

A Corpus-Based Study of Japanese EFL Learners' Request Strategies

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate how Japanese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners use request strategies in interactive discourse and how it develops with the increase in their English proficiency levels. The present study uses data of intermediate-level Japanese EFL learners and native speakers of American English that were collected from the role-play section of the SST (Standard Speaking Test) corpus. The results indicated that Japanese EFL learners displayed peculiar characteristics in the use of request strategies; this appeared to result from pragmatic L1 (first language) transfer. With regard to the English proficiency level, differences were observed between the Intermediate Low group and the Intermediate Mid group.

1. Introduction

Pragmatic competence is one of the most important competences necessary to achieve successful communication. However, learners are liable to make pragmatic failures since it is more difficult to recognize the pragmatic differences between languages than to recognize the other linguistic differences such as phonological or syntactic differences. In addition, native speakers rarely recognize the pragmatic failures of learners as well. If learners are grammatically competent and fluent in speaking, their apparent impoliteness or unfriendliness, which actually arise from the lack of pragmatic knowledge is likely to be regarded as a peculiar characteristic of their personality.

This paper deals with this necessary competence in using any language by focusing on requests. While a majority of the existing literature deals with requests, the pragmatic development and discourse-pragmatic aspects of requests have not been thoroughly discussed yet. In response to this need, the present study attempts to delineate the developmental pattern of the use of request strategies among Japanese EFL learners by using the role-play data collected from the SST corpus. The following are the main issues that will be discussed in this paper:

1. What kind of request strategies do Japanese EFL learners prefer to use in interactive discourse?
2. How does the learners' use of request strategies change according to their English proficiency levels?

2. Requests and Request Strategies

2.1. Requests and Politeness Theory

Requests are one of the most commonly researched speech acts in both cross-cultural pragmatic studies and interlanguage pragmatic studies. As Barron (2003) claims that requests represent “problematic areas for learners of all cultural backgrounds, even for advanced students” (p.122), requests are supposed to be the best method for investigating the pragmatic development of learners. In order to understand the underlying structure of requests, this paper describes requests from the perspective of politeness, to be more exact, from the face-management view which was proposed by Brown & Levinson (1978, and revised 1987).

According to Thomas (1995), a *face* is best understood as “every individual’s feeling of self-worth or self-image,” which “can be damaged, maintained or enhanced through interaction with others” (p.169). Every individual needs or expects his/her face to be respected by others (i.e., *face wants*), and attempts to strike a balance between his/her own face and that of others.

According to Brown & Levinson (1987), “certain kinds of acts intrinsically threaten face” (p.65). These are known as *face threatening acts (FTA)*; and requests are one of the FTAs that are likely to threaten the face of both the speaker and the hearer. Brown and Levinson noted that the weightiness of the FTA can be calculated using three parameters: the social distance between the speaker and the hearer, the hearer’s power over the speaker, and the degree of imposition of the request. Since both the speaker and the hearer have their own face wants, the speaker attempts to reduce the potential threat in the request by adopting certain politeness strategies. The choice of strategies varies according to the weightiness of the FTA. Brown & Levinson (1987) classified politeness strategies as follows.

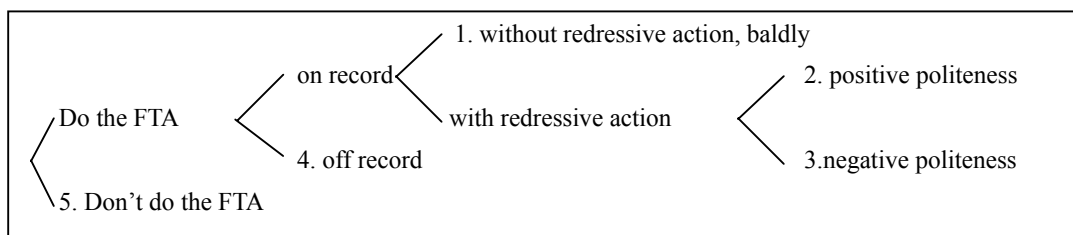


Figure 1: Possible Strategies for Performing FTAs (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.69)

There are five patterns of that strategies: 1. perform the FTA bald on record, 2. perform the FTA using positive politeness, 3. perform the FTA using negative politeness, 4. perform the FTA off record, and 5. not perform the FTA.

When one tries to perform the FTA, first, he/she has to decide whether or not to perform the FTA. If the weightiness of the FTA is excessive, the speaker must choose not to perform the FTA. If the weightiness of the FTA is not too much, and the speaker chooses to perform the FTA, the next

decision he/she is faced with is whether to go *on record* (i.e., address directly) or to go *off record* (i.e., not to address directly). Off-record strategies include the use of metaphors, rhetorical questions, tautology, etc., all of which are termed as *hints*. Since off-record strategies are indirect, the speaker can soften the FTA by using them; however, by doing so, the speaker also runs the risk of the hearer misunderstanding the speaker's intention.

