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Pragmatic Transfer in the Invitation Speech Acts of Beginner-Level Japanese Language Learners

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Abstract

Pragmatic transfer refers to the influence of first-language pragmatic knowledge on target-language use. This study aimed to describe invitation strategies used by beginning-level Japanese language learners and identify non-target-like patterns that can reasonably be interpreted as pragmatic transfer by comparing learner responses with Japanese native speakers (JNS) and Indonesian native speakers (INS). A qualitative comparative design was employed using a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) comprising four scenarios varying Power, Social Distance, and Ranking of Imposition. Responses from 15 learners, 10 JNS, and 10 INS were coded using an adapted invitation-strategy scheme based on Suzuki (2009). Evidence of first-language transfer was considered stronger when learner patterns differed from JNS while resembling INS. Results showed that sociopragmatic transfer was most evident in supportive strategies. When inviting a less familiar professor, learners used apology expressions less frequently than JNS, with their pattern more closely resembling INS. Explicit burden-minimizing expressions were absent from both learner and INS responses, while they occurred in JNS responses. A similar first-language tendency appeared in learners' frequent use of address terms when inviting a familiar professor. In contrast, learners' use of direct imperative forms toward a familiar professor was not observed in either native-speaker group, suggesting a learner-specific pragmalinguistic or developmental difficulty rather than straightforward first-language transfer. These findings highlight the importance of using both first-language and target-language baselines when identifying pragmatic transfer and of explicitly teaching context-sensitive invitation strategies.

Keywords: Japanese language learners; invitation speech acts; pragmatic transfer

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1. Introduction

The growing interest in learning Japanese in Indonesia, reflected in the large scale of Japanese-language education reported by the Japan Foundation (2021), has increased the

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responsibility of Japanese language education institutions to ensure that the quality of language instruction continues to improve and becomes more comprehensive. In addition to grammar and vocabulary, Japanese language education should also emphasize pragmatic competence, which enables learners to understand and participate in more meaningful intercultural communication. Pragmatic errors made by Japanese language learners in intercultural contexts are considered more serious than grammatical errors (Yogyanti et al., 2023). Japanese language learners often translate expressions directly into Japanese without sufficient knowledge of Japanese sociocultural norms, resulting in pragmatic failure that may leave an impression of impoliteness. Insufficient pragmatic knowledge may also lead to misunderstandings in communication (Cai & Wang, 2013). These pragmatic errors may subsequently result in pragmatic transfer.

To better understand how pragmatic transfer occurs during second language acquisition, it is necessary to first examine the concept of Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP), which provides the theoretical foundation for explaining the relationship between language development and pragmatic competence.

1.1 Interlanguage Pragmatics

When learning a new language, learners construct a linguistic system that is neither identical to the first language nor identical to the target language, but rather an interlanguage (Selinker, 1972). This system develops as learners draw on prior linguistic knowledge while gradually incorporating target-language forms and usage patterns. Interlanguage therefore provides a useful basis for examining why learner production may be grammatically possible yet still differ from target-language pragmatic conventions.

Pragmatic difficulty may arise when learners have linguistic resources in the target language but have not yet fully developed context-sensitive knowledge of how those resources are used in interaction. In the Japanese-learning context, Supriatnaningsih et al. (2021) found that insufficient sociopragmatic knowledge could contribute to intercultural communication problems among learners. This supports the view that successful language learning depends not only on linguistic competence but also on the ability to select expressions appropriately according to social context.

This relationship between developing learner language and context-sensitive language use is a central concern of Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP). ILP examines how nonnative speakers understand and perform linguistic action in a second or foreign language and how their pragmatic knowledge develops in relation to first-language and target-language norms (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993).

Kasper (1992) questioned the extent to which the first language influences the acquisition of the target language. He concluded that the influence of the first language on target-language pragmatics is inevitable. In fact, first-language influence is consistently observed whenever learners use the target language in pragmatic contexts. This influence subsequently results in transfer effects. The question therefore shifts from whether transfer occurs to what is transferred by language learners.

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The concept of pragmatic transfer has therefore become one of the central concerns in Interlanguage Pragmatics research because it explains how learners' existing pragmatic knowledge influences their use of the target language.

1.2 Pragmatic Transfer

Thomas (1983) argued that pragmatic transfer refers to the transfer of pragmatic knowledge from the first language to the target language, resulting in deviations from the pragmatic norms of native speakers of the target language. In contrast, Kasper (1992) regarded pragmatic transfer as one of the primary factors shaping learners' pragmatic competence in the target language. Pragmatic transfer occurs when learners use the target language based on the pragmatic knowledge of their first language. This transfer encompasses two dimensions: (1) speech production and (2) speech comprehension.

