examining telephone data between female university students. Chen (2010) studied request behaviors in Japanese novels from the perspective of discourse structures and politeness strategies that are observed in different social and psychological distances. In particular, Takagi (2003b) analyzed how native speakers convey their request intentions in natural telephone conversations, dividing their adjustment types into making the interlocutor realize the request, conveying the intention, trying to persuade the interlocutor to perform the request, and finishing the conversation only. Politeness strategies identified in the study include demonstrating consideration to the burden

involved and the interpersonal relationship, proceeding the conversation while prompting the interlocutor's understanding and confirming his/her consent instead of throwing out the request abruptly, specifying the speaker him-/herself as the favor recipient, and expressing the effort of facilitating the interlocutor to fulfill the request. Teidaa (2004) investigated situations when making a request is difficult, identifying native speakers' solutions such as through providing adequate bedding, grounding and explanation, seeking for advice instead of requesting, appealing by reiterating the necessity, alleviating counterparts' burden, and expressing consideration by proceeding according to the counterparts' reaction. Furthermore, Fukushima (2009) inspected the style shift between close equals, finding that the change in the degree of imposition accounts most of the shift from informal to formal style. She also collected requests made by university students in e-mails (Fukushima, 2012), analyzing the strategies adopted and challenging the stereotype that Japanese people tend to be polite and indirect. She discovered that when the speaker and the interlocutor are intimate and of the same social status, they tend to use direct and informal strategies, such as bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies.

Some studies address Japanese request-making characteristics by examining specific language devices or expressions. For example, Kim (2000) described donative auxiliary verb usage among family members, peers, and between juniors and seniors, as well as the usage distinction between different age groups and genders. Noro (2015) studied the expression *-te-morattemo-ii-desu-ka* (Lit. Can I receive your favor of doing something for me) that is prevalent recently, suggesting that it may not be as respectful as considered, and that people should select other alternative expressions instead.

Several features of Japanese native speakers' request expressions emerge from previous studies: 1) Native speakers usually show consideration to their interlocutors, who prefer

proceeding while confirming their reaction, especially in vis-à-vis scenarios. 2) They tend to choose different speech styles to different interlocutors, which is further determined by hierarchy, gender, intimacy, et cetera, and which in turn reflect speakers' roles. Although the target of second language learning may not be communicating in exactly the same way as native speakers do, a more native-like way of using the language may prompt more effective communication with less misunderstanding. On the contrary, a lack of pragmatic consistency with native speakers might result in impoliteness, unpleasantness, and misunderstanding. Therefore, in this study we compare learners' performance with native speakers', trying to identify the discrepancies between these two groups as well as suggesting areas that need more pedagogical attention.

## **2.2 INTERLANGUAGE PRAGMATICS—LEARNERS OF JAPANESE**

As asserted by Moscoe (1993), many studies have merely focused on communication instead of learning, and the acquisitional aspects of interlanguage pragmatics have been ignored. However, development of pragmatics has been attached more importance to since the 1990s. For instance, Taguchi (2005, 2007, 2008, 2009) investigated pragmatic comprehension of conventional implicature regarding comprehension speed and accuracy. In addition, the influence of learning environment on the development of pragmatics is also broadly examined in many languages (e.g., Eton, 2002; Fukazawa & Fordyce, 2005; Li, 2014; Rasouli Khorshidi & Subbakrishna, 2013; Ren, 2012; Taguchi, 2015; Xu, 2009).

As international exchange becomes intensified, the interlanguage pragmatics of Japanese requests has been examined from various aspects. Some research studies tackled learners' perception on requestive imposition rate, namely what composes imposition (Takahashi, 1998),

students' awareness on politeness, and the influence of power, distance, and cultural difference on imposition (Bulaeva, Tamaoka, & Huang, 2014). Lu (2011) also explored the perception difference on degree of respectfulness between Chinese JFL learners and Japanese native speakers, as well as the rationale that attributes to the difference such as cultural differences, functional constructions of expression formats, and the current state of Japanese education.

Some investigated case studies on intermediate Chinese and Korean learners regarding their progress on honorific expressions before and after taking a course on honorific communication, discussing the respective reasons behind (Taniguchi, 2004). On the other hand, Manabe (2013) focused on intermediate and advanced learners, indicating that it may be difficult even for advanced learners to construct requests and refusals when politeness level becomes higher and indirect expressions are expected.

Some studies focused on the instructional effect on learners' pragmatics performance. Tateyama (2008, 2009) stressed the influence of instructions on pragmatic competence, as well as how the effects are displayed depending on the type of outcome measure. The results revealed a significant instructional effect on the telephone and role-play tasks. Furthermore, learners performed better in the role-play than in the telephone task, because the interlocutor offered repairs to ratify learners' requestive intent or candidate understanding, suggesting that task types might affect the learning outcome. She also found a relatively large instructional effect in the video task that examined the learners' metapragmatic awareness. Moreover, an increase in the number of conventionally indirect strategies in the post-test DCT, telephone and role-play tasks that investigated learners' use of request strategies was witnessed, implying that instructional effects manifested in a similar manner despite the type of outcome measure.

Some studies focused on the overall politeness strategies and differences between learners and native speakers. Tsujioka (1996) examined the level of politeness of native speakers and JFL learners as well as social and cultural aspects of their language usage. He discovered that both Japanese and American participants adopted hints and conventionally indirect strategies to senior interlocutors with superior status or the ones of the same age with equal social status. Native speakers preferred using hints, whereas American JFL learners preferred straightforward strategies to junior interlocutors with lower social status. Moreover, a discrepancy was spotted between native and non-native speakers in the perception of required gendered language forms, which indicates a pragmatic transfer from L1. Furthermore, Tanaka (2004) identified some general request-making problems in role-plays of Japanese-language-school students such as approaching the interlocutor instantly, making requests abruptly and inexplicitly, and using difficult-to-understand expressions, in addition to cultural issues including behaving selfishly and not showing gratitude upon leaving the room, to name a few. Nishi (2015) evaluated the appropriateness level of intermediate and advanced learners' requests and demands for amendment, comparing learner production to native speakers'.

Some researchers investigated structures, sequences and the length of requests. For example, Harako (2000)'s study centered on request sequences and links between the learners' performance and instructions. Results from the role-play data suggest that the majority of students had difficulty using direct-style final predicates. Although students' learning materials already provide ample examples of the direct style in Japanese conversations as well as detailed grammatical and pragmatic explanations in a systematic presentation, learners still experience the difficulty handling requests in ways that fit contextual particulars. Hence, opportunities for making requests in various scenarios should be increased. Wu (2010) also focused on request sequences

and links, finding significant differences in solicitude, inserting preceding topics, confirming the schedule, inserting post topics, and re-requesting between Chinese learners and Japanese native speakers, indicating that learners have not grasped the “basic patterns” of Japanese requests. Meng (2009) examined the relationship between the length of utterance and information amount. He found that for advanced Chinese learners of Japanese, as the length of residency increases, their utterance becomes even longer than native speakers’, and that the utterance length can be better measured by adding word count into semantic formula analysis.

Some studies addressed micro-units and related problems in learners’ requests. For instance, Lai (2005) investigated grounders, especially apologies as a supportive move before requests, for instance:

**Example 1**

*Totsuzen-de warui-n-dakedo... Getsuyoobi-ni X o kashite-kure- n?*  
Suddenly bad N<sup>1</sup> but... Monday on X Obj. lend give me N  
Sorry (to bother you) in a sudden, but... Can you lend me X on Monday?

She found that native speakers tend to apologize when the interlocutor is superior, regardless of the propriety level. In contrast, Taiwanese learners tend not to apologize when the propriety level of requests is high, irrespective of the hierarchy of the interlocutor. Moreover, Taiwanese students tend to modify their supportive move more depending on the content and interlocutors’ reaction; meanwhile, they rely more on fixed expressions than native speakers. Providing such discrepancies, it would be intriguing to examine learners’ acquisition trajectory, namely whether the gap between learners and native speakers would diminish or enlarge as they enter higher study years, and when the gap disappears, if any.

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<sup>1</sup> Known as “interactional discourse marker”. For further explanations, see Yoshimi (2001).

Some scholars narrow their attention down to specific expressions. Sato (2012) suggests that even intermediate-advanced JFL learners who already passed JLPT<sup>2</sup> N1 test cannot master expression *-yooni* (lit. “like”: to turn into the state of, or to become able to) when making requests/orders, advocating for more drills on this language device. In addition, Matsuura (2003) inspected *-morau/-itadaku* (receive your favor of doing something for me) expressions, discovering that Chinese JSL (Japanese as a second language, i.e., learning Japanese in Japan) learners tend to acquire this expression relatively naturally as their residence length increases, whereas Chinese JFL learners, even those who passed JLPT N1 level, avoided this expression and experienced difficulty understanding its usage. Both Tanaka (1995) and Hatakeyama (2012) broach the problem of learners’ using *-kara* (because) as a justification indicator of their requests compared to native speakers who basically use *-node* (because) for the same function, pointing out that the intonation of *-kara* is too rude and strong to justify a request.

### **2.3 INTERLANGUAGE PRAGMATICS—LEARNERS OF ENGLISH**

In addition to learners of Japanese, studies on Japanese learners of English focusing on various aspects have also been flourishing in recent decades. These aspects include strategies, modifications, and sequences of request-making process (Konakahara, 2011), learners’ perception on politeness and how that influence their interlanguage production (Kitao, 1990), and especially the usage of “please”, concerning learners’ awareness of the employing situation, frequency, and

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<sup>2</sup> Japanese-Language Proficiency Test, N1 being the highest level. For detailed description on linguistic competence of each level, please refer to: <http://www.jlpt.jp/e/about/levelsummary.html>

politeness related to “please”, as well as its applying strategies (Abe & Suezawa, 2011; Yamazaki, 2002). Specifically, Wang (2007) examined request strategies of Chinese and Japanese EFL (English as a foreign language) learners regarding the L1 (first/native language) influence on the supportive move (the optional unit external to the request, which modifies its impact by either aggravating or mitigating its force). By conducting a DCT questionnaire, she demonstrated that L1 sociopragmatic knowledge and power factor have a substantial impact on supportive moves, whereas only Chinese learners exhibited an influence from L1 pragmalinguistic selections on supportive move usage. Also, Fukazawa and Fordyce (2003) explored Japanese EFL learners’ development of pragmatic competence in terms of syntactic and lexical downgraders. By conducting a DCT on requests, they found a significant influence of grammatical competence as well as residency length in the environment of the target language on learners’ downgrader usage. The comparison between Japanese EFL learners’ data and native speakers’ DCT results also suggests that second language learners adopt a restricted range of syntactic downgraders and fewer lexical downgraders except for “please”. Kurotaki (2001) investigated the developmental patterns of Japanese learners of English, identifying their areas of progress in terms of request strategy reservoir and supportive move frequencies.