If the speaker chooses to go on record, he/she must decide whether to perform the FTA using *redressive action* (i.e., actions that “give face” to the hearer), or without using such action (i.e., the speaker goes *bold on record*). If the speaker judges the weightiness of the FTA to be sufficiently small, he/she can choose to go bold on record (i.e., to address the utterance to the hearer in the most direct manner). This strategy entails a high risk of posing a threat to the hearer's face; therefore, in most cases, the speaker does not choose this strategy. Instead, he/she attempts to counteract the potential threat to the hearer's face by using redressive action. Redressive action can assume two forms—one is oriented toward the *positive face* (the need to be accepted by others) and the other is oriented toward the *negative face* (the need for freedom of action). The strategy that uses the former is *positive politeness* and the one that uses the latter is *negative politeness*. Positive politeness strategies lead to expressions of sympathy and friendship (e.g., “I'd really appreciate it if you...”), while negative politeness strategies lead to expressions of apology for interference and imposition (e.g., “I'm afraid if you could...”). According to Fukushima (2000), these strategies of face management are universal and necessary for successful communication; however, there exist certain cultural differences in the use of these strategies.

2.2. Types of Request Strategies

In accordance with the politeness strategies described by Brown & Levinson, Fukushima (2000) classified request strategies as follows:

1. Going on record without redressive action (direct requests)
2. Going on record with redressive action (conventionally indirect requests)
3. Going off record (non-conventionally indirect requests)

Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper (1989) proposed a more detailed classification of request strategies in the Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP). They classify the core of a request sequence—known as the *Head Act* (i.e., the minimal unit that can realize a request)—into nine strategy types¹.

According to Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), a request sequence includes three elements in addition to the Head Act: *alerters* (i.e., attention getters), *supportive moves* (i.e., phrase(s) or sentence(s) that

¹ See Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) for more information regarding the nine strategy types.

support the Head Act in persuading the hearer to fulfill the request), and *internal modifications* (i.e., elements that can optionally be used to supplement the Head Acts in order to mitigate the FTA syntactically, lexically, and phrasally). For example,

[A] Hi.

[S] I just bought this shirt. And when I got home, I realized that it was the wrong size.

[H] *I was wondering if I could* exchange it for something else.

[A]: alerter, [S]: supportive move, [H]: Head Act, *Italics*: internal modification

As illustrated by this example, in most cases, speakers use these elements in combination to make a request. A large number of combinations are possible. To ensure that a request is successful, it is necessary to select an effective combination of these elements.

3. Recent Studies on Requests

There are a number of studies which deals with request. In this section, recent studies are reviewed on three points: pragmatic differences between Japanese and English, pragmatic differences between natives and learners, and learners' pragmatic development.

In her study, Fukushima (2000) found that Japanese subjects changed their request strategies depending on the context, while British subjects displayed a consistent preference for conventionally indirect strategies. Due to this tendency, the Japanese subjects preferred to make direct requests when they judged the weightiness of the FTA to be sufficiently small, while the British subjects preferred to use conventionally indirect strategies even when they judged the weightiness of the FTA to be as small as was judged by the Japanese subjects. With regard to hints, Rinnert & Kobayashi (1999) pointed out that hints used by the Japanese speakers are generally more ambiguous than those used by English natives. Other studies revealed that native speakers of American and British English conceive non-conventionally indirect strategies as being less polite than conventionally indirect strategies (Blum-Kulka, 1987, cited by Weizman, 1993). One of the possible reasons for this is that non-conventionally indirect strategies require the hearer to deduce the speaker's intention, which can be a burden to the hearer. The highly inferential nature of such strategies may be the major cause for their being regarded as less polite than conventionally indirect strategies.

There are significant differences not only between Japanese and English but also between English natives and English learners. According to Hassall (2001), several studies have shown that intermediate or advanced English learners use fewer internal modifications and produce more lengthy supportive moves than English native speakers. With regard to hints, Weizman (1993) revealed that English learners use more hints than English natives. According to Weizman, hints have a high "deniability potential" because of their highly inferential nature. Consequently, when

speakers use hints, they can deny having made a request (e.g., “I never meant it. I just said that it’s a little short for me.”). The overuse of hints on the part of learners may result from their exploitation of the inferential nature of hints in order to save their own face. Other studies (Takahashi, 1987; Takahashi & DuFon, 1989) have revealed that Japanese EFL learners prefer want statements (e.g., “I’d like to...”) and willingness questions (e.g., “Would you..?”), while American natives prefer using mitigated ability statements (e.g., “I wonder if you could...”) and mitigated expectation statements (e.g., “I would appreciate it if you would...”). Takahashi (1992) argues that this tendency among Japanese EFL learners results from an L1 transfer since the two former strategies are common forms of requests in Japanese. Takahashi also claims that these strategies are “automatized” in learners’ speech performance in English; therefore, learners can use them easily. Since the two latter strategies used by native speakers of English are more grammatically complex, they may not be automatized in the learners’ interlanguage.

There are also some studies focus on the request development of learners. A majority of the studies suggest that the request development of learners proceeds from being direct to indirect and from being simple to complex. However, the development of the use of hints differs among the studies. Rose (2000) revealed that the group with the lowest proficiency used more hints than the higher-level group; however, other studies (Ellis, 1992; Achiba, 2002; Kasper & Rose, 2002) yielded contrary results. One explanation for the differences between these studies is that they used different research methods. The study conducted by Rose (2000) was cross-sectional, while the others were longitudinal.

