AN INTERCULTURAL PRAGMATICS STUDY ON JAPANESE RESISTIVITY AND AMERICAN ACCEPTABILITY IN REFUSALS

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, a great deal of research has been done in *cross-cultural pragmatics* (CCP) and *interlanguage pragmatics* (ILP). CCP is a well-recognized subfield of pragmatics, which stresses similarity and difference in pragmatic strategies between at least two languages and/or cultures (Blum-Kulka, House, Kasper, 1989; Spencer-Oatey, 2000). According to Kasper and Schmidt (1996), the CCP approach is *comparative*, focusing on the cross-cultural similarity and difference in the linguistic realisation and the sociopragmatic judgement in contexts.

With the basis of the main constructs and the methods developed in CCP, a great number of studies have been made on ILP (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993; Kasper & Dahl, 1991; Kasper & Rose, 1999; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996). According to Kasper and her colleagues (Kasper & Dahl, 1991, p. 216), ILP is *acquisitional*, exploring "'nonnative speakers' [NNS] comprehension and production of speech acts, and how their L2-related speech act knowledge is acquired," and also "examines child or adult NNS speech act behaviour and knowledge, to the exclusion of L1 child and adult pragmatics." In addition, ILP has been fundamentally the same in research issues and methods as CCP since CCP has been a basis for ILP, and the specific focus of ILP has been on pragmatic transfer (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996).

Pragmatic transfer can be defined as "any use by NNSs of speech act realisation strategies or linguistic means that is different from L2 NS use and similar to L1 NS use" (Kasper & Dahl, 1991, p. 225). This pragmatic transfer has two different levels: pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfer (Thomas, 1983). *Pragmalinguistic transfer* is the

NNS application of L1 *linguistic form* to L2, which naturally influences the illocutionary power or the degree of politeness of the interlanguage utterance. *Sociopragmatic transfer* is the NNS application of L1 *pragmatic judgment* to L2 on how appropriate a given speech act strategy is according to social status, social distance, and the degree of imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Each type of pragmatic transfer is further divided into two: *positive* and *negative* transfer. The former refers to the correspondence between the learners' L1 and the L2 pragmatic principles while the latter refers to the difference between them. In ILP, much effort has been made specifically focusing on pragmatic transfer.

As an example of this type of research, Takahashi and Beebe (1987) studied American-Japanese differences in refusals, namely, how Japanese and Americans refuse "initiating acts" (Gass & Houck, 1999) such as requests, invitations, offers and so forth. From a sociopragmatic viewpoint, they found that Japanese were *status-sensitive* whereas Americans were *familiarity-sensitive*. Japanese people change their behaviour according to relative social power (i.e., they may use more elaborate speech for superiors, and less for subordinates), whereas Americans change their behaviour according to social distance (i.e., they may use more elaborate speech for intimates, but less for strangers.).

Also, Takahashi and Beebe found that refusals by Japanese, compared to those by Americans, seemed unspecific, empathetic, and lofty. Firstly, Japanese would have a tendency to make more unspecific excuses than Americans when a subordinate refuses invitations from his or her boss (e.g., I have things to take care of at home.). Secondly, a Japanese refusal would sound more empathetic than an American's when an employer refuses his or her employee's request for pay raises (e.g., I understand your situation.). Finally, Japanese speakers of English may use more lofty speech when an employer refuses his or her housekeeper's offer to replace a broken vase (e.g., To err is human.). These utterances characterized as status-sensitive, unspecific, empathetic, and lofty are identified as pragmatic negative transfers from Japanese into English.

Although this research orientation would be useful in that it can tell us about such a NNS tendency to make potentially inappropriate speech acts for NS, it seems to me seriously problematic because of the underlying assumption that NS sociopragmatic norms should be an ultimate or desirable goal for all the NNSs. Although this presupposition might sound relevant

to some traditional linguists, probably because of Chomsky's notion of ideal native speaker, a great deal of scholars in SLA have recently argued that a NS-based norm-referenced target should be replaced by a NNS-based criterion-referenced one (Cook, 1999), especially in terms of sociopragmatic norms concerning appropriateness (Alptekin, 2002; Bamgbose, 1998; Brumfit, 2001; McKay, 2002; Kramsch, 1998; Seidlhofer, 1999; Smith, 1987; Widdowson, 1994, 1998). This is mainly because the filter that judges whether a given utterance is appropriate, is conversational participants' beliefs, values for their own culture (Thomas, 1983), social identity, and subjectivity (Grotjahn, 1991; Pierce, 1995; Siegal, 1996). In these internal and affective filters, there are obviously no prescriptive principles nor an absolute standard in the real world (Fairclough, 1992; Thomas, 1983, 1995). That is, if we should try to force NNSs to conform to a NS norm, it would be nearly the same as a NS's ideological control over NNSs or cultural imposition on NNSs by NSs' socially hegemonic strata (Thomas, 1983)

It should be added that some recent studies have insisted that NNSs have affective resistance toward the use of the NS norm to maintain his or her own identity, and may commit pragmatic negative transfer "on purpose" (Al-Issa, 2003; Robinson, 1992; Siegal, 1996). Siegal (1996) reported that a female western learner of Japanese felt affective resistance to a Japanese norm, because Japanese female language appears to her too humble. Also, Robinson documented that female Japanese learners of English felt uncomfortable refusing in English, because they felt refusing were not so desirable in Japan. Moreover, Al-Issa (2003) sheds light on some motivating factors for Arabic learners of English to make socio-cultural transfer deliberately, such as their pride in L1, learners' perception of L2, and religion. Considering these orientations of research, there may be a great possibility that NNS pragmatic negative transfer results from the NNS affective resistance to the NS practice rather than a lack of the "NS-like" pragmatic competence (Siegal 1996).[1]

Such a consideration would naturally lead us to the question, *Is a given cross-cultural difference in pragmatics between NS and NNS really problematic?* Although there is a great deal of cross-cultural information on pragmatics around, almost no studies have ever been

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[1] The goal to achieve NS norm may be undesirable from NS viewpoint as well. For NSs, they may perceive NNSs' NS-like pragmatic behaviour as "offensive and inconsistent with the NNS's role as outsider to the L2 community" (Kasper 1997).

made at whether or not a cross-cultural difference in pragmatics is really problematic in intercultural communication[2]. In other words, except for a few studies, (See some works in Spencer-Oatey, 2000), the CCP/ILP studies predominantly speculated about what would happen with the basis of "independent" actions of each cultural group. By this approach, it seems improbable that we will discover what actually happens in a dynamic "interaction" between them. More directly speaking, most existing studies have presupposed that NNS-like behaviour is a cause of miscommunication with little attempt to investigate what the actual consequence might be﹣ though Kasper (1992) prudently maintains that "negative" transfer equals "difference from L2", but "'difference from L2 equals miscommunication' is a *non sequitur*" (p. 221).

For the purpose of filling the gaps of the previous literature, I hereby propose an innovative subfield of pragmatics, which I call *intercultural pragmatics* (ICP).[3] Intercultural pragmatics—based on Spencer-Oatey's definition of "intercultural" (2000, p. 4) and Thomas's definition of "pragmatics" (1995, p. 22)—is *interactive,* exploring *making meaning in interaction* between two different cultural groups in a specific context. The current main agenda of ICP is to investigate the following issues (Fujiwara, 2002): (1) *Consequences of the intercultural encounter: Is a given difference really problematic? What communicative effect does it have?* (Kasper, 1992, p. 221) (2) *NS's attitude*: *How acceptable are NNS speech acts to NS?* (McKay, 2002). *If unacceptable, why?* (3) *NNS's attitude*: *What attitude to the NS norm do NNSs have? Do they violate the NS pragmatic rules intentionally or not?* (Al-Issa, 2003; Robinson, 1992; Siegal, 1996).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This is an intercultural pragmatics study on the difference between Japanese and

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[2] The terms "cross-cultural" and "intercultural" are used throughout the paper with the basis of Spencer's definitions (2000, p. 4). The term "cross-cultural" refers to the comparison of "data obtained independently from different cultural groups," and the term "intercultural" refers to the observation on "data when people from two different cultural groups interact with each other."

[3] Although the broad notion of CCP comprises what I call intercultural pragmatics (Spencer-Oatey 2000), I would rather dissociate ICP from CCP for the clear distinction between the three subfields of pragmatics.

Americans in refusal strategies. There were two reasons for this choice. First, refusals have received a great deal of attention in ILP literature (Beebe et al., 1990; Gass & Houck 1999; Robinson, 1992; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987). Thus, the Japanese-English differences in refusals can be easily identified and appropriated for the use of ICP studies. Second, refusals are obviously worth investigating since they are typical face threatening acts (Brown & Levinson 1987). Brown and Levinson define "face" as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself [and herself]" (1987, p. 61). They claim that people in an interaction usually cooperate to maintain each participant's face. Certain acts like refusals, however, by their very nature, make it difficult to maintain the faces of all conversational participants. These are called "face threatening acts" (FTAs). On these two grounds, this ICP study focuses on refusals.

Following the ICP agenda above, and focusing on the speech act of refusals, I would like to examine the following research questions:

- *How resistive do Japanese learners consider American refusals?*
- *How acceptable do Americans consider Japanese refusals?*
- *As far as the differences in refusals are concerned, can they seek for the common ground between the two cultures or not?*

While focusing on the three questions, this study also examines whether a participant's pragmatic system and social identity will change according to the transition of time and place: if we suppose the relationship between NS and NNS pragmatic systems is "dynamic" rather than static like grammar (Thomas, 1995), there is assumed to be a difference in judgments on acceptability (or resistivity) for the other norm between participants who live only in their own country (e.g., Americans who live only in America) and those who have been to foreign countries (e.g., Americans who have lived in Japan for a considerable time).

METHODOLOGY

<u>Participants</u>

The research participants were 20 Japanese learners of English and 20 American English native

speakers. Japanese participants were further divided into two groups: those who had approximately one-year length of residence (10-12 months) in English-speaking countries (JE: N = 10) and those who had never stayed there (JJ = 10). The same division was made for Americans: those who had lived in Japan more than one year (AJ: N = 10) and those who had never stayed there (AA: N = 10).

Methods and Operationalization of Pragmatic Acceptability/Resistivity

With regard to the data elicitation method, I constructed a *pragmatics acceptability questionnaire* (PAQ) for Americans and a *pragmatics resistivity questionnaire* (PRQ) for Japanese learners. The former was designed to measure *pragmatic acceptability*, which was operationally defined in this study as "the probability with which a given NNS speech act strategy will be acceptable relative to other NNS strategies." The latter was constructed to measure *pragmatic resistivity*, the probability with which a given L2 speech act strategy will be resistive relative to other L2 strategies. In PAQ, American research participants were asked to judge how acceptable a given Japanese utterance is. In PRQ, on the other hand, Japanese research participants were asked how resistive a given American utterance is. This acceptability/resistivity rate was assessed on a 7-point Likert scale (-3= unacceptable/irresistive, +3= acceptable/resistive).

In computing acceptability/resistivity rate, the original values (from -3 to 3) on the rating scale were converted to values from 1 to 7 in order to avoid calculation problems by inclusion of minus values (i.e. -3, -2, and -1). The value more than 4 is considered to be 'acceptable' or 'resistive' (> 4) while less than 4 'unacceptable' or 'irresistive' (< 4).

Relations between NNS Resistivity & NS Acceptability.

If we suppose it possible to clearly determine whether or not a given utterance is acceptable or resistive by the dichotomy, there are theoretically four cases in a 2Ø 2 matrix with the two variables (acceptability/resistivity) and the two values (positive/negative). Here are descriptions of the four cases:

Case 1: *Discussion Needed*

Case 1 is where we need further discussion since the NS acceptability is low [-acceptable] with the NNS resistivity judgment high [+resistive]. That is to say, both cultural groups unfortunately fail to find the common ground between them.

Case 2: *NNS-norm Preferred*

Case 2 is where NNS-norm is preferred because NS judgment on a NNS speech act is acceptable while NNS feel a NS utterance resistive. In other words, when Japanese have a sense of resistance to American English NS norms because they cannot express their cultural identity by the recommended expressions by American people [+resistive] whereas Americans would accept the Japanese refusals [+acceptable], it may be wise to apply a Japanese pragmatic principle to this context to facilitate intercultural communication.

Case 3: *NS-norm Preferred*

The third case is where NS-norm is preferred on the grounds that both Japanese resistivity and American acceptability are low [-resistive] [-acceptable]. In this case, it may be prudent to put a priority over an American pragmatic principle to avoid a cultural misunderstanding.

Case 4: *No Problem*

Case 4 is where Japanese resistivity to an American utterance is low [-resistive] with American judgment on a Japanese utterance acceptable [+acceptable]. In such a case, there is no problem even if conversational participants behave according to their own principles that might be different from each other. This is either the case where both cultural norms would be overlapped although a given utterance is not "typical" or "mainstream" in referring to one cultural norm, or the case where the difference between them is really noticeable, but judged to be acceptable.

In summary, these are the four cases according to the relationship between Japanese pragmatic resistivity and American pragmatic acceptability. Those four cases are ordered in light of the degree of 'problematicity.' The two polar categories are Case 1, *Discussion Needed*, as the highest problematic one and Case 4, *No Problem*, as the lowest. The intermediate categories are Cases 2 and 3 where both cultural groups can achieve a mutual consensus on the use of pragmatic principles by one side. These relationships are shown in Table 1 for the consequences of intercultural communication.

Table 1: Relations between NNS Resistivity and NS acceptability

	NNS Resistivity	NS Acceptability	Results	Problematicity
Case 1	↙	↛	Discussion-Needed	High
Case 2	↙	↙	NNS norm preferred	↑
Case 3	↛	↛	NS norm preferred	↓

| Case 4 | ⇸ | ↙ | No problem | Low |

Note: '+' means more than four while '⇸' less than four.

All samples of Japanese and American refusals were extracted from the previous ILP research (Beebe et al., 1990; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987), which were subject to American acceptability and Japanese resistivity judgments. There are four refusal situations: 1) request for pay raises (RPR), 2) offer of broken vase (OBV), 3) invitation to party (IP), and 4) invitation to dinner (ID). In the ILP studies above, potentially problematic refusal strategies by Japanese are to make 1) a comparatively unspecific excuse (e.g. we made up *another plan* for next Sunday a long time ago…) and 2) frequent use of statement of apology/regret (e.g. I'm terribly *sorry*…, So I feel awfully *sorry* to say…).

The differences in each situation are as follows. In the RPR, Japanese people appear to make a "statement of empathy" (e.g., I understand your situation). This strategy was never chosen by American English users. In the OBV, a statement of philosophy is a frequently -used strategy in Japanese refusals (e.g., To err is human.), which may sound too "lofty" and philosophical to Americans. In the IP, Japanese utterances in English are likely to start with a regret (e.g., I'm sorry), which may sound a little abrupt to Americans. Americans would rather make a positive statement before refusals (e.g., I would love to but...). The same strategy and reason of the IP is true of the ID. All differences are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Individual Situations and Differences (potential problems)

Speech Acts	To What	Social Status	Differences (potential problems)
REFUSAL	Request for pay raises	H → L	Statement of empathy Twice use of "off the hook"
	Offer of broken vase	H → L	Statement of philosophy
	Invitation to dinner	Equal	First apology (no positive opinion)
	Invitation to party	L → H	Last regret (not second)

Preliminary Study

To ensure the pragmatics acceptability/resistivity questionnaire as reliable and valid as possible, one preliminary study was carried out. The research collaborators in the pilot did not

participate in the main study, but are supposed to be comparable to those in the main study in terms of social variables such as ethnicity, gender, social class, and so forth.

The first version of the questionnaires had two sections: 1) *How is a given utterance acceptable/resistive?* 2) *Why do you think it is unacceptable/resistive?* In the first section, some Japanese/American research participants were asked to rate acceptability/resistivity of different utterance from their own norm in the preceding research (Beebe et al., 1990; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987). If the chosen answer was unacceptable/resistive in this part, the participants were then asked to write in a free format the reason why they think it was unacceptable/resistive.

After administering the pilot, the results and cautious discussion gave rise to three problems of the questionnaire. The first problem was that research participants might notice the researcher's intention since all the situations chosen in the preliminary study required them to rate only the targeted refusals. The second issue was that there would be the case where raters judged them as resistive/unacceptable not because of the contents of an utterance, but because of the execution of refusal itself. The final problem was that the result might be chaotic if they were allowed to write their responses in a free format.

Main Study

As for the revealed problems in the preliminary study, three solutions were developed. First, in case research participants read the main theme of this questionnaire, there were an equal number of distracters and targeted refusals (N=4). The distracters were also the following face threatening acts: disagreement, chastisement, and correction, each of which was extracted from prior empirical research (Beebe & Takahashi, 1989; Takahashi & Beebe, 1993). Furthermore, the situations in both questionnaires were subject to randomatization, and then two different forms (i.e., Form A/B) were constructed, each of which contains different orders of the questions in order to minimise the so-called priming effect.

Secondly, in terms of the levels of questions, I established two more, resulting in four levels. Level 1 is the same as in the pilot where they were asked to evaluate how *acceptable/resistive* a given utterance is. Level 2 is, if unacceptable/resistive, whether the *execution* of the speech act itself is so. Level 3 is that if not in Level 2, what part of the

contents is unacceptable/resistive. Level 4 is that they were asked to voluntarily write down an *alternative utterance*, that is, what they would say in that situation.

Finally, the free response-format in Question 2 was replaced by the structured response-format with five multiple options used for the purpose of overcoming the practical problems. While one was "other" for an individual's own opinion, four options in each question were constructed after careful consideration, by Japanese and Americans, for the reasons why a certain utterance would be problematic in the ILP studies (Beebe et al., 1990; Beebe & Takahashi, 1989; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987, 1993). Through these stages, the pragmatics acceptability and resistivity questionnaires were administered.

RESULTS

Japanese Resistivity and American Acceptability
How is a given utterance resistive for Japanese or acceptable for Americans?

First of all, we will focus on Japanese resistivity and American acceptability from a quantitative view. Table 3 summarises Japanese resistivity rates in the four refusal situations. Overall, the resistivity rates judged by Japanese learners including JJ and JE are low enough to achieve the "irresistive" level (< 4). More specifically, Japanese participants in the RPR do not have a sense of resistance to the American English norm where a boss says positive opinions, and then gives a relatively specific excuse to refuse a request for pay raises by his or her subordinate. The same is true of the IP and ID where they are refusing invitations from a boss or a friend by using positive opinions and comparatively specific excuses. However, there is a small difference in the OBV where an employer refuses his or her employee's offer to replace a broken vase. In this situation, the resistivity rate of JJ is regarded as low ($M = 3.1 < 4$) while that of JE is slightly high ($M = 4.2 > 4$). In sum, although the judgment by JE in the OBV is slightly resistive, the Japanese resistivity to American English NS norm is very low on the whole.

Table 3: Means and standard deviations of the resistivity rates by Japanese

	Japanese					
	JJ			JE		
Situation	N	M	SD	N	M	SD

RPR	10	2.4	0.96	10	3.5	1.84
OBV	10	3.1	1.91	10	4.2	1.47
ID	10	3.2	1.87	10	2.1	1.44
IP	10	3.3	1.56	10	3.2	1.39

Turning to the result on the acceptability by Americans including both AA and AJ, the acceptability rates in all the cases except for the IP, is interestingly much higher than the previous study expected (Takahashi & Beebe 1987), and indeed within the "acceptable" level (4 <) (See Table 4 below). Taking the refusal situations individually shows that the statement of empathy in the RPR, the statement of philosophy in the OBV, and the statement of apology/regret with a conversational starter in the ID are all regarded as acceptable. The only one utterance judged to be slightly unacceptable is the IP, where a subordinate refuses an invitation to a home party by his or her boss↘ AA M = 3.7, AJ M = 3.4 < 4↗. The results reveal that Japanese refusals in all the cases except for the IP are acceptable for the American research participants.