## **2.4 CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON**

Many studies have investigated the differences between Japanese and other languages, such as between Japanese and Korean (Kawamura, 1999; Matsuda, Kim, Lee, & Park, 2007, 2008; Oki, Kang, Zhao, & Nishio, 2010; Sasagawa, 1999; Um, 2001, 2004; Won, 2012; Yoon, 2012; Zhang, 2013), between Japanese and American/British English (Christianson, 1994; Ebsworth & Kodama,

2011; Fukushima, 1996; Gagné, 2010; Kitao, 1987; Konakahara, 2011; Kuraya, 2013; Nakazato, 2011, 2013; Niki & Tajika, 1994; Ohashi, 1995; Shiomi & Nakabachi, 2014), between Japanese and German (Harting, 2008), between Japanese and Vietnamese (Guen, 2012; Nguyen, 2014), between Japanese and Thai (Sasagawa, 1999), and between Japanese and Indonesian (Sasagawa, 1999; Takadono, 2000), which established a solid theoretical foundation for the subsequent discussion on pragmatic transfer, as well as providing a pool of possible explanations on L2 interlanguage pragmatic productions.

Specifically, several studies examined the cultural difference of various speech acts between Chinese/Taiwanese Chinese and Japanese. For instance, Yang (1999) focused on backchannels and indicated that the variety of backchannels in Chinese conversation remains constant, yet the frequency is considerably affected by the content of the conversation, whereas the frequency of backchannels in Japanese conversation remains the same, with the backchannel format being influenced by interpersonal relationship. Yang and Okada (2003) observed politeness strategies in Chinese and Japanese. They found that Chinese speakers used more positive strategies such as thanking, complimenting, expressing envy, emphasizing rapport, acknowledging benefit-receiving, directly asking, and concluding with wishes. On the other hand, Japanese speakers preferred negative politeness, using more indirect requests, apologies, and expressing more consideration to their counterparts' feelings, time, and money involved. Zhang (2004) suggests that Japanese speakers tend to interact more and even co-construct the request with their interlocutors, i.e., waiting for the counterpart to understand what is being requested and proffer it, whereas Chinese speakers tend to confirm the capability of accomplishing the request with their requestees directly. Regardless of Japanese native speakers interacting with their interlocutors more, they usually maintain the distance when proceeding, while Chinese speakers often make an

effort to release interlocutors' burden. Similarly, Xu (2007) explored the preceding parts of Taiwanese Chinese and Japanese requests, finding that Japanese speakers are inclined to allocate more attention on the current situation, meanwhile using sentence endings such as *yone* (sentence-final interjection performing confirming and agreement-searching functions) to seek for counterparts' recognition, with more backchannels in the conversation. On the other hand, Taiwanese Mandarin speakers tend to articulate their predicament first with less interaction with their counterparts. Li (2005) also examined the characteristics of request patterns in Chinese and Japanese languages. He suggests that Japanese native speakers use more apologies in the preceding part, as well as avoiding stating the request in a straightforward way but rather make their interlocutors aware, whereas Chinese requests contain more varied elements in the conversation with diverse discourse types.

As seen from previous studies, differences in language expressions may be ascribed to the underlying cultural differences, or different ways of thinking. Regarding second language acquisition, even advanced learners may not be able to manifest native-like usage even though they use perfect grammar, and their L1 way of expressing themselves is also known as discourse accent (Green, 1991; McKay, 1986). Hence, cultural differences may impede successful and smooth information exchange without being sufficiently addressed, and recognizing as well as taking them into account in second-language teaching may enhance communication between different cultures.

## 2.5 PRAGMATIC TRANSFER

Considering the differences between learners' request production and native speakers', pragmatic transfer is probably one of the most intriguing reasons to explore. Pragmatic transfer can appear in different forms. For instance, example 2 and 3 illustrates the transfer of the preparatory request strategy (the "Can..." pattern) from Chinese to Japanese, as seen from translations.

### Example 2: Chinese

*Laoshi, nin neng bang wo xie feng tuijianxin ma?*  
Teacher, you <H> can help me write QUAN<sup>3</sup> recommendation letter Interj.  
Teacher, can you help me to write a recommendation letter?

### Example 3 (Y2, Q2): Japanese

*Sensee, suisenjyoo- o kaite-itadake- masen- ka.*  
Teacher recommendation letter Obj. write can receive <H> COP (Neg.) Que.  
Teacher, can't I receive your favor of writing a recommendation letter (for me)?

The pragmatic transfer provides extensive insights on interpreting different acquisition patterns of pragmatics, a prominent theme investigated by many. For instance, Obana (2009) presented a detailed analysis of similarities and differences of politeness strategies as well as pragmatic transfer emerged among Japanese and English speakers. She ascribed pragmatic errors in L2 requests to "strategic planning", namely English speakers preferring positive strategies and avoiding face threatening acts, whereas Japanese speakers' planning is based on "how the speaker perceives his/her *tachiba* (standpoint) in a given situation. (p. 39)" Takahashi (1993) tackled the transferability of L1 indirect request strategies to L2 contexts. By looking into Japanese ESL (English as a second language) data, she stated that contextual factors played a major role in determining the transferability at the pragmatic level and identified some proficiency effects on

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<sup>3</sup> QUAN=Quantifier

transferability of those request strategies as well. In other words, although some strategies seem universal, they can only be transferred in certain contexts; vice versa: some seemingly language-specific strategies can also be transferred in certain contexts. She also found that other than contextual factors, proficiency also influences the transferability. Fouser's 1997 research on pragmatic transfer of advanced L2 students revealed that in pragmatic areas, learner performance deviated from widely accepted linguistic norms to a greater degree than their overall language proficiency would indicate. Metapragmatic knowledge (learners' ability to describe rules) and affective variables exert a more profound impact on pragmatic competence than on acquisition of other areas of competence. Takahashi and Beebe (1987), studying the relationship between language proficiency and pragmatic transfer, discovered that pragmatic transfer is pervasive across different proficiency levels, and EFL learners exhibit more L1 transfer than ESL learners in refusals. They further made a hypothesis that higher proficiency is correlated with stronger transfer, since learners of higher proficiency have more tools to convert what they would have said in their L1. In contrast, Suzuki (2013) witnessed a reverse transfer from Chinese JSL students who have been living in Japan for more than three years. Her analysis of refusal patterns indicates that long residence length (more than three years) influences Chinese JSL learners' way of using semantic formulas since they are bringing Japanese way of expressing into their Chinese refusals. The difference between these two studies probably implies that although advanced speakers master more linguistic devices to transfer their L1 expression to L2, those who stay long enough in the target language community not only acquire L2 patterns but also transfer those strategies back to L1.

Other studies on pragmatic transfer that are devoted to discuss differences between Japanese, English, Chinese, and Korean will be introduced here. Nakazato (2011) researched data

from Japanese native speakers (JNS), American English native speakers (ENS), and Japanese learners of English (JSE) regarding sentence forms, modal auxiliary verbs, verb agents, and propositional directness related to their speech acts. He identified that ENS mainly used holistic alteration to sentence forms, while JSE and JNS primarily used partial modification on smaller units (JSE manipulated modal auxiliary verbs and JNS manipulated the verb agents) in order to modify the politeness level of their discourses. However, patterns transferred from JNS to JSE do not seem negative because JSE employed abundant modal verbs to adjust the politeness level, making the request adequately polite as native speakers'. The only negative transfer that caused pragmatic incongruence with native speakers was the overuse of propositionally direct verbs, which was unique to JSE interlanguage. Fukushima (1990) conducted a study regarding the performance on requests and offers of Japanese learners of English, suggesting that even students intended to be politer, they were not able to use appropriate expressions in different situations, and that many of their expressions seemed direct and rude. Nevertheless, Christianson (1994), in an attempt to attack the weaknesses in Fukushima (1990)'s study, argued that both English and Japanese speakers differentiate expressions between intimate friends and acquaintances. In terms of pragmatic transfer, Japanese ESL/EFL learners heavily rely on Japanese pragmatic strategies, which, as a matter of fact, often turns out to be positive transfer—i.e., although NSs and learners adopt different strategies, the strategic difference does not equal to negative transfer. Nonetheless, strategies such as camaraderie-building sound more awkward when transferred. Kurotaki (2001) suggests that some features of supportive moves in Japanese is transferred by Japanese EFL students such as excessive apologies and explanations when they make requests. In other words, learners show too much concern to their interlocutors (negative transfer from Japanese to English), which conversely downgrades the politeness level in English. Meng (2008) analyzed semantic

formulas in requests made by advanced Chinese learners of Japanese, discovering that pragmatic transfer from Chinese to Japanese exists in hesitation, maintaining the relationship, sympathy, requirement, interjection, appellation, accusation, and compliment, to name a few. He also identified the distinctive characteristics of interlanguage in terms of reasoning, apology, alternative plans, faltering, and making brief responses while listening. Matsuda, Kim, Lee, and Park (2007) addressed the negative transfer of a specific Korean pattern *-ja* (“let’s do something”, can be used as a command or request) into Japanese *-yoo* (“let’s do something”, only used when both speakers perform the task together) in requests made by Korean learners of Japanese.

## 2.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Built upon the literature review, this study investigated interlanguage pragmatics in a more holistic way. By simultaneously viewing different aspects of learners’ requests, I intend to answer the following questions in this study: 1) For Chinese learners of Japanese in a foreign language context, what is the possible development pattern regarding making requests? 2) What factors attribute to such pattern? 3) Is there any pragmatic transfer—from L1 (Chinese) to L2 (Japanese)—that can be observed?

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 RECRUITMENT OF SUBJECTS**

73 students in first, second and fourth year majoring in Japanese who were studying at a university in northern China were recruited to participate in this study. 15 Japanese native speakers residing in the United States were also asked to fill out the questionnaire as the control group. As a separate proficiency test was not conducted, it is assumed that students' language proficiency improves as they enter higher study years, which is considered to be one of the weaknesses of this study. Table 1 provides some basic information about learners' Japanese curriculum for us to achieve a better estimation of their approximate Japanese proficiency.

**Table 1: Information on the Japanese curriculum**

Year	Mandatory Japanese courses	Length	Textbook	Optional Japanese courses
First	Intensive Japanese	Fall: 4h/week×17 weeks	Fall: New Japanese 1 <sup>4</sup>	Another 28 credits of elective courses from the College of Foreign Languages
		Spring: 4h/week×17 weeks	Spring: New Japanese 2	
Second <sup>5</sup>	Intensive Japanese	Fall: 4h/week×17 weeks	Fall: New Japanese 3	
		Spring: 4h/week×17 weeks	Spring: New Japanese 4	
Third	Intensive Japanese	Fall: 4h/week×17 weeks	Internal textbooks	
		Spring: 4h/week×17 weeks		
Fourth	Introduction to Culture, introduction to Japanese linguistics, reading newspaper and magazines, classical literature, and Japanese interpretation	Fall: 4h/week×17 weeks	Varied	
		Spring: 4h/week×17 weeks		

<sup>4</sup> This series of textbooks are adopted by most universities for Japanese-major students in China.

