EVALUATION OF POLITENESS: DO THE JAPANESE EVALUATE ATTENTIVENESS MORE POSITIVELY THAN THE BRITISH?

Saeko Fukushima

Abstract

This study investigates evaluation of attentiveness by British and Japanese university students. Attentiveness (*kikubari*) (defined as a demonstrator's preemptive response to a beneficiary's verbal/non-verbal cues or situations) is demonstrated without being requested and it is one of the important politeness strategies. A questionnaire including six attentiveness situations was distributed to 74 British and 138 Japanese participants, who were asked to evaluate the attentiveness situations on a five-point Likert scale and to state the reasons for their evaluation. The Likert-scale evaluations were analyzed using a three-way ANOVA and subsequently, the reasons for evaluations were analyzed qualitatively. It was anticipated that the Japanese would evaluate attentiveness more positively than the British, as attentiveness has been important in Japanese culture. The results, however, did not necessarily confirm this. That is, there were significant differences between British and Japanese participants in four situations, the British participants having evaluated attentiveness more positively than the Japanese participants in two situations and the reverse being the case in two other situations.

Keywords: Politeness; Evaluation; Attentiveness; Japanese; British.

1. Introduction

This paper will look into how the Japanese and the British evaluate attentiveness (*kikubari*), trying to fill the gap in politeness research from the following perspectives: (1) the hearer's aspect and (2) attentiveness, one of the politeness strategies, which has not been much investigated. Although politeness has gained its solid status in linguistic research, some researchers point out what has been lacking in politeness research. One of the criticisms is that only the speaker was focused on. For example, in a forum article by Spencer-Oatey (2005: 335), Keckes points out that research on politeness has predominantly focused on linguistic features and on the speaker, and that the perspective of the hearer/receiver has been missing. In response to Keckes, Spencer-Oatey (2005: 335-336) argues that the examples cited in Spencer-Oatey (2000: 16) refer to the reactions of the hearer and that her discussion of speech acts (Spencer-Oatey, 2000: 17-18) has taken a hearer-centered approach. However, the aspect of the hearer has not been salient in politeness research. Haugh (2007) maintains that politeness implicatures are not simply indirect meanings arising from recognition of speaker intentions by hearers, but they arise from joint, collaborative interaction between speakers and hearers. In sum, the hearer's aspect has not been the central

issue in politeness research despite its importance and, hence empirical studies focusing on the hearer are still limited.¹

Another criticism on politeness research so far is the less attention on evaluation. That is, the focus of many previous politeness studies was on production. Hickey and Stewart (2005: 7) point out as follows:

That the evaluation rather than the production of behavior has been of less interest to linguists may be due in large part to the fact that the analyst does not have access to the intentions or interpretations of speakers and hearers even assuming that these are conscious and unitary.

As production is made by the speaker and evaluation is made by the hearer, this criticism has to do with the first one, i.e., the lack of the attention on the hearer's side. Eelen (2001: 245-246) also admits a disregard for the hearer's active position and the lack of evaluation on politeness.

The primary purpose of this paper, therefore, is to pay attention to the hearer's side, or this paper focuses on evaluation rather than production. "Hearer" and "speaker" insinuate that the data are only spoken, but attentiveness data are not only spoken, including behavioral data (i.e., attentiveness manifested behaviorally) (see section 2). Therefore, in this paper, "beneficiary" and "demonstrator" are used hereafter instead of "hearer" and "speaker" respectively. The present paper focuses on evaluation of attentiveness made by the beneficiary. Evaluation of attentiveness means how the other party, i.e., the beneficiary of attentiveness, feels when attentiveness is demonstrated, and what the beneficiary thinks about the attentiveness demonstrated or/and what s/he thinks about the demonstrator's attitude. Attentiveness is focused on in the present study, because of the lack of investigation of this phenomenon and its importance in cross-cultural pragmatics.

Attentiveness is one of the important politeness strategies and it was included in Brown and Levinson's (1987) model, although the term "attentiveness" was not used. Explaining the payoffs of going off-record, Brown and Levinson (1987: 71) state that H can give a 'gift' to the original speaker, if H chooses to pick up and respond to the potentially threatening interpretation of the act. They give the following example of such a gift. If I say 'It's hot in here' and you say 'Oh, I'll open the window then!' 'Oh, I'll open the window then!' is what they call a gift and what I refer to as attentiveness in the present study. Attentiveness was first empirically investigated in Fukushima (2000), although the term "solicitousness" was instead employed. In his review of Fukushima (2000), Haugh (2005: 164) confirms this, saying that "solicitousness" is a politeness strategy not investigated by others in the field, and he admits the importance of attentiveness in understanding politeness across cultures.