Based on the findings of previous studies as discussed above, the present study proposes the following six hypotheses.

H1: Japanese EFL learners prefer conventionally indirect strategies. In particular, they prefer want statements and willingness questions.

H2: Learners use more indirect strategies as their English proficiency level increases.

H3: Learners use a wider range of strategies as their English proficiency level increases.

H4: Lower-level learners use more hints (non-conventionally indirect strategies) than higher-level learners.

H5: Learners use more internal modifications as their English proficiency level increases.

H6: Learners use more supportive moves as their English proficiency level increases.

4. Research Design and Methodology

4.1. SST Corpus

The present study uses the role-play section (the SST stage 3: “shopping: advanced”) of the SST

Corpus² compiled by the Communicative Research Laboratory (CRL) and the Telecommunications Advancement Organization of Japan (TAO) from 1999 to 2004³. The data source of the corpus is the audio-recorded interviews of the SST that were conducted by ALC Press Inc. The SST is based on the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) of the American Council on Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), and it is designed to meet the intermediate level of Japanese learners. Since the SST rates speakers' oral proficiency in English and not merely their grammatical competence, it is considered as the best method for evaluating the pragmatic development of learners.

In the SST stage 3, subjects are asked to read a role-play card and perform a one-to-one role play with the interviewer according to the instructions on the card. The duration of the role play ranges from one to four minutes. In the "shopping: advanced" task, a customer (the subject) has to request the sales clerk (the interviewer) for a refund or an exchange a product that the customer had purchased at the store but found it unsatisfactory for some reasons. The subjects are allowed to decide on the product and the reasons for exchange or refund. The sales clerk does not easily accept customers' request; therefore, customers must persuade the salesclerk to comply with their request.

4.2. Subjects

All the native subjects were native speakers of American English and had been living in Japan for a period of one month to one year at the time they took the SST. The learner subjects ranged from 19 to 43 years of age and all the native subjects were in their early twenties. The data on the learners was divided into two groups according to the SST levels, i.e., Intermediate Low (the SST levels 4 and 5) and Intermediate Mid (the SST levels 6 and 7)⁴.

Table 1: The Groupings of the Data

Groups	SST Levels	Number of Samples	Average Age
Native Speakers		5	21.4
Intermediate Mid	4, 5	17	29.4

² The SST Corpus was not officially available when this study was conducted; therefore, its unpublished version was used with the permission of the NICT. Since the main data on the learners was not completely coded, the present study used the original corpus of the learners (without error tags) instead of the error-tagged spoken learner corpus. The SST corpus is now (November, 2004) officially available as "the NICT JLE Corpus" published by ALC Press Inc.

³ On April 1, 2004, the CRL and TAO were reorganized as the National Institute of Information and Communications Technology (NICT).

⁴ Two or three trained raters scored the tape-recorded SST interviews from Level 1 (Novice Low) to Level 9 (Advanced) based on four specified criteria (visit <http://www.alc.co.jp/edusys/tescomp2.htm> for more information on the SST levels and rating criteria).

There are many factors that influence the pragmatic development of learners. The two major factors are the learners' level of grammatical competence and the duration of their residence in the TL community. In order to eliminate influence of the former factor, the present study used the SST, which evaluates not only the learners' grammatical competence but also their overall proficiency in speaking. With regard to the latter factor, the data on subjects who had any experience of living overseas were excluded in this study⁵.

4.3. Coding Scheme

The coding scheme used in this study was based on that of the CCSARP, which was revised by the author according to the findings of recent studies on request strategies. The following four elements were coded in this scheme: alerters, the strategy types of the Head Act, internal modifications, and supportive moves. The classification of each element was partially subdivided or unified according to its expected frequency⁶.

The data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative analyses included the following six items: the frequency and distribution of request strategies on a three-point directness scale (direct strategies, conventionally indirect strategies, and non-conventionally indirect strategies), the strategy distribution of all the strategy types (including subtypes), the total frequency of the internal modifications, the distribution of the types of internal modifications, the total frequency of supportive moves, and the distribution of the types of supportive moves. The qualitative analysis included a detailed examination of the content of supportive moves and the request order. The request order refers to the order of the request sequence in the course of the entire discourse. In particular, The present study focused on the order of the supportive moves and the Head Act.

5. Results

5.1. Quantitative Analysis

Table 2 presents the frequency of three-level request strategies (direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect) used by the three subject groups. The total number of Head Acts used by the native group was markedly larger than that used by the other two groups. The native group used more strategies, except direct strategies, than the other groups at all three levels. The Intermediate Low group used direct strategies most frequently among the three groups. The

⁵ Although 86 learner subjects performed the "shopping: advanced" task, the data on 15 subjects in the Intermediate Low group, 31 subjects in the Intermediate Mid group, and all the subjects in the Intermediate High (SST level 8) and Advanced (SST level 9) groups were not used because of this problem.

⁶ See the appendix for more information on the coding categories and the details of each element.

