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Leyre Ruiz de Zarobe &  
Yolanda Ruiz de Zarobe (eds)

# Speech Acts and Politeness across Languages and Cultures

Peter Lang

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**Speech Acts  
and Politeness  
across Languages  
and Cultures**



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# The Effect of Two Years Abroad on the Development of Apologies in the Japanese L2 of Adult English Native Speakers

## 1. Introduction

Research on cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics has witnessed explosive growth in recent years (e.g. Barron 2003, Barron/Warga 2007, Kinginger 2008, 2009, Kraft/Geluykens 2007). Longitudinal and cross-sectional research has been carried out into various language combinations, such as Irish English NSs learning German (Barron 2003), and Austrian German NSs learning French (Warga/Schölmlberger 2007). There have also been several studies into Japanese NSs learning English (e.g. Kondo 1997, Matsumura 2007, Park/Nakano 1999), and English L1 learning Japanese (Iwasaki 2010, Marriott 1995), and on various speech acts; for example, requests (e.g. Barron 2003, Félix-Brasdefer 2004) and apologies (Kondo 1997, Warga/Schölmlberger 2007). One general finding of these studies is the non-linear nature of pragmatic development, which has been explained in terms of pragmatic transfer from the L1, typical learner behaviour such as over-generalisation, the influence of the ‘complexification hypothesis’ and the presence or absence of noticing opportunities and negative feedback.

Relatively little work has been done on the development of apologies of English L1 learners of Japanese (see however Tamanaha 2003). This is a particularly interesting area of research as Japanese politeness strategies are regulated by complex culture-specific norms (Pizziconi 2003, 2007a, 2007b).

The originality of the present study also lies in the selection of the second experimental group. While most studies focus on the ef-

fect of a single academic year abroad, the present study looks at a number of participants who have spent at least two years in the target language community. The analysis focuses on the use of illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs), explanations, verbal redress, intensifiers, offers of repair, and acceptance of responsibility by L2 learners/users who have lived in Japan and compares this with the strategy choices of learners who have not lived in Japan and with baseline data from English and Japanese NSs.

First, we will provide a brief review of several studies in this area, before moving on to describe the method used, participants, and results, finally linking the findings with results from other researchers, and discussing possible explanations for the findings.

## 2. Background

There have been several studies which focus on the effect of proficiency on pragmatic competence (cf. Rose 2000, Sabaté i Dalmau/Curell i Gotor 2007, Trosborg 1995). These researchers report that in many cases grammatical and pragmatic competence seem to develop relatively independently. Individual differences have been linked to learning context and time spent in the target language community. Bardovi-Harlig/Dörnyei (1998) looked at the pragmatic awareness of advanced Hungarian EFL learners of English and compared it with that of advanced ESL learners living in the USA. They found that the EFL students rated grammatical errors as worse than pragmatic ones, whereas the ESL students did the opposite, acting in the same way as the control group of English NSs. This leads to the idea that studying in the target language community gives rise to increased pragmatic awareness, and possibly improved pragmatic competence.

Other studies have followed students who studied abroad. Warga/Schölmberger (2007) investigated the effect of study abroad on the pragmatic development of the apologies of seven Austrian German L1 learners of French, who spent ten months in Quebec.



Data were also taken from native speakers of Quebecois French and Austrian German. The results were mixed: some aspects moved towards the L2 norm (for example, the number of justifications used decreased), some did not change (for example, overuse of IFID), and some moved away from the L2 norm (for example, use of upgraders). Interestingly, the excuse rather than the IFID was the most common strategy used by the learners, which is different both from the usual findings and from the NS norm in both languages.

Félix-Brasdefer (2004) studied the refusals of English L1 learners of Spanish from the USA who had spent various amounts of time, ranging from one to 30 months, in Latin America and compared the results with baseline data from English and Spanish NSs. He found pragmatic development occurred over the 30 months, with participants who had spent at least nine months in the target language community demonstrating more native-like refusals, using more lexical and syntactic mitigation and more negotiation, than those who had spent less than five months abroad.

Barron (2003) investigated a group of Irish (English L1) learners of German who spent an academic year in Germany as part of their degree program. She also found some aspects of the learners' language became more native-like but other aspects moved away from the L2 norm (e.g. use of 'kein problem' – a direct translation of 'no problem', a minimizer in English but not German). Evidence of negative transfer was also apparent even after time abroad. Learners' pragmalinguistic competence appeared to increase as they were able to make more complex requests and use a wider range of strategies, including internal modification, than prior to their time abroad. However, their sociopragmatic competence seemed to develop more slowly, as, although the students achieved some situational variation, it did not always correspond to the L2 norm.

Kondo (1997) studied Japanese learners of English who spent a year in the USA. She found that many of their apology strategies, such as the use of explanation, or the percentage of utterances containing an IFID, moved closer to the L2 norm and that the amount of negative transfer decreased during the learners' time abroad. However, the tendency to use repeated IFIDs, characteristic of Japanese rather than American apologies, did not change during the time. On

the other hand, there were also a few moves away from the L2 norm; for example, learners overused the ‘concern for hearer’ strategy.

While Marriott (1995) did not look at a particular speech act, she studied Australian high school students of Japanese who spent one year in Japan, and found that while most of them at the beginning of their stay used the neutrally polite form of the verb (e.g. 飲みます *nomimasu* ‘(I) drink’), during their time abroad they began to use the plain or familiar form (飲む *nomu* ‘(I) drink’). However, they over-generalised this form, which Japanese NSs use with friends and family, using it in formal situations, for example with the interviewer during data collection, and switching apparently randomly between the two forms. They also did not develop their use of address forms, continuing to refer to out-group third parties without the use of the polite *さん* ‘*san*’, something which is very negatively evaluated by native speakers. There were, however, some moves towards the L2 norm; for example, the students increased their use of politeness routines, and opening and closing formulae towards native-like competence.

Similarly, Iwasaki (2010) looked at the use of the plain and polite forms, rather than a particular speech act, by five American men (L1 English) who studied for a year in Japan. She found that before departure all participants used the polite style. After their return from Japan, two learners overused the plain form. The others shifted occasionally to the plain style to index utterances that were close to their ‘selves’ (2010: 68). All learners had picked up on some of the social meanings of the styles and nuances of style mixing used by the L1 Japanese speakers.

