TRANSPUBLIKA
Precise. Resilience. Felicitous.

Transformational Language, Literature, and Technology Overview in Learning
https://ojs.transpublika.com/index.php/TRANSTOOL
Online ISSN 2828-397X

https://doi.org/10.55047/transtool.v5i2.2202

Original Article

Forms of Address as Markers of Hierarchical Relations in Japanese and Indonesian Workplace Culture: A Contrastive Sociopragmatic Analysis

Mochamad Rizky Adriansyah[1*], Teguh Santoso[2]

[1,2]Department of Japanese Literature, Faculty of Economics, Law, and Humanities, Universitas Ngudi Waluyo, Indonesia
Email: [1)] rmocha1104@gmail.com, [2)] teguh.santoso@unw.ac.id

Received : 28 March - 2026
Accepted : 27 July - 2026
Published online : 29 July - 2026

Abstract

Language use is deeply embedded in social structures, with address terms serving as key markers of power relations, social distance, and politeness in interpersonal communication. In workplace settings, the choice of address terms reflects and reinforces hierarchical relations, yet the extent to which cultural norms shape this system varies across societies. This study examines the use of address terms as markers of hierarchical relations in Japanese and Indonesian workplace cultures through a contrastive sociopragmatic approach. The data were collected from professional interactions both formal and semi-formal in workplace settings in Japan and Indonesia, complemented by observations and document analysis. The analysis focuses on the types of address terms, their social functions, politeness strategies, and the influence of cultural norms and interpersonal distance on their selection. The findings reveal that in Japanese workplace culture, occupational titles (such as *buchō* and *kachō*) and the systematic use of *keigo* including *sonkeigo*, *kenjōgo*, and *teineigo* serve to reinforce hierarchical structures and maintain workplace harmony (*wa*), often through negative politeness strategies that protect the superior's "face." In contrast, Indonesian workplace interactions employ address terms such as *Bapak*, *Ibu*, *Pak*, *Bu*, *Mas*, and *Mbak* to express respect and politeness, but with greater flexibility influenced by interpersonal closeness and local cultural norms. While both cultures use address terms to signal hierarchy and maintain politeness, Japanese practices are more formal and consistent, whereas Indonesian practices are more adaptable and egalitarian. This study contributes to cross-cultural sociolinguistic research and offers insights for effective professional communication in multicultural work environments.

Keywords: Address Terms, Hierarchical Relations, Politeness Strategies, Sociopragmatics, Workplace Culture.

1. Introduction

Language plays a central role in human social life, functioning not only as a medium of communication but also as a symbolic system that reflects the social structures within a community. From a sociolinguistic perspective, language use is shaped by various social factors such as social status, age, gender, power relations, and the situational context of communication. The linguistic variations that emerge in society demonstrate that speakers' choices of linguistic forms often mirror the social relationships between interlocutors (Holmes, 2013). Thus, examining language use provides valuable insights into how social norms, cultural values, and hierarchical relations are embedded in everyday communicative practices.

One linguistic feature closely tied to social relations is the use of address terms. Address terms are linguistic expressions used to call, refer to, or identify interlocutors in interaction.

Copyright: © 2026 by the authors.
This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the CC BY 4.0.

Beyond identifying individuals, address terms serve as markers of social relationships, signaling power dynamics, social distance, and the level of formality in a given communicative situation (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). In many societies, systems of address terms develop as social mechanisms that allow speakers to express respect, solidarity, or social distance toward others.

Whereas earlier research in sociopragmatics has addressed topics of honorific system, cross-cultural miscommunication, and identity negotiation in the Japanese and Indonesian work environment, there is still much left to be explored in the domain. While a lot of the previous research considered Japanese and Indonesian address terms separately and not together within the same workplaces (Haryanti, 2020; Widianti, 2021), the evidential base of this research mostly consists of interviews and surveys and does not include naturally occurring interactions in the workplace that could give insight into the sequentiality of the choice of address terms (Kuraesin & Amalia, 2026; Moody, 2018). The mixed language and digital address terms, which became a part of professional communication, have also not been studied enough in the case of Japan and Indonesia (Chandra et al., 2024; Surya et al., 2020). Finally, the differences in the gender, generation, and subcultures' choice of address terms have not been explored enough despite clear evidence of their role in address term selection (Surono, 2018). Most importantly, no longitudinal study of adaptation has ever been conducted.

Accordingly, this study aims to fill these gaps by conducting a contrastive sociopragmatic analysis of Japanese and Indonesian workplace interactions. Specifically, it examines the use of address terms as markers of hierarchical relations in Japanese and Indonesian workplace cultures through a contrastive sociopragmatic approach.

2. Literature Review

From a pragmatic standpoint, address terms are closely linked to politeness strategies. According to Brown et al. (1987), speakers employ specific linguistic strategies to maintain social harmony and avoid threatening the interlocutor's "face." Choosing appropriate address terms is therefore essential for expressing respect, maintaining interpersonal relationships, and preventing conflict in social interaction (Yule, 1996). The selection of address terms is influenced by social factors such as social distance, power relations, and the degree of formality.

In Japanese society, social hierarchy and organizational structure strongly influence language use. This is reflected in the honorific system known as *keigo*, which includes *sonkeigo* (respectful language), *kenjōgo* (humble language), and *teineigo* (polite language) (Ide, 1982). *Keigo* is used to show respect toward interlocutors or third parties, taking into account their social status and position. In Japanese workplaces, address forms such as *–san*, *–sama*, *senpai*, and occupational titles like *buchō* (division head) or *kachō* (section chief) reinforce hierarchical structures and help maintain workplace harmony (Maynard, 1997).

In contrast, the Indonesian system of address terms is more flexible, although it still carries important social functions. In professional communication, terms such as *Bapak*, *Ibu*, *Pak*, *Bu*, *Mas*, *Mbak*, and occupational titles are used to express respect and politeness. These forms serve as markers of social relationships and politeness strategies that help maintain harmonious interaction (Kridalaksana, 2013). Compared to Japanese, however, Indonesian address terms are more influenced by interpersonal closeness and local cultural norms, resulting in a more egalitarian and adaptable system.

3. Methods

This study employs a qualitative contrastive sociopragmatic approach to examine how address terms function as markers of hierarchical relations in Japanese and Indonesian workplace settings. A qualitative design was chosen because the research aims to explore linguistic behavior within its social and cultural context, rather than measure variables quantitatively. The data consist of direct and indirect utterances containing address terms drawn from professional communication in both formal and semi-formal settings in Japan and Indonesia. Additional data were obtained from documentary sources such as corporate emails, scripted dialogues, and professional communication training materials.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore speakers' perceptions of address term usage, their awareness of social norms, and the politeness strategies they employ in workplace interactions. Participant observation allowed the researcher to observe real-time interactions in workplace environments or simulated professional scenarios, providing insight into the social dynamics and hierarchical structures that shape linguistic choices. Document analysis including corporate emails, scripts, and training materials served as supplementary data to strengthen the contrastive analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using sociopragmatic analysis, focusing on the relationship between linguistic forms and their social functions. The analysis involved identifying types of address terms, examining their contextual use, interpreting the hierarchical relations they encode, and evaluating the politeness strategies employed by speakers in both cultures. A contrastive analysis was then conducted to highlight similarities and differences in the use of address terms in Japanese and Indonesian workplace communication. The theoretical framework draws on P. Brown et al. (1987) politeness theory, R. Brown & Gilman (1968) concepts of power and solidarity, and Dell Hymes's SPEAKING model, which provides a lens for understanding how social factors, status, and situational context influence linguistic choices.

Through this methodological approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how address terms operate within hierarchical professional contexts in Japan and Indonesia, and to contribute to broader cross-cultural sociolinguistic research and effective professional communication practices.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the use of address terms in Japanese and Indonesian workplace communication reflects hierarchical relations and politeness norms, although each culture exhibits distinct characteristics shaped by its sociocultural values. In Japanese professional settings, address terms and *keigo* forms such as *–san*, *–sama*, *senpai*, and occupational titles like *buchō* (division head) and *kachō* (section chief) are employed consistently to reinforce organizational hierarchy and express respect toward individuals of higher status. The selection of these forms is not merely linguistic but is deeply intertwined with social factors such as seniority, rank, and interpersonal relationships within the workplace.

In contrast, Indonesian workplace interactions also utilize address terms—such as *Bapak*, *Ibu*, *Pak*, *Bu*, *Mas*, and *Mbak*—as politeness strategies, but with greater flexibility. Their use is influenced not only by hierarchical relations but also by interpersonal closeness and local cultural norms. This flexibility reflects Indonesia's more egalitarian orientation,

where maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships often takes precedence over rigid hierarchical distinctions.

Overall, the contrastive analysis reveals that while both cultures rely on address terms to signal hierarchy and maintain politeness, the degree of formality, consistency, and cultural motivations behind their use differ significantly. Japanese communication practices emphasize formality, hierarchical order, and the maintenance of social harmony (*wa*), whereas Indonesian practices prioritize relational warmth, adaptability, and context-sensitive politeness. These findings highlight the importance of understanding cultural norms in cross-cultural professional communication, particularly in multicultural work environments where differing expectations of politeness and hierarchy may influence interactional dynamics.