Intermediate Mid group used more non-conventionally indirect strategies than the Intermediate Low group. There was no marked difference in the frequency of conventionally indirect strategies and the total number of Head Acts between the Intermediate Mid group and the Intermediate Low group.

Table 2: Frequency of Request Strategies – Directness Level by Three-Point-Scale

	Direct		CI		NI		Total	
	n	mean	n	mean	n	mean	n	mean
Native Speakers	1	0.20	17	3.40	11	2.20	29	5.80
Intermediate Mid	2	0.12	45	2.65	7	0.41	54	3.18
Intermediate Low	7	0.44	45	2.80	0	0.00	52	3.25

CI = conventionally indirect strategies
 NI = non-conventionally indirect strategies

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the three-level strategies used by the three groups. All three groups displayed a markedly high frequency of the use of conventionally indirect strategies. However, while the two learner groups displayed a strong inclination toward the use of this strategy, the native group was characterized by a more balanced use of conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect strategies.

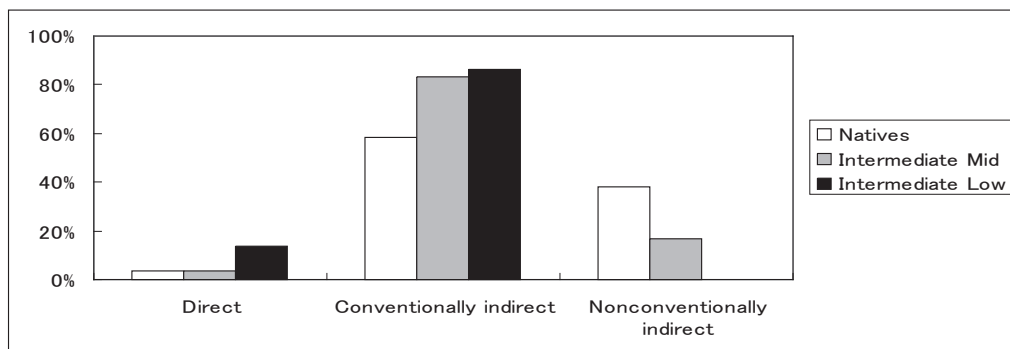


Figure 2: Distribution of Request Strategies Directness Level on Three-Point-Scale

Figure 3 shows the distribution of the use of all types of request strategies. The two strategies that were used most frequently by all three groups were (4) want statements and (6b) ability questions. The frequency of the use of these strategies by the native group increased in proportion to the indirectness of the strategies, and the frequency of use by the Intermediate Mid group was almost the same as that by the native group. This tendency suggests a positive correlation between the use of indirect strategies and the English proficiency level. Another notable feature is that among all

groups, the Intermediate Mid group used the widest variety of strategies.

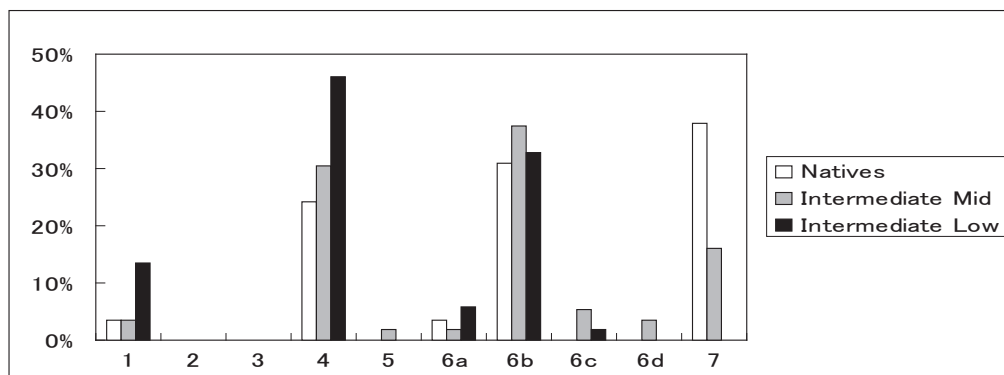


Figure 3: Distribution of All Types of Request Strategies

Table 3 presents the frequency of the use of internal modifications per Head Act. The native group used internal modifications most frequently. The Intermediate Mid group used more internal modifications than the Intermediate Low group.

Table 3: Frequency of internal modifications

	Total number	Mean	(IM/Head Act)
Native Speakers	78	15.60	2.69
Intermediate Mid	103	6.06	1.91
Intermediate Low	63	3.94	1.21

IM: internal modification

Figure 4 shows the distribution of the use of internal modifications. All groups displayed a fairly high frequency of the use of (2) subjunctives and (5) conditional clauses. The frequency of the use of (1) negations of preparatory conditions, (11) cajolers, and (13) intensifiers revealed a positive correlation with the English proficiency level, while the frequency of the use of (6) politeness markers and (7) understaters revealed a negative correlation. With regard to the use of a variety of internal modifications, this was the same among the native and Intermediate Mid groups, but lower in the Intermediate Low group.

