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L2 Learners' Selection of Formality in Japanese Verbs: Linguistic and Non- Linguistic Factors

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT

This study explores how Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL) learners express their own cultures and identities as well as their L1 aspects in L2 Japanese in terms of politeness. Many scholars claim that language reflects the speaker's culture and identity, so it could be natural for JFL learners to express their cultures and identities in Japanese. Based on the idea, how JFL learners' non-linguistic as well as linguistic aspects are reflected in their use of Japanese verb forms in terms of formality was examined through an activity called 'Translation-based Communicative Activity' in a university-level Japanese class. In the activity, the learners selected verb forms at different levels of politeness according to different social contexts. The participants were 12 international students from 8 different countries studying in Japan. As a result, American, German, and French students tend to show their L1 *context* (both linguistic and cultural aspects) in expressing politeness in L2. On the other hand, half of the Asian students (Chinese, Taiwanese, Vietnamese, and Mongolian) selected the verb forms in the way of the Japanese rather than their own ways. In this paper, we discuss what makes the difference in the students' selections of the verb forms in each context among different subjects.

1. Introduction

The current study focuses on Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL) learners' writing productions to view how the learners express their own cultures and identities (L1 *context*) in Japanese (L2). From a sociolinguistic perspective, many researchers claim that L2 learners are considered to reflect their cultural backgrounds as well as linguistic backgrounds in the L2 that are different from those of the native speakers. In our previous study (Saito, 2019), a new class activity design for L2 learning was proposed, which is called 'Translation-based Communicative Activity,' and introduced into a Japanese class at college. In the activities, the students were asked to choose verb forms at different levels of formality according to different social contexts. Based on the collected data, the current study aims to examine whether and how the selection of the verb forms reflects the students' cultures and identities, that is, their L1 *context* in politeness in L2 Japanese. On the contrary, students who are highly motivated to acculturate themselves into the Japanese community, in other words, whose 'psychological distance' is close to the Japanese society and people would express the Japanese culture and identity over their own in politeness in L2 Japanese. Thus, the current study views the data based on the two-fold: L1 *context* and psychological distance to analyze and discuss how and why the students chose the verb forms in each of the different social contexts from a sociolinguistic viewpoint.

2. Background

2.1 Linguistic and Non-linguistic L1 *Context* Reflected in L2

Many scholars agree with the idea that language is profoundly associated with the speaker's culture and identity. Niemeier (2014) pointed out that language is not only a communication tool but also reflects the *context*, such as the speaker's own culture and identity. Further, Morimitsu (2010) remarked that language comprises the important aspects of the culture and is deeply involved in the cogitation of people using the language. Therefore, even the same language becomes different depending on the speakers'

cultures and identities. For example, English is spoken in multiple countries as a native language such as the US, Australia, and the UK, but these 'Englishes' (i.e., American English, Australian English, and British English) are not the same because the speakers in each country express their cultures and identities in English. Further, the idea can be applied to non-native English speakers as well as native English speakers. Smith (1976), who developed the concept 'English as an International Language' (EIL), claims that ESL/EFL learners should speak their own English by expressing their cultures and identities, enabling them to acquire the ownership of English and speak English as their own language. In fact, there are many English varieties all over the world, including non-native English varieties (i.e., Singlish and Chinglish). Although the idea clearly reveals in the case of English since it has been spoken world-widely as a common language in history, it can be generalized into all languages. Namely, L2 learners reflect their cultures and identities in the L2 and acquire its ownership, which leads to L2 diversity.