In summary, these studies point out some important effects towards and away from the L2 norm that can be triggered by time abroad, but also stress the non-linear nature of this kind of pragmatic development.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 *Participants*

Data were collected from a total of 46 participants: two control groups of monolinguals (English and Japanese NSs), and two groups of high-intermediate English NS learners/users of Japanese. The first experimental group of English NS students (which will be referred to as NNS1) consists of eleven participants (five women, six men, age 20-55, mean age 34) who had studied Japanese only in the UK and had spent no more time in Japan than a two-week holiday. The second experimental group (NNS2) consists of nine participants (six women, three men, age 28-43, mean age 32) who had spent at least eight months studying or working in Japan. In this group, four learners had spent more than two years living in Japan.

The learners were drawn from several different intermediate level classes (Japanese classes at Birkbeck, SOAS, and Alpha Japanese Language School, all in London). The groups are fairly small, but they are comparable with several other studies in the area, such as Félix-Brasdefer (2004), who had six participants in each group.

The first control group consisted of 14 British English NSs (hence NSE) (seven women, seven men, age 25-55, mean age 34). The second control group consisted of twelve Japanese NSs (hence NSJ) (eight women, four men, age 25-56, mean age 37).

#### 3.2 *The research instrument*

All the participants were asked to complete a Discourse Completion Task (DTC), which was written in both English and Japanese, to avoid any problem of comprehension for the learners. The eight apology situations used have already been validated by several studies e.g. Sabaté i Dalmau / Curell i Gotor (2007), Trosborg (1995). The situations included various social settings and different levels of social distance and social dominance. See appendix A for the full questionnaire.

DCTs have been shown to have both strengths and weaknesses. Geluykens (2007: 35) points out that “they cannot provide authentic speech but only written approximations”. The data elicited through DCTs is therefore not comparable to natural spoken language. The fact that there is no turn-taking and that the emotional investment is quite different when facing a sheet of paper compared to facing an actual person is undeniable. The redeeming feature of DCTs is that they “can provide insights into what subjects *think* they would do in a certain situation, in the process revealing tendencies or penchants for certain formulations and routine behaviours” (2007: 36).

One potential problem with DCTs is that they may elicit descriptions of facts, and are subject to being misunderstood by participants. In the present study, this was minimised by having instructions in both Japanese and English, however one participant’s DCT had to be disregarded as he had misunderstood the instructions. Also DCTs measure only knowledge rather than control or performance. Despite this, they are much used in acquisitional pragmatics, as they have several advantages (see e.g. Sabaté i Dalmau / Curell i Gotor 2007); for example, data can be quickly collected, and the context can be easily controlled and varied.

The situations used in the present study were as follows:

1. A university lecturer has not finished marking a student’s essay (unfinished marking).
2. A student has forgotten to bring a lecturer’s book that he/she borrowed (forgotten book).
3. The manager of a café is late to begin an interview with a candidate (late manager).
4. A waiter brings the wrong dish to a customer (wrong dish).
5. A student is late to meet a friend (late student).
6. A person bumps his/her car into another car in a car park (bumped car).
7. An office worker offends a colleague during a meeting (offended colleague).
8. A person’s bag falls onto another person on a bus (fallen bag).

### 3.3 Coding

The coding categories used were based on the CCSARP coding manual, Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), and Kondo (1997). Seven categories of apology strategies were created: 1) IFID; 2) Repeated IFIDs; 3) Explanation; 4) Acceptance of responsibility; 5) Offer of repair; 6) Verbal Redress; 7) Intensifier<sup>1</sup>.

An IFID is a typical expression used to apologise. In English, an example of an IFID would be ‘I’m sorry’ or ‘I apologise’, whereas in Japanese the most common IFIDs are ごめんなさい (*gomenasai*) ‘I’m sorry’ and すみません (*sumimasen*) ‘I’m sorry’, ‘excuse me’. Other IFIDs are ごめん (*gomen*) ‘sorry’, ごめんね (*gomenne*) ‘sorry’. The three following IFIDs mean ‘I’m sorry’, literally: ‘it’s inexcusable’, with increasingly polite verbs: もうしわけない (*moushiwakenai*), もうしわけありません (*moushiwake arimasen*), もうしわけございません (*moushiwake gozaimansen*). The next two IFIDs mean ‘I’m sorry’, literally: ‘I’m being rude’, with the second verb being more polite: しつれいします (*shitsurei shimasu*), しつれいいたしました (*shitsurei itashimashita*). The final two IFIDs are ゆるしてください (*yurushite kudasai*) ‘Please forgive me’ and おまたせしました (*omatase shimashita*) ‘I’m sorry for being late’. A repetition of IFIDs was coded separately.

The next category was the use of an explanation to apologize, such as e.g. バスが遅れました (*basu ga okuremashita*) ‘The bus was late’.

Acceptance of responsibility could be a statement of the thing that the speaker has done wrong: e.g. 本を忘れました (*hon o wasuremashita*) ‘I have forgotten the book’; the same as previously with verb-*te* *shimaimashita*: e.g. 本を忘れてしまいました (*hon o wasureteshimaimashita*) ‘I have unfortunately forgotten the book’ (discussed below); explicit self-blame: e.g. 悪かった (*warukatta*) ‘That was bad (of me)’; lack of intent: e.g. 間違いました (*machi-gaimashita*) ‘I made a mistake’.

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1 See appendix B for the full coding scheme used.

Offers of repair could either be straight: e.g. 明日持ってきます (*ashita mottekimasu*) ‘I’ll bring it tomorrow’ or could be accompanied by a request: e.g. 明日でもだいじょうぶですか (*ashita demo daijoubu desu ka*) ‘Is it okay if I bring it tomorrow?’

Verbal redress could either be an expression of concern for the hearer: e.g. だいじょうぶですか (*daijoubu desu ka*) ‘Are you okay?’ or a promise of forbearance: e.g. 今後は気をつけます (*kongo wa ki o tsukemasu*) ‘I’ll be more careful in the future’.

Intensification with an adverb inside the IFID constitutes the last category: ほんとうに (*hontou ni*) ‘really’ and たいへん (*taihen*) ‘terribly’.