4.1. Characteristics of Address Terms in Japanese Workplace Culture

In Japanese professional communication, a wide range of address terms—such as *–san*, *–sama*, *senpai*, and occupational titles like *buchō* (division head) or *kachō* (section chief)—serve as linguistic markers of social status and hierarchical relations. These forms function not only to express respect but also to maintain social distance and reinforce organizational structure. Additionally, the use of *keigo*, which includes *sonkeigo* (respectful language), *kenjōgo* (humble language), and *teineigo* (polite language), plays a central role in aligning one's speech with the interlocutor's social position. From a sociopragmatic perspective, the selection of address terms and *keigo* reflects speakers' awareness of hierarchy, their obligation to maintain interpersonal harmony (*wa*), and their efforts to protect the interlocutor's "face" through culturally appropriate politeness strategies.

Example (1)

Rizky :部長、こちらの資料をご確認いただけますか。
Buchō, kochira no shiryō o go-kakunin itadakemasu ka.
"Division Head, would you be willing to review this document?"

Tatsuya (Buchō) :ああ、分かった。後で目を通しておく。
Ā, wakatta. Ato de me o tōshite oku.
"Alright. I'll look at it later."

Context and Analysis

This interaction occurs in a formal workplace setting between a subordinate and a superior. The subordinate addresses the superior using the occupational title *buchō* rather than a personal name, signaling recognition of hierarchical distance and institutional power (Maynard, 1997; Holmes, 2013). The use of *go-kakunin itadakemasu ka*, a humble form (*kenjōgo*), further lowers the speaker's position relative to the superior. According to P. Brown et al. (1987) politeness theory, this combination of title and humble form constitutes a negative politeness strategy aimed at minimizing imposition and protecting the superior's negative face. The exchange illustrates how Japanese workplace communication relies on linguistic forms to maintain social order, uphold cultural norms, and avoid interpersonal conflict.

Example (2)

Ade :リズキさん、お疲れ様です。今日の会議の資料、もう確認しましたか。
Rizuki-san, otsukaresama desu. Kyō no kaigi no shiryō, mō kakunin shimashita ka.
"Hello Rizki, thank you for your hard work. Have you reviewed the meeting materials?"

Rizky :アデさん、お疲れ様です。はい、先ほど確認しました。
Ade-san, otsukaresama desu. Hai, sakihodo kakunin shimashita.
"Hello Ade, thank you for your hard work. Yes, I reviewed them earlier."

Context and Analysis

This exchange takes place between colleagues of equal status in a formal workplace environment. Despite their equal rank, both speakers use *–san*, the polite *desu/masu* form, and the ritual expression *otsukaresama desu*, which functions as a phatic expression to maintain workplace harmony. The interaction reflects Ide's (1989) concept of *wakimae* (discernment politeness), where politeness arises from adherence to social norms rather than individual strategy. The use of polite forms also positions the interlocutor within the *soto* (out-group) category in the *uchi/soto* framework, maintaining a level of formality appropriate for professional settings. This example demonstrates how even peer-level interactions in Japan reproduce hierarchical norms through linguistic choices that preserve social distance and harmony.

4.2. Characteristics of Address Terms in Indonesian Workplace Culture

In Indonesian workplace communication, address terms such as *Bapak*, *Ibu*, *Pak*, *Bu*, *Mas*, *Mbak*, and occupational titles function as important linguistic markers that signal social relationships between speakers and interlocutors. These forms express respect, politeness, and social alignment, while also helping speakers negotiate social distance. The choice of address terms is shaped by multiple factors, including hierarchical relations, interpersonal closeness, and local cultural norms—particularly those influenced by Javanese politeness traditions (*unggah-ungguh*). From a sociopragmatic perspective, Indonesian address terms reflect both hierarchical positioning and relational warmth: the more distant or higher the interlocutor's status, the more formal the address term; conversely, closer relationships allow for more informal and egalitarian forms.

Example (1)

Andini (Subordinate):

"Ibu Sari, apakah Ibu sempat melihat draft proposal ini?"

"Ms. Sari, were you able to review this proposal draft?"

Ibu Sari (Superior):

"Sudah, akan saya beri masukan besok pagi."

"Yes, I have. I will provide feedback tomorrow morning."

Context and Analysis

In this interaction, the subordinate uses the address term "Ibu Sari," combining a formal honorific (*Ibu*) with the superior's personal name. This form signals respect and acknowledges the hierarchical structure of the workplace. The question is phrased politely and indirectly, reflecting a negative politeness strategy aimed at minimizing imposition and respecting the superior's negative face. The superior's concise response reinforces her authority while maintaining politeness, illustrating how Indonesian workplace communication balances hierarchy with interpersonal warmth.