Looking at this from the viewpoint of second language acquisition (SLA), the interlanguage (IL) theory (Selinker, 1972) can explain the idea differently. According to the theory, there is *language transfer* in which "L1 knowledge contributes to the shape of the interim grammar, i.e., IL system, and hence affects IL products" (Bialystok & Smith, 1985). Concerning this, Adjemian (1976) affirms the 'modular' approach to describe IL products as a combination of separated knowledge sources; one is the L1 system, and the other is the developing L2 system. In other words, the theory underlines IL outputs both aspects of L1/L2. Therefore, L2 learners make grammar 'errors' (i.e., interlingual errors) as the result; the particular aspect of L1 is revealed in the L2. Some 'error' types, on the other hand, have a different nature. Based on the view that language reflects the speaker's culture and identity (i.e., L1 *context*), it can be considered that the *context* is also incorporated into the IL system, introducing 'errors.' Thus, IL outputs both aspects of L1/L2 *context*, producing 'errors' unique to a learner (the aspect of L1 *context* reflected in the speaker's style of L2 use). For example, Japanese people communicate indirectly while Germans communicate directly, comparatively, when it comes to communication style. Based on the idea, their different communication style originates from the differences of L1 *context*, and it is expected that some German JFL learners will communicate directly (an aspect of the German communication style emerges) even in L2 Japanese.

2.2 Translation-based Communicative Activity

In our previous study (Saito, 2019), a new class activity design for teaching Japanese called 'Translation-based Communicative Activity' was proposed. This activity combines the traditional grammar-translation method and the communicative approach. As for the communicative approach, the idea of Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) was incorporated into the activity. Although the communicative approach and the traditional grammar-translation method have been regarded as the opposite ways in L2 teaching, Cook (2010) argues the value of the 'communicative' aspects in the translation method and proposes the combination of translation and TBLT so that L2 learners can practice the target grammars and vocabulary communicatively.

2.2.1 Language and Culture/Identity in Politeness

The activity is designed for JFL learners to choose different verb forms at different levels of formality according to different social contexts. Regarding the verb forms of the Japanese language, there are mainly four types with different grammatical structures: honorific form, humble form, polite form, and casual form. In this study, these forms are categorized into three groups in terms of the levels of formality as below.

Respectful language group: honorific/humble forms
These forms are used to show respect to the interlocutor. The honorific form is used for the actions performed by the interlocutor while the humble form is used for the actions performed by the speaker. These forms are the highest in terms of formality.

Formal language group: polite form
The form is also used to show respect to the interlocutor, but the level of formality of this form is lower than that of honorific/humble forms.

Informal language group: casual form
The form is used to show friendliness to the interlocutor, so the level of formality is the lowest among these forms.

In the current study, it is hypothesized that the selection of these verb forms reflects JFL learners' own cultures and identities (L1 *context*) in politeness and social relationship, which would show their own communication style in politeness that is different from that of Japanese-native speakers. Concerning this, Okamoto (1999) stresses that 'expressions of politeness are relative to specific social contexts as well as to the speakers' ideas about politeness' (p.51). In light of that people's cultures and identities are the foundation to create ideas, expressions of politeness are also relative to the speakers' cultures and identities. Further, she mentioned that 'while politeness in languages like English is mostly thought to concern speakers' volitional strategies, the use of honorifics and other formal expressions in Japanese is often said to be governed by rigorous situation-based rules, or conventions' (p.51). It indicates how expressions of politeness are used is associated with the speakers' languages and ideas. Given the points above, people with a different language, culture, and identity are likely to have different ideas about politeness and show different patterns in the selection of the verb forms in L2 Japanese.

2.2.2 Factors in Selecting the Levels of Formality by L2 Learners

As for the factors in selecting the Japanese verb forms, Yin et al. (2005) propose the following: *hyponymy*, *social distance*, and *formality*.

Hyponymy: It can be rephrased by social status. The higher the social status of the interlocutor is in terms of affiliation, position, age, etc., the politer and formal verb forms are used.

Social distance: It depends on how close the social relationship with the interlocutor is, which is represented by two types of distance: internal and external distance. If the interlocutor is a member of your group such as family and colleagues, the distance is internal. Whereas, if the interlocutor is not a member of your group such as other company's people, the distance is external.

Formality: It indicates a situation of conversation with the interlocutor that affects the selection of the verb forms. For example, if the situation is formal such as presentation speech, the verb forms in a high level of formality are selected.

Considering that *social distance* is often different from country to country (Yin et al., 2010), it is significant to analyze and discuss whether the learners' culture and identity in politeness and social relationship are expressed concerning the factor.

