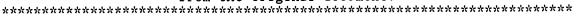ABSTRACT
        A study investigated differences in the speech styles
used in making requests among five native speakers of Japanese (JJ),
five American learners of Japanese (AJ), and Americans speaking
English (AE) and their implications for intercultural communication.
All subjects were adults. Data were elicited in role-plays of a
scenario including the face-threatening situation of making a request
of a supervisor. Results show differences in the order of speech acts
indicating request and reasoning in JJs and AJs; all AJs explained
the situation before making the request, while four JJs made the
request first. Content of the semantic formulas in each group varied
in the style of the request opening, but no significant patterns
emerged. JJs expressed desire explicitly but only one asked for
permission explicitly. AJ requests were very implicit, and AE
requests were explicit. It is concluded that results show differences
between Japanese and American business cultures. Follow-up interviews
with the subjects indicated that while the Americans were aware of
Japanese speech style rules, they did not necessarily try to follow
them, seeking instead a non-offensive style within which they were
comfortable. Speech samples are appended. Contains 16 references.
(MSE)

Acquaintance or Fiancee:
Pragmatic Differences in Requests
between Japanese and Americans

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Many researchers have indicated difficulties in acquiring a speech
community's rules for appropriate language use. Learners' use of strate-
gies, such as transferring the rules in their native language and
overgeneralizing the target language culture, often make acquiring rules
problematic. This study provides empirical findings on how the speech
style used in making requests differs among native-speakers of Japanese,
Americans learners of Japanese and Americans speaking English. Based
on the findings, the researcher examines the type of strategies American
learners use when they speak Japanese and discusses how these strategies
become problematic.

S ince Hymes (1972a, b) proposed the concept of communicative
competence, many researchers (e.g., Paulston 1974; Canale &
Swain 1980) have sought applications of the concept for language
teaching. Hymes emphasized acquiring a speech community's rules for
appropriate language use in a given social context in addition to
developing general linguistic knowledge. Consequently, developing
sociolinguistic competence, traditionally not a focus of language teaching,
has come to be one of the major emphases in language teaching (Savignon
1983). However, many researchers have reported that even learners at the
advanced level have considerable difficulty acquiring these society-specific
rules of appropriateness (e.g., Cohen & Olshtain 1981; Beebe, Takahashi, &
Uliss-Weltz 1990; Eisenstein & Bodman 1986; Billmyer, Jakar, & Lee 1989;
Wolfson 1989; Billmyer 1990; Olshtain & Cohen 1991).

Wolfson (1983: 61) and Olshtain and Cohen (1991: 155) stated that each
language differs not only in general linguistic areas such as phonology,
syntax and lexicon, but also in the rules of speaking and the patterns of
interaction which vary from one speech community to another. Language
learners are required to be proficient in these community-specific rules in
order to communicate appropriately and effectively with people in the
target language (Wolfson: 61). Due to the current trend in communicative

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language teaching that emphasizes acquiring these rules of speaking, empirically based research has been carried out to meet the needs of material developers and language teachers (Wolfson 1989: 79).

In spite of these researchers' emphasis on sociolinguistic rules for language teaching, as stated above, second language learners often fail to acquire rules of appropriateness. Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990: 56) identified pragmatic transfer as one of the reasons for this failure. Wolfson (1989:141) defined pragmatic transfer as "the use of rules of speaking from one's own native speech community when interacting with members of the host speech community." Second language learners' attempts to translate conventional routines specific to a first language (L1) verbatim into the second language (L2) often result in miscommunication even if the results of their attempts are grammatically correct (Olshtain & Cohen 1991: 155).

Among various types of speech acts, face-threatening acts such as refusals, requests, and disagreements are particularly problematic for a second language learner if speech rules in their first language are employed (Beebe & Takahashi 1989; Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz 1990; Fukushima 1990). Brown and Levinson (1978: 65-67) defined face-threatening acts as acts that intrinsically threaten face, the public self-image that a person seeks to preserve. Fukushima conducted a study of requests in English made by Japanese university students. She found that the Japanese subjects failed to employ appropriate formulaic expressions which are considered to be appropriate by native speakers. The problems manifested in the subjects' overuse of *I'm sorry* to soften a request. Second, other expressions used by the subjects tended to be too direct and oftentimes were interpreted as being rude.

In addition to the problems of transferring learners' L1 rules into L2, Beebe and Takahashi (1989) found that second language learners sometimes experienced communication breakdowns due to overgeneralizing stereotypes of the target language culture. The Japanese subjects in their study tended to be too direct because their English teachers overemphasized directness in speaking English.

While observing Japanese learners' sociolinguistic errors, the researcher found that some of the errors were caused by pragmatic transfer and overgeneralization of the target language culture. In this paper, differences in Japanese speech patterns between native Japanese speakers and American learners of Japanese will be examined. Specifically, the following questions will be addressed:

1. When Americans speak Japanese, how does their speech style differ from the style of native Japanese speakers?

2. Does pragmatic transfer exist in the sequence of speech acts, the choice of lexical items, and the content of semantic formulas used in the speech act production of Americans speaking Japanese?

3. Does overgeneralization of stereotypes exist in the speech of Americans speaking Japanese?

Methods

Subjects

The subjects who participated in this study include 5 native Japanese subjects speaking Japanese (JJ), 5 American subjects speaking Japanese (AJ), 5 American subjects speaking English (AE), and the experimenter whose L1 is Japanese. All of the subjects are males in their mid to late 20s. The JJs are students in a business school in the US Their lengths of stay in the US varies between one and three years. Some of them identify themselves as being Americanized, and their status in the Japanese business community is considerably high, so their ways of interacting with people do not necessarily represent a typical Japanese speech norm, particularly in the use of politeness. The AJs are students of the same business school. They are the experimenter's students studying Japanese language and culture. They have previously lived in Japan for one to three years. Their proficiency in Japanese is high based on the Oral Proficiency Interview test administrated by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, with scores ranging from advanced high to superior.[1] They also have knowledge of the sociolinguistic rules of Japanese. The AEs are also students of the same business school. Two of them have visited Japan and the other three have never visited Japan.

Data collection procedure

The data were elicited through role play situations. The experimenter prepared a scenario that included the face-threatening situation of making a request to a supervisor. The content of the request was to ask for an afternoon off. Since the reason for the day off was to go to the airport to pick up his fiancee, it would have been expected to create an awkward situation (see Appendix B). The subjects were asked to play the employee's role approximately three minutes after it was shown to them. All of the role plays were tape-recorded and the portion which dealt with the request were transcribed from the tapes by the experimenter.

To collect the Japanese data the experimenter played the supervisor. In playing that role, the experimenter was consistent in interacting with the subjects. To collect the English data, four native speakers of American English played the supervisor role, and five native speakers of American English played the employees. Although the interactions could not be controlled as well as in the Japanese data, since different people played the supervisor role, overall interactions were quite consistent.

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[1] According to the ACTFL OPI tester training manual (1989), "the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview is a standardized procedure for the global assessment of functional speaking ability, or oral proficiency." "The Superior level is characterized by the ability to discuss a broad range of topics in depth by supporting opinions and hypothesizing about abstract issues."

Data analyses procedure

The transcribed data (see Appendix A) were analyzed by the following procedure: First, the data from the JJs and AJs were compared in order to identify differences between these two groups' speech styles in the order of speech act production for requests, and the content of semantic formulas used in the speech act production of opening a conversation and making a request. Second, the data from AJs and AEs were compared in order to determine if the identified differences were due to pragmatic transfer from their L1. In addition to the transcribed data, the experimenter conducted follow-up interviews with all of the subjects after the role play in order to uncover what motivated their speech.

Findings

The sequence of speech act production

The speech style of JJs and AJs differed in the order of speech act. Both of the groups started with some opening statements. However, there was a discrepancy in the order of request and reasoning.