Example (2)

Mbak Sari:

"Mas Rudi, kamu sudah cek laporan penjualan minggu ini?"

"Mas Rudi, have you checked this week's sales report?"

Mas Rudi:

"Sudah, Mbak Sari. Nanti aku kirim revisinya."

"Yes, Mbak Sari. I'll send the revision shortly."

Context and Analysis

This exchange occurs between colleagues of equal status. The use of *Mas* and *Mbak* reflects egalitarian politeness rooted in Javanese cultural norms, signaling respect while maintaining relational closeness. The use of informal pronouns (*kamu–aku*) indicates reduced social distance. From a sociopragmatic perspective, this interaction exemplifies positive politeness strategies that foster solidarity and interpersonal harmony—key values in Indonesian workplace culture.

4.3. Contrastive Comparison Between Japanese and Indonesian Address Systems

The systems of address terms in Japanese and Indonesian workplace communication share several sociopragmatic functions, particularly in expressing politeness, signaling respect, and marking hierarchical relations. In both cultures, address terms serve as pragmatic tools that help speakers manage social distance and maintain harmonious interaction. For instance, Japanese forms such as *–san* or *buchō* and Indonesian forms such as *Pak* or *Bu* similarly function to acknowledge the interlocutor's social position.

However, notable differences emerge in terms of formality, consistency, and the cultural values underlying their use. The Japanese system is highly structured and hierarchical, with address terms such as *–san*, *–sama*, *senpai*, and occupational titles like *kachō* or *shachō* used with great precision. These forms are closely tied to social status, age, and organizational rank, reflecting Japan's cultural emphasis on hierarchy, social harmony (*wa*), and the protection of face through negative politeness strategies.

In contrast, Indonesian address terms are more flexible and context-dependent. Forms such as *Mas*, *Mbak*, *Pak*, and *Bu* can be used across age groups and social statuses, and their selection often depends on interpersonal closeness and local cultural norms. Indonesian workplace communication tends to prioritize solidarity and relational warmth, resulting in politeness strategies that lean toward positive politeness—strategies that reduce social distance and foster interpersonal connection.

When examined through the theoretical lenses of power, distance, and politeness, these differences become even more apparent. In Japanese communication, power (hierarchical authority) and distance (social separation) strongly determine the choice of address terms and the level of *keigo* required. The higher the interlocutor's status, the more formal and elaborate the linguistic forms become. Meanwhile, in Indonesian communication, power remains relevant but social distance is more negotiable; interpersonal closeness can reduce formality even in hierarchical relationships.

Overall, the contrastive analysis reveals that the differences between Japanese and Indonesian address systems are not merely linguistic but deeply rooted in cultural orientations: Japan's hierarchical and norm-driven communication style contrasts with Indonesia's more egalitarian and relational approach. These findings highlight how address terms function as sociopragmatic practices shaped by cultural values, social structures, and politeness expectations in each society.

4.4. Influence of Contextual Situations on Address Term Selection

The choice of address terms in Japanese and Indonesian workplace communication is strongly shaped by situational context, particularly the level of formality, the nature of social relationships, and the communicative goals of the interaction. In highly formal settings—such as official meetings, professional emails, or interactions between superiors and subordinates—both cultures tend to employ more polite and socially distant forms of address.

In Japanese workplaces, formal contexts require the use of name + *–san* or higher honorifics such as *–sama*, as well as occupational titles like *buchō* (division head) or *kachō* (section chief). These forms are typically accompanied by formal *keigo*, including *teineigo* and more elaborate expressions such as *gozaimasu* or *go-kakunin itadakemasu*. This reflects the Japanese cultural emphasis on hierarchy and *wakimae*—the expectation that speakers adhere to socially prescribed norms of politeness (Ide, 1989).

In Indonesian professional settings, formal interactions similarly involve the use of respectful address terms such as *Bapak/Ibu*, *Pak/Bu*, or occupational titles like "Pak Direktur" or "Ibu Manager." These forms signal respect and maintain appropriate social distance in accordance with organizational hierarchy (Holmes, 2013). Politeness strategies in formal Indonesian contexts often align with negative politeness, aiming to minimize imposition and protect the interlocutor's negative face (P. Brown et al., 1987).

Example (Formal Japanese Email)

Hana (Subordinate):

鈴木課長、こちらが本日の会議で使用する最新の資料でございます。ご確認いただけますと幸いです。

Suzuki kachō, kochira ga honjitsu no kaigi de shiyō suru saishin no shiryō de gozaimasu. Go-kakunin itadakemasu to saiwai desu.

