

JAPANESE LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE IN THE USE OF ENGLISH

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Abstract. Language is a social and cultural marker of human identity, but English proficiency in Japan remains relatively low, ranking 55th out of 100 countries worldwide. This sociolinguistic condition triggers interference in the mother tongue that infiltrating the unconscious use of foreign languages among bilingual speakers. This research, with a qualitative descriptive method, aims to identify various forms of interference and analyze the factors that cause interference in Japanese speakers when using English. The data were collected from spontaneous speeches in audio-visual data (i.e. videos on the YouTube channel). The study's findings show interference in several aspects, beginning with lexical interference involving the use of Japanese vocabulary across the categories of verbs, adjectives, nouns, and adverbs, due to the speaker's limited vocabulary. At the morphological level, the use of the affirmative suffix ~yo, the respectful suffix ~san, and aizuchi expressions such as ee, eeto, and un are still influenced by the culture and nuances of Japanese politeness. In addition, syntactic interference arises through the insertion of Japanese phrases or clauses at the beginning of speech as a representation of the speaker's thought process. In conclusion, the main driving factors behind this interference include low English-language competence, differences in cultural norms regarding politeness, and strong first-language thinking habits that carry over into the target language. Although interference risks threaten the purity of language, they are still seen as an important part of the process of future development and enrichment of the language's vocabulary.

Keywords: *interference, Japanese, lexical, morphology, syntax*

Introduction

A language is the characteristic of a society because it contains characteristics that may not be found in other languages. The characteristics of a language can be known through grammatical forms, pronunciation (the sounds of the language), and the way the language is written. As one of the important things that support life, language will be inseparable from humans. Dirgandini (2004) argues that people interact socially using language. With language, people communicate to express feelings, moods, and attitudes. This is one of the reasons why language has a very important role in human life. According to Poedjosoedarmo (2006), the process of language change is varied; there are at least two types that can be identified, namely (1) internal changes that occur in the grammatical system. These changes usually occur slowly; (2) external changes, i.e., changes caused by the arrival of influences from other languages. This change is relatively rapid and usually begins with lexical richness. Languages that serve as a link and a means of communication are becoming more widespread, so they are learned and used in several countries. For example, English is now used as a common language for cross-border activities worldwide. This is supported by the opinion of Crystal (2010) who states that English is a global language, so almost all things related to the international world always use English as an introduction. However, there is a country that, until now, has upheld and is very proud of its language, so it is often used even on

important international occasions, namely Japan. This is supported by findings from the English Proficiency Index published by EF (2020), which ranks Japan 55th out of 100 countries.

Japanese is one of the foreign languages that is now widely learned by the world community. This phenomenon can be seen in the increasing number of international students and Japanese language learners in Japan, as well as in various Asian countries and around the world (Chiavacci, 2012). Apart from this, given the use of Japanese on various occasions, it is not surprising that Japanese speakers lack mastery of other languages, especially the international language, like English. The influence of the mother tongue when using a foreign language often causes an unconscious mistake. Chaer and Agustina (2010) state that sociolinguistics is an interdisciplinary field of science that studies language in relation to its use in society. The use of language is closely related to the influence of other languages. The term that corresponds to the phenomenon is interference. Weinreich (Aslinda and Leny, 2007) first used the term interference to refer to the contact of a language system with other language elements, carried out by bilingual speakers. In his book entitled *Language in Contact*, the interference referred to by Weinreich is the interference that appears in the change in the system of a language, both regarding the phonological system (sound), morphology (grammar), syntax (the use of the structure of other languages in the formation of sentence sentences in the target language), and lexicon (words). Interference is also defined as the use of foreign-language elements by individual bilinguals in a language and in the teaching of a second language, with language errors in the form of elements of their own language that are brought into the language or other dialects being studied (Kridalaksana, 2008).

The discussion of interference has been extensively researched, including the study by Muliana et al. (2025), which examines the influence of the mother tongue (Japanese) on English oral production. The study analyzed the phonological, grammatical, and lexical aspects of Japanese students' speech. The results of the study show that these three aspects interfere with English speech production due to the transition from the mother tongue (Japanese) to English as the target language. In addition, studies on interference involving English and Japanese were also found in Sarif and Suganda (2020) study. The study analyzed the use of English elements related to the COVID19 pandemic by Japanese speakers. The findings of the study include phonological interference (addition, insertion, and replacement of phonemes), morphological interference, and syntactic interference related to word formation and word class differences between the two languages. The following study, which also addressed interference, was conducted by Wulandari et al. (2017). The findings of this study are the types of interference carried out by souvenir traders in the Ubud market, and the levels of interference include: morphology, phonology, and lexical. At the phonological level, most errors in Japanese involve the unpronounced sounds of double consonants (sokuon), a feature not found in Indonesian. Then, at the morphological level, errors occur as word repetition (reduplication), changes in shape, and reversals of sentence arrangement. Meanwhile, at the lexical level, there is vocabulary borrowing in both Indonesian and English.