<sup>5</sup> Most students pass JLPT N1 by the end of second year.

Third-year students were not included in this study because the majority of them went to Japan for exchange study. I contacted Faculty of Foreign Languages in person and visited Department of Japanese in December 2014. After briefly introducing my research topic and obtaining the approval for me to collect data from their students, I officially started distributing the questionnaire from late May in 2015. Because the break between Japanese classes was the only time that I could meet all the students and explain my study, I visited Japanese classes during the break for several times so as to collect questionnaires from different study years. With the approval of all Japanese language teachers, I directly asked students to fill out the questionnaire and remained in the classroom for the whole session in order to make sure that nobody copied others' answers. As participation was voluntary, those who chose not to fill the survey were free to leave the classroom. Since fourth-year students no longer took Japanese classes in whole-group sessions, I was not able to visit their Japanese class. After the discussion with the administrator, questionnaires were forwarded to the class monitor on photo day, who was also responsible for collecting responses from students on defense day. Students whose native language was not Chinese were not included in the study. Because the questionnaire did not aim at testing lexical or grammatical knowledge, students were allowed to use dictionaries. Research participation did not affect students' course credit or grades. Informants in the control group mainly come from native speakers I met in Japanese Conversation Club near our university. I was not present when native speakers completed the questionnaire: they were asked to finish it at home and bring it back in the next meeting.

### 3.2 INSTRUMENT

A discourse completion task (DCT) was adopted for this research. DCT has proved by many scholars to be an efficient and economic test instrument: not only does it gather substantial amount of pragmatic usage during a relatively short period, but it is also powerful in eliciting various speech acts such as compliments, refusals, and apologies that are difficult to observe systematically in reality (e.g., Meng, 2009). Nonetheless, the debate on the validity of DCT has also lasted for decades. For one thing, many argue that DCT cannot replicate a real situation that provides considerably more information such as the environment where the conversation occurs, ambience, the exact urgency of a particular request, gender, mood, facial expressions, and the exact relationship between interlocutors, to name a few. As illustrated by Rintel and Mitchell (1989), it seems difficult to affirm the representativeness of what subjects write on DCT, which may differ from what they would say in spontaneous conversations. This partially explains why many students used rather ambiguous reasons to explain their requests in my data, and they probably would have provided more detailed justifications had they been assigned a role-play task. In contrast, even role-plays, although proved to elicit more interactions and more intact conversations between interlocutors by Sasaki (1998), cannot perfectly simulate real situations since they are artificially designed to elicit certain speech acts. Kodama's study in 1996 specifically investigated the differences between role-play and DCT in eliciting refusals in Japanese, and she indicated that "almost half of the subjects felt uncomfortable about initiating conversations after simply reading a description of a situation (p. 164)." Therefore, it is asserted that role-plays cannot represent what speakers intend to convey perfectly either, whereas a DCT allows us to analyze communicative competence in a comparably reliable and effective way (Nakazato, 2013). As this study focuses

on the pragmatic development trajectory instead of the authenticity of DCT itself, further discussion on this issue will be omitted.

The study initially intended to adopt the questionnaire from Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper's CCSARP and translate it into Chinese, as that version balanced several crucial variables that can potentially influence speech act strategies such as power, solidarity and propriety. Nonetheless, Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper's DCT, although rather efficient in eliciting speech acts in European societies, does not seem to work perfectly among Chinese students. For instance, situations as "a girl trying to get rid of a boy pestering her on the street" and "a student asks people living on the same street for a ride home" seem fairly unfamiliar to Chinese undergraduate students, which increases the artificiality of the questionnaire. Considering the artificiality criticized by many researchers, as well as only focusing on two particular parameters—hierarchy and propriety, I decided to design another questionnaire for the current study, which is more adapted to students' perspectives, including concepts like the internship, sports clubs, boyfriends/girlfriends, the final paper, et cetera. According to Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford's study on DCT questionnaires (1993), the inclusion of conversational turns is preferred at least for eliciting rejections, which especially influences non-native speakers' response. Although requests seem to be an initiation rather than a reaction, I included a very brief response to the request in order to make it an intact "conversation". Furthermore, Billmyer and Varghese's studies in 1996 and 2000 suggest that details in prompts, though not significantly affect request strategies or the amount of internal modifications, or generate differences in head acts, do produce longer and more elaborated requests. Regarding the parameters of my questionnaire design, I checked the interpretation accuracy of hierarchy and propriety with native Chinese and Japanese speakers, meanwhile ensuring that subjects will not be overwhelmed by excessive details in prompts.

The DCT includes eight situations, balanced according to hierarchy and propriety that are divided into high and low levels, with two situations in each combination (marked as a “condition”).<sup>6</sup> “High hierarchy” means superiors, such as professors and bosses, whereas “low hierarchy” refers to non-superiors, such as classmates and friends. “High propriety” represents situations of higher reasonability, such as asking for a recommendation letter from a professor, and “low propriety” is equivalent to less reasonable situations, such as borrowing too much money from a friend. Each discourse sequence presents a brief description of that situation, specifying the setting and the status of between interlocutors, followed by an incomplete dialogue. Table 2 summarizes all situations, and Appendix A provides a full version of the questionnaire.

**Table 2: Summary of situations**

Conditions	Situation descriptions
High hierarchy × High propriety	Situation 2: asking for a recommendation letter from a professor
	Situation 5: asking for information on sports clubs from a senior staff member
High hierarchy × Low propriety	Situation 3: asking for a two-week leave during a one-month internship from a boss
	Situation 6: asking for a deadline extension from a supervisor
Low hierarchy × High propriety	Situation 4: asking for lecture notes from a classmate
	Situation 8: asking a driver to move the car as a police officer
Low hierarchy × Low propriety	Situation 1: borrowing \$200 from a classmate

<sup>6</sup> The discussion on the relationship between conditions and how students form their requests is omitted in the current paper and will be analyzed in future studies.

### 3.3 CODING SCHEME

The current study mainly adopted CCSARP's coding manual for requests. Data are coded in six categories, including perspectives, speech levels, request strategies, syntactic downgraders, semantic downgraders, and supportive moves. Except for supportive moves (the optional unit external to the request that modifies its impact by either aggravating or mitigating its force), all the other categories were used to analyze the head act (the core of a request sequence). Appendix B provides a summary table of coding methods applied in this study, which incorporates Blum-Kulka et al.'s coding manual (1989) and responses from my subjects.

#### 3.3.1 Perspectives

Perspectives refer to the viewpoint on which the speaker is standing to make the request, which include hearer dominance, speaker dominance, and impersonal. Here are some examples of each perspective. In example 4, the donative auxiliary verb *-kureru* ("give me") implies that the subject is "you" in this sentence (we will discuss donative auxiliary verbs more in Section 3.3.5). Hence, the perspective is hearer dominance. Whereas in example 5, the donative auxiliary verb *-itadaku* ("I receive your favor of doing something") suggests that the subject is "I", and therefore, speaker dominance is applied. In example 6, similar to English, the verb *aru* ("there is/are") indicates that a specific subject is absent here, so it uses impersonal perspective.

#### **Example 4 (Year4, Q7): Hearer dominance**

*Atarashii keitai- ga hoshii-desu- ga, kate-kure<sup>7</sup>- masen- ka.*  
New mobile Sub. want COP<sup>8</sup> HSE<sup>9</sup> buy give me COP (Neg.) Que.  
I want a new phone... can't you buy (one) for me?

**Example 5 (Year2, Q5): Speaker dominance**

*Jyoo<sup>hoo</sup>- o oshiete-itadake- masen- ka.*  
Information Obj. tell can receive <H> COP (Neg.) Que.  
Can't I receive your favor of telling me the information?

**Example 6 (Year4, Q4): Impersonal**

*Kinoo- no nooto- ga ari- masu- ka.*  
Yesterday LK<sup>10</sup> notes Sub. have COP Que.  
Are there yesterday's notes?

**3.3.2 Speech levels**

“Speech level” is a new category because it is language-specific, which refers to the speech style, an element in honorific language. In Japanese, honorific language refers to a mature and complicated system catering for needs of distinguishing hierarchy and maintaining interpersonal relationship in a vertical society, which consists of an indispensable portion of the politeness system. In general, honorific language can be divided into respect language, humble language, and polite language (e.g., Cao, 2012; Peng, 1997; Tang & Yi, 2011). Such a system of coding interpersonal relationship and context into grammar rules is named the deixis system by Peng (1997), which is profoundly associated to the innate structure of Japanese. As pointed out by Wang

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<sup>7</sup> The dotted underline indicates that the subject of the request pattern is implied from the verb instead of directly stated

<sup>8</sup> COP=Copula

<sup>9</sup> HSE=Hedged sentence endings

<sup>10</sup> LK=Linking word

(1989) and Zhang (2013), because Japanese is a non-configurational language with agglutinative morphology, it is possible to add respect level-indicating markers into verbs.

In our coding system, “plain level” refers to non-honorific language, which is marked by *-da* endings. “Neutral level” corresponds “polite language” in the honorific language system, which mainly refers to normal *-desu/-masu* endings. “Polite level” is in accordance with both “respect language” and “humble language” in the system, which involves honorific verbs that either directly elevate the interlocutor (respect) or indirectly elevate the interlocutor by lowering the speaker him-/herself (humble). Strictly speaking, honorific language and speech styles are separable: i.e., it is possible to use honorific verbs (respect/humble language) with plain endings (plain level). Nonetheless, in our data, students rarely mix honorific verbs with *-da* endings, and therefore, only three most prominent levels are defined here for convenience. In addition, only head acts with honorific verbs (excluding nouns and adjectives) will be marked as polite level in this study; honorific verbs appearing only in supportive moves will not influence the speech level of head acts. The rationale behind this category is that speech levels marked by different endings are a unique character for Asian languages such as Japanese and Korean, which stands as a distinct politeness strategy. Especially when the hierarchy is a parameter in the task design, understanding whether students can adopt appropriate speech levels in different situations is imperative. In contrast, most European languages lack speech-level distinctions, and Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper’s coding system mostly considers the “volitional” strategies. However, the “discernment” defined by Ide (1986), namely the obliged choice of discourse level because of power differences, can be reflected by adding this category. For further clarification, one can adopt many politeness strategies described in Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper’s manual while using the plain level when

speaking to a superior, which is considered inappropriate by Japanese native speakers, as shown in example 7.

### **Example 7**

*Kono repooto, chotto chekkushite-kure-nai-daroo?*

This report a little check give me Neg. HSE

Can't you check the report for me?

Although example 7 applied semantic downgraders such as understaters (*chotto*) and syntactic downgraders such as negations (*nai*), interrogatives, and hedged sentence endings (*daroo*), as the utterance ends in plain endings (plain level), it would be inappropriate to use it towards a superior. Thus, “speech level” should be an independent category.