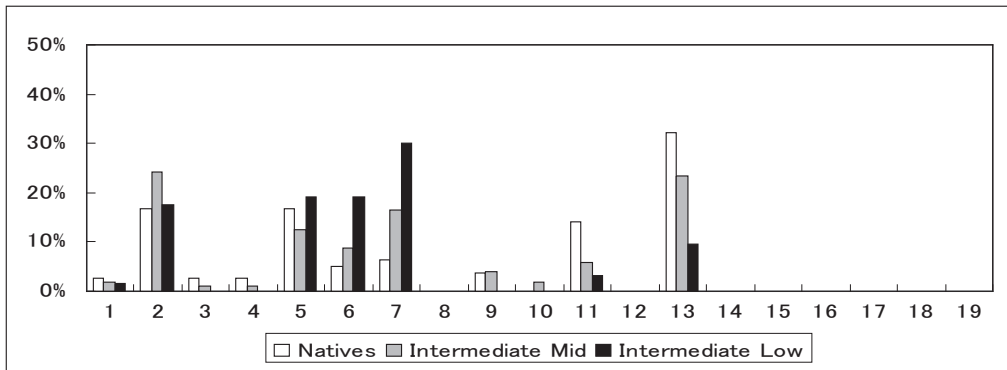


Figure 4: Distribution of Internal Modifications

Table 4 presents frequency of the use of supportive moves. Among the three groups, the native group used supportive moves most frequently and the Intermediate Low group used them the least. However, the Intermediate Mid group used the most internal modifications per Head Act.

Table 4: Frequency of the Use of Supportive Moves

	Total number	Mean	(SM/Head Act)
Native speakers	41	8.20	1.41
Intermediate Mid	87	5.12	1.61
Intermediate Low	64	4.00	1.23

SM: supportive moves

Figure 5 shows the distribution of the use of supportive moves. All groups displayed a high frequency of the use of (3) grounders. Although the frequency was low, (7) insults, (8) threats, and (9) moralizing were used by the learner groups but not by the native group. Further, the native group used (4a) agreement and (6) imposition minimizers fairly often. With regard to the use of a variety of supportive moves, learner groups used a wider variety than the native group.

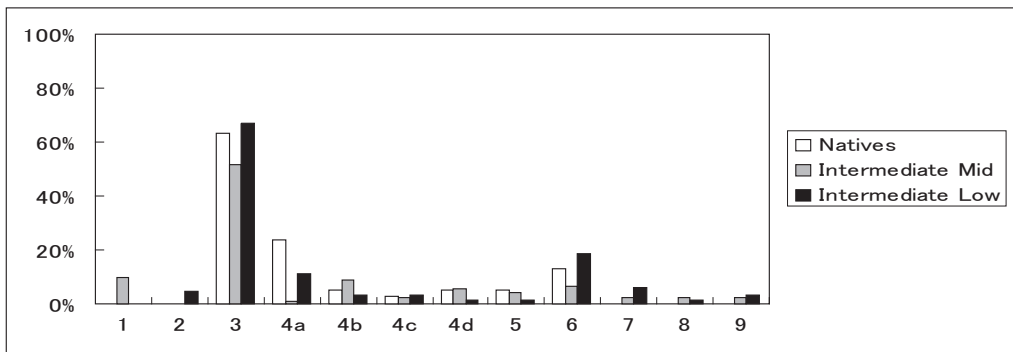


Figure 5: Distribution of Supportive Moves

5.2 Qualitative Analysis

There was no marked difference between the two learner groups with regard to the content of the supportive moves. However, there were three notable differences between the native group and the learner groups.

The first difference concerns the clarity of the grounders. Six subjects belonging to the Intermediate Low group and eight subjects belonging to the Intermediate Mid group simply used the statement “I don’t like this” as their first grounder. They did not specify the reason for disliking the product until they were asked to do so by the interviewer. The subsequent grounders used by the learners were also less specific than those used by the English natives. The same tendency was observed in the manner in which they referred to the product they had purchased. Two subjects in the Intermediate Low group and five subjects in the Intermediate Mid group referred to the product as merely “this” or “this stuff.” In contrast, the other subjects, in their first grounder, identified the product that they had purchased. The most frequently mentioned products were a shirt and a sweater. Table 5 presents the types of grounders used by the subjects.

Table 5: Types of Grounders

Grounder	Example
Not yet been used	e.g., “I have just opened it, but I haven’t used it.”
Possession of a receipt	e.g., “I have a receipt, and I bought it yesterday.”
Dislike	
size	e.g., “It’s a little too small for me.”
color	e.g., “The color was not the same as I thought.”
design	e.g., “It is too short for my age.”
defects	e.g., “There’s a little hole in the side of the sweater.”

The second difference concerns the internal modifications used in the grounders. The native group often used intensifiers while the learner groups frequently used understaters, as shown in Figure 4.

e.g., The use of intensifiers by the native group:

“You know, it’s *really really* bad together.”

“He doesn’t like it *at all* and will *never ever* wear it.”

The use of understaters by the learners:

“This sweater is *little* tight.”

“It is *a little bit* small.”

The third difference pertains to the use of insults, threats, and moralizing. The learners used these supportive moves with grounders, while the native speakers did not use any of the three supportive moves. In contrast to the learners, they often used agreement and admission.

e.g., The use of insults by the learners:

“You didn’t suggest me (about the store policy) [sic].”