2.2.3 Task-based Language Teaching

Regarding TBLT, Skehan (1998) defines it as an activity whose objectives and goals are relevant to real-world activities. Branden (2006) also asserts the importance of "a close link between tasks performed by the learners in the language classroom and in the outside world" (p.6). Besides, he mentions "the things learners do with the target language in the classroom (i.e., the classroom tasks) should be related to, or derived from, what the learners are supposed to be able to do with the target language in the real world (target tasks)" (p.6).

In the present study, there are mainly two reasons to introduce TBLT into the activity based on the expectation to induce JFL learners' cultures and identities in politeness. First, TBLT is learner-centered; the instructor's interaction toward the learners such as corrections for grammar and vocabulary should be minimized, that is, the learners' fluency can be more focused than their accuracy. Namely, the learners can freely work on the activity under less pressure and stress from the instructor. In such a relaxed environment, it can be more comfortable for the learners to reveal the L1 *context*, reflecting their cultures and identities. Second, TBLT can bring a real-life communicative situation with interlocutors whose *social distance* with the learners is internal, which also leads them to communicate in a relaxed manner and proactively demonstrate their L1 backgrounds in L2 Japanese. Based on a report from Sharma (2018), bidialectal people are likely to speak their own dialect with close people such as their family and friends, that is, those whose *social distance* with them is internal. Given that dialect is another way to express the speaker's culture and identity in daily-life communication, his report suggests that the interlocutors from the same group would promote the learners' reflection of their L1 *context*. Taking advantage of these characteristics of TBLT above, JFL learners' cultures and identities are expected to emerge as their own communication style in politeness.

2.3 Linguistic Politeness in the L1s of the Participants

To view how JFL learners' L1 *context* in politeness is reflected in L2 Japanese, it is necessary to recognize their L1 systems in politeness, including whether such systems originally exist in their L1s. The current study focuses on JFL learners from China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Mongolia, Bangladesh, America, Germany, and France, so the rules and cases of the honorific or polite verb forms in each of the languages are explained below.

Chinese/Taiwanese (Min et al., 2016)
In Chinese (Mandarin) and Taiwanese, some expressive honorific morphemes are used to modify actions. For instance, the action verb *gao* meaning 'to tell' can be more formal with the morpheme (prefix) *feng-*. Following the rule, *feng gao* means "*I respectfully tell you.*"

Vietnamese (Srichama, 2005)
Though Vietnamese does not have any patterns and rules for the conjugations or modifiers of the verbs in politeness, some polite verbs can be found. For instance, there are two ways of describing 'to sit down' casually and formally, respectively: *ngồi xuống* and *an toạ*. For example, "*Hãy ngồi xuống*" means "Sit down" while "*Xin hãy an toạ*" means "Please have a seat" In greetings, the verbs such as *xin* and *kǐnh* individually meaning 'to beg' and 'to respect' are used to show politeness. For instance, *kǐnh chào* (to greet) represents 'respectively greet'.

Mongolian (Brackin, 2014; Legerski, 2014)

In Mongolian, when a suffix *-аарай* comes with the verb, it forms the polite context. The suffix functions as 'please' in English and is commonly used in commands and requests. The suffix is used based on the high anticipation that the hearer will agree with the requested content. Hence, it would be inappropriate when the hearer is unlikely to agree with it.

Bangla (Sultana, 2016)
Bangla has the honorific marker *-en* that appears with the verbs. The marker is an inflection that attaches to different verb forms based on the verb tenses. There are six different verb forms in line with six different tenses in Bangla as well as English. Looking at the verb *por-* (to read) as the example, the verb form in the simple present is *poren*, on the other hand, the one in the past perfect is *porech^hilen*. Further, different inflections are used for informal and neutral contexts individually in Bangla, which is similar to Japanese in that different verb forms at different levels of formality are used depending on the situation.

English (Onishi & McVay, 2011)
In English, the simple past tense can describe politeness. For instance, "I *hoped* you could lend me some money" sounds more polite than "I *hope* you can lend me some money". Further, auxiliary verbs can be used to express politeness. For example, "I *would like* to go" sounds more formal than "I *want* to go". When it comes to requests, it is common to use auxiliary verbs in the formal context; "*Shall we* have dinner" sounds more polite than "*Let's* have dinner". Further, the auxiliary verbs in the past tense are used for a high level of formality; "*Would you* lend me some money" is more polite than "*Will you* lend me some money".

French (Bianco & Crozet, 2003)
There are two pronouns to address the second person 'you' in French: *tu* and *vous*. The *tu* is used to address someone close such as family and friends, whereas the *vous* is used to address someone not close. That is, the *tu* is a casual term of address while the *vous* is that of a formal one. "The fact that French also have two verbs to negotiate the use of *tu* and *vous* between speakers reflects the socio-cultural importance and complexity of their appropriate use. Those two verbs are *tutoyer* and *vouvoyer*, literally meaning, the act of saying *tu* and the act of saying *vous*" (p.123).

German (Sennrich et al., 2016)
When making requests and commands in German, the imperative verbs are different between formal and informal contexts. In the informal situation, the verb is composed of only its stem. In the formal situation, on the other hand, the verb consists of its stem and ending *-en*. For example, "*Trink Bier*" means "Drink beer" in an informal manner while "*Trinken Bier.*" means "Please drink beer." in a formal manner.

Looking at the individual language system expressing politeness above, particular rules or cases applied to the verbs are found in the system respectively, although most of them are used in limited contexts such as request and command situations. Therefore, all the learners are expected to have the linguistic concept of the verb forms at different levels of formality through their L1. Namely, changing the verb forms according to different social contexts should be linguistically and culturally familiar for them more or less, so their style of choosing the verb forms in Japanese would reflect their own socio-cultural characteristics in politeness.

2.4 L2 Learners' Assimilation toward L2 Native Speakers and Society
L2 learners consciously or subconsciously tend not to show their own cultures and identities but those of the L2 when they want to assimilate themselves into the L2 native speakers and society. Schumann (1978) explains L2 learners' linguistic and cultural assimilation toward L2 society with the term called 'psychological distance' that represents how much they are motivated to acculturate the L2 society. When the psychological distance is close, for instance, L2 learners express L2 culture and identity in place of their own in the L2. With regard to it, Yoshinaga (2009) posits that identity is created through mutual interaction in the L2 society, and the people have multiple identities including the ones as an L1 speaker and an L2 learner. In line with the promotion of mutual interaction, some identities will be focused and others will not, therefore, the identity is multi-layered. In other words, the identity as an L2 learner can be highlighted through the interaction with people in the L2 society and reflected in the L2 rather than the one as an L1 speaker. Further, Caltabiano (2008) concludes that L2 learners would consciously or unconsciously make efforts to choose the 'appropriate style' according to social contexts if their 'appropriate use' of the L2 was perceived positively by L2 native speakers. Regardless to say, JFL learners' motivation to practice 'appropriate Japanese' is co-related to their psychological distance. In the case of this study, therefore, JFL learners who are highly motivated to assimilate themselves into the Japanese society through 'appropriate use' of Japanese would select the verb forms in a Japanese way, that is, they consciously or subconsciously do not express their own cultures and identities in politeness. Hence, this study views the learners' selections of the verb forms from two perspectives: L1 *context* and psychological distance.

3. Methodology
3.1 Participants
The participants in this study were international college students in Japan who majored in computer science and engineering. In total, 12 participants (9 males and 3 females) from 8 countries (Chinese, Taiwanese, Vietnamese, Mongolian, Bangladeshi, American, German, and French) participated in the activity. Their Japanese proficiency ranged from intermediate to advanced level. The international students at the university are not required to show Japanese capabilities for its entrance, so many of them are not fluent in Japanese. Thus, the undergraduate students are obliged to take the Japanese courses as their foreign language study for at least two years. As for graduate students, they are recommended to participate in the courses to get a job in Japan after their graduation. The participants are composed of both undergraduate and graduate students.