Another purpose of the present study is to make a cross-cultural comparison on evaluation of attentiveness. According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 71), a demonstrator can get credit for being generous and cooperative when s/he demonstrates attentiveness. However, I believe that evaluation of attentiveness by a beneficiary is not always positive. There may also be negative evaluations. For example, when what a beneficiary of attentiveness wants does not match what a demonstrator does, or when a

¹ There is a study by Fukushima (forthcoming), which focused on the hearer, but it dealt with request situations and request strategies.

beneficiary may feel intruded upon, the beneficiary will tend to evaluate attentiveness negatively. Such evaluation may vary culturally, too. For this reason, in this paper I will investigate how a beneficiary evaluates attentiveness cross-culturally, making a comparison between the British and Japanese participants.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), both British and Japanese cultures are categorized as negative politeness cultures. In negative politeness cultures, “one would expect symmetrical use of high-numbered strategies to be most evident” (Brown and Levinson 1987: 251), which means that negative politeness and off-record strategies are often used. When only British culture is examined, the features of negative politeness cultures prevail, as exemplified in the study of Stewart (2005), for example. That is, British English tends towards negative politeness and favors off-record strategies in carrying out certain face-threatening acts. When British and Japanese cultures are compared (e.g., Fukushima 2000), however, they are not necessarily the same, although both of them belong to negative politeness cultures. It was suggested in Fukushima (2000: 192-195; 204) that British and Japanese cultures could be categorized somewhat differently, because of the following results. The Japanese opted for more direct requesting strategies than the British. The British used a narrower variety of requesting strategies avoiding bald-on-record strategies, even when the threat was perceived to be low. With regard to the responses to off-record requests, more attentiveness was chosen by the Japanese than the British.

When a comparison is made between a positive politeness culture and a negative politeness culture (e.g. Greece and England in the study by Sifianou (1992)), Brown and Levinson’s (1987) categorization, negative politeness/positive politeness cultures, may be applicable. However, when a comparison between two negative politeness cultures (e.g. British and Japanese cultures) is made such as in this study and when these two cultures seem to be somewhat different, as suggested by Fukushima (2000), another perspective to look at cultures is necessary. For this reason, British and Japanese cultures are considered from the perspective of collectivist-individualist cultures next.

Ting-Toomey (2009: 231) explains individualism and collectivism as follows:

Basically, individualism refers to the broad value tendencies of a culture in emphasising the importance of the ‘I’ identity over the ‘we’ identity, individual rights over group interests, and individuated-focused emotions over social-focused emotions. In comparison, collectivism refers to the broad value tendencies of a culture in emphasising the importance of the ‘we’ identity over the ‘I’ identity, in-group interests over individual wants, and other-face concerns over self-face concerns.

Whereas Japanese culture has been said to be collectivist and in a collectivist culture interdependence is important, British culture has been said to be individualist and in such a culture independence is important (e.g., Hofstede 1991). Attentiveness is related to interpersonal reality, which is valued in collectivist cultures (Yoshida 1994: 257) in which maintaining good relationships is important. Actually, attentiveness is translated as *kikubari*², and attentiveness arises from considering the others. Ohashi (2008: 2155) states that “Research on linguistic ‘politeness’ so far encompasses phenomena including

² *Ki* (spirit) is important in Japanese culture. *Kikubari* is composed of *ki* and *kubari* (a noun form of *kubaru*, to allocate). Therefore, *kikubari* literally means to allocate spirit to others, which can be equivalent to be considerate to others. Haugh (2005: 164) translates *kikubari* as emphatic consideration.

conflict avoidance, repair work, indirectness, honorifics, *consideration for others*, enhancement of solidarity, denigration of self, and exaltation of others” (author’s emphasis). Although “consideration for others” is in the realm of politeness research, attentiveness, which arises basically from being considerate for others, has not been much investigated in previous research. Therefore, it is worth investigating attentiveness in the present study. Attentiveness has been cherished in Japanese culture. Someone who can demonstrate attentiveness gains credit in Japan. It is, therefore, anticipated that the Japanese participants would evaluate attentiveness more positively than the British participants.

Although a cross-cultural comparison of attentiveness among British, Japanese and Swiss participants was made in Fukushima (2004), there were several limitations. First, some non-standard situations, i.e., which might not be familiar to the participants (e.g., a student gives a lift to a member of the academic staff), were used. Second, the intrusion into the beneficiary’s private territory was not considered. Third, the degree of imposition of attentiveness was not incorporated. This study attempts to control these potential problems, the situations having been carefully selected from the situations which actually occurred, including those with different degrees of intrusion into the beneficiary’s private territory, and the participants having been asked to rate the degree of imposition of attentiveness. The degree of imposition of attentiveness is defined as how much trouble the demonstrator has had to go through to demonstrate attentiveness in terms of time and financial burden. It is anticipated that the degree of imposition of attentiveness would influence the evaluation of attentiveness.