Threats:

“If you don’t accept my offer, you surely lose your customer, one customer [sic]”

Moralizing:

“Actually, I have some kind of this trouble so far, but the most shops’ master could change the item for us [sic]”

The use of agreement by the native speakers:

“Right, right, right. Yeah, I understand that.”

“I realize you don’t typically allow exchange.”

Admission:

“I made a bad decision when I purchased the bag. I’m not gonna deny that.”

No specific pattern of the request order was observed in any of the groups. Almost all the subjects began their request sequence with a grounder, then used a Head Act followed by another grounder or other supportive moves such as disarmers, and repeated this sequence until the negotiation ended.

6. Discussion

6.1 Quantitative Analysis

The Japanese EFL learners displayed a high frequency of the use of conventionally indirect strategies; in particular, they used want statements and ability questions most frequently among the ten subtypes of strategies. This result, with the exception of the use of ability questions, supports H1 (Japanese EFL learners prefer conventionally indirect strategies. In particular, they prefer want statements and willingness questions.). A possible explanation for this result may be the difference in the situations in which these strategies were used. In the studies conducted by Takahashi (1987) and Takahashi & DuFon (1989), the subjects were faced with a situation in which they had to request a next-door neighbor to do them a favor (to give them a lift, etc.). The situation in the present study, however, was one in which a customer requested a sales clerk to exchange a product or refund the money. Thus, differences in the power relationship and social distance in these two situations may be accounted for the learners’ decision to use ability questions. Another explanation is that since ability questions are a very popular conventionally indirect strategy that is studied and

practiced in junior high school in Japan, it is possible that ability questions, like want statements and willingness questions, are automatized in learners' speech act performance in English.

With regard to the differences in the use of strategies according to the subjects' English proficiency level, it was observed that the Intermediate Low group used less non-conventionally indirect strategies than the Intermediate Mid group, and used direct strategies most frequently among all the three groups. These results support H2 (Learners use more indirect strategies as their English proficiency level increases). However, the results do not support H3 (Learners use a wider variety of strategies as their English proficiency level increases) and H4 (Lower-level learners use more hints than higher-level learners) because the Intermediate Mid group used the widest variety of strategies among all the groups and used more hints than the Intermediate Low group. One of the possible explanations for the use of a variety of strategies is that the Intermediate Mid group may have attempted to use as many strategies as possible in order to compensate for their lack of L2 proficiency, resulting in the overuse of the strategies. In contrast, the Intermediate Low group was probably not sufficiently competent to use as wide a variety of strategies as the Intermediate Mid group. Another explanation is that the number of subjects in the native group was too small to yield valid results. With regard to the use of hints, the results support the developmental pattern proposed by Ellis (1992) and Achiba (2002) despite the fact that H4 is not supported. It appears natural for higher-level learners to use more hints, which are the most indirect of all strategies. Another possible reason is the influence of the situation constructed in the role play. Since the interviewer was a Japanese person who spoke in English, the Japanese EFL learners may have employed Japanese pragmatic rules and consequently, used fewer indirect and more direct strategies in the role play.

Concerning the use of internal modifications, the results revealed that the native group used internal modifications most frequently; they were followed by the Intermediate Mid group and then, the Intermediate Low group. This result supports H5 (Learners use more internal modifications as their English proficiency level increases). With regard to the use of a variety of strategies, this was almost the same among the native and Intermediate Mid groups, and the least in the Intermediate Low group. This suggests that learners use a wider variety of internal modifications as their English proficiency level increases.

As for the use of supportive moves, the results partly support H6 (Learners use more supportive moves as their English proficiency level increases) since the Intermediate Mid group used supportive moves most frequently and the learner groups used a wider variety of supportive moves than the native group. Since the data on the native speakers was limited, the results were not completely reliable. However, they were the same as those of the studies discussed in Section 3. The learners may resort to the use of many supportive moves in order to compensate for their lack of L2 proficiency.

6.2 Qualitative Analysis

The results revealed a marked difference between the learner groups and the native group with regard to the types of supportive moves. The use of insults, threats, and moralizing may have resulted from a pragmatic transfer from Japanese (L1) to English (TL). This transfer may have been motivated by the situation in which the interviews were conducted, that is, the interviewer was Japanese, as mentioned in Section 6.1., and spoke in English only during the SST interviews. The high quality of customer service in Japan may have also led the learners' to adopt the use of supportive moves. The Japanese system holds that the "customers are god"; consequently, the learners may have judged the power relationship between the customer and the sales clerk to be strongly in their favor, and thus, they may have judged the FTA to be sufficiently small in order to allow them to use these three supportive moves.

The use of vague grounders and understaters may also be the result of pragmatic transfer. These two supportive moves are classified as negative politeness strategies that are often employed in Japanese speech acts. However, this strategy is not appropriate for the shopping situation while speaking in English. The native subjects used intensifiers in situations in which the Japanese EFL learners used understaters. These internal modifications are of opposite natures. This may lead to pragmatic failure, which in turn, generates cultural misunderstandings.