Table 4: Means and standard deviations of the acceptability rates by Americans

	Americans					
	AA			AJ		
Situation	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
RPR	10	4.9	1.79	10	5.1	1.91
OBV	10	4.5	1.77	10	6.5	0.70
ID	10	4.5	1.90	10	5.4	1.77
IP	10	3.7	1.88	10	3.4	1.77

Concerning the degree of problematicity which was, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, theoretically classified into four cases, all the refusal situations with the exception of the IP are categorized into Case 4 *"No Problem."* which is the lowest problematic one. Specifically, in the RPR, OBV and ID, the value of Japanese resistivity is negative whereas American acceptability is positive. In such a case, there is no problem even if Japanese learners of English make a pragmatic negative transfer influenced by their cultural background, or if Americans use their own principles that would be different from Japanese. These results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Results of the four situations according to the categories of possible four cases

	NNS Resistivity	NS Acceptability	Results
RPR	↛	↙	No problem
OBV	↛	↙	No problem
ID	↛	↙	No problem
IP	↛	↛	NS norm preferred

Note: '+' means more than four while '↛ ' less than four.

Next, let us consider the IP where the Japanese utterance seems difficult for American English NS to accept. This circumstance where Japanese resistivity and American acceptability are both negative is classified into the category "*NS-norm preferred*." In this case, it would be worth considering the American English norm in the language classroom to avoid a cultural misunderstanding.

Why do you think a given utterance is resistive/acceptable?

We now proceed to the analysis of the reason why a given utterance is resistive for Japanese, and unacceptable for Americans. This section limits our concern to the problematic cases revealed in the previous section, namely the OBV and IP. This is because it should be clear from the result that the other cases (i.e., RPR and ID) are not problematical in one way or another. Thus, we will focus on, and analyse the JE's judgements in the OBV and the American judgements in the IP from quantitative and qualitative viewpoints.

In the first place, as for the reason why JE has a sense of resistance to the use of the American model, "Don't worry. It was an accident," the most chosen option is "other" (66.6%). This implies there is the immense individual difference in the group. To explain this more clearly, I will take up some examples here. Some Japanese learners of English comment that an employer should blame more than this by saying, "Don't worry. I know it was an accident. But you know, you must pay attention to prevent such an accident," while others maintain that this boss should have a employee get "off the hook" more by saying "Never mind, it's OK, but how about you? Didn't you cut your fingers?" Although it is unquestionably difficult to interpret this result due to the insufficient number of research participants (N=10), the most

frequent response is "other."

In the second place, the main reason why the utterance in the IP would be unacceptable is again "other" (60.0%). In others, the most predominant reason is that the promise for the next time (e.g., next time, I will go to your party, I promise.) sounds to their ears odd and foreign. The American research participants did not choose the options that reflect the previous research finding (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987): this utterance is regarded as unacceptable not because it is unspecific and does not have a positive tone, but because it has the promise for the next time.

Temporal and Residential Change in Japanese Resistivity and American Acceptability

This section will consider whether a participant's pragmatic system and social identity will change according to the residential and temporal change. The important question in this section is "*Is there any difference in acceptability rates between AA* (i.e. American who had lived in only America) *and AJ* (i.e. American who had had more than one-year length of residence in Japan)?" The same question is applied to the Japanese case: "*Is there any difference in resistivity rates between JJ and JE?*"

Hypothesis 1 posits that the acceptability rate of AJ is much higher than that of AA. *Hypothesis 2* predicts that the resistivity rate of JE is much lower than that of JJ. In connection with these two hypotheses, *Hypothesis 3* predicts that the problematicity in an intercultural communication is becoming lower and lower due to the residential and temporal change of both cultural groups. As for American acceptability for Japanese refusals, AJ would regard Japanese utterances more acceptable than AA, since AJ is supposed to be more familiar with Japanese pragmatic norm by their experience in Japan. The same phenomenon applies to Japanese language learners: the resistivity rate of JE would be lower than that of JJ, because JE, by their overseas experience, is supposed to be more accustomed to the pragmatic practices in English speaking countries. As a result of the compromise by the both sides, the problematicity in the intercultural communication between Americans and Japanese is getting lower and lower. With these hypotheses in mind, we will now take a look at the results respectively.

Hypothesis 1

This hypothesis is supported by the comparison between AA and AJ. In all cases except for the IP, the AJ acceptability rates are numerically higher than that of AA (see Table 4 above). Although I am aware that the sample size of each group (N=10) is noticeably small, the mean differences between AA and AJ were statistically tested by using the non-parametric *t*-test. The significant difference and tendency were obtained in the OBV (*p* = .004) and Total (*p* = .083).

In addition to the quantitative difference above, the qualitative difference is found in the section of alternative utterance to support the same hypothesis. According to the comments given by AA and AJ, it is supposed that AJ have a sense of allowance more than AA. While some of the AA group, on the use of Japanese refusals in the ID, commented, "By saying they have something to do in their office, it sounds as if the person is avoiding the dinner party. It is fine to say that he has work to do or has to stay late at work." As for the IP, one of the AA group says, "Simply stating that your subordinate had a previous engagement would be acceptable. No need for expressing apology." Those opinions, though the number of them is very few, can be seen in the comments by AA, which is actually pointed out by the previous research (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987).

However, after going through a life in Japan more than one year, their comments would be, in the ID, changed into "Response is good because it's polite, to the point." Furthermore, in the IP, one participant in AJ states: "I don't think this response is unacceptable, but I don't think it's appropriate, either. If a native speaker used these words, they might be sarcastic due to their excessive subservience. If a Japanese person said these words, I would understand that the response was meant to be 'sincere'." This remark tells us that it is possible to have "double standards" on whether a given utterance is appropriate, and that this judgment depends on whom the interlocutor is (whether a conversational partner is Japanese or American). According to the commentary, she would think this response would be "sarcastic" if American English native speakers used these words while this response would be "sincere" if Japanese say so. This point will be discussed later. Here, let me just point out that it is fairly obvious that AJ have a greater sense of allowance than AA.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 predicted the resistivity rate of JE would be lower than that of JJ. The results show that this hypothesis is not confirmed since the JE values are, contrary to our expectation, higher than the JJ's in the RPR, OBV and Total, and the only case of which the hypothesis is true is the ID. As Table 3 reflects, although all the resistivity rates except for the OBV are within the "irresistive" range, the JE resistivity rates are, in a numerical sense, slightly higher than that of JJ. However, the differences between them can be ignorable since the non-parametric t-test reveals that all differences between JE and JJ are statistically not significant. Thus, all we can say here is Japanese resistivity rates would increase or would not change significantly due to the temporal and residential change.

Hypothesis 3

The final hypothesis predicts that the problematicity in the Japanese-American intercultural communication is becoming lower due to the residential and temporal change of both cultural groups. This hypothesis is partially confirmed, not only because American acceptability would increase due to their experience in Japan more than one year, but also because Japanese resistivity rates are remarkably low although the one-year experience in English-speaking countries does not have a significant effect on Japanese people. That is, although the result is not perfectly the same as what I expected, the problematicity between Japanese and American people would become lower and lower by the residential and temporal change of the groups.

DISCUSSION

Japanese Resistivity and American Acceptability

As for Japanese resistivity, the results show that, with the exception of the OBV, the resistivity rates are generally very low. This indicates they have almost no affective resistance to the use of American NS refusals. As for American acceptability, on the other hand, we found that with the exception of the IP, the acceptability rates are, though surprisingly, high enough to achieve the acceptable level. That is, contrary to researchers' assumptions in the previous

research, the Japanese use of "negative transfers" in refusals are believed to be highly acceptable although they do not seem typical or native-like expressions in American English.

From what has been found above, the four refusal situations except for the IP are theoretically classified into the case where there is *"No Problem."* These results lead us to the conclusion that the potentially problematic differences for cultural miscommunications are merely a "myth": just a 'potential,' not a 'real' scenario for both American English speakers and Japanese learners.

Based on these findings, let me point out one of the most critical problems in the ILP practices: although many ILP researchers have contended that the negative pragmatic transfer (or the differences between cultural groups) would be problematic, it would not always be the case since pragmatic communication is not as static as prescriptive grammar, but rather dynamic and never prescriptive (Thomas, 1995). Thus, it should be important to revisit the previous research findings in CCP/ILP from the intercultural perspective—if our intention is to establish more an equal or pluralistic society rather than an unequal or monolithic one.

It is also revealed that this non-problematic tendency, however, has two exceptions. Firstly, the OBV is regarded as slightly resistive by Japanese with approximately one-year overseas experience (i.e., JE). Secondly, the IP has a slight possibility to be unacceptable for both American groups (i.e., AA and AJ). Therefore, it is worthwhile examining the two cases by focusing on the question: *Why are these speech act strategies problematic for Japanese and Americans*?

As we have seen, given utterances are seen as resistive for Japanese and unacceptable for Americans often for reasons "other" than those provided in the questionnaire. This finding is noteworthy in that they choose their own opinions while ignoring the researchers' presuppositions of what should be "right" reasons (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987). Moreover, though there seems to be a general consensus among American groups on why a Japanese refusal strategy in the IP is unacceptable (i.e., the promise for the next time sounds too odd for most American people), yet Japanese people with overseas experiences in English speaking countries do not have a consensus on why the American refusal in the OBV is resistive.

Considering these points, it seems pragmatic judgments are influenced by not only social/cultural factors but also *individual* factors, and furthermore the latter might be more

prominent than the former. To put it simply, even though they belong to the same cultural group, there are immense individual differences within the group. Indeed, the existence of individual differences in pragmatic systems are not so surprising since pragmatic judgments, as pointed above, depend on the affective filters such as the conversational participants' beliefs and values from their own culture (Thomas, 1983), social identity, and subjectivity (Grotjahn, 1991; Pierce, 1995; Siegal, 1996). In such filters, as the term "identity" implies, there are not only cultural or social differences, but also individual differences in judging whether or not a given utterance is appropriate.