In our daily lives, we are not aware of the reasons why we evaluate certain attentiveness as positive or negative, when a situation is not very specific. The reasons may be intuitive or unconscious. In this study, however, the reasons for evaluation of attentiveness will be investigated, as the reasons may reveal more about why a certain evaluation of attentiveness is made.

The research questions for this study are as follows:

- (1) Are there any differences in evaluation of attentiveness between the British and Japanese participants?
- (2) Are there any differences in evaluation of degree of imposition of attentiveness between the British and Japanese participants?
- (3) What are the reasons for evaluation of attentiveness?

A detailed explanation of attentiveness is given in the next section. In section 3, data collection of the present study is reported, and in sections 4 and 5, the data analysis and results are presented respectively. The findings are discussed in section 6.

2. Attentiveness (*Kikubari*)

Attentiveness can be defined as a demonstrator’s preemptive response to a beneficiary’s verbal/non-verbal cues or situations surrounding a beneficiary and a demonstrator, which takes the form of offering. Cues for attentiveness can be verbal or non-verbal, including situations. The following are some examples of verbal and non-verbal cues and situations from which a demonstrator may demonstrate attentiveness:

Verbal cue: One says: “I forgot my pen.”

Nonverbal cue: One searches for a pen in a bag.

Situation: Two persons sit next to each other, attending a lecture. One of them doesn't have a pen.

Attentiveness can also be manifested linguistically and/or behaviorally. Examples of attentiveness to the above situation may include any of the following.

Attentiveness manifested linguistically: "Shall I lend you my pen?"

Attentiveness manifested behaviorally: A demonstrator hands a pen to a beneficiary.

Attentiveness manifested both linguistically and behaviorally: A demonstrator hands a pen to a beneficiary, saying "You can use this."

After considering a potential beneficiary's verbal/non-verbal cues and situations and inferring a potential beneficiary's needs or wishes, a demonstrator is likely to think of values (cultural and personal) and behavioral conventions which are culturally bound. As a result of considering these factors, one can decide to demonstrate attentiveness, although s/he may not be aware of this process in most cases. Figure 1 shows the process of demonstrating attentiveness.

Figure 1. The process of demonstrating attentiveness

1. A demonstrator observes

2. A demonstrator infers the beneficiary's wishes or needs.

3. A demonstrator considers

4. A demonstrator demonstrates attentiveness.

Attentiveness

Whether attentiveness is demonstrated or not depends on the uptake and the willingness of a demonstrator. When a demonstrator infers the needs or wishes of a beneficiary and is willing to demonstrate attentiveness, attentiveness arises. Willingness to demonstrate attentiveness derives from consideration for the beneficiary. There may be cases in which a potential demonstrator infers the desires of a potential beneficiary, but does not

want to demonstrate attentiveness. For example, even if a potential demonstrator infers that a potential beneficiary wants to borrow a pen, s/he does not lend her/him a pen if s/he has only one and s/he wants to use it her/himself. Therefore, for attentiveness to arise, demonstrator's inference of beneficiary's needs and demonstrator's willingness to demonstrate attentiveness are both necessary.

There are cases in which a beneficiary has an intention of receiving attentiveness and there are cases in which a beneficiary does not have an intention of receiving it. In his explanation of politeness implicature and speaker intentions, Haugh (2007: 96) points out that there are cases in which politeness implicatures can emerge, even when the intentions of the speaker are not clear, referring to the following example:

(A mother and her daughter are walking down the street towards the train station in Tokyo)

Mother: *Mama, hankachi mot-te-ki-ta to omot-ta-n-da kedo...*

(I thought I had brought a hankie along but...)

Daughter: [Passes her handkerchief to her mother]

Mother: *A', doomo.*

(Oh, thanks)

(Haugh 2007: 95)

An intention-based explanation of the above example would assume that the mother intended to imply a request, and her daughter correctly made an inference about that intention, consequently demonstrating attentiveness. But according to the person who reported the above example in Haugh (2007), the mother herself did not have this intention, nor was the daughter sure she had it, but when she was given a handkerchief by her daughter, they realized that an implicature had arisen. As this example shows, a beneficiary's intention of receiving attentiveness is not always clear, and there are mainly two cases when attentiveness is demonstrated. One is that a potential beneficiary of attentiveness wants the other party to do something for her/him. In that case, the beneficiary tries to hint that wish, either by use of a verbal cue (e.g., using off-record strategies) or a nonverbal one. Another case is that a beneficiary her/himself does not think of receiving attentiveness. S/he may say or do something as in the above example, but s/he does so without an intention of receiving attentiveness. In both cases, a demonstrator of attentiveness is concerned for a beneficiary, and infers a beneficiary's needs or wishes.

3. Data collection

3.1. Participants

All the participants were university students, in order to guarantee uniformity among the participants and comparability between the British and Japanese participants. The participants were 74 British (18 males and 56 females; mean age=23) and 138 Japanese (29 males and 109 females; mean age=19.7) undergraduates³. Since I intended to make

³ Japanese participants were recruited from a university which is located in Yamanashi, i.e. west of Tokyo. British participants were recruited from two universities, one being located in the south of

a cross-cultural comparison, I selected participants who live in their own culture, as people who live in foreign cultures may have different cultural values from those who live in their home country, being influenced by a culture in which they are.

3.2. Instrument

A questionnaire was prepared to elicit evaluation data of attentiveness. The situations in the questionnaire were chosen from those which actually occurred⁴. Situations with both big and small impositions in terms of demonstrating attentiveness were included. Different degrees of intrusion were also taken into account when selecting the situations from those which actually occurred. The questionnaire was written both in English and in Japanese to enable the participants to answer in their mother tongues.

The social distance between a demonstrator and a beneficiary of attentiveness was small in all the situations, because in most of attentiveness situations which actually occurred, the social distance was small. Furthermore, social distance may influence evaluation of attentiveness. Indeed, Sifianou (1997: 68) explains how the social distance influences evaluation of attentiveness (although she did not use the term “attentiveness,” she referred to “doing things for others without being requested to”). According to her, attentiveness could be evaluated negatively, because the beneficiary of attentiveness feels that s/he has to reimburse the demonstrator when there is a social distance. As the social distance may influence evaluation of attentiveness, the social distance between a demonstrator and a beneficiary of attentiveness in this study was kept the same in all the situations, i.e., close.

The situations used in the instrument include the following (Alphabetical letters were used to name the people in the situations to avoid the influence of gender and the influence which personal names may give the participants.):

Situation 1 You’ve got flu and have been in bed. You live alone in your flat. You have already told your close friend, G, that you had flu. G lives far away from your flat (it takes about an hour by car). While you were in bed, G came to your flat with some food one evening.

Situation 2 You and your classmate, H, take the same lecture. The lecture dragged on. You had to leave, because you had a part-time job. The next day when you met H, H said to you as follows and gave you a handout.
H: Yesterday after you left, the lecturer gave us a handout. You haven’t got one, have you?

England and another in the north of England. There was a difference in number between Japanese and British participants. The number of male/female participants also varied. However, they were not problems, as statistical analyses were conducted. There was a slight difference in age between Japanese and British participants, but the difference was not very big and the participants’ commonality, being undergraduates, exceeded the slight age difference as the quality of the participants in this study.

⁴ The situations used in the questionnaire were taken from those which actually occurred in university students’ life in Japan. A British researcher examined the situations and the situations used in the questionnaire were thought to be applicable also to British students.

Situation 3 You were going to take notes at a lecture, but you realize that you haven't got a pen. Your close friend, I, who was next to you, said to you as follows.

I: You haven't got any pen? You can use this.

Situation 4 You live with your parents. Books were scattered around in your room. You were thinking of sorting them out, but you went to a university to attend a lecture without doing so, as it takes a long time. When you came home, your mother, J, said to you as follows.

J: I've sorted out your books in your room.

Situation 5 You had a lunch with your close friend, K, in a cafeteria. After eating, K cleared away K's and your dishes.

Situation 6 You are going to graduate from the university soon. You wanted to travel before graduation and you went to the U.S.A. When you returned from the trip, there was a note from your close friend, L, saying that L has cooked dinner for you. There were many good dishes in the refrigerator. You left the key of your flat with L. L lives close by.

After the description of situations, (1) a five-point Likert scale⁵ for evaluation of attentiveness by a demonstrator (actions or/and utterances), one being very positive evaluation and five being very negative evaluation, (2) a space to write the reasons for the above evaluation (the participants could write any reason) and (3) a five-point Likert scale for evaluation of the degree of imposition on a demonstrator, one being very small imposition and five being very big imposition, were given in each situation.

Here is an example from situation 1:

How would you evaluate G's action?⁶

	1	2	3	4	5	
kind						intrusive

Reasons for your evaluation

⁵ According to Hatch and Lazaraton (1991: 57), most researchers who use scales prefer to use a 5-point, 7-point or 9-point scale, as the wider range encourages respondents to show greater discrimination in their judgments. I have decided to use a 5-point scale, as the participants would be confused if they were given too many discriminations and it would be easy for the participants to interpret the following: 3 on a 5-point scale is neutral, the scores under 3 means positive evaluation and those above 3 means negative evaluation, as 1 being very positive evaluation of the attentiveness and 5 being very negative evaluation on a scale.

⁶ When a demonstrator says and does something, i.e., attentiveness is both linguistically and behaviorally manifested as in situations 2, 3 and 4, this question goes like "How would you evaluate H's action and utterance?" (situation 2)

How big an imposition on G do you think it is to deliver you some food?