### **3.3.3 Strategies**

Strategies refer to “the obligatory choice of the level of directness by which the request is realized” (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989), and five subcategories were adopted from the manual. 1) Mood derivable, in which “the grammatical mood of the locution conventionally determines its illocutionary force as a request”, ranks the first place concerning directness. It usually appears in imperative forms, such as “please move your car”. 2) Want statement is the second most direct strategy in our list, which mainly expresses speakers’ desire. However, not every request with “want” expressions is treated as a want statement. For instance, “I want to receive your favor of lending me the notes” is classified as want statement, whereas “I want an iPhone 6” will be coded as “strong hint” strategy because the request “would you please buy it for me” is implied from the utterance. 3) Suggestory formula refers to suggestions that include illocutionary intentions, which is not a typical request strategy but a common invitation strategy in Japanese as illustrated by example 8.

**Example 8 (Y4, Q4)**

*Nooto-o kureta- no- wa ikaga- desu- ka.*

Notes Obj. give me NOM<sup>11</sup> Top. how about COP Que.

How about giving me the notes?

It could be seen from the example that requesting, rather than inviting, should be the closest interpretation of learners' responses, and I consider the application this strategy to be one of the features of interlanguage pragmatics. 4) Preparatory is the most common strategy in many languages, which “contains reference to a preparatory condition for the feasibility of the request, typically one of ability, willingness, or possibility, as conventionalized in the given language ((Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989, p. 280)” and is often realized in interrogations such as “Can you pass me the salt.” In the current coding system, not only the conventional indirect strategies asking about capability, but the “is it OK” pattern in Japanese is also marked as preparatory, as shown in example 9 and 10.

**Example 9 (Y1, Q5)**

*Iroiro- na supootu-no jyoohoo- ga itadake- masen- ka.*

Various LK sports LK information Sub. can receive <H> COP (Neg.) Que.

Can't I receive the information on all kinds of sports?

**Example 10 (Y1, Q1)**

*Chotto 1000 gen- o kashi-temo- ii- desu- ka.*

A little 1000 yuan Obj. lend even if good COP Que.

Even if you lend some 1000yuan (to me), is it OK?

5) Strong hint indicates that “the illocutionary intent is not immediately derivable from the locution; however, the locution refers to relevant elements of the intended illocutionary and/or propositional act.” It should be noted that strong hint is one kind of request strategies that applies to the head act. For instance, the request strategy for “Parking is not allowed here, (so) move your

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<sup>11</sup> NOM=Nominalization

car” is coded as mood derivable, since the first clause before comma will be treated as the supportive move part that justifies the request; whereas merely “Parking is not allowed here” will be coded as “strong hint” because the illocutionary intent is implied.

### **3.3.4 Syntactic downgraders**

Syntactic downgraders refer to the internal syntactic modification of head acts that mitigate the imposition force (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). The first subcategory, “interrogatives”, is coded differently from the manual—I also coded the unmarked usage of interrogatives. Namely, whenever students use a question (such as in the preparatory “Can you pass me the salt”), they are considered to use this tool. The second subcategory, “negation of a preparatory condition” refers to “sentences where negative is optional”, which is a frequently adopted mitigator in Japanese requests. Because syntactic downgraders are “specific for individual languages” (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989, p. 281), I defined a third subcategory—hedged sentence endings—for the current study. Hedged sentence endings mitigate the tone at a clause level, which occurs only occasionally in European languages, yet it is rather popular in Japanese requests. Hedged sentence endings include “*daroo/deshoo* (maybe)” that makes the sentence euphemistic, “*kana*” that mostly appear in casual speeches, “*-kedo/-keredo/-keredomo/-ga*” that turn an utterance into an incomplete one, and simply an ellipsis “...”.

### **3.3.5 Semantic downgraders**

Semantic downgraders refer to internal lexical adjuncts that soften the imposition (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989, p. 283), and three subcategories are defined in this study. 1) “Understater”,

“hedge”, and “downtoner” in the manual are combined to one single subcategory named “understaters”. Specifically, it refers to adverbial modifiers by means of which the speaker underrepresents the state of affairs denoted in the proposition, adverbials used by a speaker when he or she wishes to avoid potential provocation, and sentential or propositional modifiers used to modulate the impact his or her request on the hearer. Japanese does not have many understaters available, and it is rather challenging to distinguish the exact function of the most frequently used understaters—*chotto* (a little), *hodo* (about), *-gurai/-kurai* (about), and *sukoshi* (a little)—according to the three original subcategories. 2) Donative auxiliary verbs emphasize that the speaker is receiving help from the interlocutor by specifying the beneficiary of the action, which are attached to main verbs. In Japanese, two basic forms of donative auxiliary verbs are *-kureru* and *-morau*, the first one taking the perspective of the interlocutor and the second one of oneself. According to Kurotaki (2001), *-kureru* can be regarded as positive politeness as it signifies more solidarity than consideration for the interlocutor. In practice, Japanese people mostly prefer the latter one, with the agent of an action being oneself (“may I receive your favor” instead of “can you help me”) considered politer in Japanese society (Kabaya, Kawaguchi, & Sakamoto, 1998; Kabaya, 2007; Taniguchi, 2006). However, because downgraders are optional, donative auxiliary verbs used as main verbs are not coded because they are obligatory. For instance, “Can I receive your notes (*Nooto-o moraeru*)” is not coded, whereas “Can I receive your favor of lending me the notes (*Nooto-o kashite-maraeru*)” is coded as applying donative auxiliary verbs. 3) Lexicons refer to unique Japanese vocabularies that express the same meaning at different politeness levels, and those at the higher level are coded. English also has several pairs of words with approximately identical meaning that are used in different contexts. For instance, people mostly say “I’m used to the American culture” when speaking to a friend, while using “I’m accustomed to the American

culture” in academic settings. In Japanese for instance, the aforementioned “*deshoo*” is not only a hedged sentence ending, but is also of higher level (i.e. used to superiors or in written texts) than “*daroo*”, and therefore, it will be coded in both categories. The higher-level vocabularies also include adjectives such as *yoroshii* (the higher level for *ii*, good) as well as honorific lexicons. For instance, many native speakers will use honorific forms of donative auxiliary verbs when asking a favor from a superior, which will be coded both in “donative auxiliary verbs” subcategory and in “lexicons” subcategory. Nevertheless, the morphologically conjugated verbs in honorific forms are not coded because they are not independent vocabularies.

### 3.3.6 Supportive moves

Supportive moves refer to external modifications of the head act. Many varieties of supportive moves are available, yet only two are prominent in our data—grounders and preparators. Grounders are one of the most frequently used supportive moves in many languages that provides reasons, explanations or justifications of the request. Preparators, according to Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper’s manual (1989, p. 287), are defined as “the speaker prepares his/her hearer for the ensuing request”, which basically conveys that “I have a request”. However, in Japanese, some expressions such as “*totsuzenna-no-desu-ga* (It is all of a sudden, but...)”, and especially apologies, also bear the function of preparing the interlocutor for the subsequent request. Therefore, they are all included in this subcategory. One of the outward expression of apology “*sumimasen*” is rather tricky because of it has multi-functions. As a general rule, if it appears initially separated by a comma, I would treat it as a mere alerter; whereas the honorific expressions of “*suminassen*”—“*mooshiwake-arimasen/ mooshiwake-gozaimasen*” usually function more than merely attracting interlocutors’ attention, which will be coded as a preparator.

### 3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

A Japanese native speaker was asked to code 10% of the requests randomly chosen from each group, and the inter-rater reliability equals 90%, indicating that the coding was consistent. As speakers have to make a mandatory choice from subcategories in perspectives, speech levels and strategies for any request they make, simple crosstab descriptive statistics is used to count the percentage of each subcategory for these categories, and the percentage of each subcategory will add up to 100% for each category. Because for obligatory categories, the choices are often situation-specific, I will only report the distribution of percentages without conducting further statistical tests. For mitigation tools that are optional in requests, including syntactic downgraders, semantic downgraders and supportive moves, data are coded binarily: “0” for not applied, “1” for applied. Because many tools cannot be used twice in one request such as hedged sentence endings, the number of application frequencies in a single utterance will be ignored. Even for those mitigators whose multi-application is possible (such as understaters), students rarely used them more than once within one request. Hence, such simplification did not exert much influence on my data. As the coding is binomially distributed, I used logistic regression to calculate the estimated probability of adopting downgraders and supportive moves for each group. Thus, the probability, instead of raw percentages, will be reported and compared. For optional categories, further pairwise comparison using Bonferroni adjustment was also performed. However, only prominent results will be reported. The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software was used to analyze data, and the alpha level was set at .05 for all analysis. The overall underlying null hypothesis for statistical tests is that the probabilities of students to use downgraders and supportive moves discussed above have no difference across study years. Table 3 summarizes the number of participants and the number of all valid responses. Since students were allowed to skip

questions, those left blank are considered missing data. The missing data rate for question 7 is relatively high compared to other questions.

**Table 3: Summary of participants and responses**

Study year	Valid/possible total (N×8 situations)
Year 1 (N=29)	189/232
Year 2 (N=27)	158/216
Year 4 (N=17)	117/136
NS (N=15)	120/120
Total (N=88)	584/704

*Note.* NS refers to native speaker group for all tables in this thesis.

## 4.0 RESULTS

### 4.1 PERSPECTIVES

Perspectives refer to the stance that the requester takes, which include speaker dominance, hearer dominance, and impersonal. Table 4 summarizes the raw percentage of each perspective chosen across different study years:

**Table 4: Percentage of perspectives by study years**

Study year	Speaker dominance	Hearer dominance	Impersonal
Year 1	51.9	40.7	7.4
Year 2	59.5	38.0	2.5
Year 4	49.6	48.7	1.7
NS	69.2	28.3	2.5

*Note.* The figures in each cell reflect percentages of participants' response in that subcategory—applied to Table 4, 5, and 6.

It is evident from the table that native speakers apply speaker dominance most frequently, and accordingly their choice of hearer dominance is the lowest compared to learners. As explained in the data coding section, a request is considered politer when the agent of the action is oneself. Nakazato (2011) also articulates that, "...referring to the speaker's action rather than the hearer's action may be less imposing and politer because it disguises as if the request is addressed to the speaker him-/herself. In short, the employment of an impersonal agent and the first personal agent may indicate higher politeness degree than the direct reference to 'you', the second personal agent. (p. 107)" Because it is the requestee who eventually fulfils the request, speaker dominance usually co-occurs with donative auxiliary verbs *-morau/-itadaku* <Honorific>, framing the request in patterns like "Can I receive your favor of doing something for me". This observation is also

corroborated in Takamura’s findings in 2014 that as the imposition rate increases, Japanese native speakers adopt more *–morau* and fewer *–kureru* (can you do something for me, hearer dominance). Focusing on speaker dominance that conveys more politeness (other perspectives will co-vary correspondingly because this category is obligatory), we can see that although second-year students exhibit in a native-like change, fourth-year students’ choices change in a non-native-like direction.