"Section Chief Suzuki, here is the latest material for today's meeting. I would be grateful if you could review it."

Suzuki (Superior):

受け取りました。後ほど内容を確認します。

Uketorimashita. Nochihodo naiyō o kakunin shimasu.

"Received. I will review the content shortly."

Context and Analysis

This exchange occurs in a formal email between a subordinate and a direct superior. The subordinate uses the occupational title *kachō* and highly formal *keigo* expressions such as *gozaimasu* and *go-kakunin itadakemasu*, demonstrating deference and maintaining hierarchical distance. The superior's concise response, expressed in standard *teineigo*, reflects authority while maintaining professionalism. The interaction exemplifies the rigid politeness norms governing vertical communication in Japanese workplaces.

In semi-formal or informal contexts—such as casual discussions among colleagues, brief exchanges during work breaks, or interactions among peers—address terms become more flexible. In Japan, although *keigo* may still be used, the level of formality decreases. Speakers may retain *–san* but use simpler *teineigo* forms, and expressions such as *otsukaresama* help maintain collegial harmony without excessive formality. However, even in informal settings, Japanese communication tends to preserve a degree of social distance.

In Indonesia, semi-formal and informal contexts allow for greater linguistic flexibility. Address terms such as *Mas*, *Mbak*, *Kak*, or even first names may be used, reflecting relational closeness and positive politeness strategies. Informal pronouns such as *aku–kamu* are common among peers, signaling reduced social distance and a more egalitarian interactional style.

Example (Semi-formal Japanese Conversation)

Hana:

リズキさん、さっきの資料見ました？

Rizuki-san, sakki no shiryō mimashita?

"Rizki, did you look at the materials from earlier?"

Rizky:

あ、はい。ざっと目を通しましたよ。

A, hai. Zatto me o tōshimashita yo.

"Oh, yes. I skimmed through them."

Context and Analysis

This conversation occurs between colleagues of equal status in a relaxed workplace setting. Although –*san* is still used as a basic politeness marker, the language is noticeably less formal. The use of simple *teineigo* (*mimashita?*) and casual expressions like *zatto* indicates a semi-informal tone. This reflects a balance between maintaining professionalism and fostering collegial rapport.

4.5. Sociopragmatic and Cultural Implications for Professional Communication

The use of address terms in professional communication has a direct impact on workplace harmony, as these linguistic forms function to express respect, regulate social distance, and maintain hierarchical relations in a manner that minimizes interpersonal tension. In both Japanese and Indonesian contexts, appropriate address term selection contributes to smooth interaction by protecting the interlocutor's face and reinforcing culturally expected norms of politeness.

In cross-cultural professional settings—particularly those involving Japanese and Indonesian employees—differences in politeness norms and hierarchical expectations may lead to misinterpretation if not properly understood. Japanese communication practices emphasize strict hierarchical order, consistent use of formal address terms, and adherence to *keigo*, whereas Indonesian communication tends to be more flexible, relational, and oriented toward interpersonal warmth. These contrasting orientations can create challenges in multicultural workplaces, especially when expectations regarding formality, deference, or directness differ between interlocutors.

To ensure effective communication in multicultural professional environments, adaptive strategies are essential. These include developing cultural awareness, adjusting levels of formality according to the interlocutor's expectations, and employing politeness strategies that are sensitive to power relations and social distance. Such adaptability helps prevent misunderstandings, fosters mutual respect, and supports collaborative work dynamics.

Example (Cross-Cultural Interaction in Japanese)

Tanaka:

リズキさん、こちらの案件について少しご相談してもよろしいでしょうか。

Rizuki-san, kochira no anken ni tsuite sukoshi go-sōdan shite mo yoroshii deshō ka.

"Rizki, may I discuss this matter with you for a moment?"

Rizki:

田中さん、もちろん大丈夫です。どうぞ、お話しください。

Tanaka-san, mochiron daijōbu desu. Dōzo, ohanashi kudasai.

"Of course, Tanaka-san. Please go ahead."

Tanaka:
ありがとうございます。リズキさんのご意見はとても参考になります。
Arigatō gozaimasu. Rizuki-san no go-iken wa totemo sankō ni narimasu.
"Thank you. Your insights are very helpful."

Context and Analysis

This interaction takes place in a multinational company between a Japanese employee (Tanaka) and an Indonesian employee (Rizki), both using Japanese in a formal work setting. Tanaka employs *–san* and highly polite expressions such as ご相談してもよろしいでしょうか to show respect and maintain social distance in accordance with Japanese norms. Rizki responds using *teineigo* forms like もちろん大丈夫です and お話しください, demonstrating his adaptation to Japanese workplace expectations. This exchange illustrates how cross-cultural communication requires sensitivity to differing politeness norms: the Japanese speaker maintains formal politeness, while the Indonesian speaker aligns with these expectations to ensure smooth and respectful interaction.