3.2 Materials and Activity Design
As mentioned in Section 2.2, 'Translation-based Communicative Activity' (see Appendix A) was created to realize the participants' real-life situations. The following is the activity setting and process.

1) Participants are an organizer of a school event, which is held twice a year to welcome new students at the university.

2) Participants send invitation emails to three different people with different social statuses, whose *social distance* is internal in the university context: *the college president*, *a close staff member*, and *a close friend*.

3) Participants translate the email sentences from English to Japanese and select the verb forms at different levels of formality (honorific/humble form, polite form, and casual form) according to each of the receivers.

By showing how differently the participants select the verb forms in the individual case, the result is expected to reflect their sociocultural perspectives in politeness, respectively.

3.3 Data Analysis
Concerning the analysis method, the usage ratio of each verb form shall be calculated by dividing the number of all verb forms by that of the particular verb form in the email in the respective situation. Therefore, the formula below is used to calculate the usage ratio.

Usage Ratio of the Form = (Number of the Form)/ (Number of All Forms) *100

For example, if the number of polite forms is 10, and that of all forms (including the polite forms) is 40, the usage ratio of polite forms is (10/40 *100) 25 percent.

4. Results and Discussion
4.1 Selection of Formality in Verbs by L2 Learners
Based on the calculation method in Section 3.3, the usage ratios of the particular verb forms are shown according to the individual situation (*the college president*, *a close staff member*, and *a close friend*) in the email and participant in Figure 1 as follows.

Table 1: Usage Ratio of Each Form in the Email

ID	L1	Verb form	President	Staff	Friend
Subject 1	Chinese	Honorific/Humble	75	40	10
		Polite	25	60	70
		Casual	0	0	20
Subject 2	Chinese	Honorific/Humble	62.5	0	0
		Polite	37.5	100	100
		Casual	0	0	0
Subject 3	Taiwanese	Honorific/Humble	40	50	11.1
		Polite	60	50	88.9

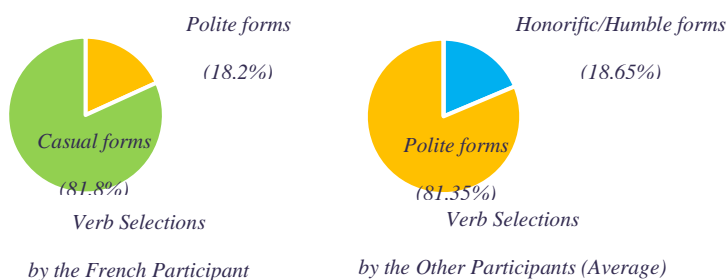|					
		Casual	0	0	0
Subject 4	Taiwanese	Honorific/Humble	81.8	11.1	0
		Polite	18.2	88.9	33.4
		Casual	0	0	66.6
Subject 5	Vietnamese	Honorific/Humble	44.4	11.1	0
		Polite	55.6	88.9	0
		Casual	0	0	100
Subject 6	Vietnamese	Honorific/Humble	62.5	44.4	25
		Polite	37.5	55.6	75
		Casual	0	0	0
Subject 7	Vietnamese	Honorific/Humble	91.6	11.1	14.3
		Polite	8.4	88.9	28.6
		Casual	0	0	57.1
Subject 8	Mongolian	Honorific/Humble	22.2	11.1	0
		Polite	77.8	88.9	70
		Casual	0	0	30
Subject 9	Bangladeshi	Honorific/Humble	37.5	37.5	0
		Polite	62.5	62.5	0
		Casual	0	0	100
Subject 10	American	Honorific/Humble	72.7	0	0
		Polite	27.3	100	0
		Casual	0	0	100
Subject 11	German	Honorific/Humble	77.8	0	0
		Polite	22.2	100	0
		Casual	0	0	100
Subject 12	French	Honorific/Humble	83.3	0	0
		Polite	16.7	18.2	25
		Casual	0	81.8	75

College president

Looking first at the case of *the college president*, all the participants combined honorific/humble forms and polite forms without using casual forms at all, and most of them used honorific/humble forms with a high ratio. The result can be mainly explained in terms of *hyponymy*. Given that *the college president* is a person with the highest social status at the university, it is natural for the participants to select honorific/humble forms and/or polite forms to show respect to him. Further, although the participants' social relationship with *the college president* is internal from a perspective of *social distance*, they hardly have opportunities to meet and communicate with him on campus, in other words, he is not very close to them. This also influences the participant's selection of the verb forms at a high level of formality toward *the college president*.

