

## **Can Norwegians be as polite as the Japanese? - A Case of Norwegian Learners of Japanese with Focus on the Speech Act of Request**

Requesting in a proper manner in a foreign language seems to be difficult and, what is worse, the speaker himself often seems to be unaware of inappropriateness. There may be a danger of giving a wrong impression of being impolite, unfriendly or even hostile when one fails to follow the usage patterns expected by native-speakers.

A Norwegian student may request a recommendation letter to his professor by simply saying “You, can’t you write a recommendation letter for me?” while this way of requesting would be considered impolite by a Japanese professor. A Japanese student would first apologize for interrupting the professor, then provide a reason for his/her affair, and finally come with a polite request with great hesitation, something like, “Um, I am terribly sorry that this really is a short notice, but um, I was wondering if you could possibly, um, write a recommendation letter for me?”

The traditional view is that the Japanese make indirect requests and Norwegians prefer direct ones, but is it that simple? If so, what could be explanatory factors for their preference for certain strategies over other possible ones in each language?

Research on request in Norwegian seems to be scarce. I would therefore like to investigate how Norwegians conduct requests and whether any changes may occur to this speech behaviour after studying in Japan.

I would first like to examine separately how the speech act of request is characteristically manifested in Japanese and Norwegian, and classify by the framework used in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) by Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper (1989). The findings will be further discussed in terms of the social factors stated in the theories of Hall (1976) and Brown & Levinson (1987). In order to identify any cross-cultural influences, the given speech act of Norwegian learners of Japanese will be compared before and after their study stay in Japan and against that of native speakers of Japanese.

My tentative hypotheses are as follows.

1. Norwegians and the Japanese use both direct and indirect strategies to make requests in their respective native language. However, the number of strategies and the types of preferred strategies may vary between the two languages.

2. The strategy choice will depend on the speaker's perception of the social factors in each context. The major factor may be the social relation for the Japanese and the personal relation for Norwegians, and this difference may cause misunderstanding between the two nationalities.
  
3. The way requests are made by Norwegian learners of Japanese may either remain unchanged or move towards that of native speakers of Japanese after the study abroad. This will depend on each individual.

As for data collection, I use a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) in order to establish as similar contexts as possible for the comparison and questionnaires to collect the background information of the informants.

## **References**

Blum-Kulka, S., House, J. & Kasper, G. (Eds.). (1989). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Brown, P. & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond Culture*. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday.