

## 論文

# Directness of Japanese Speakers of English in Request Forms

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### Abstract

Researchers Fukushima and Iwata (1985), Rose (1996), Beebe (1989a), and Ellis (1991) have reported that the Japanese are more direct than Americans when using English in certain situations. Was this due to lower level L2 proficiency? To examine differences of levels of directness when making requests by JE speakers, a study was made to explore the level of directness of advanced level JE speakers (TOEFL scores above 600) in comparison with AE speakers in producing low-, medium-, and high-imposition requests. Responses were gauged with Takahashi's "Components of the Conventional Indirectness Level of the Taxonomy" (1993) and the nine levels of directness in the Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989). Results showed that there are general tendencies in directness of requests between NS and NNS, but there was no cultural dichotomy. It is difficult to specify differences in the level of directness used by both groups apart from how interactants determine the level of directness appropriate to the situation — in addition to other variables, such as age, gender, and perhaps even social class. EFL teachers may recognize that students may be more attuned to pragmatic features of English than they were 20–30 years ago.

## 1. Introduction

Japanese people are generally perceived as being shy, quiet, nonverbal, and indirect, while Americans are categorized as vocal, direct, and clear (Miller 1994). Fukushima (2001) points out that Japanese society tends to suppress individuals who stand out and that on the surface, teamwork and harmony are valued. Japanese who are articulate are viewed as lacking in substance, and the Western ideal of a publicly articulate and expressive speaker is likely to be viewed as overbearing (Loveday 1982, p.3). This pattern of Japanese not being as verbal as other cultural groups might be viewed as negative, but it does help to highlight the differences. These cultural differences have been analyzed by Hall (1976). According to Hall (1976), Japan is a nation that has more high context (HC) communication than the United States. The United States is placed more towards the other end of the continuum and is a nation of low context (LC) communication. A HC message is one where most information is internalized in the physical context and little is coded or explicit in the message. A LC message is one where most of the information is embedded within the code or the language itself (p.91). Barnlund (1989) also supports the notion of the Japanese preference towards indirect speech.

It is generally acknowledged that Japanese society is largely homogeneous and that of the United States heterogeneous. Such stereotypes have their limitations; nevertheless, there is much empirical evidence to suggest the demands of America's multiethnic society — the desire to avoid misunderstandings — have made Americans more explicit than their Japanese counterparts. In the “melting pot” image of the United States, it is probably understood that with the mixture of cultures comes differences in communication patterns. Condon (1984)

suggests that for an American, putting thoughts into words is the usual way to let people understand what is on one's mind. He says that the Japanese, on the contrary, assume that there are other ways to sense the problem and that they rank low in their trust of words. Japanese husbands are known to speak to their spouses with single words, *furo*, *cha*, and *meshi* (*bath*, *tea*, *food*). A similar use of single words is often encountered on trains when teenagers are overheard talking to their friends on their cell-phones. Several researchers, Fukushima and Iwata (1985), Rose (1996), Beebe (1989a), and Ellis (1991), have reported that in certain situations the Japanese are more direct when using English than Americans. If the Japanese are usually indirect and generally prefer to avoid impoliteness by putting the other in a "face losing" situation, why are they reportedly perceived as direct when speaking in English?

A dichotomy that interprets Americans as direct and Japanese as indirect minimizes directness into a single cultural context and oversimplifies cultural differences. Of course, this claim may spread to other Eastern cultures, and these claims are little more than stereotypes. Stereotypes can represent, however, some characteristics of reality, and more detailed study is needed to discover the complexity of issues, including communication methods and language use. Nonetheless, the Japanese tendency towards being indirect or using no speech at all is repeated often in discussions of Japanese and American English.

To explore the issue of the differences between the native speaker of English and the Japanese English speaker, certain communicative functions could be examined. A polite request made by an American speaker of English (AE) may or may not be misinterpreted due to a

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Japanese English speaker's (JE) lack of language proficiency or cultural misunderstandings; but a request made by a JE speaker may be misinterpreted by an AE listener due to the speaker's misinterpretation of the situation (sociopragmatic failure), a transfer of Japanese language norms (linguistic failure), or a combination of both.

From my personal experience, having lived in Japan for over twenty years, I have observed that Japanese people seem to infer meaning from the context of situations and tend to be ambiguous when speaking; this, of course, is not restricted to the Japanese. However, for the focus of this paper, I will refer exclusively to a Japanese – AE difference. Even though I am bicultural and bilingual (American father and Japanese mother) and should be able to understand both cultures, I have nonetheless found myself in uncomfortable situations where I could not perceive what the implied message was when being spoken to by a Japanese person. For example, a question *What do you think?* was posed to me by a Japanese friend, but I later found out that it was rhetorical and a direct answer was not required. This has occurred more than once. Similarly, my father would often ask my mother to “get to the point.” In addition, I find that when Japanese people make requests in Japanese or in English, as in my mother's case, they can be very wordy and often make long explanations before reaching the main point. I have noticed that this is not always due to a lack of language proficiency: it is often attributable to a desire to explain the situation clearly and in detail before imposing on the listener. Clancy (1990) notes that empathy is important in Japanese communication patterns; there is a reluctance to inconvenience other people. Many Japanese speakers provide more information before making a request so that listeners can better judge how they may respond, which can be seen as a face-saving

gesture intended for the listener.