1 2 3 4 5
 small |_____| |_____| |_____| |_____| big

3.3. Procedure

The participants were asked to evaluate six attentiveness situations (how they felt when attentiveness was demonstrated) and to respond according to a five-point Likert scale (with one representing positive evaluation and five indicating negative evaluation). In addition, they were asked to give reasons for their evaluations. The participants were also asked to evaluate the degree of imposition of the instance of attentiveness on a five-point Likert scale, one being small imposition and five being big imposition (see 3.2).

4. Data analysis

The procedure of data analysis was as follows:

- (1) A three-way ANOVA (nationalities (2) x gender (2) x situations (6)) was conducted in order to investigate whether there were any differences in the evaluation of attentiveness between the British and Japanese participants and between the male and female participants across the different situations.
- (2) A three-way ANOVA (nationalities (2) x gender (2) x situations (6)) was conducted in order to investigate whether there were any differences in the evaluation of imposition of attentiveness between the British and Japanese and between the male and female participants across the different situations.
- (3) The reasons for evaluation of attentiveness provided by the participants were examined.

5. Results

5.1. Attentiveness

The results of the first analysis (a three-way ANOVA) showed that the main effect of the situation factor was significant ($df=5/1045$, $F=59.854$, $p<.0001$). The interaction between the situation factor and the nationality factor was significant ($df=5/1045$, $F=6.687$, $p<.0001$). Since the interaction was significant, post hoc tests (unpaired t -tests for the comparison of nationalities in each situation) were conducted. The results showed that there were significant differences in situations 2 ($df=211$, $t=3.943$, $p<.001$), 3 ($df=211$, $t=4.135$, $p<.0001$), 4 ($df=211$, $t=3.074$, $p<.001$) and 6 ($df=211$, $t=2.889$, $p<.01$) between the British and Japanese participants in evaluation of attentiveness.

The mean scores of the evaluation of attentiveness in each situation by the British and Japanese participants are presented in Table 1. One is positive evaluation of the attentiveness and five is negative evaluation.

Table 1. Mean scores of the evaluation of attentiveness by British and Japanese participants

Situation	Scores by British/Japanese participants
1 (bringing food)	B: 1.2 (.58) J: 1.4 (.74)
2 (taking a handout)	B: 1.7 (.91) J: 1.3 (.57)**
3 (lending a pen)	B: 1.5 (.72) J: 1.2 (.50)**
4 (sorting out the books)	B: 2.7 (1.27) J: 3.2 (1.20)**
5 (clearing away the dishes)	B: 1.7 (.81) J: 1.8 (1.16)
6 (cooking dinner)	B: 1.9 (1.12) J: 2.4 (1.30)*

The numbers outside the parentheses indicate the mean scores and the numbers in the parentheses indicate the standard deviations. **There was a significant difference at the .001 level ($p < .001$). *There was a significant difference at the .01 level ($p < .01$). B: Scores by British participants J: Scores by Japanese participants

As demonstrated in Table 1, the mean scores evaluated by the British participants were significantly higher than those by the Japanese participants in situation 2 (taking a handout) (British: 1.7; Japanese: 1.3) and in situation 3 (lending a pen) (British: 1.5; Japanese: 1.2). The mean scores evaluated by the Japanese participants were significantly higher than those by the British participants in situation 4 (sorting out the books) (Japanese: 3.2; British: 2.7) and in situation 6 (cooking dinner) (Japanese: 2.4; British: 1.9). As “one” indicates very positive evaluation and “five” represents very negative evaluation on the Likert scale in the questionnaire (see 3.2), these results mean that the Japanese participants evaluated attentiveness more positively than the British participants in situations 2 and 3 and that the British participants evaluated attentiveness more positively than the Japanese participants in situations 4 and 6. This answers the first research question (Are there any differences in evaluation of attentiveness between the British and Japanese participants?).

5.2. Imposition of attentiveness

The results of the second analysis (a three-way ANOVA) showed that the main effect of the situation factor was significant ($df=5/1045$, $F=163.056$, $p < .0001$). However, there was no main effect of the nationality factor or the gender factor, and no significant

interactions were found⁷. In answering the second research question (Are there any differences in evaluation of degree of imposition of attentiveness between the British and Japanese participants?), there were no significant differences between the British and Japanese participants in evaluation of degree of imposition of attentiveness. The mean scores of the evaluation of the imposition of attentiveness in each situation are presented in Table 2. One is very small imposition of attentiveness and five is very big imposition.

Table 2. Mean scores of the evaluation of imposition by British and Japanese participants

Situation	Scores by British/Japanese participants
1 (bringing food)	B: 3.8 (1.22) J: 4.0 (1.00)
2 (taking a handout)	B: 1.8 (.99) J: 2.1 (1.01)
3 (lending a pen)	B: 1.6 (1.06) J: 1.8 (.98)
4 (sorting out the books)	B: 3.4 (.79) J: 3.6 (1.05)
5 (clearing away the dishes)	B: 2.4 (.94) J: 2.5 (1.15)
6 (cooking dinner)	B: 3.6 (.97) J: 3.8 (1.15)

The numbers outside the parentheses indicate the mean scores and the numbers in the parentheses indicate the standard deviations. B: Scores by British participants J: Scores by Japanese participants

5.3. Reasons for evaluation of attentiveness

I will first consider the reasons for evaluation on the situations which had significant differences between the British and Japanese participants in the evaluation of attentiveness (situations 2, 3, 4 and 6). Then I will consider the reasons in other situations.