With regard to the request order, the results did not reveal any fixed pattern. However, the results did provide the evidence that requests are accomplished in the course of a series of utterances. In an interactive discourse, a potential non-conventionally indirect request may function as a supportive move for the next Head Act; further, a supportive move itself may be a requestive hint. Speakers use various combinations of supportive moves and Head Acts in order to accomplish their goals.

7. Conclusions

This study has shown that (1) Japanese EFL learners prefer to make conventionally indirect requests, particularly want statements and ability questions, (2) the Intermediate Mid group adopted a large number of grammatically complex strategies by using more supportive moves and internal modifications than the Intermediate Low group, (3) the peculiar characteristics of Japanese EFL Learners with regard to the use of supportive moves may have resulted from pragmatic L1 transfer.

The following are the six limitations of this study:

1. The number of subjects used in this study was insufficient. In particular, the data on native speakers was extremely limited. Therefore, it is difficult to generalize the results of this study.
2. This study is a cross-sectional study and not a longitudinal one. Therefore, it is difficult to use the results of this study to explain the actual development of language skills.
3. The study used only one method of evaluation, i.e., role play. According to Cohen (1995), the use

- of a role play carries the risk of forcing the subjects to perform unnatural behavior. If the subject is not a good actor/actress or is too skilled as an actor/actress, the results will be problematic. Since a role play is not an authentic form of communication but an artificial one, some learner subjects stated that they would not behave as they did in the role play when faced with the same situation in reality. Therefore, the results are not entirely applicable to the actual use of strategies.
4. The study investigated only the utterances of the subjects and not the hearer's responses to their requests. It is necessary to consider the hearer's reactions in order to conduct a more accurate investigation of the interactive aspects of pragmatic development.
 5. The study investigated only intermediate-level learners. Therefore, developmental differences could not be sufficiently observed.
 6. The study did not fully utilize the advantages of the corpus and was unable to demonstrate the merits of using a computerized corpus.

8. Implications

8.1 Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications of this study are that, first, it reveals the importance of the discourse pragmatic aspect of interlanguage research. This study revealed that learners construct a request sequence during interactions by using not only one Head Act but also various combinations of supportive moves and internal modifications. In order to investigate request realization, it is necessary for researchers not to consider a speech act in isolation but to examine the entire discourse aimed at making a request.

From an educational point of view, it is possible to derive three more implications of this study. First, the study confirms a possible developmental pattern of requests that had been indicated in previous studies, that is, a progression from direct to indirect and from grammatically simple to complex requests. Second, it suggests the need for learners to understand a request as a sequence that must be executed in order to accomplish an illocutionary goal. Finally, the study suggests that instruction in the use of internal modifications and supportive moves can assist the learners in achieving successful L2 communication.

8.2 Implications for the Development of Conversational Materials

This study has three implications with regard to development of conversational materials.

First, this study suggests a possible order for the teaching of request strategies. According to the developmental patterns revealed in this study, learners use more indirect and complex strategies as their English skills improve. This study will provide a good indication for the choice of items to be included in material that corresponds to the proficiency level of the learners.

Second, this study suggests the importance of paying close attention to an entire conversation

while preparing a text of conversational materials, particularly focusing on communicative functions. As in the case of grammar, teachers and learners tend to concentrate on one or two key sentence(s)—usually on a Head Act—while teaching or learning a certain communicative function. However, the method of teaching/learning communicative functions should not be the same as that used in grammar. As revealed by the study, a speaker generally uses several supportive moves in order to accomplish one communicative goal. It is important to take note of the flow of a conversation and not merely underline or emphasize one Head Act.

Finally, the study suggests the need for explanatory notes for some pragmatic errors that are likely to occur. In this study, the learner subjects used insults, threats, and moralizing in inappropriate situations. Thus, they ran a high risk of being misunderstood by native speakers of English and of causing serious interpersonal conflicts. Since this type of pragmatic failure is not usually taught nor even noticed, these explanatory notes should prove very useful to the learners.

8.3 Implications for Further Research

Based on the abovementioned limitations, six further topics of study are suggested. First, in order to confirm the results of this study, it is necessary to conduct studies with a larger number of subjects. Second, in order to investigate the actual developmental pattern, longitudinal studies using interactional conversation are required. Third, it is necessary to conduct a study using not one but multiple methods in order to obtain more valid and reliable results. Since no single method is capable of entirely assessing the behavior in question, a combination of several methods and a detailed examination of the afterthoughts or retrospections of the subjects will increase the reliability of the study.

With regard to the study conducted using the SST corpus, a consideration of the length of the subjects' experience of living overseas, which was excluded from this study, will yield interesting results. Another topic for further study is the examination of the hearers' reactions to the requests. In order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the interactive pragmatic aspects of requests, it is necessary to investigate hearers' reactions. Finally, it is necessary to conduct studies using tasks other than a role play. Since the SST stage 3 comprises five tasks, studies on other speech acts can be conducted.

It is expected that further research will clarify the mechanism of the pragmatic development of interlanguage.