## 4.2 SPEECH LEVELS

Table 5 briefly summarizes the percentage of speech levels adopted by each year:

**Table 5: Percentage of speech levels by study years**

Study year	Plain level	Neutral level	Polite level
Year 1	8.5	58.2	33.3
Year 2	25.3	39.2	35.4
Year 4	23.1	41.9	35.0
NS	37.5	17.5	45.0

An apparent change can be observed from year 1 to year 2 when students begin to use substantially more plain forms and fewer neutral forms. This pattern can be anticipated to some extent since many Japanese textbooks introduce neutral forms first. Neutral *–desu/–masu* endings are considered the “safest” level because they are neither too rude nor too polite, and therefore, first-year students chose the neutral level in over half of their requests. The percentage of neutral level drops sharply at the end of the second year when students are aware of the difference between speech levels as well as consciously distinguishing their usage. Nonetheless, such improvement

does not reach a native-speaker level, whose speech levels turn out most polarized with fewest neutral forms. Namely, native speakers tend to use polite forms when speaking to a senior and plain forms when speaking to a peer/junior more frequently compared to learners. The following two examples illustrate this point:

**Example 11 (NS, Q1): speaking to a classmate**

*Onegai ichiman-en kashite!*  
 Please 10000 yen lend  
 Please lend me 10000yen!

**Example 12 (NS, Q5): speaking to senior staff**

*Kochira-no supootu kurabu-no jyoo-hoo- o teikyoo-shite-itadaki- tai-no-desu-ga...*  
 Here LK sports club LK information Obj. provide receive <H> want N COP Que.  
 I would like to receive your favor of providing the information about the sports clubs here, but...

Hence, although Japanese people are widely considered polite, they do use plain forms and direct strategies when conversing with an in-group/junior members, the politeness level depending on to whom they are speaking, as confirmed in Fukushima’s 1996 study.

### 4.3 REQUEST STRATEGIES

Table 6 presents request strategies adopted by each study year:

**Table 6: Percentage of strategies by study years**

Study Year	Mood derivable	Want statement	Suggestory formula	Preparatory	Strong hint	Others
Year 1	20.1	7.4	6.9	56.6	6.9	2.1
Year 2	11.4	7.6	2.5	70.3	7.6	0.6
Year 4	20.5	4.3	0.9	66.7	5.1	2.6
NS	12.5	17.5	0	57.5	8.3	4.2

Two general patterns emerge from the table: 1) Preparatory is the primary strategy chosen by both learners and native speakers, the percentage of which is always larger than 50. 2) Native speakers use considerably more “want statements” than all learner groups, further explaining the discrepancies emerging in the application of syntactic downgraders and semantic downgraders, which we will elaborate more in Section 5.3.

#### 4.4 SYNTACTIC DOWNGRADERS

Table 7 summarizes the probability of applying each syntactic downgrader across different study years:

**Table 7: Probability rate of syntactic downgraders by study years**

Study year	Negations	Interrogatives	Hedged sentence endings
Year 1	.35	.65	.08
Year 2	.53	.73	.23
Year 4	.47	.73	.11
NS	.40	.59	.49

*Note.* The figures in each cell reflect probability rate calculated by SPSS of different study years—applied to Table 7, 8, and 9.

Regarding negations, although first-year students’ probability was slightly lower (.35) than native speakers’ (.40), by the end of the second year, the rate was already higher (.53).

Interrogatives appear to be a universal syntactic downgrader for all groups, whose application probability is always higher than .50. A closer investigation reveals that learners prefer interrogatives more than native speakers, who seem to use them least frequently.

Another intriguing phenomenon is that native speakers are much more likely to use hedged sentence endings, which significantly outnumbers learner groups (pairwise comparison between native speakers and all learner groups:  $p=.0001$ ). As described in the coding system, hedged sentence endings refer to the final particles or conjunctions that mitigate the tone and/or make the sentence an incomplete one, as shown in example 13. The final conjunctive particle “*-ga*”, literally meaning “but”, indicates that the sentence is not ended and the request part “can you give me a two-week holiday” is implied.

**Example 13 (NS, Q3)**

... 2 *shuukan hodo o-yasumi-o itadaki- tai-n-desu-ga.*  
 2 week around holiday Obj. receive <H> want N COP HSE  
 ... (I) want to receive around two weeks of holiday, but...

Hedged sentence endings as well as the application discrepancy between learner groups and native speakers will be elaborated more in Section 5.3.

#### 4.5 SEMANTIC DOWNGRADERS

Table 8 summarizes the application probabilities of semantic downgraders in all groups:

**Table 8: Probability rate of semantic downgraders by study years**

Study year	Understaters	Donative auxiliary verbs	Lexicons
Year 1	.23	.38	.25
Year 2	.20	.67	.24
Year 4	.08	.62	.26
NS	.09	.60	.42

For understaters, no significant difference is discovered between the first year and the second year (pairwise comparison  $p=1.000$ ), as well as between the fourth year and the native

control group (pairwise comparison  $p=1.000$ ), and learner’s probability of using understaters gets closer to NS performance. As a group of optional adverbials that mitigate the illocutionary force, some understaters have freer locations, as illustrated below.

**Example 10 (Y1, Q1)**

*Chotto 1000 gen- o kashi-temo- ii- desu- ka.*  
 A little 1000 yuan Obj. lend even if good COP Que.  
 Even if you lend some 1000yuan (to me), is it OK?

As for example 10 mentioned in data coding section, it would still be grammatical to say “1000 gen-o chotto kashi-temo-ii-desu-ka”; i.e., the location of “chotto” can be either sentence-initial or before the main verb. Therefore, from the calculated probabilities, it seems that students of lower proficiency rely more on these freer-word-order lexical units to adjust the illocutionary level, whereas advanced speakers and native speakers rely less on this tool.

The application probability of donative auxiliary verbs presents a clear leap from the first year to the second year: students are significantly more likely to attach these auxiliary verbs to main verbs in order to specify their appreciation as a recipient of favor (pairwise comparison between year 1 and year 2:  $p=.0001$ ). As illustrated previously, a common example of donative auxiliary verbs would be:

**Example 3 (Y2, Q2)**

*Sensee, suisenjyoo- o kaite-itadake- masen- ka.*  
 Teacher recommendation letter Obj. write can receive <H> COP (Neg.) Que.  
 Teacher, can’t I receive your favor of writing a recommendation letter (for me)?

Concerning lexical usage, learner groups do not exhibit much difference (.25, .24, and .26), whereas native speakers present conspicuously higher probability to adopt politer terms in their requests. As explained in the coding scheme, the lexicon subcategory refers to words that are upgraded to politer ones, which usually co-occurs with honorific language. For instance, in example 14, the donative auxiliary verb *-itadaku* is upgraded from *-morau*.

#### Example 14 (Y4, Q3)

*Nishuukan yasū-masete-itadake- masen- ka.*  
Two weeks rest let can receive <H> COP (Neg.) Que.  
Can't I receive your favor of letting me rest for two weeks?

It seems that upgrading the existing vocabulary requires a long-term effort, and therefore even the gap between advanced learners and native speakers is large (.26 and .42).

### 4.6 SUPPORTIVE MOVES

Table 9 summarizes the probability rate of supportive moves adopted by each study year:

**Table 9: Probability rate of supportive moves by study years**

Study Year	Grounder	Preparator
Year 1	.73	.07
Year 2	.51	.10
Year 4	.64	.06
NS	.60	.31

It is apparent from the table that the grounder is the most frequently used supportive moves both by learners and by native speakers, the probability of which all passed .50. First year students are most likely to use grounders (.73), indicating that they probably rely more on external modifications to mitigate their requests.

Preparator is the second most popular applied supportive move compared to other tools that are not discussed here, yet learners still use significantly fewer preparators than native speakers (pairwise comparison between native control group and all learner groups:  $p_s=.0001$ ). The findings echo Lai's research in 2005 that learners' request often sounds "abrupt" to native ears because they do not make enough bedding for their request. In contrast, even in written

questionnaires, native speakers tend to use preparators to foreshadow their request, who would even negatively transfer the “excessive” explanation to their English production, as seen in Kurotaki’s study (2001). The adoption of other supportive moves such as imposition minimizers, appealers, repetitions, and promise of reward is relatively insignificant, the discussion of which will be omitted in this study.

## 5.0 DISCUSSION

The previous section presents questionnaire results, and this section will specifically answer the research questions, namely 1) what the acquisitional pattern of making requests is for Chinese learners of Japanese in a foreign language context, 2) what accounts for such pattern, and 3) the role pragmatic transfer plays in the acquisitional process of pragmatics. Moreover, the coding system adopted from CCSARP (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989) will also be discussed.

### 5.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 1

For the first research question, the major patterns emerged from our data are 1) a native-like improvement from year 1 to year 2; 2) a less native-like change from year 2 to year 4; and 3) a gap between learners in general and native speakers. In the following discussion, we will only focus on one subcategory for obligatory categories because the percentage of other subcategories will co-vary as they add up to 100%. Firstly, the percentage of using “speaker dominance” was 51.9% for first-year students, and the number approximates to native speakers’ 69.2% by escalating to 59.5% in the second year—yet a gap of 9.7% still exists. Nonetheless, “speaker dominance” drops to 49.6% in the fourth year. In terms of speech levels, if we focus on plain level, the percentage increased from 8.5 to 25.3 from the first year to the second year, which is still lower than native speakers’ 37.5%, whereas the percentage of the fourth year drops slightly to 23.1. Regarding request strategies, the percentage of second-year students falls from 20.1 to 11.4 for mood derivable strategy, which is approximately same as native speakers’ 12.5. Nonetheless, fourth-year

learners' percentage rose back to 20.5. Moreover, the application probability for hedged sentence endings (in "syntactic downgrader" section) exhibits a native-like increase from .08 to .23 from the first year to the second year, though still manifesting a .26 gap from native speakers' .49. Nevertheless, fourth-year speakers' application rate decreases to .11, indicating a less native-like changing pattern. Therefore, the overall developmental pattern is: improvement (year 1 to year 2)—plateau effect/ deterioration (year 2 to year 4). Potential reasons that attribute to such developmental pattern will be addressed in the next section.

However, fourth-year students do demonstrate native-like change regarding understater usage, which echoes a cross-language pattern that freer-word-order lexical units are easier for beginners to acquire. Our data further suggests that advanced learners basically do not go back to use these understaters for tone-softening purpose.