Pragmatic transfer may be positive when first-language and target-language pragmatic conventions overlap, because existing pragmatic knowledge can facilitate target-like choices. Conversely, negative pragmatic transfer may occur when learners apply first-language pragmatic conventions in contexts where the target language organizes the same social meaning differently (Kasper, 1992; Qian et al., 2024). The direction and strength of transfer therefore need to be established from observable cross-language patterns rather than assumed from broad cultural similarity or difference.

Qian et al. (2024) explained that pragmatic transfer is a complex phenomenon and cannot be predicted solely from structural differences between the first language and the target language. Cultural awareness, intercultural experience, learning motivation, proficiency, and other developmental factors may also shape learner choices. In this article, pragmatic transfer is therefore distinguished from the narrower notion of first-language interference: pragmatic transfer is a neutral term that may describe positive or negative L1 influence, whereas interference usually refers specifically to negative L1 effects. Accordingly, a learner-JNS difference is interpreted as transfer only when there is observable alignment with the INS baseline; otherwise, it is described more cautiously as pragmatic divergence or developmental difficulty.

Thomas (1983) further classified pragmatic transfer into two types: pragmalinguistic transfer and sociopragmatic transfer.

1.2.1 Pragmalinguistic Transfer

Pragmalinguistic transfer refers to the inappropriate use of linguistic forms in the target language due to the influence of linguistic patterns from the first language.

Example 1. Pragmalinguistic transfer (example from Oktarina, 2021)

Japanese learners at JLPT N4-N2 level

「本を持つのを忘れてしまった。」

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"*Hon o motsu no o wasurete shimatta.*"

"I forgot to bring the book."

Native speaker

「本を持ってくるのを忘れてしまいました。」

"*Hon o motte kuru no o wasurete shimaimashita.*"

"I forgot to bring the book."

Example 1 demonstrates pragmalinguistic transfer in the learner's choice of the verb *motsu* to express the meaning of *membawa* ("to bring"). In contrast, the native speaker used motte kuru, which is more appropriate in a context involving bringing something to a particular destination. The learner transferred the Indonesian concept of *membawa* directly into Japanese by selecting only motsu without recognizing the contextual distinction expressed in Japanese when movement toward a destination is involved.

1.2.2 Sociopragmatic Transfer

Sociopragmatic transfer refers to the transfer of social and cultural norms from the first language into the target language.

Example 2. Sociopragmatic transfer

As an illustration of sociopragmatic transfer in real-life interaction with a close Japanese peer, a learner may overgeneralize the use of the honorific suffix "*-san*" together with the polite "*desu/masu*" style even when the relationship would normally permit less formal language. Such over-formality can create unintended interpersonal distance. This example is used to illustrate how an L1-based judgment of appropriate social distance may influence L2 choice; it is not intended to claim that all Indonesian learners behave in this way or that the pattern necessarily originates in classroom instruction.

1.3 Invitation Speech Acts in Japanese

Invitation speech acts, or (さそい) *sasoi* in Japanese, are among the speech acts that are relatively complex from a pragmatic perspective and are particularly susceptible to pragmatic transfer from Indonesian. Brown and Levinson (1987) explained that invitations are face-threatening acts (FTAs) because they threaten the hearer's negative face by requiring the hearer to make a sacrifice, such as giving their time or effort. Therefore, producing invitations requires not only grammatically accurate expressions but also pragmatically appropriate linguistic strategies, particularly within the cultural and linguistic context of Japanese.

Llewellyn (2021) found that native speakers of Japanese employed negative politeness strategies more frequently than Japanese language learners, indicating a gap between learner and native-speaker invitation behavior. In the Indonesian JFL context, Yogyanti et al. (2024)

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specifically examined beginner-level Indonesian university students learning Japanese in classroom conversation tasks; their findings therefore concern Indonesian learners of Japanese, not Indonesians in general. These studies show that pragmatic difficulties may already be visible at beginning levels and may involve both linguistic selection and sociopragmatic calibration.

Previous research provides two important points of comparison for the present study. Llewellyn (2021), in a study of invitation discourse, found systematic differences between Japanese learners and native Japanese speakers in the deployment of politeness strategies, demonstrating that grammatical ability alone does not guarantee target-like invitation behavior. In the Indonesian JFL context, Haristiani et al. (2023) showed that pragmatic transfer may arise through literal L1-to-L2 mapping as well as through the transfer of pragmatic functions, while Yogyanti et al. (2024) found that pragmatic failures already occur among beginner-level Japanese learners. These findings support examining pragmatic competence from the early stages of learning and also caution against classifying every learner-JNS difference as transfer without evidence of an L1 pattern.

Although research on pragmatic transfer among Japanese language learners has increased, studies that specifically investigate invitation speech acts among beginning-level Indonesian learners using both a Japanese native-speaker baseline and an Indonesian native-speaker baseline remain limited. Previous studies have largely examined other speech acts such as apologies (Haristiani et al., 2023, 2024) and refusals (Nurjaleka, 2019), while invitation-focused work such as Llewellyn (2021) has not specifically addressed beginning-level Indonesian learners. The beginning level is analytically important because non-target-like forms may arise from a restricted L2 repertoire or developing register control as well as from L1 influence. Without an INS baseline, a learner-JNS difference can therefore be over-interpreted as transfer. The present study addresses this gap by using the INS group to test whether learner patterns that diverge from JNS also show a corresponding L1 direction across changes in power, distance, and imposition.