There was, however, one strategy for which the coding category was unclear, as mentioned earlier. In Japanese it is possible to convey a sense of regret about an action by using the expression *verb-te shimaimashita*. Compare the first utterance, which is simply a statement of fact:

- (1) 私はコーヒーを落としました  
*watashi wa kofi o otoshimashita*  
 (I topic marker coffee direct object marker drop past)  
 ‘I dropped the coffee’

and the second utterance which includes the speaker’s regret:

- (2) 私はコーヒーを落としてしまいました  
*watashi wa kofi o otoshite shimaimashita*  
 I regrettably dropped the coffee / I unfortunately dropped the coffee and I’m embarrassed about it.

Meier (1997) has a category for ‘negative feelings’ in which he includes the speaker’s being embarrassed, and in Warga/Schölmberger (2007), excuses are divided into those that include the word *malheureusement* (‘unfortunately’), which could be a good translation of *verb-te shimaimashita*, and those which do not. However, in Blum-Kulka et al.’s CCSARP coding manual (1989), an expression of embarrassment is coded under ‘taking on responsibility’ and, as this expression can only occur with a statement of responsibility, we have decided to code it as a subset of that category.

The same coding scheme was used for the English apology strategies. The most frequent IFIDs for the NSE were: *I'm sorry*, *I apologise* and *excuse me*. Intensification included the following words: *really*, *very*, *so*, *terribly*, *extremely*.

#### 4. Research questions

- 1) Is the distribution of apology strategies comparable among our NSE and NSJ?
- 2) If not, is the distribution of apology strategies different in the two NNS groups (NNS1 and NNS2)?
- 3) Does the distribution of the NNS groups approximate the Japanese or the British English NS distribution patterns more closely?
- 4) Which lexical items are used by the groups of learners and the NSJ?

#### 5. Results

Table 1 shows how the 1999 tokens of apology strategies are distributed per group and type of apology strategy.

Group	IFID	Re-peated IFID	Explana- tion	Acceptance			Intensi- fier	Total
				respon- sibility	Offer repair	Verbal Redress		
NSE	101	3	28	97	19	56	97	401
NNS1	321	24	9	64	19	7	12	456
NNS2	276	74	5	49	22	4	14	444
NSJ	375	82	28	83	71	16	43	698

Table 1. Total number of apology strategies produced by Native Speakers of English (NSE), Non-Native Speakers of Japanese who had not been in Japan (NNS1), Non-Native Speakers of Japanese who had been in Japan (NNS2), and Native Speakers of Japanese (NSJ).

We calculated the proportion of apology strategies for every participant as this permitted a statistical analysis of the data. Independent samples t-tests were used to determine the differences in the proportion of a particular apology strategy between NSE and NSJ, NS1 and NNS2, NNS1/2 and NSJ, NNS1/2 and NSE.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of apology strategies across the four groups of speakers. What is immediately apparent is the difference between NSE and NSJ, with the learners approximating the target language distribution. In the following sections we will look at the differences between the four groups for each apology strategy.

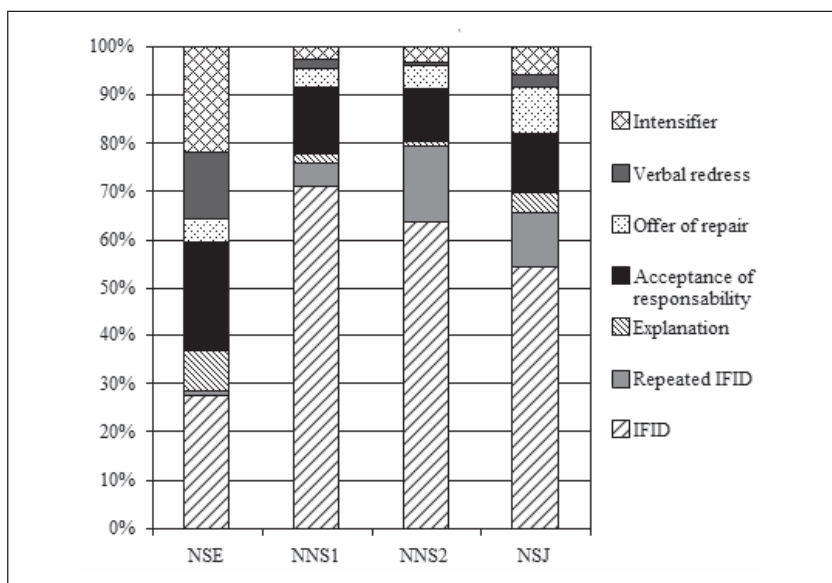


Figure 1. Distribution of the seven apology strategies produced by the NSE, the NNS1, the NNS2, and the NSJ.



### 5.1 IFIDs

The proportion of IFIDs used by NSJ (Mean = 54.6%, SD = 9.0) is significantly higher ( $t = -7.0$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) than the proportion of IFIDs in the apology strategies of the NSE (27.6%, SD = 10.4). The difference between the two groups of learners is not statistically significant (Mean NNS1 = 70.8%, SD = 9.5 compared to Mean NNS2 = 63.6%, SD = 14.1 respectively;  $t = 1.3$ ,  $p = \text{ns}$ ). A comparison between NNS1 and NSJ shows a significant difference ( $t = 4.2$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). The difference between NNS2 and NSJ is no longer significant ( $t = 1.8$ ,  $p = .09$ ). The proportions of this strategy are significantly different between NNS1 and NSE ( $t = -10.7$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) and so is the difference between NNS2 and NSE ( $t = -7.0$ ,  $p < .0001$ ).

A closer analysis of the data for specific situations showed that the 'unfinished marking' situation elicited the fewest IFIDs in general, while the 'bumped car' situation elicited the fewest from the NSE. The NNS1 are closer to the NSE in this latter situation, using an IFID in only 91% of utterances, while the NNS2 use an IFID in 100% of utterances, like the NSJ. This could be seen as a move towards the L2 norm.

The 'late student' situation also elicited significantly fewer IFIDs from the NSE than from the NSJ; both groups of learners, and the NSJ used an IFID in 100% of utterances in this situation. On the other hand, all the groups including the NSE used an IFID 100% of the time in the 'wrong dish' situation.