I have observed that my EFL students who interact in English in the classroom with peers are able to make requests that are structurally simple and grammatically correct. What is perplexing at times is that these requests sound more “direct” than those made by native speakers of English (NS). The accounts cited above seem to indicate the image that the Japanese distrusts the verbal is a more stereotypical image and more nuanced phenomena than generally viewed, and one should, therefore, avoid oversimplification. Another observation I made while teaching was that students are often verbose and use long explanations before making a request. I wondered if this verbosity is due to cultural factors that place a value on going around an issue rather than going straight to the point, as suggested by Condon (1984) and Olshtain and Weinbach (1993), who contend that learners at an intermediate to advanced level use more words to negotiate the intentions of their speech acts in their new language. Accordingly, this paper examines the L2 level of directness in Japanese speakers of English.

## **2. Theoretical background**

The term “communicative competence” was introduced by Hymes (1972), who focused upon the importance of knowing how to communicate in actual performance and the necessity of including linguistic and social linguistic perspectives in speech. According to Canale and Swain (1980), communicative competence includes grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence, and also the appropriateness of an utterance in a particular situation. Communicative functions as the basic units of language, for communication was defined by Austin (1962) as “illocutionary acts”

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and by Searle (1992) as “speech acts.” According to Searle (1992), “Speaking a language is performing speech acts, acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions, making promises and so on” (p.16). Agar (1994) says, “communicative competence is the difference between the master of grammar and dictionary and the person who has built the frames necessary to communicate” (p.152). In addition to various functions of a language, a person’s communicative style and the way language is used reflect cultural beliefs.

Brown and Levinson (1987) utilized the concept of “face” that Goffman (1967) introduced in the theory of politeness. People interact with each other and try to maintain “face,” in an effort to avoid humiliating their interlocutors and cooperate in the maintenance of a good public image. Brown and Levinson divide face into two types. The first is negative face: the want of every competent adult member that his actions be unimpeded by others. The second is positive face: the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others (p.62).

When a speaker makes a request, the listener’s “face” is threatened when the speaker forces the listener to accept an unpleasant responsibility. The speaker’s “face” is also threatened when a request is rejected. This loss of “face” is a “face threatening act” (FTA) (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p.65). The “social distance,” and relative “power” of the speaker and listener and the ranking of impositions in the particular culture indicate the weightiness of a FTA. Face saving towards the addressee is considered when making requests.

Fukushima and Iwata (1985) observed the way advanced Japanese English language learners made requests in order to investigate the use of politeness in English and to point out difficulties advanced Japanese

EFL speakers have in producing polite expressions in the language. Ten Japanese females were asked to invite a friend and a teacher to a hypothetical dinner party. The subjects were instructed to request that the invitees come on time and be dressed properly. The ten students were advanced level English speakers who attended an English-language school in Tokyo. There was a control group that consisted of six female native English speakers. Results showed that Japanese EFL speakers were more direct than NS when making invitations to teachers.

Beebe and Takahashi (1989a) found that advanced Japanese ESL (English as a second language) learners were “sometimes” more direct than American English speakers (AE). AE speakers often volunteered to talk further and used more softeners, positive remarks, and fewer explicit criticisms. In situations where a higher-status person was addressing a lower-status person and in situations where a lower-status person was talking to a higher-status person, Japanese ESL students were more direct than AE speakers.

Takahashi (1993) studied the extent to which Japanese indirectness strategies when making requests affected transfer to situations when making indirect requests in English. The effects of language proficiency on transferability of indirect requests were examined and results showed that contextual factors were influential in determining transferability at the pragmatic level. An indirectness taxonomy developed by Takahashi (cited in Takahashi, 1993) was used for analysis of the output of speakers of English at varying proficiency levels, and it was found that Japanese English-as-second-language learners (ESL) tended to favor a more explicit strategy than American English speakers when performing indirect requests in English.

Concerning stereotypes regarding the directness of Americans and

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Japanese, Rose (1996) finds that while previous studies by Lakoff (1985), Condon (1984), and Lebra (1987) show evidence that the Japanese are often more indirect than Americans, recent studies show that Americans can be quite indirect, just as Japanese can be direct. Rose points out that there are contexts in which Japanese prefer directness. He observes that directness is a frequent request strategy in Japanese for requests involving a low degree of imposition, not made to higher status speakers (p.77). He concludes that Americans and Japanese exhibit different patterns in the level of directness in interaction. More specifically, English can be vague and indirect when referring to social relations linguistically, while Japanese can be explicit and direct.

Kitao (1993) also reports that Japanese can be direct when using English. Kitao noted that the reasons for the directness might be due to common student problems such as a lack of linguistic control, stereotypes about English speakers' directness in speech, or a transfer of sociocultural patterns from Japanese to English. Kitao says that in addition to the development of grammatical competence, there is a necessity for students to develop sociolinguistic competence and to learn what expressions are appropriate in different situations.

Matsuura (1998) examined Japanese and American perceptual differences of politeness in English requests. In a situation where a close friend was the listener, JE speakers tended to use casual expressions, while AE speakers indicated they would use more polite requests (p.46). The findings showed that the Japanese and Americans indicated similar degrees of politeness for ten sentences out of eleven; however, the "May I" form was underused by Japanese students.

In the studies by Fukushima and Iwata (1985) and Beebe and



Takahashi (1989a), results showed that Japanese English speakers were more direct than AE speakers when making requests. Even though they were advanced level speakers of English, did JE speakers know how “direct” the language they produced was? The studies by Kitao (1993) and Matsuura (1998) have shown that there are several variables that may affect Japanese directness when using English, such as cultural stereotypes about the directness of Americans, lack of knowledge of American culture, poor control of language, or socio-linguistic transfer. Many Japanese students are taught in classroom textbooks to be direct when speaking in English (Kitao, 1993); therefore, “transfer of training” may occur (Selinker, 1972). Tanaka (1988) states that due to lack of linguistic control JE speakers become more direct even though they are aware of polite expressions. Apparently, many Japanese believe that English speakers are direct, and the language is egalitarian when compared with Japanese. According to Ellis (1991), the issue of politeness is not dealt with in Japanese junior and senior high-school textbooks.

### **3. Methodology**

In this study I would like to examine whether the JE speakers are direct when making requests in English and whether the level of directness or indirectness is what the speakers intended.

To examine perceptual differences of levels of directness and politeness when making requests by JE speakers, I conducted a pilot study with my EFL college students. I asked five English NS (as a control group) and ten Japanese college students to write down request forms in discourse completion questionnaires. Findings from this preliminary study showed that the NNS were more direct than NS.

NNS tended to use the imperative form with the word “please,” a form that could be interpreted as being an order, and, therefore, in certain situations too direct.

The observations noted have raise questions about the true intentions of JE speakers when making requests; do they indeed say what they intend to say? This paper aims to analyze and examine the directness of JE speakers when making requests and their intentions with respect to the level of directness when making requests in L2. Are Japanese NNS producing the level of directness that they perceive to be appropriate for different situations? The research questions that will be explored are:

- 1) What is the level of directness according to Takahashi’s (1993, p.58) taxonomy and the CCSARP scale (Blum-Kulka, House, Kasper, 1989, p.18) of advanced level JE speakers (Japanese speakers of English) in comparison with American English (AE) speakers when making verbal requests in English?
  
- 2) Are JE speakers with high L2 proficiency able to produce the level of directness they perceive to be appropriate when making requests in English?

### **3.1 Subjects**

To answer the question of whether JE speakers are more direct than American English speakers when making requests, I asked ten Japanese informants, two male and eight female students with TOEFL scores above 600 to fill out a discourse completion task (DCT) questionnaire. For the control group, I also asked five American English speakers, four male and one female to complete the same survey. All

participants reside in Japan and are employed as EFL teachers.

### **3.2 Data collection method and materials**

The method used to collect data was an oral role-play. The subjects responded verbally to ten questions that I read to them. The DCT questionnaire was modeled after Fukushima and Iwata's test (1987, p.46) on how to make requests. DCTs are usually written questionnaires where subjects read descriptions of different situations and then respond with answers they deem appropriate for the given context. I modified the DCT by having participants respond orally instead of requiring them to write their requests. This was done to retain the spontaneity of oral interaction and to avoid eliciting the edited utterances that sometimes characterize written responses (see Appendix A).

The ten questions in the DCT included situations where informants had to make requests to people of three levels of social status: higher, equal, and lower. Subjects were to make a high-imposition request such as borrowing money and a low-imposition request such as borrowing a book. Subjects' responses for the ten hypothetical role-play situations were tape-recorded. The following are examples from the discourse completion task. In the first example, the speaker makes a request of low imposition to a person of higher status.

Situation 1: You are interested in a book that your professor has.  
You want him/her to lend it to you.

Response: You say... .

In the second example, the speaker makes a request of high imposition to a person of lower status.

Situation 7: You are a professor at a college and have invited your students out for lunch. You realize that you left your wallet

in your office. You need to ask one of your students to lend you money.

Response: You say...

The ten situations were randomized, mixing the status level of the speakers and listeners and high and low imposition requests to avoid giving subjects a pattern with respect to the responses. Before the DCT was given, subjects were told that they were to make their requests to English NS.

### **3.3 Procedure**

Subjects were given the DCT questionnaires individually, and upon completion of the discourse completion task questionnaires, they listened to their taped responses. Japanese participants were interviewed in Japanese and American participants in English in a follow-up interview session that sought to examine the thoughts and the comprehension processes of the informants. The participants verified what they had said and why they considered that the level of directness or indirectness used was appropriate in each situation. Through the interview I hoped to determine whether Japanese NNS chose the level of directness intentionally or inadvertently. After listening to their tape-recorded responses, all subjects spoke about their reflections, talking about why they had made their requests in the way they did and whether they were able to say what they had intended. These interviews were also tape-recorded and all taped data were transcribed and categorized.

## **4. Analysis**

Qualitative and quantitative analyses were applied to explore the first research question which examines the level of directness of advanced level JE speakers in comparison with AE speakers with

respect to verbal requests.

To define levels of “directness,” Takahashi’s Components of the Conventional Indirectness Level of the Taxonomy (1993) and the CCSARP (Blum-Kulka, House, Kasper, 1989) coding scheme were used. Both categorizations consist of nine levels of directness. Takahashi’s nine linguistic levels range from the “want” statement as most direct to the “mitigated expectation” statement as least direct:

1. Want statement: *I would like you to open the window.*
2. Expectation statement: *Would you open the window?*
3. Willingness question: *Would you open the window? Would you be willing to open the window?*
4. Ability question: *Can you/could you open the window?*
5. Reason question: *Why don't you open the window?*
6. Permission question: *Can I ask you to open the window?*
7. Mitigated ability question: *Do you think that you can open the window?*
8. Mitigated ability statement: *I wonder if you could open the window.*
9. Mitigated expectation statement: *I would appreciate it if you could open the window.*

The CCSARP taxonomy (Blum-Kulka, House, Kasper, p.18) has nine levels of directness. However, it includes direct imperatives as most direct and mild hints as least direct. In this scale, in levels 1, 2, and 3, the illocutionary force is derivable through linguistic indicators, and in levels 4 ~ 5 understanding relies on the semantic content of the utterance. In levels 6 and 7, the meaning is derived from conventional usage, and in levels 8 and 9 the meaning relies mainly on context.