Although there were significant differences in the evaluation of attentiveness between the British and Japanese participants in situation 2 (taking a handout) and in situation 3 (lending a pen), there were no big differences between them in the reasons for their evaluation. Both the British and Japanese participants wrote such positive reasons as “they appreciated attentiveness” (situation 2: British: 83.7%; Japanese: 91%;

⁷ For situations, post hoc tests (Scheffe tests for the comparison of situations) were conducted. The results showed the following significant differences in the degree of imposition of attentiveness: The mean score of situation 1 was significantly higher than those in situations 2, 3, 4, and 5; the mean score of situation 2 was significantly lower than those in situations 4, 5, and 6; the mean score of situation 3 was significantly lower than those in situations 4, 5, and 6; the mean score of situation 4 was significantly higher than that in situation 5; and the mean score of situation 5 was significantly lower than that in situation 6.

situation 3: British : 87.9%; Japanese: 94.7%).

The British participants evaluated attentiveness in situation 4 (sorting out the books) more positively than the Japanese participants. While 41.5% of the British participants stated such positive reasons as “they appreciated attentiveness”, only 27.5% of the Japanese participants did so.

The Japanese participants evaluated attentiveness in situation 6 (cooking dinner) more negatively than the British participants did. Although there was a significant difference in the evaluation of attentiveness, the positive reasons by the British and Japanese participants were similar: “they appreciated the attentiveness” (British: 74.6%; Japanese: 54.5%). Among the negative reasons provided by the participants, “being intrusive” was given most frequently both by the Japanese (29.5%) and British participants (19%). There were no British participants who stated other negative reasons, but some of the Japanese participants stated the following reasons (although there were not many who stated those): “feeling it as a burden” (6%), “the demonstrator does not have to do that” (3%) and “faulting/criticizing the beneficiary (incapability)” (0.8%).

In situations 1 (bringing food) and 5 (clearing away the dishes), there were no significant differences between the British and Japanese participants in the evaluation of attentiveness. Most British participants (91.2%) and most Japanese participants (89.6%) wrote such positive reasons as “they appreciated the attentiveness” in situation 1. In situation 5, the participants stated more reasons than in situation 1. Most of the British (52.6%) and Japanese participants (68.5%) wrote such positive reason as “they appreciated the attentiveness.” The reason, “there was no obligation on the demonstrator,” was also given both by the British and Japanese participants, although the number of the Japanese participants who gave this reason was small (British: 29.8%; Japanese: 1.6%). The reason, “it was with low imposition on the demonstrator,” was given only by the British participants (5.3%). Such negative reason as “I wanted to do that myself” was given both by the Japanese and British participants (Japanese: 13.4%; British: 3.5%). Another negative reason, “I felt it as a burden,” was given only by the Japanese participants (9.4%).

In sum, there were not major differences between the British and Japanese participants in the reason for positive evaluation, “appreciating attentiveness” being stated both by the British and Japanese participants, but some differences between them were found in the reason for negative evaluation. While “being intrusive” was stated both by the British and Japanese participants, “feeling it as a burden” was stated only by the Japanese participants. The Japanese participants stated “feeling it as a burden” in situations 1 (food), 4 (handout), 5 (dishes) and 6 (dinner), although the number of the participants who stated this reason was relatively low (situation 1: 4.4%; situation 4: 0.8%; situation 5: 9.4%; situation 6: 6%).

6. Discussion

Although it was anticipated that the Japanese participants would evaluate attentiveness more positively than the British counterparts, the results of the present study showed that the Japanese participants evaluated attentiveness more positively than the British participants only in two situations (situations 2 (handout) and 3 (pen)) out of six. The British participants evaluated attentiveness more positively than the Japanese

participants also in two other situations (situations 4 (books) and 6 (dinner)). This suggests that the Japanese do not necessarily have collectivist features, which will be further discussed later in this section.

It was anticipated that the British and Japanese participants would evaluate the degree of imposition of attentiveness differently, which may lead to different evaluation of attentiveness. There were, however, no significant differences between the British and Japanese participants in evaluation of degree of imposition of attentiveness. This suggests that for different evaluation of attentiveness between the British and Japanese participants there are some other factors, which will be investigated next from the reasons given by the participants.