### 5.2 Repetition of IFIDs

NSJ used a repeated IFID (i.e. used a word meaning 'sorry' more than once), significantly more ( $t = -4.7$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) than NSE (Mean NSJ = 11.2%, SD = 7.9 compared to Mean NSE = 0.8%, SD = 2.2). The difference between the two groups of learners is also significant ( $t = -2.5$ ,  $p < .022$ ) with NNS1 using fewer repeated IFIDs (Mean = 4.9%, SD = 9.5) compared to NNS2 (Mean = 15.7%, SD = 9.4).

A comparison between NNS1 and NSJ shows a non-significant difference ( $t = -1.7$ ,  $p = .10$ ). The difference between NNS2 and

NSJ is not significant either ( $t = 1.2$ ,  $p = ns$ ). The proportions of the repeated IFID strategy are not significantly different between NNS1 and NSE is ( $t = -1.6$ ,  $p = ns$ ) but the difference between NNS2 and NSE is highly significant ( $t = -5.7$ ,  $p < .0001$ ).

### 5.3 Choice of IFIDs

As Sabaté i Dalmau / Curell i Gotor (2007) suggest, English has a very small number of lexical items to draw from in apologies. They compared English to Catalan; however, the same is true of Japanese, which uses a much wider range of lexical items to apologise than English, making the choice of an IFID a problem for English NS learners. The data show that in fact the choice of IFID by both groups of learners differed significantly from that of the NSJ.

The most frequently used IFIDs were すみません (*sumimasen*, meaning ‘I’m sorry’ or ‘excuse me’), ごめんなさい / ごめん / ごめんね (*gomenasai / gomen / gomenne*), also translated as ‘I’m sorry’ or ‘sorry’) and 申し訳ありません / 申し訳ございません (*moushiwake arimasen / moushiwake gozaimasen*, literally ‘it’s inexcusable’ but generally translated as ‘I’m sorry’). This latter is more formal than the previous two (see figure 2).

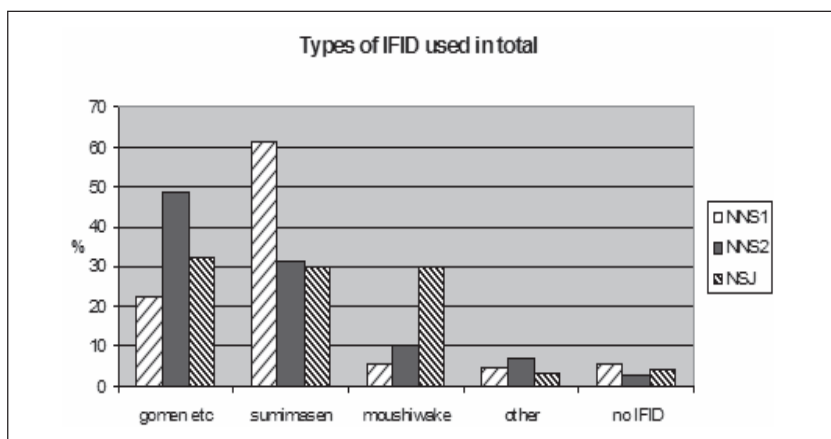


Figure 2. Proportion of types of IFIDS used by the NNS1, NNS2 and NSJ.

Figure 3 also shows that NNS1 overuse *sumimasen* compared to the NSJ, using it 61% (n = 52) compared to the NSJ's 30% (n = 28). NNS2 seem closer to the L2 norm in their use of *sumimasen*; however their use of *gomenasai* etcetera (49%, n = 34) also differs from the Japanese (32%, n = 30). Neither NNS1 nor NNS2 use *moushiwake arimasen* etcetera in a way that approximates the L2 norm.

In the 'wrong dish' situation, every utterance from both the NSJ and both groups of learners contained an IFID. However the kind of IFID used differed considerably, as shown in Figure 3.

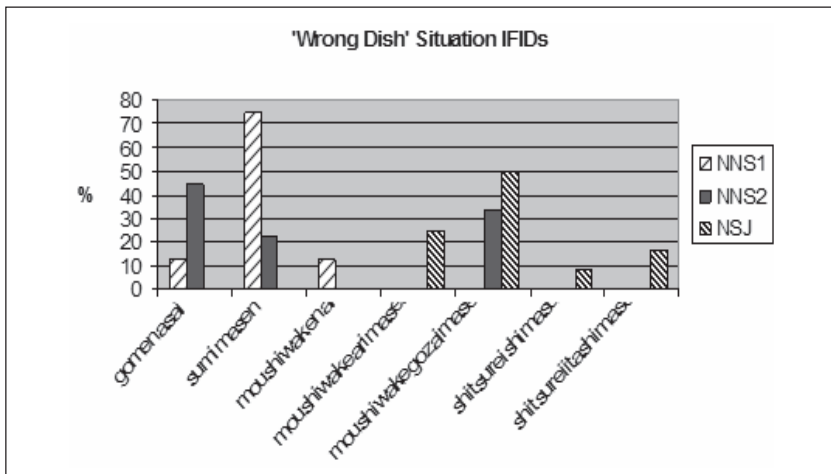


Figure 3. Proportion of types of IFIDS used by the NNS1, NNS2 and NSJ in response to the 'wrong dish' situation.

In this situation, NNS2 used *sumimasen*, which is a polite neutral form, less than the NNS1 group, who rely very heavily on it and so are closer to the NSJ who do not use *sumimasen* at all. There also appears to be development towards the target language norm in the use of *moushiwake gozaimasen*. This IFID is used by the NSJ in half of utterances, compared to a third for NNS2. However, it is not used at all by the NNS1 group. The learners' apparent closeness to the L2 norm is only due in part to the more idiomatic use of *sumimasen* and *moushiwake arimasen*. It is also due to the overuse of *gomenasai* by NNS2. This IFID was not present in any utterance by a Japanese NS

in situation 4, as it is too informal for this kind of situation. However, it is used by both groups of learners and more by NNS2.

Equally unlike the NSJ, neither of the two groups of learners use *shitsurei shimasu / itashimashita* at all. In the more casual 'late student' situation, however, the NNS2 are closer to the L2 norm. NNS2 use *gomenasai* more often than NNS1 but less than NSJ. One NNS1 participant also used the unidiomatic *sumimasen*.