Therefore, this study aims to (1) describe the invitation speech act strategies employed by beginning-level Japanese language learners across four PDR-based situations, (2) compare learner patterns with JNS and INS baselines, and (3) identify pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfer only where the three-group comparison—that is, beginning-level learners, JNS, and INS—provides sufficient evidence of L1 alignment rather than learner-JNS divergence alone.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a comparative descriptive design using a qualitative approach. The study focused not only on analyzing the invitation expressions produced by Japanese language learners but also on examining the extent to which these expressions reflected pragmatic transfer from the learners' first-language pragmatic norms when compared with the pragmatic norms of native speakers of Japanese.

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Data were collected using a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) consisting of four communication scenarios. The scenarios were designed based on the PDR variables proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), namely Power (P), referring to the relative power relationship between interlocutors; Distance (D), referring to the degree of social distance; and Ranking of Imposition (R), referring to the degree of burden imposed on the hearer.

2.2 Participants

The study involved three groups of participants. The learner group consisted of 15 beginning-level Japanese language learners with proficiency equivalent to JLPT N4 (n=7) and N5 (n=8). Learners were purposively included only when they were native speakers of Indonesian, were approximately at N5-N4 level, had not lived in Japan for more than six months, and produced responses across the four scenarios that were sufficiently developed for pragmatic coding. The comparison groups consisted of 10 native speakers of Japanese (JNS), used as the target-language baseline, and 10 native speakers of Indonesian (INS), used as the first-language baseline. The JNS sample size reflected practical recruitment constraints because eligible respondents were primarily located in Japan, and the INS group was matched to the JNS group in size to keep the two native-speaker baselines comparable. The INS group was not included merely as a descriptive comparison; its responses were used to test whether learner patterns that differed from JNS also resembled pragmatic tendencies found in Indonesian responses. Because the study uses a small purposively selected sample within a qualitative descriptive design, the findings are interpreted as tendencies within the present dataset rather than as estimates that can be generalized to the wider population of beginning-level Japanese learners.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected using a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) consisting of four communication scenarios. Each scenario was designed to elicit invitation speech acts while systematically varying the PDR variables proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987): Power (P), Distance (D), and Ranking of Imposition (R).

All scenarios were based on the same communicative context. Participants were asked to imagine that they were going to give an undergraduate thesis presentation that was open to the public and that they wished to invite the designated interlocutor to attend the presentation. The four scenarios differed only in terms of the interlocutor and the PDR variables. The scenario design was reviewed during supervision and was also tried out in a small preliminary survey (*mini chousa*) to check clarity. However, no independent manipulation check was conducted to verify participants' perceptions of Power, Distance, and Ranking of Imposition; this is therefore treated as a methodological limitation.

Different administration modes were used: learners completed a paper-based DCT, whereas JNS and INS completed an equivalent web-based DCT through Google Forms. The scenarios, contextual information, interlocutor roles, and response prompts were kept identical across groups to maximize comparability. The DCT is not treated here as a direct measure of learners' spontaneous real-life pragmatic competence; rather, it provides controlled written evidence of the strategies participants report that they would use under the same elicited

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conditions. Because administration mode may still influence formulation, the paper-versus-web difference is acknowledged as a methodological limitation, and the findings are interpreted as comparative pragmatic tendencies rather than a complete representation of naturally occurring performance.

The DCT was selected because it allows the same social variables to be controlled across participant groups and facilitates systematic comparison of speech-act realizations. At the same time, DCT responses are elicited representations of what participants say they would produce in a scenario, not recordings of naturally occurring interaction. Golato (2003) demonstrated that DCT data and naturally occurring conversational data may differ in the kinds of pragmatic behavior they reveal. Accordingly, the present study uses DCT data to identify comparative tendencies in strategy choice and does not claim that the responses reproduce spontaneous invitation interaction in full.

2.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach. The analysis focused on the invitation strategies produced by the learners and on whether those strategies converged with the Japanese or Indonesian baseline patterns. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to illustrate tendencies across situations and participant groups; they were not used for statistical hypothesis testing. Because a single response could contain more than one Preparatory Act or Supportive Move, percentages for these components represent strategy occurrence and do not necessarily sum to 100%.

The responses were first coded using an adapted scheme based on Suzuki's invitation taxonomy (Suzuki, 2009, as cited in Ünsal Şakiroğlu & Özyıldırım, 2024). Suzuki's framework distinguishes Address, Head Act, Preparatory Act, and Supportive Move functions. For the present article, these functions were operationalized into three reporting blocks—Head Act (HA), Preparatory Act (PA), and Supportive Move (SM)—with address/vocative expressions reported as SM-Addr. Thomas's (1983) framework was then used only at the interpretive stage to determine whether a cross-group pattern represented possible pragmalinguistic or sociopragmatic transfer. Thus, the Suzuki-based scheme identifies what strategy is present, whereas Thomas's framework is used to explain the source and type of pragmatic divergence.

For the three-group comparison, the same operational definitions were applied to learner, JNS, and INS responses. Particular attention was given to strategies that could be identified transparently across languages, including apology openings (SM-Apol), explicit burden minimization (SM-Min), and address/vocative expressions (SM-Addr).

Table 1. DCT Scenarios and Interlocutors

Scenario	Interlocutor	PDR Variables	Situation
S1	Close friend	P=H, D-, R low	You are going to give your undergraduate thesis presentation, which is open to the public. You would like to invite the <interlocutor> to attend your presentation.
S2	Not close friends	P=H, D+, R moderate	
S3	Familiar professor	S<H, D+, R moderate	
S4	Unfamiliar professor	S<H, D+, R high	

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SM-Apol is an operational supportive code used in this study for explicit apology expressions that accompany the invitation; it is reported separately because apology behavior became analytically important in the higher-imposition situations. Because the present coding was conducted by the researcher and an independent inter-rater reliability coefficient was not available, ambiguous cases were interpreted conservatively and this issue is reported as a limitation.

The adapted Suzuki-based coding is organized into the following three analytical blocks:
Preparatory Act (PA): Opening expressions that prepare the hearer before the main invitation is delivered.
Head Act (HA): The core invitation expression.
Supportive Move (SM): Supporting expressions that reinforce the invitation by providing additional information, explanations, or reasons.
Previous invitation research has reported a recurrent sequence in formal Japanese invitations to higher-status interlocutors, such as SM-Apol → SM-Desc → PA-Time → PA-Cond → HA-Hyp → SM-Reward (Llewellyn, 2021). In the present study, this sequence is used as a descriptive reference rather than as a fixed or obligatory formula; actual strategy combinations vary according to speaker, relationship, and context.

Table 2. Invitation Strategy Codes Adapted from Suzuki (2009)

No	Strategy	Code	Example
1	Head Act — Declarative	HA-Dec	E: "Let's have lunch together!" J: 「一緒に食べましょう！」
2	Head Act — Interrogative	HA-Int	E: "Would you like to watch a movie together?" J: 「映画を見に行きませんか？」
3	Head Act — Hypothetical + Interrogative	HA-Hyp	E: "If you don't mind, how about we...?" J: 「もしよかったら、ご一緒にいかがでしょうか」
4	Head Act — Want/Desire Statement	HA-Want	E: "I'd like to go together with Sensei...." J: 「先生と一緒に行きたいと思っているんですが」
5	Head Act — Imperative/Directive	HA-Imp	E: "Please come!" J: 「来てください！」
6	Preparatory Act — Query on Hearer's Plan	PA-Query	E: "Are you free tomorrow?" J: 「明日、お暇はありますか？」
7	Preparatory Act — Time Specification	PA-Time	E: "After today's class..." J: 「今日の授業の後に」
8	Preparatory Act — Conditional Preface	PA-Cond	E: "If you don't mind...." J: 「もしよろしければ」
9	Supportive Move — Description of Event	SM-Desc	E: "There will be a group presentation..." J: 「グループ発表があるんですが」
10	Supportive Move — Address / Vocative	SM-Addr	E: "*Sensei*," "*Senpai*," J: 「田中先生、」「山田先輩、」
11	Supportive Move — Promise of Reward,	SM-Reward	E: "It will be enjoyable!" J: 「きっと楽しいですよ！」
12	Supportive Move — Imposition Minimizer	SM-Min	E: "It will only take a little while." J: 「少しだけでいいので」

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3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Result

Based on the adapted Suzuki-based coding scheme, the analysis is organized around three reporting blocks: the Head Act (HA), which carries the core invitational force; the Preparatory Act (PA), which prepares conditions such as time or willingness before the invitation; and the Supportive Move (SM), which provides relational or contextual support around the invitation. Table 3 therefore compares how learners and JNS realize each block across the four situations. Pragmatic transfer requires evidence from both the target-language and first-language baselines, Table 4 then adds INS data for selected supportive strategies that can be identified transparently across Japanese and Indonesian responses. This component-by-component organization makes the adapted Suzuki framework the descriptive basis of the analysis, while Thomas's (1983) framework is used only at the interpretive stage to distinguish possible pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfer.

3.1.1 Head Act (HA)

In Situation 1, learners most frequently used HA-Dec and HA-Imp at an equal rate of 33%, while JNS predominantly used HA-Int at 50%.

Learner (5) HA-Dec example, S1:

「今度私のはっぴょうするだんだけど来てくれたらうれしいな！」

("I'm going to have a presentation soon — I'd be so happy if you came!")

JNS (2) HA-Int example, S1:

「今度、研究発表会があって、私も発表するから、もし時間があって興味ありそうだったら見に来てくれない？」

("I have a research presentation coming up and I'll be presenting too — if you're free and interested, would you come and watch?")

In Situation 2, learner use of HA-Imp increased to 47%, while JNS continued to predominantly use HA-Int at 50%. HA-Hyp began to appear in both groups, though at low frequencies.

Learner (4) HA-Imp example, S2:

「今度、発表があります。よかったら、見に来てください。」

("I have a presentation coming up. Please come and watch if you'd like.")

JNS (4) HA-Int example, S2:

「今度発表するんだけど、もし都合が合えば、見に来てもらうことってできる？」

("I'm going to be presenting soon — if it works out for you, would you be able to come and watch?")

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In Situation 3, HA-Hyp became the most frequently used strategy among JNS (70%), while learners showed an increase in HA-Hyp usage, though it remained equal to HA-Int at 33%.

Learner (8) HA-Hyp example, S3:

「せんせい、あしたぷれぜんがあるんですが、もしじかんがあれば、みにきていただけませんか。」

("Sensei, I have a presentation tomorrow — if you have time, would you be able to come and watch?")

JNS (1) HA-Hyp example, S3:

「00 月 00 日に、〇〇で、私の大学の卒業研究発表会が予定されています。もし先生のご都合がよろしければ、ぜひいらしてご覧いただければと思っています！」

("My university's thesis presentation is scheduled on [date] at [venue]. If it is convenient for you, Sensei, I would be honored if you could attend.")

Table 3. Frequency and percentage of occurrence of invitation strategies using the adapted Suzuki-based coding scheme

Code	S1 N	S1 JNS	S2 N	S2 JNS	S3 N	S3 JNS	S4 N	S4 JNS	∑ N	∑ JNS
HA-Dec	5 (33%)	3 (30%)	1 (7%)	2 (20%)	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6	6
HA-Int	4 (27%)	5 (50%)	5 (33%)	5 (50%)	5 (33%)	2 (20%)	3 (20%)	2 (20%)	17	14
HA-Hyp	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	2 (13%)	2 (20%)	5 (33%)	7 (70%)	9 (60%)	10 (100%)	16	20
HA-Want	1 (7%)	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	1 (7%)	1 (10%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	4	2
HA-Imp	5 (33%)	3 (30%)	7 (47%)	1 (10%)	4 (27%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	16	4
TOTAL HA									**59**	**46**
PA-Query	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	2 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0	3
PA-Time	3 (20%)	8 (80%)	2 (13%)	6 (60%)	5 (33%)	7 (70%)	7 (47%)	9 (90%)	17	30
PA-Cond	4 (27%)	4 (40%)	9 (60%)	8 (80%)	10 (67%)	9 (90%)	13 (87%)	10 (100%)	36	31
TOTAL PA									**53**	**64**
SM-Addr	6 (40%)	3 (30%)	5 (33%)	3 (30%)	12 (80%)	5 (50%)	9 (60%)	5 (50%)	32	16
SM-Desc	13 (87%)	10 (100%)	13 (87%)	10 (100%)	14 (93%)	10 (100%)	14 (93%)	10 (100%)	54	40
SM-Apol	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	3 (20%)	3 (30%)	6 (40%)	10 (100%)	11	13
SM-Reward	5 (33%)	3 (30%)	2 (13%)	2 (20%)	5 (33%)	5 (50%)	5 (33%)	6 (60%)	17	16
SM-Min	0 (0%)	1(10%)	0 (0%)	4 (40%)	0 (0%)	2 (20%)	0 (0%)	3 (30%)	0	10
TOTAL SM									**114**	**95**

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In Situation 4, all JNS used HA-Hyp (100%), while learners reached 60%.

Learner (4) HA-Hyp example, S4:

「もしお時間がありましたら、見に来ていただけるとうれしいです。」

("If you have time, I would be delighted if you could come and watch.")

JNS (2) HA-Hyp example, S4:

「今度、研究発表会がありますので、もしご都合つくようでしたら、ご参加いただけますと幸いです。」

("I will be holding a research presentation soon — if it suits your schedule, I would be grateful if you could attend.")

Overall, learner use of HA-Hyp increased consistently from S1 (0%) to S4 (60%), indicating growing pragmatic awareness regarding the importance of selecting an appropriate Head Act type in accordance with situational formality. However, a significant gap remains compared to JNS, particularly in S3 (33% vs. 70%), suggesting that learners have yet to apply this strategy consistently across all hierarchical contexts.

3.1.2 Preparatory Act (PA)

PA was dominated by PA-Cond in both groups. This strategy increased progressively across situations, with learners ranging from 27% to 87% and JNS from 40% to 100%.

Learner (4) PA-Cond example, S1:

「今度、私の発表があります。時間があったら、ぜひ来てね。」

("I have a presentation coming up. If you have time, please come!")

JNS (2) PA-Cond example, S1:

「今度、研究発表会があって、私も発表するから、もし時間があって興味ありそうだったら見に来てくれない？」

("I have a research presentation coming up — if you have time and are interested, would you come and watch?")

PA-Time also occurred at high frequencies among JNS across all situations (80% in S1 and 90% in S4), but was considerably lower among learners (20% in S1 and 47% in S4).

Learner (3) PA-Time example, S1:

「明日は発表があったから、見に行けよ！」

("I've got a presentation tomorrow, so come watch!")

JNS (4) PA-Time example, S1:

「今度発表するんだけど、都合が合えば、見に来れる？」

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("I'm presenting soon — if it works out, can you come?")

In contrast, PA-Query was entirely absent from learner data across all situations, while JNS also used it infrequently (10% in S1 and 20% in S2).

JNS (3) PA-Query example, S1:

「発表会があるんだけど、その日空いてる？良かったら見に来てほしいなって。」

("I have a presentation — are you free that day? I'd love it if you came and watched, if you'd like.")

3.1.3 Supportive Move (SM)

SM-Desc was the most frequently used strategy by both learners (87%–93%) and JNS (100% across all situations).

Learner (7) SM-Desc example, S4:

「このたび、そつぎょうろんぶんのはっぴょうおこないます。ごたぼうのところきょうしゅくですが、もしおじかんをいただけましたら、ごれいじょういただけますとさいわいです。どうぞよろしくおねがいします。」

("I will be holding my thesis presentation. I sincerely apologize for the imposition given your busy schedule, but if you could spare some time, I would be deeply honored by your attendance.")

JNS (9) SM-Desc example, S4:

「ご無沙汰しております。〇月〇日に〇〇大学にて卒業研究発表会を行います。〇〇教授にはぜひ来ていただきたく、ご連絡をさせていただきました。」

("It has been a while. I will be holding my thesis presentation at [university] on [date]. I am reaching out because I would very much like you, Professor, to attend.")

SM-Addr was also frequently used by learners (40%–80%), peaking in S3, while JNS remained stable at 30%–50%.

Learner (11) SM-Addr example, S3:

「先生、今度卒業研究の発表があります。お時間があったら、ぜひ見に来てください。」

("Sensei, I will be having my thesis presentation soon. Please come and watch if you have time.")

JNS (9) SM-Addr example, S1:

「やっほ〜！〇月〇日時間がある？〇〇大学の卒業研究発表会があるんだけど、ぜひ来てもらいたいなと思って！どうかな？？」

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("Hey! Are you free on [date]? I have my university thesis presentation and I really hope you can come! What do you think?")

SM-Apol showed a progressive increase as the situational formality shifted toward hierarchically asymmetric contexts (S < H). Among learners, it first appeared in S2 (13%) and increased to 40% in S4. Among JNS, it was absent in S1–S2, then rose to 30% in S3 and reached 100% in S4.

Learner (6) SM-Apol example, S4:

「先生、お忙しいところおそれいります。らいしゅう、はっぴょうかいをおこないます。ごつごうよろしければ、ぜひ、こりんせきいただけますとさいわいです。」

("Sensei, I am sorry to impose on your busy time. I will be holding a presentation next week. If it is convenient, I would be honored by your attendance.")

JNS (6) SM-Apol example, S3:

「お忙しいところ申し訳ありません。〇〇の研究発表を〇月〇日〇時より、実施する運びとなりました。ご都合よろしければぜひ見に来ていただけますと嬉しいです。」

("I am terribly sorry to trouble you when you are so busy. My research presentation will be held on [date] at [time]. I would be very happy if you could come if your schedule permits.")

Conversely, SM-Min was found exclusively in JNS data at low rates (10%–40%) and was entirely absent from learner data (0%).

JNS (3) SM-Min example, S2:

「発表会があるんだけど、良ければ見に来てほしいな。無理にとは言わないから！」

("I have a presentation — I'd love it if you came, if you feel like it. No pressure though!")

3.1.4 INS Baseline and Three-Group Comparison

Table 4 therefore focuses on three strategies that can be identified consistently across Japanese and Indonesian responses: SM-Apol, SM-Min, and SM-Addr. In S3, 2 of 10 INS used an explicit apology expression and all 10 used an explicit address term; in S4, 4 of 10 used an apology expression and all 10 used an address term. No INS response contained an explicit burden-minimizing move equivalent to expressions such as 'no pressure' or 'it is okay if you cannot come.' Conditional expressions such as *'jika berkenan'* were coded as conditional preparatory strategies rather than SM-Min unless they explicitly reduced the burden or licensed refusal.

The three-group comparison changes the strength of several interpretations. SM-Apol in S4 shows clear learner-INS convergence: both groups used the strategy in 40% of responses, whereas JNS reached 100%. SM-Min provides an even clearer contrast, being absent in both

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learner and INS data while appearing among JNS in S3 and S4. SM-Addr shows a different type of convergence: learners used explicit address terms much more frequently than JNS in S3 (80% vs. 50%), while INS used them in all responses (100%). In S4, however, learner SM-Addr decreased to 60%, so the L1-alignment interpretation is stronger for S3 than for S4. These patterns provide a more defensible basis for discussing sociopragmatic transfer because the learner behavior is evaluated against both baselines.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Pragmalinguistic Difficulty: Use of HA-Imp toward Higher-Status Interlocutors

The most visible learner-JNS divergence in the Head Act was the use of HA-Imp in S3. Learners used HA-Imp in 27% of responses, while the JNS group in the present dataset did not use it in this situation. Forms such as "来てください" may be grammatically well formed but can carry a directive force that requires careful calibration when the speaker has lower status. Rachman (2023), in a comparative study of Indonesian and Japanese request imperatives, likewise showed that Indonesian request markers such as "*tolong*" and "*mohon*" can soften imperative force, whereas Japanese distinguishes command and request realizations through a broader set of grammatical resources. This difference helps explain why literal equivalence at the lexical level does not necessarily yield equivalent pragmatic force across the two languages.

INS data did not show a matching concentration of imperative Head Acts toward a familiar professor, so the learner HA-Imp pattern does not satisfy the strongest criterion for L1 transfer. It is therefore treated here as a pragmalinguistic difficulty that may involve several interacting sources: partial L1-to-L2 mapping, limited control of Japanese request/invitation forms, and developing sensitivity to register. This interpretation is consistent with Haristiani et al. (2023), who found that Indonesian learners' pragmatic problems can arise both from literal L1-to-L2 mapping and from difficulty selecting among Japanese forms, and with Yogyanti et al. (2024), who reported that pragmalinguistic failures are already common among beginner Japanese learners. Thus, HA-Imp remains pedagogically important, but the present data do not justify presenting it as a purely Indonesian-transfer effect.

Learner (15) HA-Imp example, S3:

「あの…. せんせい、あとでそつぎょうはっぴょうがあります。ぜひきてください！せんせいがきてくてたら、めちゃうれしい…. ありがとうせんせい。」

("Um... Sensei, I have my thesis presentation later. Please definitely come! I'd be super happy if you came... thank you, Sensei.")

Table 4. Three-group comparison of selected sociopragmatic strategies in S3-S4

Strategy	S3 N	S3 INS	S3 JNS	S4 N	S4 INS	S4 JNS
SM-Apol	3 (20%)	2 (20%)	3 (30%)	6 (40%)	4 (40%)	10 (100%)
SM-Min	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (30%)
SM-Addr	12 (80%)	10 (100%)	5 (50%)	9 (60%)	10 (100%)	5 (50%)

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3.2.2 Sociopragmatic Transfer: Three Consistent Patterns

3.2.2.1 Sociopragmatic Transfer 1: Limited use of SM-Apol in high-imposition contexts

SM-Apol provides the clearest three-group evidence in S4. Learners used an apology opening in 6 of 15 responses (40%), INS in 4 of 10 responses (40%), and JNS in all 10 responses (100%). The identical learner-INS percentage, combined with the large difference from JNS, supports an L1-aligned sociopragmatic interpretation more strongly than a learner-JNS comparison alone. The point is not that Indonesian speakers never apologize before an invitation: the INS data contain forms such as 'mohon maaf mengganggu waktunya' ('I am sorry to disturb your time'). Rather, apology was optional in the Indonesian baseline but highly regular in the JNS S4 responses. For beginning learners, the 40% rate may also reflect a developing L2 repertoire and incomplete sensitivity to when an apology opening is pragmatically expected. The result is therefore interpreted as an interaction between an L1-aligned sociopragmatic judgment and developing learner competence, not as a categorical constraint on Indonesian communication. Haristiani et al. (2023) similarly showed that learners may possess an apology form while differing from JNS in its contextual deployment. The present result should therefore be framed as a difference in distribution and contextual necessity, not as a fixed cultural rule.

3.2.2.2 Sociopragmatic Transfer 2: Absence of explicit burden-minimizing moves

SM-Min was absent from all learner responses and all INS responses, whereas it occurred across all four JNS situations (10%–40%). This learner-INS convergence provides strong support for an L1-aligned sociopragmatic pattern. A clear JNS example is “無理にとは言わないから” ('No pressure, though'), which explicitly licenses refusal and reduces the interpersonal burden of the invitation. Llewellyn's (2021) invitation study showed that JFL learners and Japanese native speakers differ in their use of politeness strategies in invitation discourse, particularly when the inviter must manage the invitee's hesitation or potential burden. The present data extend that concern to beginning-level Indonesian learners: the issue is not simply the absence of a particular phrase but the absence of an explicit move that gives the interlocutor an overtly verbalized route to decline. Because beginner proficiency may also restrict the repertoire available to learners, the finding is interpreted as strong evidence of L1 alignment but not as proof that proficiency has no role.

3.2.2.3 Sociopragmatic Transfer 3: Frequent use of SM-Addr as an explicit respect marker

SM-Addr shows partial rather than uniform transfer. In S3, learners used explicit address terms in 12 of 15 responses (80%), INS in 10 of 10 (100%), and JNS in 5 of 10 (50%). This distribution is compatible with an L1-aligned preference for overtly marking the interlocutor through forms such as *Pak, Bu,* or *Sensei*. The raw INS responses repeatedly begin invitations to lecturers with an address term, while the learner data similarly make “先生” or “*Sensei*” highly salient. In S4, however, learner SM-Addr fell to 60% despite remaining at 100% in INS and 50% in JNS; therefore, the pattern cannot be described as a stable one-to-one transfer across all formal situations. The evidence is strongest in S3 and is best interpreted as a sociopragmatic tendency that interacts with learners' growing use of Japanese honorific and conditional resources.

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The inclusion of INS also prevents over-interpretation of other learner-JNS gaps. For instance, a strategy may differ from JNS yet fail to resemble the Indonesian baseline, in which case proficiency, incomplete register control, or individual variation remains a plausible explanation. This distinction is consistent with the broader ILP literature and with Yogyanti et al. (2024), whose beginner data show that pragmatic failure can arise from linguistic selection problems as well as sociopragmatic miscalibration. In the present study, 'transfer' is therefore reserved for patterns with observable L1 alignment, while other differences are reported as pragmatic divergence or developmental difficulty

3.2.3 Cross-Situational Differences in Pragmatic Transfer

Taken together, the S1-S4 pattern suggests that pragmatic difficulty becomes more visible as contextual demands increase, but the type of difficulty differs by strategy. In low-imposition interaction with close friends, learner and JNS choices overlap more substantially. As social distance and power asymmetry increase, learners must coordinate the Head Act with preparatory and supportive moves rather than merely select a grammatically polite form. Beuckmann and Mori (2018) specifically examined the role of power and rank of imposition in Japanese request, invitation, and apology speech-level choices, supporting the relevance of these contextual variables to pragmatic selection.

The three-group evidence is especially informative in S3-S4. HA-Imp in S3 is a strong learner-JNS divergence but weak evidence of transfer because the INS baseline does not reproduce the learner pattern. By contrast, S4 SM-Apol and S3-S4 SM-Min show learner-INS convergence against a distinct JNS pattern, making the transfer interpretation more defensible. SM-Addr occupies an intermediate position: the S3 distribution strongly resembles INS, while the S4 distribution is less clearly aligned. This layered interpretation avoids collapsing pragmalinguistic difficulty, proficiency effects, and sociopragmatic transfer into a single category.

Pedagogically, these findings support explicit pragmatic instruction from the beginning level. Yogyanti et al. (2024) showed that pragmatic failures can emerge even in basic Japanese learning, and Llewellyn (2021) demonstrated that invitation politeness involves discourse-level strategy choices rather than isolated grammatical accuracy. Instruction should therefore contrast not only forms such as “～てください” and “～ていただけませんか”, but also the contextual functions of apology openings, conditional prefaces, burden minimizers, and address terms under different combinations of P, D, and R.

4. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that pragmatic transfer can be identified more reliably when learner data are compared with both L1 and target-language baselines. In this article, pragmatic transfer is not used as a synonym for first-language interference: transfer is a broader, neutral concept that may be positive or negative, whereas interference refers specifically to negative L1 effects. The clearest INS-supported sociopragmatic patterns were found in supportive strategies: learners' use of apology expressions in S4 and address terms particularly in S3 showed tendencies closer to INS than JNS, while explicit burden-minimizing expressions were absent from both learner and INS data. In contrast, learners' use of direct imperative forms

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toward a familiar professor was not reflected in the INS baseline, so it is treated as a learner-specific pragmalinguistic or developmental difficulty rather than straightforward L1 transfer. These findings highlight the need to distinguish L1-aligned pragmatic tendencies from general learner difficulties and suggest that beginning-level Japanese instruction should address not only polite grammatical forms but also how invitation strategies vary according to power, social distance, imposition, and the interlocutor's freedom to decline. Future research should therefore involve larger samples, multiple coders, an explicit manipulation check, and complementary methods such as role-play or naturally occurring interaction to further validate these pragmatic patterns.

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Author Contributions

Y.T.: conceptualization, methodology, data collection, formal analysis, writing - original draft; N.H.: supervision, writing - review and editing. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Generative AI Usage Declaration

OpenAI ChatGPT was used for language editing and readability improvements in selected sections of the manuscript. Its use was limited to improving readability, clarity, and language. All AI-assisted revisions were reviewed and approved by the authors, who remain fully responsible for the content of the manuscript.

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