Most of previous research on interference has drawn on data from Japanese speakers who speak English. These studies show similarities to this study regarding interference that intersects with what the author will carry out, particularly in lexical, morphological, and syntactic aspects. The research to be conducted by the author will use data from

Japanese speakers' speech when they are challenged to speak English. The data was found in several YouTube videos. Jendra (2007) distinguishes interference into five linguistic aspects, including interference in the field of sound systems (phonology), interference in word formation (morphology), interference in sentence structure (syntax), and interference in vocabulary (lexical). However, in this study, the author will limit the research to recording only the interference that appears, especially at the morphological, lexical, and syntactic levels. Based on the background described earlier, the author wants to find out more about the interference of Japanese speakers in the use of English in Japanese television shows by formulating the following problems: (1) How is the form of intervention of Japanese speakers in the use of English in Japanese television shows? (2) What are the factors that cause Japanese speakers to interfere with the use of English in Japanese television shows?

Materials and Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive research type. Accordingly, the descriptive method is used to examine the status of a group of people, an object, a set of conditions, a system of thought, or a class of events in the present. Meanwhile, the qualitative method is defined as a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behaviors. The data produced consists of words, images, and human behavior. The qualitative descriptive research method is intended to obtain information about the forms of interference that occur and how the Japanese language can interfere with the pronunciation of English words by Japanese speakers on YouTube channels where such interference occurs.

The data source for this video consists of videos on the YouTube channel that show Japanese speakers saying English words spontaneously and quickly. The data is available on the channels of That Japanese Man Yuta. The title of the video uploaded on channel is "When Japanese People Speak English." This video features a Japanese television show that challenges Japanese speakers to tell stories about experiences predetermined by the theme, such as emotional or embarrassing ones. Meanwhile, the video on Yuta's That Japanese Man channel is titled "Do Japanese People Speak English?" and indicates that the channel's owner, Yuta, randomly interviewed Japanese people in Shinjuku using English. To support the smooth running of the study, this research also uses books and journals. The data collection technique used in this study is to examine the overall content of the videos used as data sources and then record words that exhibit interference phenomena.

The steps taken in qualitative descriptive data analysis are: collecting data by examining the full content of videos on a YouTube channel related to the pronunciation of English words by Japanese speakers. Then identify the form of interference that occurs due to the influence of the Japanese language and how Japanese can cause interference in the pronunciation of English words by Japanese speakers, and lastly, draw conclusions on the results of the study after discussing them in detail.

Results and Discussion

Forms of interference

In this section of the results and discussion, the author will analyze the data related to interference. The data in this study were obtained from two YouTube channels where Japanese speakers tried to speak in English. After analyzing the forms of interference found, the author will explain them further in the section below.

Lexical interference

In this study, the author found several Japanese words in English speech, and their presence tends to interfere with the use of the target language because they are not included in the loanword. Here are some examples found along with the discussion.

Lexical interference in the verb class

Based on the collected data, the author identified several sentences containing lexical interference in the verb class, such as: (a) Yesterday gurai (kira) rain ochirune (rain) and kasa (umbrella). Oh, umbrella sashinagara (while carrying an umbrella); (b) Umbrella go people look at me, oh no, oh my God, tojiruyo (shut the umbrella). Close close go, go! Embarrass. Situation: this Japanese speaker recounts his experience a while ago when it rained while walking alone with an umbrella. However, when entering the roofed shop area, the Japanese speaker forgot to cover his umbrella, which made him embarrassed. The use of this verb is caused by the lack of mastery of Japanese speakers in the number of verb vocabulary that tends to be limited, so the speaker mixes Japanese verbs with English sentences

Lexical interference in adjective classes

Lexical interference in adjective classes was found in data from both videos, namely, videos on storytelling challenges in English and also in video interviews. Here are examples found from the two videos. (a) Reina ippai (many) elevator manpower hito (people). Ee people ippai (many) walk walk elevator people people, reina potsun (in the middle). Wow people people wow party angry. Situation: The speaker is boarding an elevator. When the elevator door opened, many people crowded in without caring that it was full, which squeezed the speaker in the middle and made him angry. (b) Okinawa, good naisu (nice) Okinawa saikou (great). Situation: the Japanese speaker is being interviewed about where he is from, and the Japanese speaker responds while adding his impression of the city. Lexical interference in adjectives, as described earlier, shows that Japanese speakers tend to use these adjectives in contexts that convey an impression. In the first example, the participant in the video even repeated it twice to try to correct the misuse of the Japanese word ippai (many) when he first said it, but still couldn't find the right English word in the end. Meanwhile, in the example sentence, the two participants in the video use two different adjectives, namely naisu (nice) and saikou (great). The word naisu is one of the English words commonly used by Japanese speakers, so it has been considered part of the language.

Lexical interference in noun classes

The use of Japanese nouns when speaking in English can be seen in some of the examples: (a) Long long yesterday. Yesterday gurai (approximately) rain ochirune (rain) and kasa (umbrella). Oh umbrella sashinagara (while carrying an umbrella). Situation: this Japanese speaker recounts his experience a while ago when it rained

while walking alone with an umbrella. However, when entering the roofed shop area, the Japanese speaker forgot to cover his umbrella, which made him embarrassed. b. ee hosto(host), rabu (love) story. Situation: a woman being interviewed about what movie she just saw and what genre and storyline it is. Then it was answered with a romantic (love) genre film that talks about the love life of a host. (c) I don't know how to say in English. But, sanseitte (agree) nani (what)? Situation: women were asked for their opinion on former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Sala, one of these women, wanted to answer yes. The use of Japanese nouns when speaking in English is due to a lack of mastery of English vocabulary and to the similarity between the original English words and their loanwords in Japanese, namely, rabu (love) and hosto (host).