#### 5.4 Explanations / Excuses

Kondo (1997: 271) points out, "Japanese have a tendency for not explaining the offence compared to Americans," suggesting that in Japanese using this strategy shows too much concern for one's own face. In contrast, our data show that although NSE do use more explanations than NSJ, the difference is not significant ( $t = 1.5$ ,  $p = ns$ ). In total, the NSE used an explanation in 8.2% (SD = 9.4) of all the utterances, compared to a mean of 4.1% (SD = 2.3) for the NSJ.

Both sets of learners used very few explanations (Mean NNS1 = 1.9%, SD = 2.0) (Mean NNS2 = 1.0%, SD = 1.3) and the difference between the groups is not significant ( $t = 1.2$ ,  $p = ns$ ). The difference between NNS1 and NSJ is significant ( $t = -2.2$ ,  $p < .037$ ) and so is the difference between NNS2 and NSJ ( $t = -3.5$ ,  $p < .002$ ). The proportions of this strategy are also significantly different between NNS1 and NSE ( $t = 2.2$ ,  $p < .041$ ) and so is the difference between NNS2 and NSE ( $t = 2.3$ ,  $p < .034$ ).

#### 5.5 Accepting responsibility

Many of the participants used the 'accepting responsibility' strategy. In most cases this was a straightforward statement of what happened, e.g. 本を忘れました (*hon o wasuremashita*) 'I forgot to bring your book'. The NSE (Mean = 22.8%, SD = 12.0) used this strategy significantly more ( $t = 2.8$ ,  $p < .009$ ) than the NSJ (Mean = 12.0%, SD = 5.5).

No significant difference emerges between NNS1 and NNS2 ( $t = 1.2$ ,  $p = ns$ ), with both groups hovering near the target norm

(Mean NNS1 = 13.9%, SD = 4.9 and Mean NNS2 = 11.0%, SD = 5.5). Not surprisingly, neither learner group is significantly different from the NSJ ( $t = 0.85$ ,  $p = \text{ns}$  and  $t = -0.43$ ,  $p = \text{ns}$ ). The proportions of this strategy are also significantly different between NNS1 and NSE ( $t = 2.3$ ,  $p < .031$ ) and so is the difference between NNS2 and NSE ( $t = 2.8$ ,  $p < .012$ ).

In Japanese many of these statements include the form *verb-te shimaimashita* at the end of the sentence, which conveys a sense of regret e.g. ‘unfortunately I forgot to bring your book’. The Japanese use this expression in a statement of responsibility in about a fifth of utterances, which is slightly more than the NNS1 and NNS2.

### 5.6 Offer of repair

A typical offer of repair in our data was ‘I’ll bring your book tomorrow’. The NSJ were found to use almost twice as many offers of repair compared to the NSE (Mean NSJ = 9.9%, SD = 5.2 and Mean NSE = 4.7%, SD = 10.4 respectively). This difference is significant ( $t = -3.0$ ,  $p < .006$ ). The difference between the groups of learners is not statistically significant (Mean NNS1 = 3.9%, SD = 4.6 compared to Mean NNS2 = 4.7%, SD = 4.7 respectively;  $t = -0.3$ ,  $p = \text{ns}$ ). The differences between the NSJ and both groups of learners are significant ( $t = -2.8$ ,  $p < .0001$  for NNS1 and  $t = -2.3$ ,  $p < .0001$  for NNS2), showing that the learners are still some way from the target language proportions for this apology strategy. The difference between the NSE and NNS1 is not significant ( $t = 0.5$ ,  $p = \text{ns}$ ) and neither is the difference between NSE and NNS2 ( $t = 0.2$ ,  $p = \text{ns}$ ), which suggests that the learners were still influenced by L1 values in their Japanese apology strategies.

### 5.7 Verbal redress

The verbal redress category includes ‘promise of forbearance’ (e.g. ‘I won’t do it again’) and ‘showing concern for the hearer’ (e.g. ‘are you okay?’). Our corpus had very few examples of the former. The

NSE used this strategy significantly more than the NSJ (Mean NSE = 13.8%, SD = 6.3 and Mean NSJ: 2.3%, SD = 0.7) ( $t = 6.2, p < .0001$ ). The difference between the two groups of learners is not significant (Mean NNS1 = 1.6%, SD = 1.7 compared to Mean NNS2 = 0.8%, SD = 1.4 respectively;  $t = 1.1, p = ns$ ). The difference between NSJ and NNS1 is not significant ( $t = -1.3, p = ns$  for NNS1) but it is significant between NSJ and NNS2 ( $t = -3.2, p < .005$  for NNS2). The learners have clearly moved away from the proportions of this strategy in their L1: the difference between the NSE and NNS1 is significant ( $t = 6.2, p < .0001$ ) and so is the difference between NSE and NNS2 ( $t = 6.0, p < .0001$ ).

### 5.8 Intensifiers

The NSE used this strategy more frequently than the NSJ (Mean NSE = 21.8%, SD = 13.6 and Mean NSJ = 5.9%, SD = 3.8;  $t = 3.9, p < .001$ ). The difference between the groups of learners is not significant (Mean NNS1 = 2.7%, SD = 3.1 compared to Mean NNS2 = 3.1%, SD = 2.6 respectively;  $t = -0.3, p = ns$ ). The difference between the NSJ and the first group of learners is significant ( $t = -2.2, p < .04$  for NNS1) but it is not significant for the second group ( $t = -2.0, p = .07$  for NNS2). The learners have also moved away from the proportions of this strategy in their L1: the difference between the NSE and NNS1 is significant ( $t = 4.5, p < .0001$ ) and so is the difference between NSE and NNS2 ( $t = 4.0, p < .001$ ).

Although in English a far smaller range of IFIDs was used, the range of adverbs used as intensifiers to make the apology stronger was much larger, including ‘very’, ‘so’, ‘terribly’, ‘really’, and ‘extremely’, whereas the NSJ used only two adverbs as intensifiers, *ほんとうに* (*hontou ni*, meaning ‘really’) and *たいへん* (*taihen*, ‘terribly’). Learners were found to use *hontou ni* as an intensifier. However, *taihen* is hardly used as an intensifier at all by the learners. Moreover, the learners who did use *taihen* used it in random situations, whereas the NSJ used it in situations requiring a high level of formality, such as the ‘wrong dish’ situation.

## 6. Discussion

Table 2 presents a quick overview of the differences in proportions of 7 apology strategies between the different pairs of participants.

Strategy	NSE/ NSJ	NNS1/ NNS2	NNS1/ NSJ	NNS2/ NSJ	NNS1/ NSE	NNS2/ NSE
IFIDs	***	ns	***	ns	***	***
Repeated IFIDs	***	*	ns	ns	ns	***
Explanations	ns	ns	*	**	*	*
Acceptance of responsibility	**	ns	ns	ns	*	*
Offer of repair	**	ns	***	***	ns	ns
Verbal redress	***	ns	ns	**	***	***
Intensifiers	**	ns	*	ns	***	***

ns:  $p > .05$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 2. Overview of the differences in proportions of apology strategies between the different pairs.

The results show that differences in proportions between NSE and NSJ are significant in six out of seven apology strategies. Differences between the two learner groups are only significant for repeated IFIDs. As would be expected, the NNS1 is more often significantly different from the values of the NSJ (4 out of 7) than the NNS2 (only 3 out of 7). On the other hand, NNS1 is closer to NSE values for two strategies compared to only one strategy for NNS2.

Both groups of learners have approximated the NSJ proportion of the strategy ‘acceptance of responsibility’. This strategy is much more frequent among the NSE than among the NSJ and yet even the learners who had not stayed in Japan used it close to NSJ’s proportions. The other strategy that both groups of learners had adopted was the use of repeated IFIDs.

There are two strategies where the NNS2 are closer to the NSJ proportions than the NNS1, which could be interpreted as develop-

ment of pragmatic competence resulting from the stay in Japan. These are the use of intensifiers and IFIDs. The IFID was the most frequently used strategy across the different groups. This is in line with the findings of many studies of both learners' and native speakers' apologies (with the exception of Warga/Schölmlberger 2007), who found that more excuses were used than IFIDs).

There was no evidence of negative transfer as NNS2 approximated the NSJ proportion, and the NNS1 even 'overshot' it. The more frequent use of IFIDs by the NSJ compared to the NSE confirms the findings of Kondo (1997) and Barnlund/Yoshioka (1990) who looked at the differences between American and Japanese apology strategies (though see Tanaka et al., 2008). Maeshiba et al. (1996), suggest that Japanese NSs in general use more IFIDs and upgrade more when they are apologising to a higher status person than to an equal or lower. For example, in their study, which includes some of the same situations, more IFIDs are used when the student apologises to the professor for forgetting his/her book, than when the professor apologises to a student for not having marked his/her essay, whereas a group of NS American English speakers used a similar amount of IFIDs and upgraders in both situations. However, although the NSJ in the present study did use fewer IFIDs for the 'unfinished marking' situation than for the 'forgotten book' situation, the mainly British English NSs followed the same pattern, in contrast to Maeshiba et al., though this may reflect a difference in British and American culture.

The use of repeated IFIDs was one of two strategies in our study that both groups of learners had adopted (the other one being acceptance of responsibility). The use of repeated IFIDs is very rare in English, yet both groups of learners approximated the NSJ proportion. The NNS2 had even slightly surpassed the NSJ proportion. Studies by Kondo (1997), Maeshiba et al. (1996), and Barnlund/Yoshioka (1990) suggest a high use of repeated IFIDs as a feature of Japanese apology, and Kondo suggests that the strategy of repeated IFID indicates sincerity in Japanese. Warga/Schölmlberger (2007) found that Austrian learners of Quebecois French repeated IFIDs more often than either Austrian or Quebecois NSs, and this repetition increased with time spent in the target language community. They suggest that this could be due to typical learner behaviour such as a desire to be direct or to



the 'waffle phenomenon' (c.f. Hassall 2003), according to which learners tend to use more words than native speakers to say the same thing. However, as there was no evidence of the waffle phenomenon in any other area, decrease of negative pragmatic transfer and an over-generalisation of the L2 norm may be a more likely explanation for the results. Our results support Barron (2003) who found that some kinds of pragmatic transfer decreased over the year her Irish students of German spent abroad, such as the use of 'are you sure?' and 'I wonder' translated literally into German as part of requests and offers. Kondo (1997) and Blum-Kulka/Olshtain (1986) also report a decrease in pragmatic transfer with an increasing length of stay.

Barron (2003) suggests that this decrease in transfer happens because the learners' ideas of the transferability of certain forms change; for example, the learners became explicitly aware that German people do not make ritual re-offers in the same way that Irish do and so consciously reduced their use of this form. She suggests that this was due to either the availability of noticing opportunities in the target language community, or negative feedback / pragmatic failure.

On the other hand, a lack of available negative feedback, or the appropriate salient input may mean learners do not become aware of the inappropriateness of certain forms. This may go some way towards explaining the participants' choice of IFID, which also showed divergence from the target language norm, with NNS1 overusing the neutral *sumimasen* and NNS2 the more informal *gomenasai*. This seems to have parallels with the findings of Marriott (1996) about the use of verb forms in Japanese. She found that Australian learners of Japanese on exchange in Japan used the neutral/polite form more than the plain/informal form before leaving Australia, but reversed this after time in Japan, overusing the informal form, even when inappropriate. She also stresses the importance of negative feedback, citing the case of a student who reversed this overuse of the informal form after her return to Australia because of negative feedback from her Australian teacher.

Although a few NNS2 students used *moushiwake arimasen*, neither group used *shitsurei shimasu*. The tendency not to use these last two may however be due to teaching rather than developmental issues. Although *moushiwake arimasen* is mentioned in the textbook

that most of the students were working from, it is translated as 'excuse me'. Equally, *shitsurei shimasu*, which all the students certainly know as it is usually taught in the first or second lesson of Japanese, is presented as a way to excuse oneself when entering a room or interrupting, and not as a way to apologise for a mistake.