Convergence/Divergence due to the Residential and Temporal Change
Social Identity Reconstruction

The results of this study endorse the notion by Thomas (1995) that pragmatic systems are not static like grammar, but dynamic and flexible. As noted above, some acceptability rates by AJ are significantly higher than those of AA. In addition, it seems that some of Japanese learners, after about one-year experience in English-speaking countries slightly diverged from the supposedly targeted norm, although their resistance to NS English norms, overall, is not at all intense.

This transition in terms of pragmatic judgments would be one of the characteristics of social identity which Pierce (1995) called *social identity reconstruction* or *social identity as changing over time*. Pierce, based on the conception of social identity or subjectivity in feminist poststructuralism, turned her attention to the changing quality of a person's social identity. She tried to demonstrate this notion with the case of a Polish woman who was learning English in Canada as an immigrant. According to Pierce (1995, p. 24), it was only over time that this woman's conception of herself as an "illegitimate" speaker of English changed to a conception of herself as a "multicultural citizen": upon first arriving, she was very reluctant to use English because she regarded herself as an illegitimate English speaker. After a considerable time, she realised that she would be a multicultural citizen in Canada, and then she started to express her own identity by means of English more positively.

The same may be said of the research participants in this study. First of all, American people, after touching on Japanese culture in Japan for more than one year, would come to be

familiar with Japanese pragmatic practices, which might be different from their own principles, and even odd for them the first time. Then, they have more 'affinity' with Japanese pragmatic principles than those who have never been to Japan. This would be a plausible reason why AJ regarded Japanese practices in refusals more acceptable than AA.

As for Japanese people, however, we do not observe the same transition of the pragmatic systems: some of them seem rather to divert from English speaking norms after overseas experience. Although it is difficult to explain why JE resistivity is numerically higher than JJ, since it might be entirely opposite to our expectation, we may be able to have two interpretations. One is that the difference between JE and JJ is negligible because it is not significant but merely a matter of number. The other way to interpret this is that this diversion from NS norm is an instance of *identity maintenance*. Some Japanese people who have been to an English-speaking country may have started to consider the issue of appropriateness according to their L1, L2 and perhaps individual norms to maintain their own identity. This interpretation can explain the result that among JE, there are the two groups, which are differently characterised in orientation: convergent and divergent. Yet, this interpretation is also tentative since, due to the research design, the data did not tell us about any definite information on whether their responses reflected their L1, L2 or idiosyncratic norms. In order to clarify this point, we have to directly ask research participants in an informal interview what their grounds for judgments are (i.e. by their L1-, L2-based or individual reasons).

Although we cannot adequately explain this result, one thing is certain: There is a slight difference between Japanese people who have stayed in English-speaking countries and those have never stayed there. The fundamentally important thing here is that individual and social pragmatic systems are not static, but rather dynamic, changing due to the temporal and residential change⁻ we are continuing to construct and reconstruct our social identity over time.

Double standards

From the comments given by a female American participant with experience in Japan for a considerable time, it is assumed to be possible for one individual to have two separate

pragmatic systems. She wrote in a free comment section that her judgment depends on who the interlocutor is (whether a conversational partner is Japanese or American). If an American-English NS uses the Japanese-influenced refusal in the Invitation to Party, this utterance sounds too "sarcastic" due to its "excessive subservience." Yet, it also sounds "sincere" if the same utterance would be said by Japanese NNS people.

According to Kasper and Schmidt (1996, pp. 158-159), there are several types of pragmatic systems possible for proficient bilingual speakers, differing in the basis of the language and the number of them. Firstly, a single pragmatic system can be based on L1, on L2, or on an idiosyncratic merged, or neutralised system between the two languages. Additionally, a language user can have not a single, but double pragmatic systems, which are used separately depending on the language and/or the interlocutor. The participant in this study who noted the possibility of two pragmatic systems is apparently classified into the case where she keeps the double pragmatic systems separate.

The fact that there are several representations of pragmatic systems leads us to the reconsideration of the validity of NS-norm. What I would like you to consider here is which NS-norm or both NS and NNS pragmatic principles should be used to measure appropriateness in an intercultural communication between NS and NNS. As we reviewed the practices in interlanguage pragmatics, there has been a dominant consensus on the use of NS-norm for measuring appropriateness in cross-cultural communication. However, if there are several types of pragmatic systems, and both NS and NNS can keep separate systems in their social pragmatics, is NS-norm still valid in measuring pragmatic appropriateness? This point seems to be an open-ended question and needs discussion among theoretical linguists and practitioners further.