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Appendix: Coding Categories for Requests (Based on *The CCS:ARP Coding Manual* by Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989)

Table A1: Request strategies—Coding categories

	Types	Examples		
Direct request	1. Mood derivable	An utterance in which the grammatical mood of the verb signals an illocutionary force	Exchange it. Please refund my money.	
	2. Performative	An utterance in which the illocutionary force is explicitly named	I'm telling you to exchange it. I'd like to ask you to refund my money.	
	3. Obligation statement	An utterance that states the hearer's obligation to the speaker to perform the act	You have to exchange it. You should refund my money.	
	4. Want statement	An utterance in which the speaker's desire to have the hearer perform the act is stated	I want you to refund my money. I wish you would exchange it.	
	5. Suggestory formula	An utterance that contains a suggestion to perform the act	How about exchanging it?	
	6. Query preparatory	a. possibility	An utterance containing a reference to preparatory conditions as conventionalized in any specific language	Is it/Would it be possible to refund my money?
		b. ability	An utterance concerning the possibility of performing the act	Can you/Could you exchange it?
c. willingness		An utterance concerning the hearer's ability to perform the act	Would you like to refund my money? Would you mind refunding my money?	
Non-conventionally indirect request	d. permission	An utterance requesting permission to perform the act	May I/Can I/Could I exchange it?	
	7. Hint	An utterance containing a partial reference to the object or element necessary for the execution of the act, or an utterance that makes no reference to the request proper (or any of its elements) but that can be interpreted as a request from its context	I wouldn't come back unless I had to. I recently bought this backpack and I was wondering... Does your policy have no room for humanity?	

Table A2: Internal modifications 1. Downgraders—Coding categories

	Types	Examples
Syntactic downgraders	1. Negation of preparatory conditions	Can't you exchange this shirt?
	2. Subjunctive	<i>Could/Would</i> you...? If it <i>was</i> possible...
	3. Aspect	I <i>am wondering</i> if you could...
	4. Tense	I <i>was</i> wondering... I <i>just wanted</i> to...
	5. Conditional clause	I'd like to exchange this, <i>if</i> it's possible.
Lexical & phrasal downgraders	6. Politeness marker	<i>Please</i> refund my money.
	7. Understater	<i>I just</i> want to... <i>All</i> I want is... Can you change it for one that is <i>a little bit</i> larger?
	8. Hedge	I'd <i>somehow/kind of/sort of</i> want to exchange it.
	9. Subjectivizer	<i>I wonder</i> if you could exchange it. <i>I think</i> you should refund my money.
	10. Downtoner	Can you <i>possibly/perhaps</i> exchange this?
	11. Cajoler	<i>You know</i> , I didn't have time and I couldn't try it on.
	12. Appealer	..., <i>will you?</i> ..., <i>OK?</i> ..., <i>could you?</i>

Table A3: Internal modifications 2. Upgraders—Coding categories

Types		Examples
13. Intensifier	An adverbial modifier that intensifies certain elements of the proposition of the utterance	I <i>really</i> want a refund of my money. I <i>definitely</i> need to exchange this shirt.
14. Commitment indicator	A sentence modifier that indicates the speaker's heightened degree of commitment to the situation	I'm <i>sure/certain</i> you can exchange this shirt for me.
15. Expletive	An adjectival modifier that indicates the speaker's anxiety	Why don't you exchange that <i>damn</i> shirt?
16. Time intensifier	An adverbial modifier that emphasizes the urgency of the situation	Exchange this shirt <i>now/immediately</i> .
17. Determination marker	An element indicating a heightened degree of determination on the part of the speaker	I'm just asking you to exchange it <i>and that's that</i> .
18. Emphatic addition	A set of lexical collocations that are used to provide additional emphasis to the request	<i>Go and</i> exchange this shirt.
19. Pejorative determiner	A determiner that emphasizes certain objects denoted in the request	Exchange <i>that</i> damn shirt.

Table A4: Supportive moves—Coding categories

Types	Examples
1. Preparator	An utterance announcing that the speaker will make a request I'd like to ask you something. I have a question.
2. Securing a precommitment	An utterance that assesses a potential refusal before making a request Could you do me a favor?
3. Grounder	A reason, explanation, or justification for making a request I bought a wrong size. I was too busy then.
4. Disarmer	An utterance that attempts to eliminate any potential objections I know that it's against your store policy. You're right.
a. agreement	An utterance indicating agreement with the hearer's utterances I made a bad decision and I don't deny it.
b. admission	An utterance indicating that the speaker admits his/her fault I'm sorry to bother you.
c. apology	An utterance that takes the form of an apology It was really nice.
d. compliment	An utterance that gives a good account of the hearer or the hearer's possessions I'll pay extra money. I'll buy this shirt too.
5. Promise of reward	An utterance that promises a reward on the fulfillment of the request You won't lose money.
6. Imposition minimizer	An utterance aimed at reducing the imposition that the speaker's request makes on the hearer You didn't mention it.
7. Insult	An utterance that increases the impositive force of the request by stating that the hearer is at fault You'll lose your customer.
8. Threat	An utterance that threatens the hearer with the potential consequences arising out of noncompliance with the request Other shops do exchange goods.
9. Moralizing	An utterance that invokes general moral maxims