Three participants in NNS2 used *moushiwake arimasen* in a native-like way. Interestingly, these three students were among those who had spent the longest (more than two years) in the target community. Although being too small a sample to be representative, these students had a more native-like pragmatic competence than the learners who had lived in Japan for less than two years, tentatively suggesting that a number of years rather than a number of months is necessary for pragmatic development to take off. However, Félix-Brasdefer (2004) suggests that nine months is the amount of time needed in the target language community to make a difference, while in Blum-Kulka/Olshtain's study (1986) of non-native speakers living in Israel, it is suggested that five years might be needed before supportive moves in requests and apologies become native-like. In Iwasaki (2008) eight weeks abroad is not found to lead to any substantial gains in pragmatic competence, while in Barron (2003), the increase in use of pragmatic routines was not recorded until near the end of the year abroad; however as overall sociopragmatic competence was still low, she suggests that one academic year abroad is not enough to acquire a native-like pragmatic level.

These differing suggestions regarding the amount of time required may confirm the findings of Matsumura (2003), who found that the Japanese L1 students he followed spent the same amount of time in Anglophone Canada studying English but their exposure varied hugely, with some preferring to stay inside the Japanese community and rarely speaking English outside the language classroom, whereas others read in English, made English speaking friends and watched English TV. He suggests therefore that amount of exposure, rather than length of stay in itself, is the important factor.

Furthermore, the importance also of the context of the exposure on pragmatic development was mentioned by Iwasaki (2011). She found that her four American L2 learners of Japanese felt uncomfortable with the 'polite' *desu/masu* forms that they associated

with social distance, and judged incompatible with American English values of friendliness. They also felt confused by the expectation of native speakers of Japanese that American men act and speak informally and were therefore not expected to use *desu/masu* forms or other honorifics (2011: 67).

In our data, explanations, offers of repair, and verbal redress were used by both groups of learners far less than either English or Japanese NSs, with no sign of development towards the target language norm. There was little evidence of pragmatic transfer, however, as the English and Japanese NSs used these strategies a similar amount. This may have to do with the learners' ideas about transferability, and the large grammatical differences between Japanese and English, which could discourage transfer. Indeed, even in cases of intensifiers such as the use of *hontou ni* ('really') or *taihen* ('terribly') which can be easily transferred as they can be directly translated and are even placed before the IFID in the same way as in English, the learners hardly transfer. Perhaps a perceived lack of transferability could lead to positive transfer not taking place. This is also the kind of situation which would not lead to pragmatic failure or receive negative feedback, so the learners may never become explicitly aware of the problem.

Both groups of learners used the final strategy 'accepting responsibility' less frequently than the NSE, moving towards the proportion used by the NSJ. However, both groups use the *verb-te shimaimashita* ending less than the NSJ with NNS2 using it the least. Barron (2007) suggests that the 'complexification hypothesis' may be able to explain a similar result which she obtained with the use of upgraders by learners of German, having also ruled out negative transfer. She points out that this hypothesis, while originally used to explain syntactic acquisition, can also be used to explain pragmatic development. Learners have to first be confident about using the head act strategy of the speech act before they are able to add modification; before this stage is reached, the use of upgraders "triggers cognitive difficulties" (Barron 2007: 132). It seems then that the complexification hypothesis may be useful in explaining some of the non-nativelike utterances the learners produced: the lack of use of *verb-te shimaimashita*, for example, which adds another level of complexity to the utterance, and so may be difficult for learners to use, even though the

form is familiar to them, and even after some time in the target language community.

A final point concerns the danger of interpreting deviation from the target language norm as an indication of a violation of L2 norms or incomplete pragmatic competence in the L2. Dewaele (2008) pointed out that L2 users can consciously refuse to accommodate towards the L2 norm because it puts them in conflict with their image of self and their beliefs. Matsumura (2007) presents an example of this conscious deviation from the target language norm. Two Japanese students who had stayed in Anglophone Canada pointed out that they preferred to opt out (i.e., not give advice to someone with a higher status) and act according to the Japanese sociocultural norm in English (2007: 186), although they were aware that, according to the Canadian norm, it is acceptable to give advice to a person with a higher social status. Iwasaki (2010) suggests that her five American participants studying in Japan were trying to consciously move away from a stereotype of being over-familiar and so were more likely to err on the side of formality (2010: 46).

## 7. Limitations of the present study

The participants returned from Japan at various times in the past. Although many studies do not mention this point (e.g. Félix-Brasdefer 2004), Matsumura (2007) and Regan (2005) have shown that the length of time since the period abroad finished has an effect on learners' pragmatic or sociolinguistic competence. For instance, Matsumura re-tested his Japanese L1 students of English who had spent time in Anglophone Canada one year after their return to Japan, and found that some of them, having developed their level of pragmatic awareness while abroad, reverted to closer to the Japanese norm after returning home.

We are also aware that the sample involved in the present study is relatively small, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Also for this reason, the numbers of men and women in each group

was felt to be too small to allow for testing for a gender effect. It would be interesting to explore this in future research using a larger sample as gender has been linked to apology strategies in native and non-native English (Ogiermann 2007).

## 8. Conclusion

This study has focused on the development of the apologetic behaviour of high-intermediate English L1 learners of Japanese, comparing a group who have spent an extended period of time in Japan with a group who have studied Japanese solely in the UK. The data show that time spent in the target language community can trigger pragmatic development, but also point to the non-linear nature of this development, in agreement with many other studies (e.g. Barron 2003, Warga/Schölmberger 2007).

Three main patterns emerged. In some cases, a developmental pattern towards the L2 norm appeared, perhaps due to a lessening of negative pragmatic transfer triggered by time spent in the target language community; for example, in the use of repeated IFIDs. In other cases, there was no significant difference in the strategy use of the groups of learners; for example, in the general use of intensifiers, explanations, offers of repair and verbal redress, and so no evidence of pragmatic development towards the target language norm. These also did not show evidence of pragmatic transfer as the NSE data did not differ to any great extent from that of the NSJ. Third, there was also evidence of a move away from the target language norm in the choice of some IFIDs.

Some possible explanations for lack of development or development away from the target language norm could include negative transfer, the complexity of the task, the lack of negative feedback and the perceived lack of transferability of strategies.

Finally, a brief cross-cultural comparison of strategies used by the NSE and the NSJ. First, we found, in contrast to other researchers who have suggested that Japanese L1 speakers are less likely than English L1 speakers to use explanations as part of an apology (e.g.