Among the reasons for evaluation of attentiveness, there were no major differences in the reasons for positive evaluation by the British and Japanese participants, “appreciating attentiveness” being most frequently stated both by the British and Japanese participants, which was expected, as positive evaluation of attentiveness derives mainly from appreciation of attentiveness. There were, however, some differences in the reasons for negative evaluation between the British and Japanese participants. “Being intrusive” was stated both by the British and Japanese participants, which was also expected, as negative evaluation of attentiveness is closely related to feeling that the attentiveness was intrusive, but “feeling it as a burden” was stated only by the Japanese participants in situations 1, 4, 5 and 6 (which were evaluated as with higher degree of imposition than situations 2 and 3⁸). This may have to do with reimbursement as stated in 3.2. That is, a beneficiary feels that s/he has to reimburse the attentiveness s/he has received. The Japanese participants may have felt that they have to reimburse the attentiveness, because the degree of imposition was high. According to Sifianou (1997), a beneficiary of attentiveness feels that s/he has to reimburse the attentiveness when there is a social distance between a demonstrator and a beneficiary, as noted in 3.2, but the results of the present study show that the high degree of imposition can be a factor which makes a beneficiary feel that s/he has to reimburse the attentiveness.

In Japan, there is a custom of *okaeshi*, literally, ‘returning’. That is, when somebody receives a gift, s/he is expected to give a gift in return. This applies not only to such material things as gifts, but also to what somebody did for somebody else as in the case of attentiveness. A beneficiary may have felt that s/he had to do something in return, having felt a burden, when attentiveness was demonstrated. The idea behind *okaeshi* may be the fact that a beneficiary wants to pay the debt back, that is, *okaeshi* is a means to redress a debt-credit imbalance. This may have to do with what Ohashi (2003) argues, i.e., caring for the debt-credit equilibrium is a significant politeness phenomenon in Japanese, and Lebra’s (1976) description of Japanese culture, i.e., *on*-reciprocity. According to Lebra (1976: 91), an *on* (‘favor’) relationship, once generated by giving and receiving a benefit, compels the receiver-debtor to repay *on* in order to restore balance. The beneficiary of attentiveness may have felt a debt, but s/he could not redress the debt, therefore, feeling a burden. This reason, feeling a burden, may be one of the factors which led the British and Japanese participants to different

⁸ The degree of imposition was evaluated as follows: situation 1: British: 3.8; Japanese: 4.0; situation 4: British: 3.4; Japanese 3.6; situation 5: British: 2.4; Japanese 2.5; situation 6: British: 3.6; Japanese: 3.8. Situation 5 was with lower degree of imposition than situations 1, 4 and 6, but situation 5 was evaluated with higher degree of imposition than situations 2 and 3 (see note 7).

evaluation of attentiveness.

There may be some other factors which influenced evaluation of attentiveness and which sometimes made the British and Japanese participants evaluate attentiveness differently. “Intrusion on private territory” may be one of these factors. In situations 4 (books) and 6 (dinner), the demonstrator came into the private territory of the beneficiary when the beneficiary was not there. In other words, the degree of intrusion into the private territory can be considered to be relatively high in these two situations, compared with other situations. It was anticipated that the British participants would evaluate attentiveness in situations 4 and 6 more negatively than their Japanese counterparts, because “the English seem to place a higher value on privacy and individuality” (Sifianou 1992: 41) and it is widely believed that people in British culture tend to cherish individual space more than those in Japanese culture. The results here, however, show that the Japanese participants seemed to have been offended by the intrusion into their private territory more than the British participants. The changes in the living (housing) situations in Japan may have something to do with this result. That is, in a traditional Japanese house, there are many common rooms which parents and children share (e.g., they sleep in the same room, and the living room with *tatami* [‘straw mats’], i.e., a Japanese style room during the daytime can be a bedroom at night). On the other hand, in a modern Japanese house, there are individual rooms and children have their own rooms, which is not very different from Western housing. Most of the Japanese participants in this study may have grown up in such a modern Japanese house. In the present study, the different degrees of intrusion were taken into account, but the participants were not asked to rate the degree of intrusion. Therefore, the correlation between the evaluation of attentiveness and the degree of intrusion could not be clearly investigated. This can be incorporated in future studies.

“The degree of necessity” may be another factor, which may be related to evaluation of attentiveness. In situation 1 (bringing food), the beneficiary needed what the demonstrator did for her/him. There was no significant difference between the British and Japanese participants in the evaluation of attentiveness, and both the British and Japanese participants stated that they appreciated attentiveness. In some way, the degree of necessity may be similar to how much the beneficiary anticipated the attentiveness. As stated in section 2, there are occasions in which the beneficiary expected the other party to demonstrate attentiveness, and there are occasions in which s/he does not expect attentiveness at all. There may be cases in which a beneficiary evaluated attentiveness positively when the attentiveness was demonstrated as the beneficiary had expected. This may be related to the following explanation of politeness by Haugh (2003: 399):

