

Apologetic Expression in Japanese “Sumimasen” and Indonesian “Maaf” –A comparative review–

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to compare apologetic expression in Japanese and Indonesian language, identify in what kind of situations do the native speakers of both countries make apologies, as well as difference between them. This research used a survey method which took time between May 20th to 25th, 2016. Survey questionnaires are distributed and collected directly to 30 Japanese people, and through LINE application to 30 Indonesian people. Both questionnaire surveys are conducted with exactly the same 10 questions. Each question is further investigated while comparing the figures of the questionnaire results of both Indonesia and Japan. The results showed that (1) Generally, when Japanese people do something wrong with their friends, they often use "gomennasai, gomen" rather than "sumimasen." However, Indonesian people say "Maaf" as it is in the same scene. (2) In the scene of a crowded train, when someone gives you a seat, there are relatively few Japanese and Indonesian who say "sumimasen" and "MAAF". (3) As predicted, "sumimasen" is considered to be a polite language by the Japanese. On the other hand, "MAAF" is considered to be a very polite word by Indonesians, and it can be used to anyone regardless of the relationship between them. (4) While Japanese people are saying "sumimasen", they express a request to others, but unlike that, Indonesian people express that they have done a bad thing to others so they say “maaf”. In the future, when researching the same subject, the next researcher needs more than 50 questionnaires from Japanese and Indonesian, and in many cases, the survey results will be spread and get further understood.

Keywords: *Apologetic Expression., Sumimasen, Japanese Apology, Indonesian Apology.*

1 INTRODUCTION

As an Indonesian, the writer discovered various things while living in Japan. The most inspiring one is the Japanese's politeness. The reason is because in daily life, Japanese people don't want to cause trouble to others, so they greet, appreciate, and apologize, regardless of gender. One has to apologize immediately when causes trouble or is being bad to others. Otherwise, there will be misunderstandings, and that is considered not good for human relations. From such a thing, an apology act is performed. In fact, apologetic word which is used for apologizing is considered an important word. Kindaichi Haruhiko (2001) wrote about apologetic word “sumimasen” as “We really like to apologize. We respect apology more than gratitude. In following situation, there is an elderly lady in a bus full of passengers, and one passenger stands

and invites her to have a seat. To express gratitude, some will say “arigatou gozaimasu”, but most of the people prefer to use expression of apology, “sumimasen”. The feeling of the elderly lady explains that “If I do not take the bus, you will likely be still sitting there. You stand when you see me getting on the bus, I have made you in difficulty. I have to apologize.”. With this logic, Japanese people feel happier to apologize.

So far, there have been many studies on apology in previous research. However, there seems to be little research comparing Japanese "sumimasen" with Indonesian apology. So, in what situations do native speakers from both countries make apologies? Also, are there any differences between them? In this research, based on the investigation of the Japanese apology expression "sumimasen" and the Indonesian apology expression "MAAF", the writer will clarify in what situations these words are used and whether they are used differently.

So why does the word "Sumimasen" have various meanings? According to the Dictionary of Word Origins, "Sumimasen" is a word that expresses feelings of apology, gratitude, and request to the other party. "Sumimasen" was born from the verb "済む(Sumu)". Since "済む(Sumu)" is the same as "澄む(Sumu)", from the meaning of 澄む, “clear”, "does not cause turbidity or mixing", while the meaning of 済む “finish” has the meaning of "work is finished" or “to finish”, therefore it also expresses the meaning of "feels calm", or "we feel good". In the negative form, the usage “sumimasen” means "I don't feel calm" or "I can not feel good." An apology to the other party "Sumimasen," as well, indicates that doing something rude to the other person makes one's heart is not clear in this way. Then, "Sumimasen" which has the meaning of gratitude, means "I'm sorry I can't give something back to you" or "I'm not clear on my mind," and it became an apologetic expression. "Sumimasen" has the above meaning, but the writer feels the difference between Japanese apologies and Indonesian apologies. Japanese apologies appear to be more convenient.

According to Indonesian National Language Dictionary, “maaf” is a word to express apologize or regret, to request for permission. It is commonly use in Indonesian daily life. Similar to Japanese, Indonesian has some apologetic expressions, but Japanese "sumimasen” seems to have the same degree of politeness as Indonesian "MAAF". However, the writer will consider and investigate the politeness in this research to see if it is actually the same.

In response to the apology in Japanese, Kindaichi Hideo (1987) explains the word "sumimasen" as “apology and gratitude” expression as follows. As it is often said, "Sumimasen" is also used as an expression of gratitude. Especially when used for gratitude, it seems to be problematic. The condition is basically that it is simultaneous with "Gomennasai" where something one did (or did not do) disadvantaged the other party, but when it is used to express gratitude or request, it seems to mean that the original act caused the disadvantage to the other party, but at the same time, bring advantage to the speaker.

1.1 Research Method

This research was conducted to clarify in what situations apologetic expressions in Japan and Indonesia are used and the differences between them. The outline is as follows. Survey method with anonymous questionnaires distribution, participants answered on the spot. Questionnaires distribution through LINE application (for Indonesians).

Table 1. Research Outline

Purpose	to identify situations of apologetic expressions in Japanese and Indonesian as well as the differences
Period	5 days (May 20th to 25th, 2016)

Survey target	Japanese native speaker 30 persons, Indonesian native speaker 30 persons
Survey place	Nara University of Education (Japanese), questionnaires through LINE application (Indonesian)

2 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The followings are questionnaire results for native speakers of Japanese and native speakers of Indonesian. Both questionnaire surveys are conducted with exactly the same questions. Each question is further investigated while comparing the figure of the questionnaire results of both Indonesia and Japan.