Kondo, 1997), that these were used with a similar amount by both the NSE and NSJ.

Second, both Britain and Japan have been categorised as negative politeness cultures (e.g. Brown/Levinson, 1987). Ogiermann (2009) explored the idea that positive politeness cultures (such as Russia and Poland) are more likely to use positive apology strategies than negative ones by comparing the use of strategies such as ‘offer of repair’, and found that British, Polish and Russian participants used similar levels. However, in the present study, the NSE and NSJ differ in their use of such strategies. The NSJ were almost twice as likely as the NSE to use an offer of repair, suggesting (in line with the results of Ogiermann) that the use of these strategies is not explained by the positive or negative politeness of the culture. This finding also supports those of Barnlund/Yoshioka (1999) whose Japanese participants’ second most used apology strategy (after the use of an IFID) is an offer to do something for the other person. It is possible, as suggested by Sugimoto (1999), that this may be down to the different perceptions of the sincerity of such an offer. She suggests that the “message alone can be appreciated without being followed through by corresponding actions in Japan” (1999: 74), while in US culture, an offer needs to be followed up and so is only made when there is a reasonable chance of doing so. We suggest that this could also apply to British culture. Neither group of British learners made any move towards the NSJ levels of use of this strategy.

On the other hand, the NSE used another positive politeness strategy, ‘verbal redress’ (almost exclusively ‘concern for the hearer’ in our data), significantly more than the NSJ. Ogiermann (2009) suggests that because ‘concern for the hearer’ is so formulaic in English (almost exclusively ‘are you okay?’ and ‘are you alright?’), it could be used more than in other languages.

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## Appendix A: DCT

### Situation 1:

Imagine you are a university lecturer. You promised to return a student's essay today but you haven't finished reading it. What do you say to the student?

あなたは大学の先生だとそうぞうしてください。今日、学生の作文を戻すと約束しましたが、作文を読んでいませんでした。学生に何と言いますか。

### Situation 2:

Imagine you are a student. You borrowed a book from your university lecturer, but you forgot to return it. What do you say to your lecturer?

大学生だとそうぞうしてください。先生に本を借りましたが、返すのをわすれてしまいました。先生に何と言いますか。

### Situation 3:

Imagine you are the manager of a café. Today you have an interview with a student, who wants a job in your café. However, you are half an hour late for the interview because of a meeting. What do you say to the student?

喫茶店の店長だとそうぞうしてください。今日、あなたの喫茶店で働きたい学生と面接があります。しかし、会議があったので、面接に30分遅れました。学生に何と言いますか。

### Situation 4:

Imagine you are a waiter in an expensive restaurant. A customer ordered beef, but you brought chicken by mistake. What do you say to the customer?

高級なレストランのウェイターだとそうぞうしてください。お客さんは牛肉を注文しましたが、あなたは鳥肉を間違えて持って来てしまいました。お客さんに何と言いますか。

**Situation 5:**

Imagine you are a student who is often late. Today you are late to meet a friend who you are working with on an essay. What do you say to your friend?

あなたは学生だとそうぞうしてください。あなたはよく遅れます。今日、作文をいっしょに書いている友達との約束に遅れました。友達に何と言いますか。

**Situation 6:**

Imagine you drove your car into another person's car in a car park. What do you say to the owner of the other car?

駐車場で、ほかの人の車にあなたの車をぶつけてしまったとそうぞうしてください。その車の持ち主に何と言いますか。

**Situation 7:**

Imagine you work for a company and today during a meeting you offended a colleague. After the meeting the colleague makes a comment to you about the incident. What do you say to the colleague?

会社員だとそうぞうしてください。今日、会議で同僚の感情を害してしまいました。会議の後で、彼がそのことについてはなしをしに来ます。同僚に何と言いますか。

**Situation 8:**

Imagine you are travelling on a bus. You put your bag in the rack, but it fell down and hit another passenger. What do you say to the passenger?

バスであなたは旅行をしているとそうぞうしてください。あなたの荷物を網棚におきましたが、落ちて乗客にあたってしまいました。乗客に何と言いますか。

## Appendix B: Coding

IFIDs	0	no IFID		
	1	ごめん	gomen	sorry
	2	ごめんね	gomenne	sorry
	3	ごめんなさい	gomenasai	I'm sorry
	4	すみません	sumimasen	I'm sorry / excuse me
	5	もうしわけない	moushiwakennai	I'm sorry (lit. it's inexcusable) verb is plain form
	6	もうしわけありません	moushiwake arimasen	I'm sorry (lit. it's inexcusable) verb is polite form
	7	もうしわけございません	moushiwake gozaimansen	I'm sorry (lit. it's inexcusable) verb is very polite
	8	失礼します	shitsurei shimasu	I'm sorry (lit. I'm being rude)
	9	失礼いたしました	shitsurei itashimashita	I'm sorry (lit. I've been rude) verb is very polite
	10	許してください	yurushite kudasai	Please forgive me
	11	お待たせしました	omatase shimashita	I'm sorry for being late

Explanation	0	No explanation	
	1	Explanation	e.g. バスが遅れました (basu ga okuremashita) The bus was late.
Acceptance of responsibility	0	No acceptance of responsibility	
	1	Statement of the thing that the speaker has done wrong	e.g. 本を忘れました (hon o wasuremashita) I have forgotten the book.
	2	Statement as above with 'verb-te shimaimashita'	e.g. 本を忘れてしまいました (hon o wasurete shimaimashita) I have unfortunately forgotten the book.
	3	Explicit self-blame	e.g. 悪かった (warukatta) That was bad (of me)
	4	Lack of intent	e.g. 間違いました (machigaimashita) I made a mistake.
Offer of repair	0	No offer of repair	
	1	Offer of Repair	e.g. 明日 持ってきます (ashita mottekimasu) I'll bring it tomorrow.
	2	Offer of repair with request	e.g. 明日でもだいじょうぶですか (ashita demo daijoubu desu ka) Is it okay if I bring it tomorrow?

**English NSs**

English coding (as Japanese, except:)

**IFID**

- 0: No IFID
- 1: I'm sorry
- 2: I apologise
- 3: Excuse me

**Intensification**

- 1: really
- 2: very
- 3: so
- 4: terribly
- 5: extremely