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This coding scheme incorporates both linguistic indicators and propositional content. Levels 1 to 5 are direct strategies; levels 6 and 7 are conventionally indirect strategies; and levels 8 and 9 are nonconventionally indirect strategies. The nine levels in the coding scale are:

1. Mood derivable: *Leave me alone.*
2. Explicit performative: *I am asking you to clean up the mess.*
3. Hedged performative: *I would like to ask you to clean the room.*
4. Locution derivable, obligation statement: *You'll have to clean the room.*
5. Want statement: *I'd like to borrow your notes.*
6. Suggestory formula: *How about lending me the book?*
7. Query preparatory: *Could you lend me a pen? Would you mind changing seats?*
8. Strong hint: *You are making too much noise.*
9. Mild hint (Intent: wanting to end the meeting): *It is already 8:00.*

For analysis of the data in this research project, it is necessary to define what a “native speaker” of English is. Though universal agreement with respect to what constitutes a native speaker is lacking, I will use the criterion of mother tongue to categorize NS as such. To deal with the first research question (how direct are advanced JE speakers when making requests in English), Tables 1 to 13 show tabulated results from the ten situations, as well as levels of indirectness for listeners of lower, equal, and higher status, and for low-, medium-, and high-imposition requests. All fifteen participants’ responses when making requests were gauged for the level of directness, and all

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responses were totaled and then divided to find the average level of directness by JE and AE speakers for each situation.

The social distance between speaker and listener in each situation is illustrated in Table 1 as follows:

S>L indicates that the speaker is in a higher position than the listener.

S=L indicates that the social distance is equal, as it might be between friends or relatives.

S<L indicates that the listener has power over the speaker.

S/L indicates that the speaker and listener are strangers.

#### 4.1. Findings gauged on Takahashi's taxonomy

##### Takahashi's taxonomy

*TABLE 1: Level of Directness in Requests by Native Speakers (NS) and Non-Native Speakers (NNS)*

##### *Low Imposition Request: Book*

##### **Situation 1: S<H: Student to Professor**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	3	4	4	8	8						27	5.4
NNS Level:	2	2	4	6	6	7	7	8	8	8	58	5.8

##### **Situation 6: S=H: Friends**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	3	4	6	6	6						25	5
NNS Level:	1	3	3	4	6	6	6	6	6	7	48	4.8

##### **Situation 4: S>H: President to Employee**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	1	6	6	6	9						28	5.6
NNS Level:	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	7	61	6.1

Note. Directness levels range from Level 1 as being the most direct to Level 9 as being the least direct.  
Higher score indicates less directness.

Table 1 shows results from the three situations in the DCT questions 1, 6, and 4 (see Appendix A-1) where subjects were asked to make a request to borrow a book. For low-imposition requests, the level of directness between NS and NNS is close in situations where S and H are of different status. A higher figure denotes less directness, and thus, we can see that NNS were less direct than NS when making low-imposition requests to those of both lower and higher status. However,



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NNS were more direct than NS when making requests to people of equal status.

NNS had a higher variability than NS ranging from level 1 to 7 when addressing friends and from level 2 to 8 when addressing a professor. But the variability was less when NNS spoke to one of lower status. NNS responses varied from six requests in level 6, the suggestory formula, to only one request in level 7, the query preparatory. NS responses had a larger variability from level 1 to 9 when making low-imposition requests to listeners of lower status.

*TABLE 2: Level of Directness in Requests by Native Speakers (NS) and Non-Native Speakers (NNS)*

**Medium Imposition Request: Observe/Audit Class**

**Situation 8: S<H: Student to Professor**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	3	6	6	7	8						30	6
NNS Level:	6	6	6	6	6	6	7	7	7	8	65	6.5

**Situation 5: S=H: Teacher to Colleague**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	3	3	6	8	8						28	5.6
NNS Level:	1	6	6	6	6	6	6	7	7	7	58	5.8

**Situation 10: S>H: Teacher to New Teacher**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	1	3	6	7	8						25	5
NNS Level:	3	4	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	8	57	5.7

Table 2 shows that NS were generally more direct than NNS when making medium-imposition requests to listeners of lower, equal, and higher status. Regarding the variability in indirectness levels, in situation

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8 where requests were made to a listener of higher status, NSs ranged between 3 to 8 and NNS ranged only between 6 to 8. Perhaps for American students there is less of a social distance in the student-professor relationship than there is for Japanese students.

In situation five, where participants made a medium imposition request, asking a colleague to observe a class, the variability level ranged between 1 and 7 for NNS and 3 and 8 for NS. In situation ten, where participants made requests to a listener of lower status, NSs indirectness levels ranged between 1 and 8.

In all three situations where subjects had to make medium-imposition requests to interlocutors of different status, NNS used level 6 "permission" questions very frequently. Similarly (as shown in Table 1), NNS used level 6 90% of the time when making a low-imposition request to a person of lower status. NNS might have felt that asking for permission was a "safe" strategy at first, especially when making a request of medium imposition without regard to status differences or when addressing listeners of lower status for low-imposition requests.

*TABLE 3: Level of Directness in Requests by Native Speakers (NS) and Non-Native Speakers (NNS)*

**High Imposition Request: Money**

**Situation 3: S<H**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	3	4	4	6	8						25	5
NNS Level:	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	6	7	7	46	4.6

**Situation 9: S=H**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	1	1	2	6	7						17	3.4
NNS Level:	4	4	4	4	4	6	6	6	7	7	52	5.2

**Situation 7: S>H**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	1	4	4	7	7						23	4.6
NNS Level:	3	3	4	4	4	4	6	7	7	*10	52	5.2

Note: \*10 indicates subject did not want to make the request. Level 10 was added to the taxonomy to indicate the most indirect level.