As appears in Tables 1 and 2, all AJs explained the situation that made them ask for an afternoon off before making a request. In contrast to AJs, four out of five JJs started with a statement of request, and followed up with explanations. Moreover, three out of the five JJs did not state the reasons for requesting the afternoon off until the supervisor asked.

The discrepancy in the order of the speech acts between JJs and AJs may be due to differences in the business cultures between the two countries. As seen in Tables 2 and 3, Americans followed the same order of speech act regardless of the language they were using. Thus, this difference in the order of speech act production may be interpreted as one of pragmatic transfer from the native language.

When I pointed out this difference in the order of request and reasoning after the role play, one American subject Philip[2] expressed the confusion he

Table 1
Order of speech act production for JJs' requests

	1	2	3
Akira	opening	request	reasons
Tomoo	opening	request	reasons
Masao	opening	reasons	request
Toshio	opening	request	reasons
Yumio	opening	request	reasons

[2] Pseudonyms are used for all subjects. The pseudonyms are as follows: Akira, Tomoo, Masao, Toshio, Yumio for the Japanese subjects, Philip, John, Steve, Jim, David for American subjects speaking Japanese, Mark, Jason, Jeff, Frank, Bill for American subjects speaking English.

Table 2
Order of speech act production for AJs' requests

	1	2	3
Philip	opening	reasons	request
John	opening	reasons	request
Steve	opening	reasons	request
Jim	opening	reasons	request
David	opening	reasons	request

Table 3
Order of speech act production for AEs' requests

	1	2	3
Mark	opening	reasons	request
Jason	opening	reasons	request
Jeff	opening	reasons	request
Frank	opening	reasons	request
Bill	opening	reasons	request

felt which was caused by the difference. When he worked for a bank in Japan, his Japanese colleagues often made requests or refused his invitations without stating any reasons. This made him very uncomfortable because he thought it was necessary to state reasons in these situations based on his cultural norm. Furthermore, since he was not sure if it was culturally appropriate for him to ask the reason, he felt very awkward in these situations (Philip, interview, March 20, 1995).

In contrast to his comments, one of the Japanese subjects Akira stated that Japanese business people are embarrassed to take a day off for a private reason due to the Japanese business society's strong emphasis on devotion to a company. According to Akira, employees in Japan are often expected to prioritize business ahead of private matters. The business community's expectation of Akira's company for employees may have resulted in the subjects' avoiding to state reasons for taking the afternoon off. Moreover, the subjects who did not explain the reasons before the supervisor asked expressed that they were hoping that they would not have to mention the reason (Akira and Toshio, interview, March 20, 1995). One other subject Tomoo commented that if it were a real situation, he would have made some arrangements in order not to take the day off. According Tomoo, it would be inappropriate to even approach the supervisor for the day off for the stated reason (Tomoo, interview, March 20, 1995).

The lexical items used for giving the reason to make the request

Differences in the business community's expectations for employees in the US and Japan may have resulted in the different discourse order used

Table 4
Lexical items used for giving reason to make the request

JJ		AJ		AE	
Akira	*chijin*	Philip	*fiancee*	Mark	fiancee
Tomoo	*fiancee*	John	*fiancee*	Jason	fiancee
Masao	*client*	Steve	*fiancee*	Jeff	fiancee
Toshio	*chijin*	Jim	*fiancee*	Frank	fiancee
Yumio	*fiancee*	David	*fiancee*	Bill	fiancee

by the students. In addition to the order, the influence of these business community's expectations appeared in the subjects' choices of lexical items for the reason they were making the request.

As summarized in Table 4, all the AJs stated their fiancee's arrival as a reason for taking the afternoon off. Two of the JJs used the same excuse. However, two other JJs mentioned only *chijin* which means acquaintance, and avoided mentioning their fiancee's visiting. One of the JJs lied completely, and used picking up one of his clients as a reason for going to the airport.

During the interview with the Japanese subjects after the role play, they commented that the choice of lexical items for the reason heavily depended on their working environment and the relationship with their supervisor. However, they admitted that stating their fiancee's arrival as a reason still would make them uncomfortable (Akira, Tomoo, Masao, Toshio, and Yumio, interview, March 20, 1995). According to Masao, the subject who lied, it would be more appropriate to make up business related reasons even if they were not true (Masao, interview, March 20, 1995). The two subjects, Akira and Toshio, who chose *chijin* (acquaintance) expressed that they felt uncomfortable stating both a lie and a truth. This made them choose the ambiguous lexical item *chijin* which was not a complete lie (Akira and Toshio, interview, March 20, 1995).

Through the interview with the American subjects, it was discussed that all of them were aware of the rules of the Japanese business community. When they worked in Japan, they witnessed that Japanese employees often used sickness or family medical problems as a reason for taking a day off even if it were not true. However, they stated that although they knew that it was accepted in Japanese business culture, they felt very uncomfortable following this rule. In addition, some of the American subjects stated that they did not have to follow the Japanese norm because Japanese supervisors often did not expect foreign employees to follow the rules of the Japanese business community (Philip, John, Steve, Jim, and David, interview, March 27, 1995).

The content of the semantic formula for opening the conversation

The content of the semantic formula of JJs, AJs, and AEs varied in the style of their request opening, yet no significant patterns were observed (see Examples A1, A2, and A3).

The most common statement for the opening in the three groups was asking a favor (e.g., *onegaishitai koto-ga arimasu* or I have a favor to ask you), and asking about the supervisor's availability (e.g., *ojikan yoroshii desu-ka* or Do you have a minute?). These opening expressions are often formulaic. Some of the AJs (Philip and Jim in Example A1) successfully used these formulaic expressions to construct a comfortable situation for making the request. However, some of the AJs (John, Steve and David in Example A2) failed to use them, and only said *sumimasen* (excuse me) to get the supervisor's attention and to try to express his difficult situation.

As appears in the AEs expressions in Example A3, American subjects made a statement for asking a favor (e.g., I have a favor to ask of you) or asked about the supervisor's availability (e.g., do you have a minute?) when they spoke in English. The AEs' style of opening for making a request is very similar to JJs. Thus, the AJs' failure to use appropriate formulaic expressions may not be due to pragmatic transfer. Cohen and Olshtain (1981) found that second language learners deviation in their speech from the native speakers' norm is not only a result of transfer, but also of deficiency in their second language proficiency. Thus, this may be due to the subjects' proficiency level since the two AJs who successfully opened the conversation were in the higher level of two classes while the other three were in the lower level.

The content of semantic formula for making the request

There was an interesting pattern in the Japanese subjects' way of making the request. Four out of five JJs expressed their desire to leave early, and asked the supervisor for permission (Example A4). Their way of expressing desire was quite explicit, yet only one asked the supervisor for permission explicitly. The other three subjects tried to express their intention to seek permission through manipulating the sentence ending *-omotte* (I'm wondering).

On the other hand, the AJs' requests were very implicit. Only one of the AJs expressed his desire to take the afternoon off explicitly. Two of the AJs stated only their intention to go to the airport, but did not make a request for the afternoon off. The other two AJs expressed that they were in a difficult situation, yet they did not make a request for the afternoon off either. However, as appears in Example A6, the American subjects made their requests quite clearly when they spoke in English. One of the AEs asked permission explicitly saying, *would it be okay to take the afternoon off?* Interestingly the other four AEs asked permission by using exactly the same expression, *I was wondering*.

Since American subjects made requests clearly when they spoke English, the AJs' ambiguity in making a request may not be the result of pragmatic transfer. As Beebe and Takahashi (1989) demonstrated, it is more reasonable to consider it as an overgeneralization of a stereotype of the Japanese speech style. As Americans study Japanese, the politeness forms in Japanese speech are emphasized. This may have resulted in the AJs' avoidance of a direct request.