Politeness thus always arises relative to some kind of situation-specific social norms. These norms are essentially expectations about what people *should* show they think of others, or what people *should* show they think of themselves. In other words, these social norms are expectations in the sense of *thinking something is necessary*. In this way, whether a particular behaviour is regarded as polite or not, depends on its perception relative to what one thinks is necessary for people to show they think of someone else, or think of themselves. (original emphasis)

Now we will investigate the results further with regard to the features of

collectivist-individualist cultures. Since Japanese culture is categorized into a collectivist culture and attentiveness is valued more in collectivist cultures than in individualist cultures as reviewed in section 1, it was anticipated that the Japanese participants would evaluate attentiveness more positively than the British participants. However, only in the case of situations 2 (handout) and 3 (pen), did the Japanese participants evaluate the attentiveness more positively than the British participants. The imposition of attentiveness in situations 2 and 3 was evaluated lower than in other situations. As stated above, when the imposition is high, a Japanese beneficiary may feel it as a burden; this may be the reason why it was only in situations with a low degree of imposition that the Japanese participants evaluated attentiveness more positively than the British participants did. The overall result, i.e., it was only in two situations that the Japanese participants evaluated attentiveness more positively than the British, cannot be traced to the features of collectivist cultures; however, to state a reason of feeling it as a burden may be traced to collectivist features. This may be similar to “mixed value patterns” suggested by Cocroft and Ting-Toomey (1994: 492), who examined the relationship between cultural variability and facework strategies by Japanese and American university students and found that the Japanese respondents reported more individualistic and collectivistic tendencies than did the U.S. respondents. It was also found in Fukushima (2004: 378) that the new perspective on Japanese culture is not very different from that of other cultures, in spite of the fact that the uniqueness of Japanese culture has been much emphasized in the literature. The findings of the present study and the above studies suggest that both an old tradition of Japan which is characterized by collectivist features and a new trend which is characterized by individualist features may coexist in contemporary Japanese culture.

As other perspectives than positive-negative politeness cultures defined by Brown and Levinson (1987), collectivist-individualist cultures were considered. There may be, however, some limitations in an individualist-collectivist dichotomy, which is mainly on a national level. In order to identify the degree of individualism in society, Hofstede (1991) asked 117,000 IBM employees in 50 countries and 3 regions their “work goal” items⁹. Based on that result, 50 nations and 3 regions were ranked according to individualism index values (IDV) (1991: 53). Among them, the IDV score of Japan was 46, with a score rank of 22/23, and the IDV score of Great Britain was 89, the score rank being 3, which is very individualistic. Hofstede’s classification is mainly based on a national level, although it contained 3 regions. It may, however, be necessary to consider culture not only from a national level. Holliday (1999) maintains the importance of a small culture paradigm, which attaches culture to small social groupings or activities wherever there is cohesive behavior, and thus avoids culturist ethnic, national or international stereotyping. The Japanese participants in this study, all of whom are all university students, do not represent the whole of Japanese people, and

⁹ The dimension to be identified with individualism versus collectivism was most strongly associated with the relative importance attached to the following ‘work goal’ items. For the individualist pole: 1. Personal time: Have a job which leaves you sufficient time for your personal or family life. 2. Freedom: Have considerable freedom to adopt your own approach to the job. 3. Challenge: Have challenging work to do – work from which you can achieve a personal sense of accomplishment. For the collectivist pole: 4. Training: Have training opportunities (to improve your skills or learn new skills). 5. Physical conditions: Have good physical working conditions. 6. Use of skills: Fully use your skills and abilities on the job. (Hofstede 1991: 51-52)

it can be considered that the participants share a small culture paradigm, which does not always conform to collectivist features. As the participants (both Japanese and British) in this study were all university students, the results represent only the data from young people who attend university. In a sense, both the British and Japanese participants in this study share a similar culture paradigm, i.e., young generation and university students. The results may differ for other generations. It may be interesting to investigate generational differences in evaluation of attentiveness in future studies.

7. Conclusion

This study explored evaluation of attentiveness by the British and Japanese participants. As noted earlier, focusing on evaluation means that the perspective of hearer/receiver is taken into account, which has been lacking in previous politeness research. Among evaluations of many things, evaluation of attentiveness was chosen as the focus of the present study, because it has not been investigated very much in previous research despite its importance in understanding politeness, especially in cross-cultural pragmatics. As evaluation of attentiveness may vary cross-culturally, evaluations by the British and Japanese participants were investigated. There were some significant differences between the British and Japanese participants in the evaluation of attentiveness, which means that attentiveness is sometimes evaluated differently cross-culturally. This implies that the good will of the demonstrator of attentiveness is not always evaluated positively in different cultures. If people are aware that there are some differences in evaluation of attentiveness in cross-cultural settings, cross-cultural misunderstanding may be reduced. It is hoped that more research on attentiveness, including the correlation between demonstration and evaluation of attentiveness, can be conducted to explore politeness further across cultures.

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