Table 3 shows that when subjects made a high-imposition request such as borrowing money, NNS were less direct than NS when speaking to a listener of equal or lower status. When making a high-imposition request, NNS were slightly more direct with an average of 4.6, as opposed to NS with an average of 5.

Regarding the variability in the levels of directness used, NS output ranged from level 3 to 8 when making requests to a listener of higher status, which was on the whole less direct than level 1 to 7 when speaking to a person of equal or lower status. NNS output varied from level 3 to 7 when making requests for money to listeners of higher

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status, 4 to 7 to listeners of equal status, and 3 to 10\* for listeners of lower status (see Table 3). In situation 7, where the subject was a professor who had to borrow money from a student, one NNS subject commented that one could never ask a student for money.

*TABLE 4: Level of Directness in Requests by Native Speakers (NS) and Non-Native Speakers (NNS)*

***A request to a stranger in theater: Silence***

**Situation 2: S/H**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	1	3	4	4	4						16	3.2
NNS Level:	1	2	3	4	4	4	4	7	*10	*10	49	4.9

Note: \*10 indicates subject did not want to make the request. Level 10 was added to the taxonomy to indicate the most indirect level.

Table 4 charts the results from situation 2, where speakers were asked to make a request to a stranger to be silent in a movie theater. When gauging the variability in the level of directness used for verbal requests, NS ranged between levels 1 and 4 and NNS ranged from levels 1 to 10. Often the NNS used often the ability question which the NS also employed; however, NNS also used the mitigated ability statement, and two opted to say nothing. This request could also be interpreted as a complaint, as participants may have opted to remain silent.

In sum, when analyzing transcribed data using Takahashi's taxonomy for requests of different levels of impositions, the findings are:

- 1) When making a low-imposition request to interlocutors of higher and lower status, NNS were more indirect than NS, and

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NNS were more direct than NS when addressing people of equal status.

- 2) When making a medium-imposition request, NNS were less direct than NS when addressing listeners of lower, equal, and higher status.
- 3) When making a high-imposition request, NNS were less direct than NS when speaking to people of equal and lower status, but more direct when addressing persons of higher status.

To answer the research question “How direct are advanced level JE speakers when making verbal requests?” I averaged from Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 all the total scores for NS and NNS indirectness levels for different degrees of imposition and social status. These show that NNS were less direct than NS with listeners of different status for low-, medium-, and high-imposition requests. (See Tables 5 and 6.)

*Table 5: Average Level of Indirectness According to Speaker and Interlocutor Status*

<b>S&lt;H</b>				
	<b>Book</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Money</b>	<b>Total</b>
NS	5.4	6	5	16.4
NNS	5.8	6.5	4.6	16.9
<b>S=H</b>				
NS	5	5.6	3.4	14
NNS	4.8	5.8	5.2	15.8
<b>S&gt;H</b>				
NS	5.6	5	4.6	15.2
NNS	6.1	5.7	5.2	17
<b>S/H (strangers)</b>	<b>Request silence</b>			
NS	3.2			3.2
NNS	4.9			4.9
				<u>Total for NS:</u>
				48.8
				<u>Total for NNS:</u>
				54.6

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Table 6: Level of Indirectness According to Degree of Imposition

Low Imposition (Book)	NS	NNS
S<H	5.4	5.8
S=H	5	4.8
S>H	5.6	6.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16.7</b>
Medium Imposition (Observe/Audit Class)		
S<H	6	6.5
S=H	5.4	5.8
S>H	5	5.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>16.4</b>	<b>18</b>
High Imposition (Money)		
S<H	5	4.6
S=H	3.4	5.2
S>H	4.6	5.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Total for Low-, Medium- &amp; High- Imposition Requests</b>	<b>45.4</b>	<b>49.7</b>

#### 4.2 Findings based on CCSARP coding scheme

In this section, I analyze the results of subject performances using the CCSARP coding scheme. I discuss these with a focus on the results obtained from Takahashi's taxonomy. I chart the results in Tables 7 to 12.

*Table 7: Level of Directness in Requests by Native Speakers (NS) and Non-Native Speakers (NNS)*

**Low-Imposition Request: Book**

**Situation 1: S<H: Student to Professor**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	7	7	7	7	7						35	7
NNS Level:	5	5	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	66	6.6

**Situation 6: S=H: Friends**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	7	7	7	7	7						35	7
NNS Level:	5	5	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	66	6.6

**Situation 4: S>H: President to Employee**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	5	6	7	7	7						32	6.4
NNS Level:	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	70	7

Table 7 shows that NNSs are more direct than NSs when making a low-imposition request to an interlocutor of equal or higher status (situations 6 and 1) but more indirect when making a request to a listener of lower status (situation 4). Similar results were found with data from Takahashi's scale, where NS were more indirect when addressing a person of equal status. Also in common was the finding



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that NNS were more direct than NS when addressing a friend. In situation six, where the speaker and listener are of equal status, figures from both Takahashi and the CCSARP scales show that NS are less direct than NNS for low-imposition requests. When using the CCSARP coding scale to study data, NNS were found to be less direct than NS when making low-, medium- and high-level imposition requests to listeners of lower status, and when making a high-imposition request (borrowing money) from a person of equal or lower status.