Conclusions

The analyses of the data on making a request provide an interesting picture of the difference between Japanese and American business cultures. By examining the order of the speech act production, it was found that the Japanese subjects felt it to be more face-threatening to state the reason for the request if the reason were a private matter. In contrast, the American subjects started by providing reasons to soften the awkward situation of making a request. These differences also appeared in their choice of lexical items for the reason they were making the request. Whereas the American subjects felt that it was appropriate to bring up a private matter as a reason, the Japanese subjects tried to avoid mentioning a private matter, and in one case lied. These cultural differences were transferred when Americans spoke Japanese.

No significant cultural differences were observed in the semantic formula for opening the conversation. Since the opening speech acts are oftentimes formulaic, the subjects' lower proficiency in Japanese resulted in the unsuccessful performances.

JJs and AEs shared a similar speech style for the semantic formula for making a request. However, when Americans spoke Japanese, their ways of making a request were very indirect and vague. This may be due to Americans' overgeneralization of stereotypes of Japanese speech styles.

While conducting the follow-up interviews with the subjects, it was found that although the American subjects were aware of the rules of Japanese speech styles, they did not necessarily try to follow them. The American learners of Japanese used various strategies to look for a style in which they would not commit a violation of the rules, and also one in which they were comfortable. This study suggests that the target forms are not necessarily the learners' goal. Language teachers need to reconsider the teaching of appropriateness for second language learners.

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Appendix A

Transcribed Data

Example 1 <u>*The content of semantic formula for opening of Japanese*</u>
<u>*subjects speaking Japanese (JJ)*</u>

Akira: *Statement of asking a favor*
ano kubota-san chotto onegaishitai koto-ga arun-desu
well Mr.Kubota little want to ask thing there is
well there is a little thing I want to ask you

Tomoo: *Apology*
ano chotto totuzen-de moushiwakenain desu-ga
well little suddenly sorry though
well I'm sorry to ask you suddenly though

Masao: *Getting attention*
ano chotto desune
well little
well

Toshio: *Asking the supervisor's availability*
kakarichou ima yoroshii deshyou-ka
supervisor now available
supervisor, are you available now?

Yumio: *Asking the supervisor's availability*
ima ojikan yoroshii desu-ka
now time available
do you have time now?

Example 2 <u>*The content of semantic formula for opening of American*</u>
<u>*subjects speaking Japanese (AJ)*</u>

Philip: *Statement of asking a favor*
ano chotto nakanaka totsuzen-de shitsurei nan-desuga
well little very suddenly rude though
although it is rude to ask you suddenly

onegai-ga arimasu-ga
favor there is
I have a favor to ask you

John: *Getting attention*
           sumimasen ano
           Excuse me well
           Excuse me well

Steve: *Expressing difficulty*
           anone etto aa nante iunoka muzukashii koto nan-desuga
           well well ah how say   difficult thing though
           well well how do you say? although it is difficult to ask

Jim: *Statement of asking a favor*
           ano kubota-kakarichou,
           well Mr. Kubota,
           well Mr.Kubota,

           ano chotto onegai shitai koto-ga arun-desuga
           well little ask   want   thing   there is
           I have a little favor to ask you

David: *Getting attention*
           sumimasen kubota kakarichyou
           excuse me Mr. kubota
           Excuse me, Mr. Kubota

Example 3 <u>The content of semantic formula for opening of American</u>
<u>subjects speaking English (AE)</u>

Mark: *Statement of asking a favor*
           I have a favor to ask of you, if I could

Jason: *Question*
           Ah, a quick question on tomorrow,
             what does the afternoon look like?