Lexical interference in adverb class

Lexical interference is also found in sentences that contain adverbs, as in the following examples: (a) Oh, umbrella sashinagara (while carrying an umbrella) shopping mall naka (in) a go. Situation: this Japanese speaker recounts his experience a while ago when it rained while walking alone with an umbrella. However, when entering the roofed shop area, the Japanese speaker forgot to cover his umbrella, which made him embarrassed; (b) Ee people ippai (many) walk walk elevator people people, reina potsun (in the middle). Situation: The speaker is boarding an elevator. When the elevator door opened, many people crowded in without caring that it was full, which squeezed the speaker in the middle and made the speaker angry. As exemplified above, a Japanese speaker with very little knowledge of English will tend to mix known Japanese words into the target language, so that the influence carries over when speaking.

Morphological interference

The data in this study also include several sentences with morphological interference. According to Jendra (2007), Morphological interference (grammar) occurs when, in the formation of first language words, the speaker uses or absorbs the prefix or suffix of the second language. The Japanese language also recognizes several suffixes that have specific meanings in their use, as shown below.

a. Addition of the suffix ~yo

“Umbrella go people look at me, oh no oh my God, tojiruyo (close the umbrella) close go, go! Embarrass.”

Close The addition of suffixes to verbs is intended to emphasize the intention of the speaker, so that the listener can know the intention to emphasize.

b. Addition of suffix ~san

*“Once upon a time, sanma san is no eyebrow say me. Embarrass
“I agree with Shinzo Abe san.”*

The addition of the suffix ~san after someone's name is commonly used by Japanese speakers. This is intended to respect the interlocutor (owner of the name). In English, ~san can be interpreted as Mr./Mrs.

c. Addition of prefix ee, eeto, a, un

“ee, I think the people living in Tokyo walks very fast. Actually, I was in the US four years ago for study English.”

“Eeto. Clutches”

“Aa my girlfriend.”

“Un graduate”

The prefixes mentioned above are also called aizuchi or expressions conveyed by the speaker in response to the information conveyed by the speaker. The use of aizuchi in this context is intended to show respect for the speaker. However, aizuchi has different meanings, such as ee/un (yes), eeto (uhm or hmm), and a (expressing understanding). This habit persists among Japanese speakers when speaking in a foreign language because of the rich nuances of politeness in it.

Syntactic interference

The two videos used as data sources in this study were also found to exhibit syntactic interference, occurring when structures from other languages are used to form the sentences. The absorption of sentence elements can take the form of words, phrases, or clauses. Some examples found are in the form of phrases and clauses, such as the following. a. kore wa (this is) chokoreto (chocolate) return. Situation: a man is asked about whether white day is in the culture of Valentine's Day in Japan. b. a konna ni (like this) liquor wine, red wine. Situation: A man is asked what type of alcohol he prefers. c. un, nante iu no (what does it mean)? Situation: Two teenage boys are asked whether they are in school or college. d. unn dou kana (how). Good town. Situation: a couple is being asked about their opinion of Tokyo. The addition of Japanese phrases or clauses at the beginning of sentences, as in the example above, can be interpreted as a way for Japanese speakers to consider which responses are appropriate to say. So, it can be said that a person tends to think in their first language and then incorporate the idea into the target language.

Factors causing interference

After analyzing the forms of interference found in the data source. The author can identify the factors that cause interference in English speech by Japanese speakers. These factors include a lack of English proficiency, considering that most of the interference described earlier is a mixture of Japanese and English in a single sentence. In general, Japanese speakers will look for the English equivalent in their first language and then mix it with the target language, namely English. In addition, the factors found are cultural differences and rules between Japanese and English, for example, in the addition of aizuchi and the suffix ~san after the name. This difference is still carried over, considering that aizuchi and the suffix ~san convey a sense of courtesy among Japanese speakers. While the last factor, which is found in the form of morphological interference, is the habit of thinking in the first language. Japanese speakers, in this

case, will use Japanese phrases or clauses when considering what responses are appropriate to offer. So, it can be said that a person tends to think in their first language and then incorporate the idea into the target language.

Conclusion

The Japanese language and its speakers are a unique unity. Although mastery of English is absolutely necessary nowadays, Japanese speakers still uphold their language, which has become a national icon. The forms of interference found, such as lexical, morphological, and syntactic interference, are the background of the causative factors, namely lack of English language proficiency, cultural differences, or language rules, and the presence of factors of thinking habits in the first language. Interference that occurs at any level (lexical, morphological, or syntactic) is a threat to the 'purity of language' because it can alter the structure of language. Meanwhile, from the perspective of language development, interference in a language is important for enriching and developing it.

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Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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