The level favored by NS when borrowing a book from a professor or a friend was only level 7, a query preparatory. NNS had only levels 5 and 7. NNS were found to be less direct. In the situation where the president of a firm asks to borrow a book from an employee, NS were more direct than NNS, ranging in levels from 5 to 7, while NNS responses were restricted to level 7. It is interesting to note that both NS and NNS chose level 7 most frequently when making a low-imposition request.

*TABLE 8: Level of Directness in Requests by Native Speakers (NS) and Non-Native Speakers (NNS)*

**Medium-Imposition Request: Observe/Audit Class**

**Situation 8: S<H: Student to Professor**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	7	7	7	7	7						35	7
NNS Level:	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	70	7

**Situation 5: S=H: Teacher to Colleague**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	7	7	7	7	7						35	7
NNS Level:	5	5	5	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	64	6.4

**Situation 10: S>H: Teacher to New Teacher**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	3	3	7	7	7						27	5.4
NNS Level:	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	70	7

Table 8 shows that NS and NNS had generally the same level of directness when making medium-imposition requests to a person of higher status (a professor). NNS were more direct to a newer teacher of lower status than NS who used only level 7 requests. When making a directive to a colleague, NS were less direct (with level 7) than NNS who used level 5, “want statements,” and level 7. NNS were less direct than NS when making a medium-imposition directive to a person in a lower position. NS in this same situation, where a senior teacher asked a new teacher for permission to observe a class, used level 7, the query preparatory, and level 3, the hedged performative: *I’d like to sit in on your class, if it’s OK with you.* Here, NNS used only level 7 and asked questions like, *Is it OK if I observe your class?* or *Can I observe your teaching?* When comparing the level of directness between NS and NNS for data results from Takahashi’s taxonomy and CCSARP’s strategies, only in situation 5, where a teacher asks a fellow teacher for a medium-imposition request, are NNS less direct than NS.

TABLE 9: Level of Directness in Requests by Native Speakers (NS) and Non-Native Speakers (NNS)

**High-Imposition Request: Money**

**Situation 3: S<H**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	7	7	7	7	7						35	7
NNS Level:	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	70	7

**Situation 9: S=H**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	2	4	7	7	8						28	5.6
NNS Level:	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	70	7

**Situation 7: S>H**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	2	7	7	7	7						30	6
NNS Level:	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	*10	73	7.3

When comparing the level of directness between NS and NNS for a high imposition request, (i.e., borrowing money) Table 9 shows that the levels were slightly different depending on the listener's degree of power. NNS were more indirect than NS when addressing a person of equal or lower status but similar to NS with a level of 7 when speaking to a person of higher status. NS had a larger variability, using level 2, where the illocutionary force is explicit, level 4, where the obligation is expected, level 7, referring to willingness or ability, and level 8, a strong hint. All NNS used level 7 with the exception of one participant who preferred not to borrow money from a student under any circumstances.

In situation 9, where the speaker tries to borrow money from a

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friend, NS with an average of 5.6 were more direct than NNS with an average of 7. There were similar results with data according to Takahashi's scale. NS were more direct with a level of 3.4 than NNS with a level of 5.2. NS were found to be more direct to their friends than NNS were in a high-imposition request.

*TABLE 10: Level of Directness in Requests by Native Speakers (NS) and Non-Native Speakers (NNS)*

***A request to a stranger in a theater: Silence***

**Situation 2: S/H**

Subject:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Average
NS Level:	7	7	7	7	7						35	7
NNS Level:	1	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	10	10	69	6.9

Table 10 presents the higher level of directness used by NNS when making a request to a stranger in a theater to be silent. NNS usage ranged from an imperative, level 1 "Stop talking!" to level 10, remaining silent. In both Takahashi's and the CCSARP coding strategies, NNS were more direct than NS, but when making requests to strangers, with Takahashi's taxonomy, NNS were more direct than NS.

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Table 11: Average Level of Indirectness According to Speaker and Listener Status

<b>S&lt;H</b>				
	<b>Book</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Money</b>	<b>Total</b>
NS	7	7	7	21
NNS	6.6	7	7	20.6
<b>S=H</b>				
NS	7	7	5.6	19.6
NNS	6.6	6.4	7	20
<b>S&gt;H</b>				
NS	6.4	5.4	6	17.8
NNS	7	7	7.3	21.3
<b>S/H (strangers)</b>	<b>Request silence</b>			
NS	7.2			7.2
NNS	6.9			6.9
				<u>Total for NS:</u>
				65.6
				<u>Total for NNS:</u>
				68.8

Table 11 shows the difference in the level of directness used by NS and NNS in regard to the status of the addressee. NS are more indirect than NNS when making a request to someone of higher status but more direct to people of equal and lower status. A comparison of the total average scores of directness levels for NNS and NS reveals that NNS are less direct than NS when making requests to listeners of various status levels.

Table 12: Level of Indirectness According to Degree of Imposition

Low Imposition (Book)	NS	NNS
S<H	7	6.6
S=H	7	6.6
S>H	6.4	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>20.2</b>
Medium Imposition (Observe/Audit Class)		
S<H	7	7
S=H	7	6.4
S>H	5.4	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>19.4</b>	<b>20.4</b>
High Imposition (Money)		
S<H	7	7
S=H	5.6	7
S>H	6	7.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>18.6</b>	<b>21.3</b>
<b>Total for Low-, Medium- &amp; High- Imposition Requests</b>	<b>58.4</b>	<b>61.9</b>

Table 12 depicts results on the level of indirectness according to the degree of imposition. NNS were more direct than NS with respect to low-imposition requests, but NS were more direct for medium- and high-imposition requests. Takahashi's chart also produces similar results, with NNS being less direct than NS for medium-imposition requests.