## 5.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 2

For the second research question, several non-pragmatic transfer factors may explain the patterns that emerged from our data. First, for the improvement part, an instructional effect is rather obvious from the first year to the second year. For students learning languages in foreign language contexts, instructors and textbooks are the major sources that they learn from, and Table 1 also indicates that students already spent at least 136 hours on Japanese classes by the end of the first year. Textbook contents suggest that students specifically learn essential knowledge of honorific languages and donative auxiliary verbs in the second half of the spring semester in the first year. Providing that the questionnaire was distributed around the end of the first half of the spring semester, it is understandable that many first-year students have not achieved second-year-level of

using the honorific language yet. From textbook contents, it seems that other than the verb conjugation part of the honorific language and donative auxiliary verbs that can be considered as “grammar”, no mitigators or politeness strategies in the aspect of pragmatics were explicitly taught. On one hand, we can acknowledge the effectiveness of classroom instructions as the questionnaire data indicate that learners become aware of many language phenomena such as using first person pronouns as the subject (speaker dominance) in an interrogative request, distinguishing different speech levels, as well as applying language devices that do not exist in Chinese, e.g. donative auxiliary verbs. On the other hand, it seems that more attention should be allocated to pragmatics when Japanese is taught, especially from the perspective of politeness strategies instead of from the perspective of grammar, which we will discuss more in Section 6.2. Needless to say, external sources have their limitations, which may only help students to consciously recognize the existence of differences between languages yet not necessarily enough for them to achieve a proficient level. Therefore, we can witness that even though fourth-year students continue taking courses related to the Japanese language (Table 1), they still manifest a huge gap with native speakers, or even experiencing pragmatic fossilization to some extent, the phenomenon of which was also investigated by Fidler (2006) and Wei (2008). Manabe’s 2003 study also asserted that even advanced learners confront with the difficulty of using appropriate indirect expressions when the interlocutor is of higher status and is less intimate, or when the imposition level is relatively high. Therefore, to achieve native-like mastery of pragmatics, it does require students’ long-term spontaneous effort, especially for language-specific devices.

Second, part of the poor performance of fourth-year students may be attributed to the uncontrollable external factors. Because fourth-year students were busy preparing for their paper defense and finding jobs, they did not complete the questionnaire under my supervision. Hence,

their condition and attitude when completing the questionnaire were unmanageable—some might treat it casually, which inevitably exerts a negative effect on final results.

From the perspective of language proficiency, as corroborated by Fukazawa and Fordyce's study (2003), one's pragmatic competence is positively related to one's overall L2 proficiency. As many students already achieve N1 level by the end of the second year, their overall Japanese proficiency reaches a relatively stable stage. Therefore, students' pragmatic competence freezes as their overall language proficiency achieve a plateau level. Another possibility is that for advanced learners (such as fourth-year students), their performance in pragmatics does not necessarily relate to their overall language proficiency positively, as asserted in Fouser's study (1999), which could even deviate from generally accepted linguistic norms to a large extent.

Another possible interpretation is that learners do not have enough opportunities to practice request-making strategies in various conditions as university students. As learners of Japanese in a foreign language context, students are not immersed in a genuine language environment and therefore, have fewer opportunities to encounter different request situations. Nowadays professors and students are often in an intimate and harmonious relationship in universities, and Japanese language teachers usually do not require students to use honorific language or even condone plain forms. It would also be awkward to use honorific forms or to mitigate requests too much between students, not to mention that they may even not converse in Japanese. For many language devices, especially those frequently used towards superior people such as hedged sentence endings, the only time students use them frequently is probably when they first learn those from their teachers. After acknowledging the existence of these "supreme" mitigators, students rarely have opportunities to practice them in daily conversations. Therefore, many advanced mitigators become dead concepts in their brain that require reactivation when learners truly need to apply

them in the society as they speak to people of higher social status. Even for those who went to one-year exchange programs in Japan, some just ended up using plain forms constantly, as confirmed in Marriott's study (1995). For them, opportunities of using polite speech styles do differ according to individual exchange-study experience, and those who did part-time jobs may be exposed to more obligatory scenarios of using the honorific language. However, it seems that at least two years of residency in target language context is required to achieve a more native-like way of making requests. In fact, Suzuki revealed that Chinese JSL students who reside in Japan for more than three years present a *reverse* transfer from L2 to L1 (2013). Hence again, a less native-like "deterioration" is observed from the second year to the fourth year.

Last but not least, motivation could also be a potential reason that second-year students performed in more native-like way than fourth-year students. As many second-year learners in this institution will take JLPT N1 test in the coming month (early July) or at least within one year, they may be more motivated to practice the "prescriptive usage" taught in the classroom. In contrast, fourth-year students, many coming back from study-abroad programs, consider themselves to be proficient Japanese users but answered the questionnaire in a hasty and perfunctory way, which downgraded their performance.

### **5.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 3**

For the third research question that specifically addresses pragmatic transfer, it is lucid from our data that a positive transfer exists for some language-universal features, especially those shared by both Chinese and Japanese such as preparatory request strategy, interrogatives, and negations. Namely, students can easily transfer language devices that are already available in their L1 to L2

production. Although sometimes the application rate is even higher than native speakers', it cannot be ignored that preparatory strategies, interrogatives, and negations are in fact rather prevailing in Japanese requests as well. As an evidence, Takamura (2014) in her study noticed that as the imposition rate increases, native speakers also use more negations.

Therefore, instead of arguing for a negative transfer, I would contend that learners tend to over transfer some universal language devices that they feel comfortable with (especially those already exist in their L1), which hinders them from accepting language-specific devices. This observation is also comparable to Takahashi and Beebe's claim that advanced learners are more capable of using L2 devices to express meaning in L1 (1989). In other words, advanced learners seem to master enough L2 tools to convey contents in a L1 way, which usually do not interfere understanding, so they are no longer motivated in endeavoring making requests in a L2 way.

As aforementioned in the results section, native speakers use much more want statements than students, and such difference in request strategy options foreshadows the difference in application of mitigators such as hedged sentence endings, interrogatives, and negations. The elaboration starts with a typical example of want statement request strategy.

### **Example 15**

*Jyoo-hoo- o oshiete- itadaki- tai- no- desu- ga...*  
Information Obj. tell receive <H> want N COP HSE  
I want to receive your favor of telling (me) the information, but...

Although want statements rank the second highest concerning directness in the current study, when we compare want statements in English and in Japanese: "I want you to lend me the book" (English) and "I want to receive your favor of lending me the book" (Japanese), it becomes more straightforward that Japanese people take advantage of donative auxiliary verbs, which makes the tone of the Japanese version softer and more euphemistic. Regarding the reason that learners use this strategy relatively infrequently, it can be noticed that no subjects appeared in the

corresponding translation line, because subjects can be implied through honorific verbs in Japanese. In Chinese, the second person pronoun “you” cannot be omitted in such request statements (though it is sometimes optional in preparatory requests). Such crucial discrepancy regarding the presence of subjects may be one of the difficulties that learners encounter when they acquire this strategy. Especially when they have language-universal preparatory strategy accessible that fulfils their normal request-making needs, students become less inclined to absorb new strategies that are unique to Japanese. On the other hand, one of the reasons that Japanese people prefer “want statement” may be because the tone is softened by an incomplete sentence ending, making the request more euphemistic, as revealed in Takamura’s study (2014). Although hedged sentence endings are also compatible with interrogatives, they are almost obligatory in “want statements” made by native speakers, since the tone may be stronger in a positive “statement” than in preparatory without the sentence being an incomplete one. Hence, as a request strategy that is in fact considered more direct than preparatory in Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper’s manual (1989), “want statements” almost always require hedged sentence endings as one of the mitigators. As negations and interrogatives are not compatible with want statements, when native speakers choose this strategy more frequently, their application probability of negations and interrogatives turns out lower than learner groups, whereas their application probability of hedged sentence endings ends up considerably higher than learner groups.

Another potential explanation on the rapid acquisition of negations (from .35 in year 1 to .53 in year 2) could be that in Chinese requests, the “half-negated” version (the “can not can” pattern) is as prevalent and as natural as normal positive requests, as demonstrated in example 16 and 17. Such existence of negation elements in Chinese requests may assist learners to accept the fully negated requests in Japanese.

**Example 16: positive question**

Ni neng jie wo 200 yuan ma?  
You can lend me 200 *yuan* interj.  
Can you lend me 200*yuan*?

**Example 17: half-negated question**

Ni neng bu neng jie wo 200 yuan?  
You can not can lend me 200 *yuan*  
Can't you lend me 200*yuan*?

Other than request strategies, potential positive transfer between Chinese and Japanese concerning supportive moves is also present. Grounders, which seem to be one of the language-universal politeness strategies that provide justifications and explanations for requests, frequently appear in learners' data. As a matter of fact, preparators are not rare in Chinese either, such as “*ni neng bang wo ge mang ma*” (Can you help me), “*wo xiang bai tuo ni jian shi*” (I want to ask you something), and “*wo neng ma fan ni jian shi ma*” (Can I bother you with something), et cetera. Nevertheless, it is intriguing to notice that the function of Chinese and Japanese preparators are different even though both languages use preparators, which could make it challenging to transfer this supportive move in a Japanese-like way. The Chinese preparators resemble those in European languages, which directly notify the interlocutor that the speaker is about to make a request. On the contrary, Japanese preparators usually indirectly prepare the interlocutor for the ensuing request by apologizing first such as *mooshiwake-arimasen-ga* (I am extremely sorry, but...) or acknowledging the suddenness of the request such as *totsuzende sumimasen-ga* (in sudden, I am sorry, but...), which involves more negative politeness strategies. Regardless of our discussion, students did not use preparators as frequently as native speakers did in the questionnaire, implying that preparator usage in Chinese may be more interactive and thus, requires real conversation to activate. Another possibility is that Chinese students do not express as much concern to the invisible interlocutors as Japanese native speakers do. In fact, other similarities in supportive

moves between Chinese and Japanese also exist, as analyzed by Meng (2008). In our data, politeness strategies such as imposition minimizers, repetitions, and promises of reward are never scarce in Chinese, as illustrated in example 18, 19, and 20.

**Example 18: imposition minimizer**

*Fang bian de hua, neng jie wo zhe ben shu ma?*  
Convenient if can lend me this QUAN book Interj.  
If it's convenient for you, can you lend me this book?

**Example 19: repetition**

*Neng fang wo liang tian jia ma? Qiu nin \_\_\_\_\_ le.*  
Can give (holiday) me two day holiday Interj. Beg you <H> Interj.  
Can you give a two-day off? Please.

**Example 20: promise of reward**

*Neng jie wo 200 yuan qian ma? Dao jia huan ni.*  
Can lend me 200 yuan money Interj. Reach home return you  
Can you lend me 200yuan? I'll return it once I'm back home.

The possible cause that learners tend not to use these supportive moves frequently in the questionnaire could be that DCT cannot provide a live scenario, as discussed previously. Without any real interactions, students generally answer in the easiest way, i.e., writing head acts only.