Pragmatic transfer hypothesis by Takahashi & Beebe

Having investigated the same issue as in this study, the Japanese-American differences in refusals, Takahashi and Beebe (1987, p. 153) suggested that "pragmatic transfer is (contrary to grammatical transfer) greater among higher proficiency learners than among lower proficiency learners," because more proficient learners can express what they want to say with fluency. They furthermore problematise this L1-influenced transfer by saying that such fluency

gives learners "the rope to hang themselves with (ibid)."

Although their hypothesis is partially confirmed by this study in the sense that higher proficiency learners (i.e., JE) would have slightly more resistance than lower proficiency learners (i.e., JJ), and might transfer their L1-related speech act strategy more frequently, their hypothesis and view of pragmatic transfer should be open to critical discussion. There are mainly two reasons for this. The first reason is that Takahashi and Beebe, like other researchers in ILP, seem to have a misleading premise that a pragmatic negative transfer is always problematic without any empirical evidence. As this study proves, L1 pragmatic transfer, at least in the case of Japanese refusals for Americans, is nearly always not problematic for native speakers of the L2.

The second reason is that this hypothesis does not entirely grasp the true figure. It can be modified as "pragmatic transfer is greater among higher proficiency learners than among lower proficiency learners, because higher proficiency learners can express "their own social identity" with fluency. What I would like to emphasize here is, we should be aware of the fact that people are not passive but active in creating both their own language and an accompanying identity continuously, and that the language use is influenced by not only cognitive factors such as language proficiency, but also affective ones like social identity. On these grounds, it is wise not to have a misleading premise that a cultural difference is always problematic, and to consider this pragmatic transfer hypothesis from affective viewpoints as well as cognitive viewpoints, considering the closer relationship between pragmatic language use and social identity.

CONCLUSION

！！！This intercultural pragmatics study has presented us the different perspectives and information from those given by the cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics. A critical problem in the cross-cultural approach as in CCP/ILP is that those studies has just compared one culture with another independently, describing differences between cultural groups, and then tried to evaluate the problematicity of cultural difference with the basis of researchers' 'stereotypical' intuitions and 'selective' anecdotes. This study in ICP—based on the cultural difference in CCP/ILP—has tried to explain the phenomenon of intercultural communication,

leaving the decisions to both cultural groups in a democratic way.

Although there are several research limitations such as the insufficient number of research participants for statistical purposes and inherent problems in the method of questionnaire (Seliger & Shohamy 1991), this intercultural pragmatics study casts a doubt on the previous research practices in the following two respects. Firstly, the cross-cultural differences between Japanese and Americans in refusal—although they are assumed to be a problem in the literature (Beebe et al., 1990; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987)—is not always problematic for both cultural groups. Secondly, in the problematicity-revealed cases, the causes of the problems are not always the characteristics that the previous research pointed out, but likely depend on individual differences. The two points can be summarised into the following sentence: the CCP/ILP studies have ignored the dynamic/flexible aspects in the pragmatic communication, paying little attention to their negotiation of meaning between both cultural groups and individual differences in one cultural group. The future research in ICP should consider this as a thoughtful remainder.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Differences in other English varieties

To put it simply, high acceptability in one norm cannot guarantee high acceptability in other norms (McKay, 2002). Considering the current wide-spread English and indigenous varieties of Englishes like Indian English (Kachru, 1986, 1992), McKay (2002: p. 63) not only admitted that it is clearly worth exploring intelligibility, comprehensibility, interpretability and acceptability between English users, but also suggested: "Whereas an item could be judged acceptable in one context…, it might be unintelligible to many speakers of English and inappropriate in other contexts as well as incorrect in reference to a standard variety of English." Thus, the future research should shed light on whether the American judgements in acceptability for Japanese refusals can be similar to other English users including both NSs of English such as British and NNSs such as Indian, Singaporean and so forth.

Mode differences

The most important limitation is that the questionnaire format in the ICP study was *written* rather than *oral*. This written format is indeed problematic since pragmatics

acceptability/resistivity is undoubtedly related with prosody—suprasegmental system such as stress, pitch rhythm and intonation (Knowles, 1997; Tateyama, 2001). For example, Knowles (1997) noted, "prosody… is one of several factors that together indicate illocutionary force, and has the special role of hinting at how directly the message should be interpreted." Moreover, Tateyama (2001), with pragmatic assessment in mind, stated: "it is necessary to have raters listen to the actual performance rather than have them simply look at the transcripts when rating in order to take paralinguistic cues into consideration" (p. 215). What has to be noticed is that in this study, there was much ambiguity about how the research participants realised a given Japanese and American speech act in their mind. These two points, namely differences in English varieties and differences in mode, should be considered in the future research.

Nonetheless, this study found that it is theoretically possible to solve all the cross-cultural problems based on the Japanese-American difference in refusals. More specifically, when Japanese learners and American English native speakers communicate each other in English as a mediate language, both cultural groups, at least in the case of refusals, have succeeded in creating a "third space" different from the home spaces of participants across the national and political boundaries. I hope that researchers should pursue not only in the cross-cultural approach where a difference is identified and sometimes overemphasised, but also in the intercultural approach, which examines whether a given difference will be acceptable for both cultural groups.

Acknowledgement

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