To summarize, the differences in the level of directness used by NS and NNS to make requests based on the CCSARP request strategy coding scheme are as follows:

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- 1) NNS are more direct than NS when making a low imposition request to an addressee of equal or higher status, but otherwise more indirect than NS when speaking to a person of lower status.
- 2) NNS and NS generally have the same level of directness when making a medium-imposition request to a person of higher status. NNS were more direct than NS when speaking to a peer, and more indirect when addressing a person of lower status.
- 3) NNS were more indirect than NS when making high-imposition requests to someone of lower or equal status but had the same level of directness when addressing a person of higher status.

*Table 13: Average Level of Directness used by NS and NNS in Making Requests Based on Takahashi's Taxonomy and CCSARP Coding Scale on Levels of Indirectness*

<i>Situation</i>	H	M	L	S<H	S=H	S>H	S/H	TNS	TNNS	CNS	CNNS
<i>Book</i>			X	X				<5.4>	<5.8>	<7>	<6.6>
<i>Book</i>			X		X			(5)	(4.8)	(7)	(6.6)
<i>Book</i>			X			X		[5.6]	[6.1]	[6.4]	[7]
<i>Observing Class</i>		X		X				<6>	<6.5>	<7>	<7>
<i>Observing Class</i>		X			X			(5.6)	(5.8)	(7)	(6.4)
<i>Observing Class</i>		X				X		[5]	[5.7]	[5.4]	[7]
<i>Money</i>	X			X				<5>	<4.6>	<7>	<7>
<i>Money</i>	X				X			(3.4)	(5.2)	(5.6)	(7)
<i>Money</i>	X					X		[4.6]	[4.2]	[6]	[6.3]
<i>Silence</i>							X	3.2	2.9	7	6.9

H indicates High Imposition Request

M indicates Medium Imposition Request

L indicates Low Imposition Request

S<H indicates Speaker is of lower status to hearer

S=H indicates Speaker is of equal status to hearer

S>H indicates Speaker is of higher status to hearer

S/H indicates Speaker and Hearer are strangers

<> indicates S<H with different level imposition request

() indicates S=H with different level imposition request

[] indicates S>H with different level imposition request

TNS indicates average score for NSs based on Takahashi's Indirectness Level Taxonomy

TNNS indicates average score for NNS based on Takahashi's Indirectness Level Taxonomy

CNS indicates average score for NS based on the CCSARP coding scale

CNNS indicates average score for NNS based on the CCSARP coding scale

Finally, in Table 13, the average level of directness used by NS and NNS in making requests based on the two coding schemes of indirectness levels, Takahashi's Taxonomy and the CCSARP, are tabulated. Depending upon the situation, NNS were less direct than NS, first when making a low-imposition or medium-imposition request to a listener of equal and lower status, and second when making a high-imposition request to an addressee of equal status. Third, NNS were



equal or more indirect than NS when making a medium-imposition request to someone of lower status. Average scores from the DCT tests using both coding schemes show that JE speakers are more indirect than their AE counterparts when making verbal requests in English for low-, medium-, and high-imposition requests to addressees of lower, equal, and higher status. Results from the CCSARP coding scale show that NNS are not always more indirect than NS in each given situation. There is a difference in results when comparing the total average scores of Takahashi's coding scheme with the CCSARP coding strategies. We cannot conclude by saying that NNS are always less direct than NS.

#### **4.3. Retrospective interviews**

In this section I will attempt to answer the second research question: Are JE speakers with a high proficiency level of English able to produce the language that they intend to verbalize? More specifically, were JE speakers with high L2 proficiency able to produce the level of directness that they perceived to be appropriate when making requests in English? After completion of the DCT questionnaires, informants listened to and verified their taped oral responses in a follow-up interview, confirming what they said and why they thought the level of directness was appropriate in each situation. Appendix A-2 shows that the advanced level JE speakers could produce what they had intended. JE speakers and AE speakers produced 90% of the time the level of directness they had intended to express when making their requests. The main findings show that advanced level JE speakers can produce what they intend to say.

## 5. Conclusion and implications for study

When analyzing for levels of directness used by NS and NNS according to Takahashi's Taxonomy, average scores show that on the whole NNS were less direct than NS to addressees of different status and for low-, medium-, and high-imposition verbal requests. The same data analyzed with the CCSARP coding scheme showed that NNSs are more direct than their NS counterparts when making a request to someone of higher status but less direct to listeners of equal or lower status. For a low-imposition request, NNS were more direct than NS but for medium- and high-imposition requests, NNS were more indirect. The differences found in results between the CCSARP and Takahashi's coding schemes show that depending upon the definition of politeness, the level of directness used by speakers changes to a degree.

Looking at each of the ten situations, it is possible to find similar results by using both Takahashi's and CCSARP coding scales. These are:

- 1) NS are more indirect than NNS for low-imposition requests to listeners of equal status.
- 2) NNS are more indirect when making a low-imposition request to addressees of lower status.
- 3) NNS are more indirect than NS for a medium imposition request, when addressing someone of lower status.
- 4) NNS are more indirect than NS for a high imposition request, when addressing someone of equal status.
- 5) NNS are more indirect than NS when speaking to a stranger,

When comparing results from this research with those from previous studies, a number of differences were found. Fukushima and Iwata (1985) observed that advanced level NNS were more direct than

NS when addressing someone of higher status. This study, however, has found that NNS were not always more direct than NS. Rose (1996) observed that JEs could be just as direct or indirect to addressees as AEs, but for low-imposition requests, NNS were more direct than NS when addressing lower-status individuals. This study revealed the opposite. Beebe and Takahashi (1989a) found that NNS were more direct than NS when a higher-status person was speaking to a lower-status person. This study found that NNS were more indirect than NS when addressing a person of lower status for low- and medium-imposition requests. When the total scores of levels of directness were averaged for both NNS and NS, using both Takahashi's and the CCSARP coding schemes, NNS were more indirect than NS.