It is worth noticing that all discussions concerning pragmatic transfer above are merely one kind of available interpretations. To verify that pragmatic transfer does exist between the two languages concerning request strategies, syntactic downgraders, and supportive moves, further experiment across these two languages needs to be conducted.

## 5.4 DISCUSSION ON THE CODING SYSTEM

Based on our previous discussion, it seems that the coding scheme proposed by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) that mainly aimed at coding European languages has several

insufficiencies in coding the Japanese language. As aforementioned, the “want statement” strategy in Japanese seems intrinsically different from that in European languages. When we compare the Japanese version “want statement” (I want to receive your favor of lending me the book) to the English version (I want you to lend me the book), the directness of the former one seems considerably lower than the latter. Therefore, the directness order in the manual not necessarily represent real directness in Japanese accurately, and it is recommended that researchers check the compatibility before using the coding scheme in CCSARP to code Asian languages.

Another crucial issue emerges because European languages and the Japanese language manipulate different linguistic aspects to adjust politeness levels. In European languages, politeness levels are mainly manipulated by modal verbs, which are coded as request strategies of various levels of politeness, as demonstrated in example 21, 22, and 23.

**Example 21: hedged performative (third direct strategy in CCSARP manual)**

I must ask you to clean the kitchen right now.

**Example 22: locution derivable (fourth direct strategy in CCSARP manual)**

Madam, you should move your car.

**Example 23: preparatory (seventh direct strategy in CCSARP manual)**

Can I borrow your notes?

Nonetheless, politeness levels are intertwined with grammar in Japanese. Generally speaking, Japanese requests become politer as they get longer, especially by speakers attaching multiple syntactic downgraders (though we have to keep in mind that politer certainly do not equal more appropriate). As a result, it is possible to express the same request using preparatory strategy on various politeness levels, as demonstrated by example 24-32 (politeness levels from low to high).

**Example 24: interrogative<sup>12</sup> + plain level**

*Nooto-o kashite-moraeru?*

Notes Obj. lend can receive

Can I receive your favor of lending me the notes?

**Example 25: interrogative + negation + plain level**

*Nooto-o kashite-marae- nai?*

Notes Obj. lend can receive Neg.

Can't I receive your favor of lending me the notes?

**Example 26: interrogative + negation + hedged sentence endings + plain level**

*Nooto-o kashite-marae- nai-kana?*

Notes Obj. lend can receive Neg. HSE

Can't I receive your favor of lending me the notes?

**Example 27: interrogative + neutral level**

*Nooto-o kashite-morae- masu-ka.*

Notes Obj. lend can receive COP Que.

Can I receive your favor of lending me the notes?

**Example 28: interrogative + negation + neutral level**

*Nooto-o kashite-morae- masen- ka.*

Notes Obj. lend can receive COP (Neg.) Que.

Can't I receive your favor of lending me the notes?

**Example 29: interrogative + negation + hedged sentence endings + neutral level**

*Nooto-o kashite-morae- nai-deshoo-ka.*

Notes Obj. lend can receive Neg. HSE Que.

Can't I receive your favor of lending me the notes?

**Example 30: interrogative + polite level (+ lexicon)**

*Nooto-o kashite-itadake- masu-ka.*

Notes Obj. lend can receive <H> COP Que.

Can I (humbly) receive your favor of lending me the notes?

**Example 31: interrogative + negation + polite level (+ lexicon)**

*Nooto-o kashite-itadake- masen- ka.*

Notes Obj. lend can receive <H> COP (Neg.) Que.

Can't I (humbly) receive your favor of lending me the notes?

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<sup>12</sup> In Japanese, interrogative particles are not necessary for questions in plain level.

**Example 32: interrogative + negation + hedged sentence endings + polite level (+ lexicon)**

*Nooto-o kashite-itadake- nai-deshoo-ka.*

Notes Obj. lend can receive <H> Neg. HSE Que.

Can't I (humbly) receive your favor of lending me the notes?

Examples 24-32 all have their less polite versions if we change the donative auxiliary verb from –*morau* (I receive your favor, speaker dominance) to –*kureru* (you give me, hearer dominance). Thus, in Japanese, perspectives, speech levels, syntactic downgraders, donative auxiliary verbs, and lexicons work as an integrity to determine the politeness level, and if researchers were to code Japanese requests according to the politeness level, it would be better to take grammar into consideration. Nevertheless, Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper's coding scheme code syntactic downgraders independently, as we did in the current study, which could be inadequate if we intend to focus on politeness strategies. In fact, Ide (1986) and Lu (2011) counted frequencies of different sentence types (similar to examples 24-32) when they examined politeness strategies adopted by American university students, Chinese learners, and Japanese native speakers. Namely, for the Japanese language, it is almost impossible to discuss “politeness” without looking at grammar if we analyze from the perspective of linguistic devices that learners adopt. Several previous studies that adopted the manual in CCSARP to code Japanese requests had to make some adjustments as the present study does; however, these adjustments may not be consistent. Therefore, I suggest that a new coding system that handles features of the Japanese language should be proposed for analyzing politeness strategies. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that as this study addresses the acquisition patterns of pragmatics, coding linguistic devices into more categories effectively generate more holistic evidence for the overall development trajectory.

It is worth mentioning that many studies that investigate pragmatics focus on meaning instead of forms, and they code data using the “semantic formula” approach, which divide the request utterance into meaningful chunks with different functions such as attention-getting, apologizing, justifying and explaining, refusing, and hedging, to name a few (e.g., Guen, 2012; Shih, 2005; Shiomi & Nakabachi, 2014; Suzuki, 2013; Um, 2001, 2004; Won, 2012; Wu, 2010; Xu, 2007; Yang & Okada, 2003; Yoon, 2012). The two coding systems take different perspective and focus on different aspects of the language (form or meaning), and it is recommended that researchers choose the one that is suitable for their own research questions.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

### 6.1 SUMMARY

In summary, this study explored the acquisition trajectory of interlanguage pragmatics by examining request-making patterns of Chinese learners of Japanese. Using a discourse completion task balanced by hierarchy and propriety, I investigated students' requests according to the following six categories: perspectives, speech levels, strategies, syntactic downgraders, semantic downgraders, and supportive moves. Application percentage of each subcategory in the first three obligatory categories are reported, and the application probabilities of each subcategory in the latter three optional categories are calculated. The major findings of this study are: 1) an apparent advancement from the first-year group to the second-year group is observed. 2) In general, the fourth-year group performed similar to or less native-like than the second-year group. 3) In spite of the improvement, a gap still exists between learners and native speakers concerning pragmatics proficiency. Instructional effect, language proficiency, attitude on completing the questionnaire, learners' identity as university students, and motivation of different study years were used to interpret acquisitional patterns emerged from our analysis. Concerning pragmatic transfer as an alternative explanation, over transfer of language-universal elements and devices is observed, which could potentially preclude students from acquiring language-specific features. The present study is probably one of the first studies that simultaneously analyze the development of pragmatics in different categories related to request-making patterns, which potentially depicts a more intact picture of learners' acquisitional trajectory and stimulates a better understanding on the current Japanese-teaching situation in Chinese universities. Moreover, it criticizes the

CCSARP coding system by identifying its deficiency in coding Asian languages as well as comparing the differences in politeness strategies between European languages and the Japanese language.

## **6.2 PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Based on findings in the current study, the first and foremost implication on pedagogy is that instructors should allocate more attention on teaching pragmatics, as learners almost stopped becoming more native-like since the second year. Instructors can try permeating knowledge regarding honorifics and politeness strategies throughout the entire language-teaching process instead of merely teaching it as an independent grammar point. Therefore, students will be able to have adequate exercise on various politeness strategies and thus attain long-term memory as well as more solid acquisition.

The gap between learners and native speakers of several language devices that seem less-transferrable, including speech levels, hedged sentence endings, lexicons, and preparators, are identified in this study. Therefore, based on the results, it is suggested that teachers can at least put more effort in raising students' awareness of using distinctive speech levels, more euphemistic sentence endings, varied vocabulary, and creating sufficient foundation for different speech acts under various conditions. Specifically speaking, for speech levels, apart from imparting what kind of speech endings to use when speaking to different people, teachers can set up role-play exercises for students to practice, especially in third-year Japanese classes after students achieved basic mastery of different speech styles. Tasks such as role-plays will stimulate students' spontaneous language usage, and teachers can consciously provide corrections and feedback regarding their

unsuitable speech-level choices. Since speech levels are only related to sentence endings and honorific verbs, instructors can always incorporate new grammar points and vocabularies to speech-level exercises. For hedged sentence endings, it seems that extra emphasis can be placed on this convenient politeness tool to make incomplete sentences. As Japanese people prefer tacit understanding (*ishindenshin*), training students to co-construct the dialogue in an interacting way with their interlocutors instead of merely finishing their own lines not only helps students to understand the “consideration culture” in Japanese conversations, but is also fairly feasible. Similar to role-play tasks for practicing speech levels, teachers only need to make some suggestions or advice on top of original feedbacks, which explicitly points out that learners can try the incomplete way of saying sentences, raising their awareness on hedged sentence endings. For lexicons as well, as politeness tools always serve for actual language usage in different contexts, all instructors need to do is to comment on students’ word choice and make recommendations for their role-play tasks that aim at practicing specific grammar points or vocabularies. In terms of preparators, instructors can spare some time introducing frequently used preparators such as *jitsuwa* (in fact), *toototsu-desu-ga* (all of a sudden, but...), *mooshiwake-arimasen-ga* (I am very sorry, but...), to name a few, as well as their functions in different contexts. As seen from previous discussions, although Chinese people also frequently use preparators when making requests, the specific expressions seem non-transferrable. Because textbooks usually do not directly introduce preparators, learners may achieve better acquisition if instructors make them explicit. It is reasonable to be optimistic about the efficacy of these teaching activities because as displayed in our data, some seemingly language-unique features such as donative auxiliary verbs can be acquired successfully through intensive classroom instructions as well as practices.

Secondly, as pointed out in Matsuura's 2003 study as well, Chinese JFL learners tend to use the fixed expression “*-te-itadake-masen-ka*” when making a request regardless of the situation, which could sound unnecessarily polite, or even ironic to intimate interlocutors. Her study indicates that under repetitive practice, learners can easily acquire, or even overuse new patterns and expressions. Since the current study indicates that different request strategy choices lead to different mitigator usage, instead of merely teaching expressions in the textbook, teachers may expose students to various request-making contexts, especially authentic ones that appear in native speakers' daily conversations, by showing them drama clips, so that students can obtain a better understanding of how these expressions are used in natural situations. Fukushima (1990) in her study also declared that “[t]he problem seem to lie in the fact that it is often the case that only the knowledge, ..., is taught, and that examples studied are not sufficient enough to cover varying situations. (p. 322)” Of course, this does not mean that students need to grasp everything immediately. Instead, they should keep open to accept diverse expressions and be willing to try out new patterns rather than sticking to what they feel comfortable with. Providing that instructions can exert a significant effect on students' learning, if instructors explicitly explain pragmatic discrepancies (such as different request strategies and their usage) between Chinese and Japanese, I believe that students can absorb the concepts fairly quickly. Nevertheless, instruction cannot do the entire work. As proved by Fukazawa (2003), some language features such as lexicons are harder than syntactic downgraders, which I think requires learners' long-term effort to master them proficiently. Thus, what instructors can do is to raise students' awareness of those features and guide them to practice repeatedly.