4.6. Translation of 10 Japanese Workplace Dialogues

Dialogue 1

Tanaka:佐藤さん、お疲れ様です。会議の資料を確認していただけますか。
"Mr. Satō, thank you for your hard work. Would you be able to review the meeting materials?"

Satō :はい、田中さん。すぐ確認します。
"Yes, Mr. Tanaka. I will check them right away."

Context and Analysis

This exchange takes place in a formal workplace setting. Tanaka uses *–san* and the ritual greeting *otsukaresama desu* to acknowledge Satō's effort and maintain professional harmony. The request form *kakunin shite itadakemasu ka* reflects a polite, indirect directive typical of Japanese negative politeness strategies. Satō's concise and professional response reinforces workplace efficiency and respect.

Dialogue 2

Yuki :山本課長、おはようございます。今日の予定を教えていただけますか。
"Good morning, Section Chief Yamamoto. Could you please share today's schedule with me?"

Yamamoto (Kachō) :おはようございます。後ほど共有します。
"Good morning. I will share it with you later."

Context and Analysis

Yuki addresses her superior using the occupational title *kachō*, signaling deference and hierarchical awareness. The request employs humble language (*itadaku*) to soften the directive. Yamamoto's brief but polite reply reflects the communication style of a superior who maintains formality while being efficient.

Dialogue 3

Ragil :鈴木先輩、昨日のメールをご覧になりましたか。
"Mr. Suzuki, did you have a chance to look at yesterday's email?"

Suzuki (Senpai) :ああ、見たよ。ありがとう。
"Yes, I saw it. Thank you."

Context and Analysis

This interaction occurs between a junior (*kōhai*) and a senior (*senpai*). Ragil uses the honorific *senpai* and the respectful form *goran ni narimashita ka*, a *sonkeigo* expression elevating the senior's action. Suzuki responds more casually, reflecting his higher status and the asymmetrical nature of senpai–kōhai relations.

Dialogue 4

Yamamoto :田村さん、こちらの書類にサインをお願いできますか。
"Mr. Tamura, could you please sign this document?"

Tamura :はい、承知しました。
"Yes, understood."

Context and Analysis

The request uses *onegai dekimasu ka*, a polite and indirect form that avoids sounding commanding. Tamura's response *shōchi shimashita* is a highly formal acceptance, signaling professionalism and respect.

Dialogue 5

Chiho :中村さん、今日の打ち合わせは何時からでしたっけ。
"Mr. Nakamura, what time does today's meeting start?"

Nakamura :10時からですよ。
"It starts at ten."

Context and Analysis

This semi-formal exchange uses *–san* and the softening expression *deshita kke*, which signals a request for confirmation rather than a direct question. The tone is polite yet relaxed, typical of peer-level workplace interactions.

Dialogue 6

Aya :木村さん、少しお時間よろしいでしょうか。
"Mr. Kimura, do you have a moment?"

Kimura :はい、大丈夫です。
"Yes, that's fine."

Context and Analysis

Aya uses a highly polite request form (*yoroshii deshou ka*) to minimize imposition. Kimura's response maintains politeness while signaling availability. This reflects Japanese norms of cautious and respectful workplace communication.

Dialogue 7

Seno :佐々木さん、これ手伝ってもらえますか。
"Mr. Sasaki, could you help me with this?"

Sasaki :もちろんです。
"Of course."

Context and Analysis

This interaction is relatively informal but still polite. The request uses *moraemasu ka*, a standard polite form. Sasaki's friendly response reflects collegial cooperation and positive politeness.

Dialogue 8

Chiro :高橋さん、昨日のデータを送っていただけますか。
"Mr. Takahashi, could you send me yesterday's data?"

Takahashi :はい、すぐ送ります。
"Yes, I'll send it right away."

Context and Analysis

The request uses *okutte itadakemasu ka*, a humble form that softens the directive. Takahashi's prompt response reflects Japanese workplace values of efficiency and responsibility.

Dialogue 9

Hiroshi :井上さん、今日の会議に参加できますか。
"Mr. Inoue, will you be able to attend today's meeting?"

Inoue :はい、参加します。
"Yes, I will attend."

Context and Analysis

This formal inquiry uses *dekimasu ka*, a polite form that avoids imposing pressure. Inoue's direct but polite response reflects commitment and clarity, valued in Japanese professional communication.