Though this study involved an exceedingly small number of subjects and is hardly representative of all AE and JE speakers, advanced level JE speakers are beginning to understand linguistic and pragmatic norms and can use the language accordingly. One can speculate that the differences between these findings and those of the previous studies might be attributable to the passing of time: in the intervening years JEs English proficiency could have improved. Given more opportunities to travel and participate in study-abroad programs, combined with the emphasis placed on communicative English, both inside and outside EFL classrooms, textbooks are beginning to introduce pragmatics (Yoshida, 2000), it is not unreasonable to assume that Japanese students are more attuned to pragmatic features than they used to be 20-30 years ago. This might explain some of the similarities between NS and NNS.

One issue that should be taken into consideration when dealing with cross-cultural comparisons of pragmatic requests is the fact that a low-imposition request to one person may be a weighty one to another. In

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effect, the degree of imposition for any request is always, at least to some degree, negotiated in interaction. While this study shows that there are general tendencies in politeness requests between Japanese NNS of English and American NS, ultimately, there is no cultural dichotomy. It is difficult to specify precise differences in the level of directness used by NS and NNS apart from how interactants determine the specific level of directness appropriate to the situation, in addition to other variables of interactions, such as age, gender, and perhaps even class.

What is of particular importance, especially for teachers, is recognition of the necessity of teaching pragmatics in conjunction with grammar. Native speakers will forgive an error in grammar or pronunciation, but they are unlikely to be so understanding for a pragmatic transgression (Wolfson, 1989). Grammar is the letter of the law, but pragmatics is its spirit. Students should be given the information needed to assess a situation correctly and be equipped with the linguistic tools - grammatical structures and lexical items- to respond appropriately. The teaching of pragmatics is often eclipsed by that of grammar. This should not be the case.

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Appendix: Discourse Completion Questionnaire

Name:

Age:

Gender:

1. You are interested in a book that the professor has. You want him/her to lend it to you. You say--?
2. You are at a movie theater and someone sitting next to you keeps talking to his/her friend. You cannot hear the movie.  
You say--?
3. You have asked your father-in-law to join you for lunch. When it is time to pay the bill, you realize that you do not have your wallet or credit cards. Ask for money.
4. You are a president of a company and see that your employee is reading a book that you want to read. You want him/her to lend it to you. You say--?
5. You want to observe your colleague's class while he/she is teaching.  
You say--
6. Your friend has finished reading a book that you would like to read. You want to read it so you ask him/her to lend it to you. What do you say?
7. You are a professor at college and have invited your students out for lunch. You realize that you left your wallet in your office. You need to ask one of your students to lend you money. You say--
8. You want to observe or audit a course. Ask the professor if you can observe the class.
9. You are at a restaurant with your friends having dinner. You suddenly realize that you have left your wallet at home. You want your friend to lend you some money. What do you say?
10. You are a teacher who must observe a new teacher's class. Ask the new teacher to let you come in while she is teaching.



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Appendix: Tabulated results from retrospective interviews

BORROW BOOK													Low Imposition Request		
Japanese English Speakers											Perception = Production				
Informant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	YES	NO	Total %		
S < H	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	7	3	70%		
S = H	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	10	0	100%		
S > H	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	9	1	90%		
American English Speakers											Perception = Production				
Informant	1	2	3	4	5						YES	NO	Total %		
S < H	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES						5	0	100%		
S = H	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES						5	0	100%		
S > H	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES						5	0	100%		

BORROW MONEY													High Imposition Request		
Japanese English Speakers											Perception = Production				
Informant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	YES	NO	Total %		
S < H	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	10	0	100%		
S = H	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	10	0	100%		
S > H	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	8	20	80%		
American English Speakers											Perception = Production				
Informant	1	2	3	4	5						YES	NO	Total %		
S < H	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES						5	0	100%		
S = H	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES						5	0	100%		
S > H	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES						4	1	80%		

AUDIT / OBSERVE CLASS													
Japanese English Speakers											Perception = Production		
Informant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	YES	NO	Total %
S < H	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	9	1	90%
S = H	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	10	0	100%
S > H	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	9	1	90%
American English Speakers											Perception = Production		
Informant	1	2	3	4	5					YES	NO	Total %	
S < H	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES					5	0	100%	
S = H	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES					5	0	100%	
S > H	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES					5	0	100%	

\*It is difficult to state whether a request to observe or audit a class is a high or low imposition. The degree of imposition depends on the addressee.

REQUEST SILENCE - MOVIE THEATER													
Japanese English Speakers											Perception = Production		
Informant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	YES	NO	Total %
S / H	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	10	0	100%
American English Speakers											Perception = Production		
Informant	1	2	3	4	5					YES	NO	Total %	
S / H	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO					4	1	80%	

KEY	
S	indicates speaker, the one who makes a request
H	indicates hearer, the recipient
S<H	indicates that the hearer has power over the speaker (e.g. son vis-à-vis father-in-law)
S=H	indicates that the social distance is small (e.g. classmates)
S>H	indicates that the speaker has power over the hearer (e.g. boss vis-à-vis employee)
S/H	indicates that speaker and hearer are strangers
NO	indicates perception is not same as language produced
YES	indicates perception is not same as language produced