### 6.3 LIMITATIONS

The current study has several limitations: the first one is a lack of independent proficiency control. Especially for fourth-year students who no longer attend classes together, conducting a separate proficiency control test was impossible. Therefore, the interpretation of test results was mainly based on the estimation of learners' proficiency. Another one is the relatively small scale. The study only sampled Japanese-major students in one institution. Although many universities in China use the same series of Japanese textbooks, their curricula differ slightly. Therefore, the generalizability of current conclusions requires further questionnaire surveys in more universities. Moreover, the design of the questionnaire can also be ameliorated. As students are allowed to skip questions, many did not make a full effort to answer them, especially for situations of lower propriety, and the missing data rate for situation 7 is slightly high. For question 1 that is also supposed to be a low propriety situation, some solved the problem by changing the currency from Chinese *yuan* to Japanese *yen*, immediately making the request more reasonable. Similar problems should be avoided in the future questionnaire design. Last but not least, the study could generate more significant results if data were repeatedly collected throughout a longer period. As most students reach N1 level by the end of the second year and some instructors also reported that many first-year students reach N2 level by the end of the first year, the "beginner" group is almost absent in the current study. Therefore, a pseudo-longitudinal study that tests students once more in winter semester could provide better description of their development trajectory in pragmatics, and thus be more suitable to detect the language acquisition patterns than the one-time cross-sectional study design.

## 6.4 FUTURE RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

Finally, I would like to propose several directions for future study. Considering that the scale of the current study is relatively small, studies in a larger scale that survey more institutions in China will increase the generalizability of our findings. As mentioned in the discussion section, the interpretations on pragmatic transfer are merely one of the alternative explanations available. Further experiments that simultaneously examine these Chinese and Japanese may help to testify interpretations made in this study. Moreover, a systematic coding system compatible with the Japanese language is worth being proposed, which can enhance the consistency of future studies on Japanese pragmatics. Starting from this study, many other directions are also available. For instance, students' subjective perceptions on language usage in different contexts are worth examining, as Matsumura (2010) tested the gap between knowledge and preference by proposing "intentional divergence" and "unintentional divergence." In addition, the influence of learning contexts, i.e. the distinction between Japanese as a foreign language (JFL) and Japanese as a second language (JSL), and how the contexts affect students' pragmatic acquisition as well as their perceptions on language usage would be an intriguing area to investigate. Another possible direction is to specifically explore instructional effects (e.g., Harako, 2000; Tateyama, 2008, 2009). Furthermore, other available testing instruments can be applied to elicit speech act data, such as multimedia DCT (Ren, 2012), as well as role plays and telephone conversations that stimulate spontaneous conversation data (Ebsworth & Kodama, 2011; Shih, 2005; Shiomi & Nakabachi, 2014; Takagi, 2003a; Tanaka, 2004; Teidaa, 2004; Xu, 2007; Yang, 1999). It will be interesting to discover the similarities and differences that different test instruments generate. Lastly, other speech acts such as apologies, compliments, and refusals can also be analyzed to enrich and to corroborate our current findings.

## APPENDIX A

### QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions: Please complete the following dialogues in Japanese. You are free to use dictionaries if you have unknown vocabulary. Please try your best to answer all questions. You can leave them blank if you have no idea about the response. Please do not disclose the test content to students in other classes or discuss answers with other classmates. This questionnaire is anonymous and the participation is voluntary. The results have nothing to do with your academic record.

**Situation 1:** You and Masamune are classmates. You two go shopping together. Not until you check out do you realize that you forgot to bring your wallet, but you want to buy an expensive coat. You want to borrow 1000*yuan* from Masamune.

You: \_\_\_\_\_

Masamune: いいけど、今度おごってよ。 (OK, but you need to treat me next time.)

**Situation 2:** You want to apply for a Master's program in a Japanese university. You want to ask Prof. Sakurai, who taught you before, to write a recommendation letter for you.

You: \_\_\_\_\_

Prof. Sakurai: いいですよ。 (Sure.)

**Situation 3:** You are doing a one-month internship in a company, but you want to ask for a two-week leave from your boss because of some personal affairs.

You: \_\_\_\_\_

Your boss: それは困ったな... (That's kind of difficult.)

**Situation 4:** You did not come to class yesterday because you were ill. You want to ask your friend, Nanami, to lend you the lecture notes.

You: \_\_\_\_\_

Nanami: いいよ。はい、これ。 (OK, here you are.)

**Situation 5:** You ask a senior staff at Student Activity Center to provide you some information on sports clubs.

You: \_\_\_\_\_

Staff: はい、ちょっと待ってください。 (OK, please wait for a while.)

**Situation 6:** You ask your supervisor for a deadline extension because you cannot finish the term paper on time.

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: 仕方ないな。今回だけは特別だよ。 (Well... I will permit you an exception only for this time.)

**Situation 7:** You and your boyfriend/girlfriend are not very rich, but you want a new mobile phone. You want to ask him/her ask to buy an iPhone 6 for you as a gift for Valentine's Day.

You: \_\_\_\_\_

Your boyfriend/girlfriend: へえ？それはちょっと... (That's kind of...)

**Situation 8:** You, as a policeman, ask a driver to move the car because he parked it in a wrong place.

You: \_\_\_\_\_

The driver: あっ、すみません。 (Oh, I'm sorry.)

This is the end of the questionnaire. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

## APPENDIX B

### CODING TABLE

**Table 10: Coding table**

Categories	Subcategories	Definition (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989)	Examples
<b>Head Act</b>			
Perspectives	Hearer dominance	Hearer dominance	<i>Shite-kur<u>eru</u>?</i> (Can <u>you</u> do it for me?)
	Speaker dominance	Speaker dominance	<i>Shite-mo<u>raeru</u>?</i> (Lit. Can <u>I</u> receive your action of doing it for me?)
	Impersonal	Impersonal	<i>Nantoka <u>nar</u>u?</i> (Lit. Can <u>it</u> turn anything out?)
Speech levels <sup>a</sup>	Plain level	Plain <i>-da</i> endings	<i>Shite-kur<u>eru</u>?</i> (Can you do it for me?)
	Neutral level	Neutral <i>-desu/masu</i> endings without honorific verbs	<i>Shite-kure-<u>masu</u>-ka?</i> (Can you do it for me?)

	Polite level	Neutral <i>-desu/masu</i> endings with honorific verbs	<i>Shite-kudasai-masu-ka?</i> (Can you <u>do</u> [ <u>honorific</u> ] it for me?)
Strategies (in descending order of directness)	Mood derivable	The grammatical mood of the locution conventionally determines its illocutionary force as a request	<i>Shite-kudasai.</i> ( <u>Do it.</u> )
	Want statement	The utterance expresses the speaker's desire	<i>Shite-morai-tai.</i> (Lit. I <u>want</u> to receive your favor of doing it for me.)
	Suggestory formula	The illocutionary intent is phrased as a suggestion by means of a framing routine formula	<i>Shinai?</i> (Don't do it?— <u>Why not</u> doing it?)
	Preparatory	Reference to a preparatory condition for the feasibility of the request	<i>Shite-kureru?</i> ( <u>Can</u> you do it for me?)
	Strong hint	The illocutionary intent is not immediately derivable from the locution; however, the locution refers to relevant elements of the intended illocutionary and/or propositional act	<i>Kyoo kuuraa-o tsukai-tai.</i> ( <u>I want to use the air conditioner today</u> —Please deliver my air conditioner today.)
Syntactic downgraders	Interrogatives <sup>b</sup>	Questions, including unmarked forms in preparatory strategies	<i>Shite-kureru?</i> (Can you do it for me?)
	Negations of a preparatory condition	Sentences where negative is optional, adopted as a mitigator	<i>Shite-kure-nai?</i> (Can't you do it for me?)
	Hedged sentence endings <sup>a</sup>	Mitigating the tone at a clause level	<i>Shite-morae-nai-kana?</i> (Lit. Can't I receive your action of doing it for me, <u>perhaps?</u> )

Semantic downgraders	Understaters (combining understaters, hedges and downtoners in the manual) <sup>b</sup>	Adverbial modifiers by means of which the speaker underrepresents the state of affairs denoted in the proposition. Adverbials used by a speaker when he or she wishes to avoid potential provocation of precision. Sentential or propositional modifiers used by a speaker in order to modulate the impact his or her request is likely to have on the hearer	<i>Chotto shite-kureru?</i> (Lit. Can you do <u>a bit of it</u> for me?)
	Donative auxiliary verbs <sup>a</sup>	Stressing that the speaker is receiving help from the interlocutor	<i>Shite-moraeru?</i> (Lit. Can I <u>receive your favor of</u> doing it for me?)
	Lexicons <sup>a</sup>	Unique Japanese vocabularies that express the same meaning at different levels	<i>Shite-itadake-masu-ka?</i> (Lit. Can I [ <u>humbly</u> ] <u>receive your</u> action of doing it for me?)
<b>Supportive Move</b>			
Supportive moves	Preparators <sup>b</sup>	The speaker prepares his/her hearer for the ensuing request, including apologies and special phrases in Japanese	<i>Onegai-ga aru.</i> ( <u>I have a request.</u> )
	Grounders	Reasons, explanations or justifications of the request	<i>Ashita haha-o mukae-ni iku-kedo, yasundemo-ii?</i> ( <u>I will pick up my mother tomorrow</u> , it is OK that I take a day off?)
	Promise of reward <sup>b</sup>	An announced reward due on fulfilment of the request, including promising the return of borrowed items	<i>1000 en kashite-kureru? Kaettara sugu kaesu.</i> (Can you lend me 1000yen? <u>I will return it immediately after I'm back.</u> )

	Imposition minimizers	Reducing the imposition placed on the hearer	<i>Yokattara, shite-kureru?</i> ( <u>If it is OK</u> , can you do it for me?)
	Appealers <sup>b</sup>	Elements used by speakers when they want to appeal to the interlocutor's benevolent understanding	<i>Shite-morai-tai-kedo, daijyoobu?</i> (Lit. I want you to help me but, <u>is that OK?</u> )
	Repetitions <sup>a</sup>	Fixed expressions externally attached after the head act, emphasizing the request	<i>Shite-kureru? Onegai.</i> (Can you do it for me? <u>Please.</u> )

*Note.* Underlines correspond to subcategories being explained.

Dotted underlines refer to parts that imply the subcategory being explained.

<sup>a</sup>Refers to new categories.

<sup>b</sup>Refers to redefined categories.

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