Close staff member

Next, in the case of *a close staff member*, most of the participants used both honorific/humble forms and polite forms as well as the case of *the college president*, but the ratio of the honorific/humble forms is lower and that of polite forms is higher, compared to the case of *the college president*. The result illustrates that *a close staff member* is closer to the participants than *the college president* in terms of *hyponymy* and *social distance*. Viewing the result from a perspective of *hyponymy*, the social status of *a close staff member* is lower than that of *the college president*, in other words, the social status of *a close staff member* is closer to that of the participants. Comparing with the verb forms toward *the college president*, therefore, the ones toward *a close staff member* became less formal across the board.

Further, *social distance* can be either internal or external, depending on how we see the group frame. Although *the social distance* of *the college president* and *a close staff member* can be both internal when seeing the whole university as a frame of the group, the frame can be subdivided from the whole university to its departments and divisions according to the levels of familiarity, and *social distance* will be different between *the college president* and *a close staff member*. From this perspective, the international department of the university where *a close staff member* works is one of the places that the participants are most familiar with since the department offers academic programs and support services for international students, that is, they frequently visit the office and ask questions to the staff members. Hence, it is natural for the participants to develop a feeling of belonging to the department as they visit and communicate with the staff members. When seeing the international department as a frame of the group, *social distance* with *a close staff member* remains internal while the one with *the college president* can be external. In this case, therefore, both factors: *hyponymy* and *social distance* are likely to lead the students to select the verb forms differently from the case of *the college president*. In light of the differences of social status between the participants and *a close staff member* (e.g. the academic position and age), however, *a close staff member* is not still close enough for them to choose casual forms. Only one French participant selected casual forms (over 80%), which can be considered to represent the cultural and linguistic features of French. Regarding this, the participant stated that the French prioritize the personal relationship over the differences of social status, in other words, they speak friendly to even people with higher social status when they are close to the people. The data is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: French Participant vs. The Other Participants (Average)

Polite forms

(18.2%)

Honorific/Humble forms

(18.65%)

Casual forms

(81.8%)

Polite forms

(81.35%)

Verb Selections

by the French Participant

Verb Selections

by the Other Participants (Average)

Close friend

Lastly, seven participants selected casual forms while five participants chose polite forms across the board in the case of *a close friend*. Although most of the participants showed similar tendencies and patterns in the selection of the verb forms in the cases of *the college president* and *a close staff member*, the clear difference can be found in the case of *a close friend*. In other words, it is expected that the participants' individual linguistic and cultural diversity in politeness is expressed here. From a viewpoint of *hyponymy* and *social distance*, it was hypothesized that many of the participants would select casual forms toward *a close friend*, but nearly half of them chose polite forms across the board. Given that, what encouraged those participants to choose polite forms toward *a close friend* can be relevant with the third factor, *formality*. That is to say, the situation to send an invitation email of the school festival as the organizer can be formal enough for some participants to select verb forms at a high level of formality toward any interlocutors, even *a close friend*. In other words, those participants prioritized their social role as the organizer over the personal relationship with *a close friend*, whereas the other participants the personal relationship over the social role.

Although categorizing the participants by their L1 to view the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the participants in the selection of the verb forms, clear patterns or tendencies cannot be found. Certainly, all the so-called "western" (American, German, and French) participants selected casual forms with a higher percentage; it appears that their linguistic and cultural factors affected their selection of the verb forms. On the contrary, Asian participants selected polite and casual forms with different percentages,

including those with even the same L1 background (Taiwanese and Vietnamese). Given that, it is not very clear whether the internal factor, L1 *context*, is relevant to the participants' selections of the verb forms.