Jeff: *Asking the supervisors' availability*
           Simon, do you have a minute?
             something unusual has come up, and I'd
             like to ask you a small favor, please

Frank: *Statement of asking a favor*
           I want to ask you something
             I've got the following situation

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Bill: *Statement of asking a favor*
               Ah, I'd like to ask you a favor

Example 4 The content of semantic formula for request of Japanese subjects speaking Japanese (JJ)

Akira: hayai jikan-ni soutai sasete-itadakereba-to omotte
           early time   leave early let me   wonder
           I wonder if you would let me leave a little early

Tomoo: mosi sashitukae nakereba soutai sasete-itadakereba
           if problem   not leave early let me
           if it's not a problem, could I leave early

Masao: gohandan-o ukagai-taito omoimashite
           judgement ask want to think
           I would like to ask your permission

Toshio: ni jikan bakari seki-o hazusasete itadakitain-desukedo
           two hours about seat leave   let me
           I would like you to let me leave about two hours

           ii desyou-ka
           okay
           is it okay

Yumio: soutai   sasete itadakenai deshyou-ka
           leave early   let me   is it possible
           is it possible to let me leave early?

Example 5 The content of semantic formula for request of American subjects speaking Japanese (AJ)

Philip: kuukou made mukae-ni iki-tainodesu
           airport to pick up go want to
           I want to go to the airport to pick her up

John: asu   naritakuukou-ni ikimasu
           tomorrow   Narita airport to I will go
           I will go to Narita airport tomorrow

Steve: soutai   sasete kudasai
           leave early   let me please
           please let me leave early

Jim: chotto komatte imasu
              little trouble in
              I'm in a little trouble

David: chotto shinpai shite imasu
              little worried
              I'm a little worried

Example 6 <u>*The content of semantic formula for request of American*</u> <u>*subjects speaking English (AE)*</u>

Mark: I was wondering if I could take off at one
             today

Jason: I was wondering if I could take the afternoon off

Jeff: I was wondering....

Frank: would it be okay to take the afternoon off

Bill: I was wondering if I could take the afternoon off

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Appendix B

Scenario for the role play

For American subjects speaking English:

1. You are an American business-person who works in Tokyo.

2. Yesterday, your fiance/e in the U.S. called you and said that s/he suddenly decided to visit Japan.

3. S/he will arrive at the Tokyo international airport at 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

4. Since it takes at least 2 hours to get to the airport, ask your supervisor for the afternoon off.

5. Start by knocking on the supervisor's door.

For Japanese subjects speaking Japanese:

1. あなたは日本の銀行のニューヨーク支店に勤務験する日本人Aです。

2. 昨日、アメリカの婚約者から突然に電話があり、彼 (彼女) が明日 ニューヨーク に来ることを知らされました。

3. 飛行機は、明日の午後3時にJFKに到着します。あなたが空港に迎えに行かないと、彼 (彼女) はとても悲しみます。

4. 系長に失礼のないように、午後の早退を申し込んでください。

5. 系長室のドアをノックするところから始めてください。

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For American subjects speaking Japanese, the following vocabulary list was provided with the scenario:

1. あなたは日本の商社の東京支店に勤務駿する
 アメリカ人A です。

2. 昨日、アメルカの婚約者から突然に電話があり、
 彼（彼女）が明日日本に来ることを知らされました。

3. 飛行機は、明日の午後3時に成田に到着します。
 あなたが空港に迎えに行かないと、彼（彼女）は
 とても悲しみます。

4. 系長に失礼のないように、午後の早退を申し込んで
 ください。

5. 系長室のドアをノックするところから始めて
 ください。

勤務する	きんむする
婚約者	こんやくしゃ
突然に	とつぜん
悲しむ	かなしむ
失礼	しつれい
早退する	そうたい

For American subjects speaking Japanese, the following vocabulary list was provided with the scenario:

1. あなたは日本の商社の東京支店に勤務駿する
   アメリカ人Aです。

2. 昨日、アメルカの婚約者から突然に電話があり、
   彼（彼女）が明日日本に来ることを知らされました。

3. 飛行機は、明日の午後3時に成田に到着します。
   あなたが空港に迎えに行かないと、彼（彼女）は
   とても悲しみます。

4. 系長に失礼のないように、午後の早退を申し込んで
   ください。

5. 系長室のドアをノックするところから始めて
   ください。

勤務する	きんむする
婚約者	こんやくしゃ
突然に	とつぜん
悲しむ	かなしむ
失礼	しつれい
早退する	そうたい

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