Dialogue 10

Tatsuya :松本さん、お疲れ様です。進捗はいかがですか。
"Mr. Matsumoto, thank you for your hard work. How is the progress coming along?"

Matsumoto :お疲れ様です。順調です。
"Thank you for your hard work as well. Everything is going smoothly."

Context and Analysis

This exchange uses ritual expressions (*otsukaresama desu*) to maintain workplace harmony. The inquiry *ikaga desu ka* is a polite, non-pressuring way to ask about progress. Matsumoto's reciprocal greeting reinforces solidarity and professionalism.

4.7. Indonesian Workplace Dialogues

Dialogue 1

Bu Sari :"Pak Rudi, have you reviewed yesterday's report?"

Pak Rudi :"Yes, Bu Sari. I will send the revised version shortly."

Context and Analysis

This exchange occurs in a formal professional setting. The use of *Bu* and *Pak* reflects Indonesian norms of respect and hierarchical awareness. The superior's question is phrased politely and indirectly, while the subordinate's response demonstrates compliance and

professionalism. The interaction highlights Indonesia's hierarchical yet warm communication style.

Dialogue 2

Mbak Rina :"Mas Andi, could you help check this data?"
Mas Andi :"Sure, Mbak Rina. I'll check it now."

Context and Analysis

This semi-formal interaction uses *Mbak* and *Mas*, kinship-based address terms common in Javanese-influenced workplaces. These forms signal respect and familiarity simultaneously. The informal pronoun *aku* indicates relational closeness, reflecting Indonesia's positive politeness orientation.

Dialogue 3

Tegar :"Bu Lilis, were you able to read my email?"
Bu Lilis:"Yes, I'll reply this afternoon."

Context and Analysis

The subordinate uses *Bu* + name to show respect toward a senior colleague. The question is softened through indirect phrasing, aligning with Indonesian norms that avoid direct imposition. The superior's response is authoritative yet polite, maintaining professional harmony.

Dialogue 4

Rino :"Pak Manager, is there any additional instruction for this project?"
Pak Amir:"Yes, I will explain it during the meeting."

Context and Analysis

This formal exchange highlights hierarchical relations through the use of *Pak Manager* and *Pak Amir*. The subordinate's question is indirect and deferential. The superior's response reflects authority and the preference for structured communication in formal settings.

Dialogue 5

Putri :"Kak Dimas, is the presentation file ready?"
Dimas :"Yes, it just needs final adjustments."

Context and Analysis

The address term *Kak* conveys respect and familiarity, commonly used among colleagues with slight age or seniority differences. The interaction is informal yet polite, reflecting Indonesia's relational communication style.

Dialogue 6

Iskan :"Mbak Tia, please send the attendance data, okay?"
Mbak Tia:"Alright, I'll send it now."

Context and Analysis

The request uses *tolong* and the softening particle *ya*, which reduce the directive force and maintain politeness. The use of *aku* signals closeness and egalitarian relations. This reflects Indonesia's preference for cooperative and non-confrontational communication.

Dialogue 7

Faiz :"Pak Budi, would you be able to attend the meeting at two?"
Pak Budi:"Yes, I'll try to make it."

Context and Analysis

The subordinate uses *Pak* + name to show respect. The question is indirect, aligning with negative politeness strategies. The superior's response indicates willingness while maintaining flexibility, reflecting Indonesian norms of polite reservation.

Dialogue 8

Enggar :"Mas Yoga, how is the progress on the design?"
Mas Yoga:"It's about 80% done. I'll update you later."

Context and Analysis

This semi-formal exchange uses *Mas* to signal respect and familiarity. The informal pronoun *aku* indicates reduced social distance. The interaction reflects Indonesia's balance between professionalism and relational warmth.

Dialogue 9

Nandis :"Bu Rina, could you review this document?"
Bu Rina :"Sure, I'll take a look first."

Context and Analysis

The subordinate uses *Bu* + name to show deference. The request is softened through interrogative form, minimizing imposition. The superior's response uses the particle *ya*, adding warmth and reducing formality.

Dialogue 10

Vina :"Sari, you're joining the team meeting later, right?"
Sari :"Yes, I'll join."

Context and Analysis

The absence of formal address terms indicates close peer-level relations. The informal pronoun *aku* reinforces egalitarian interaction. This reflects modern Indonesian workplace communication, which can be relaxed yet efficient among colleagues of equal status.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that address terms serve as essential sociolinguistic markers that reflect hierarchical relations, cultural values, and politeness norms in Japanese and Indonesian workplace communication. Through a contrastive sociopragmatic analysis, the findings reveal that both cultures rely on address terms to maintain respectful interaction,

regulate social distance, and uphold interpersonal harmony. However, the ways in which these functions are realized differ significantly due to distinct cultural orientations.