When individually seeing the participants who selected the verb forms at a high level of formality in this case (2 Chinese participants, 1 Taiwanese participant, 1 Vietnamese participant, and 1 Mongolian participant), a common external factor can be seen. First, the two Chinese participants are undergraduate students belonging to the international program at the university that aims to produce global talents who will play an important role in Japan, so they have a high intention to stay and work in Japan in the future. Next, the Vietnamese and Taiwanese participants are graduate students who are enrolled in the university to work in Japan after graduation. Last, the Mongolian participant is also a graduate student who proactively joins the local Japanese events and activities to socialize with the local people. Considering the factor from a perspective of the ideas of Schumann (1978) and Caltabiano (2008), it is natural to expect that the participants' psychological distance is close and their motivation for the use of 'appropriate Japanese' is high, which encourages them to follow the Japanese linguistic and cultural norms by selecting the verb forms in the same way of the Japanese. From their understanding, the Japanese formally communicate with even their close friends when the communication is not based on the personal relationship but the social relationship. In all the cases, therefore, it seems that at least these participants selected the verb forms as the Japanese do without expressing their L1 *context* in politeness.

4.2 Comparison with the Japanese Native Speakers

In 2020, the activity content was introduced as a cross-cultural group activity in an English class where 18 Japanese students discuss intercultural topics with international students. One of the topics was politeness. In the discussion, the students exchanged and shared ideas about politeness in the context of their countries according to the activity questions. The last question focuses on politeness in the Japanese context, and the question content is the same as the one in the translation activity: "What verb forms would you use to the following persons (*a college president*, *a close staff member*, and *a close friend*) in the situation?" One of the reasons for setting the question was to compare the international students in the translation activity and Japanese students in the cross-cultural activity in the selection of the verb forms in each situation. The result is as follows.

Table 2: Selection of the Verb Forms by Japanese Students

Interlocutors	Verb forms at different levels of formality		
	Honorific/humble forms	Polite forms	Casual forms
a college president	17	1	0
a close staff member	7	11	0
a close friend	0	8	10

As expected, the Japanese students did not choose casual forms toward *a college president* and *a close staff member* at all, which is almost the same as the case of the international students. On the contrary, 10 out of 18 (approximately 56%) students selected casual forms to *a close friend*, which might be a surprising outcome for the participants who thought they followed the Japanese socio-linguistic and cultural norms and chose polite forms to even *a close friend*, considering the formality in the Japanese context.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, we examined how non-linguistic (cultural aspects), as well as linguistic (L1) factors, influence the selection of the formalities in the verb forms by JFL learners. Although it was expected that the participants (international college students)' linguistic and cultural differences would emerge in L2 Japanese according to their L1 based on the sociolinguistic view, the result does not show diversity in their usage style of politeness in L2 Japanese in the cases of *a college president* and *a close staff member*. It is conceivable that the participants with a certain level of fluency in Japanese (intermediate and above) mastered the use of honorific forms in Japanese (although such grammatical structure is missing in their L1) and applied it to the most typical cases where they are expected to use them (*the college president* and *a close staff member*). However, there is one case that the French participant chose the casual forms toward *a close staff member* across the board even though the other participants mostly chose the honorific/humble and polite forms. This case indicates that the selection of the verb forms describes the participant's culture and identity, referring to his comment about the selection. In contrast with these cases above, the case of *a close friend* divides the participants into two groups; one selected the casual forms while the other selected the combination of the honorific/humble and polite forms. The difference is likely to be attributed to their psychological distance rather than the L1 *context*. The participants who are planning to work in Japan or building a good friendship with the local Japanese, that is, whose psychological distance is close to the Japanese demonstrated their assimilation toward the Japanese through the linguistic and cultural uniqueness of Japan,

politeness. In other words, those participants consciously or subconsciously tried to express Japanese culture and identity over their own in politeness. To clarify the point, however, it is necessary to collect more data from more participants and classify them in terms of both their L1 and psychological distance.

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