In Japanese professional settings, the use of address terms is highly structured and closely tied to organizational hierarchy. Honorifics such as *–san*, *–sama*, *senpai*, and occupational titles like *buchō* or *kachō*, along with the systematic use of *keigo*—including *sonkeigo*, *kenjōgo*, and *teineigo*—reinforce social order and reflect the cultural emphasis on hierarchy, *wa* (harmony), and discernment politeness (*wakimae*). Japanese speakers tend to employ negative politeness strategies that minimize imposition and protect the interlocutor's face, resulting in communication that is formal, cautious, and highly sensitive to status differences.

In contrast, Indonesian workplace communication exhibits greater flexibility in the use of address terms. Forms such as *Bapak*, *Ibu*, *Pak*, *Bu*, *Mas*, and *Mbak* express respect while simultaneously allowing for relational warmth. Although hierarchy remains relevant, Indonesian speakers often negotiate social distance through positive politeness strategies that emphasize solidarity, familiarity, and interpersonal connection. This reflects Indonesia's more egalitarian and context-adaptive communication style, where politeness is shaped not only by rank but also by interpersonal closeness and cultural norms.

The contrastive analysis highlights that the primary difference between the two systems lies in their degree of formality and cultural motivation: Japanese address practices are rule-governed and hierarchy-oriented, whereas Indonesian practices are relational and adaptable. Contextual factors—such as formality level, communicative purpose, and the nature of the relationship—further influence the selection of address terms in both cultures.

Overall, this study provides a deeper understanding of how address terms function as sociopragmatic tools that embody cultural values and regulate professional interaction. The findings offer important implications for cross-cultural communication, particularly in multinational workplaces where differing expectations of politeness and hierarchy may affect interactional dynamics. Awareness of these cultural patterns can enhance intercultural competence, reduce miscommunication, and support more effective and harmonious professional relationships.

6. References

Brown, P., Levinson, S. C., & Gumperz, J. J. (1987). *Politeness*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511813085

Brown, R., & Gilman, A. (1968). The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity. In *Readings in the Sociology of Language* (pp. 252–275). DE GRUYTER. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110805376.252

Chandra, P. C., Bhimasena, H., & Ekarina, E. (2024). Mixing of Indonesian Addressing Terms in the Local English: Motivations and Identity Expressions. *Linguistik Indonesia*, *42*(2), 413–423. https://doi.org/10.26499/li.v42i2.634

Haryanti, P. (2020). Culture Shocks at Japanese Workplace of Indonesian Student Taking Internship Program in Japan. *Proceeding of International Conference on Business, Economics, Social Sciences, and Humanities*, *3*. https://doi.org/10.34010/icobest.v1i.109

Holmes, J. (2013). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315833057

Ide, S. (1982). Japanese sociolinguistics politeness and women's language. *Lingua*, *57*(2–4), 357–385. https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-3841(82)90009-2

Kridalaksana, H. (2013). *Kamus Linguistik (edisi keempat)*. Gramedia Pustaka Utama.

Kuraesin, U., & Amalia, A. (2026). Negotiating Wa in Indonesia: A Cultural-Pragmatic Analysis of Japanese Speech Acts and Politeness at PT. Ohki Indonesia. *Indonesian EFL Journal*, *12*(1), 223–234. https://doi.org/10.25134/ieflj.v12i1.123

Maynard, S. K. (1997). *Japanese communication: Language and thought in context*. University of Hawaii Press.

Moody, S. (2018). Terms of Address and Identity in American-Japanese Workplace Interaction. In *Cook, H., Shibamoto-Smith, J. (eds) Japanese at Work. Communicating in Professions and Organizations* (pp. 205–234). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63549-1_9

Surono, S. (2018). Address Terms Across Cultures: A Sociopragmatic Analysis. *Proceedings of the Fourth Prasasti International Seminar on Linguistics (Prasasti 2018)*. https://doi.org/10.2991/prasasti-18.2018.59

Surya, M. A., Marnita, R., & Usman, F. (2020). Honorifik Bahasa Jepang (Keigo) dalam Surat Elektronik di Perusahaan Jepang. *LINGUA: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Dan Pengajarannya*, *17*(2). https://doi.org/10.30957/lingua.v17i2.667

Wardhaugh, R., & Fuller, J. M. (2015). An Introduction to SociolinguisticsSociolinguistics. In *The Routledge Handbook of Applied Linguistics*.

Widianti, S. (2021). Interpretation of Verbal and Nonverbal Communication in the Japanese Workplace. *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Language, Literature, Culture, and Education (ICOLLITE 2021)*. https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.211119.102

Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford university press.