Q : What do you say if you accidentally step on your friend's foot?

Figure 1

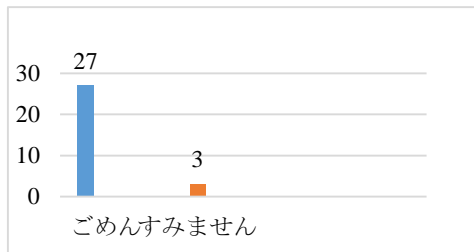


Figure 2

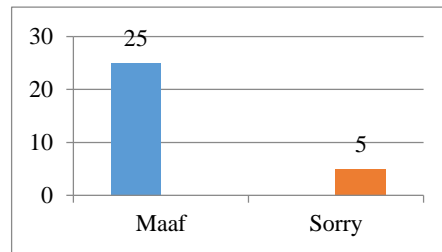


Figure 1 and 2 above show the scene where you have stepped on your friend's foot. First, in Figure 1, 27 persons of the Japanese group answered "gomen". And the remaining 3 answered "sumimasen". Figure 2 is the result of the same question asked to the Indonesian group. There are 25 people who say "MAAF (Indonesian language of 'sorry')" and 5 people answered "SORRY (in English)". In terms of scenes, Japanese people tend to use apologetic expressions "gomen", because the situation does not occur in formal places. On the other hand, although the apologetic expression of "MAAF" in Indonesian language has the same meaning as "sumimasen", Indonesian people use polite words even in informal situations such as the above. Indonesians sometimes use English word "SORRY", but it is often used when they want to make friends with the other person or want to apologize with a slight feeling.

Q : In a bus full of passengers, what do you say if someone offers you his/her seat?

Figure 3.

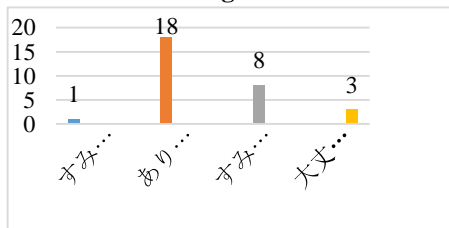


Figure 4.

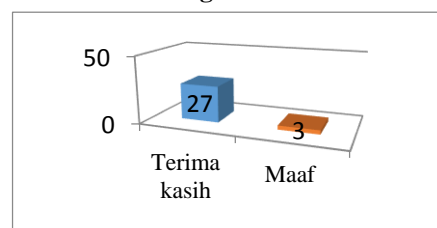


Figure 3 and 4 show a scene where someone gives you a seat in a full bus. In Figure 3, there are 18 people from the Japanese group who answered “Arigatou gozaimasu (Thank you)”. Answer for “Sumimasen, arigatou gozaimasu (sorry, thank you)” is fewer, with only 8 people. And there was only one person who said "Sumimasen (I'm sorry)". It turns out that the Japanese don't use apologetic word very much in such a scene. In Figure 4, there are 27 Indonesians who answered "TERIMAKASIH (thank you)". And there are three people who answered "MAAF (I'm sorry)", which is slightly more than Japan. This indicates that Indonesian tend to express gratitude immediately rather than apologizing when given a seat by someone.

Q : What do you say if you receive a souvenir from your teacher?

Figure 5.

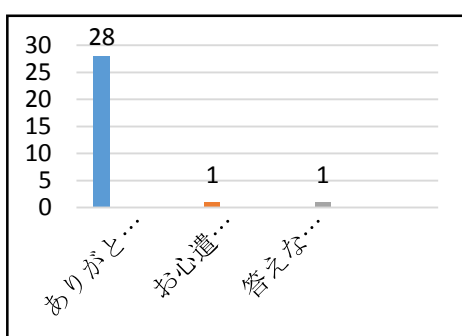


Figure 6.

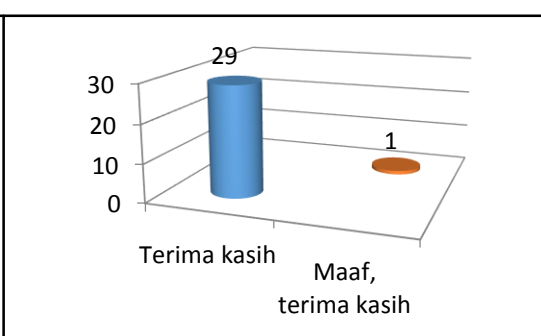


Figure 5 and 6 show that both results are almost the same (28 Japanese, 29 Indonesian), one immediately say "Thank you" when receiving a souvenir from the teacher. There is no custom of saying "MAAF" apologies in receiving a present. There is one person in the Indonesian group who answered "I'm sorry", but immediately followed by "Thank you".

Q : Suppose that you're losing your way and trying to ask for directions to an unknown High School student. What do you say to call out that person?

Figure 7.

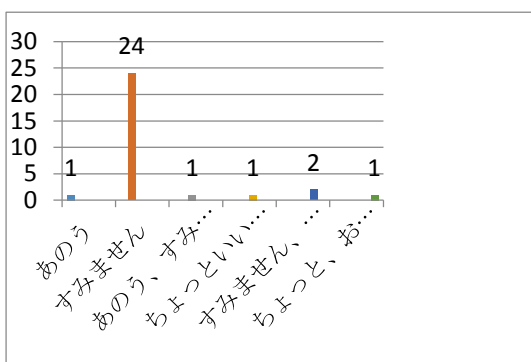


Figure 8.

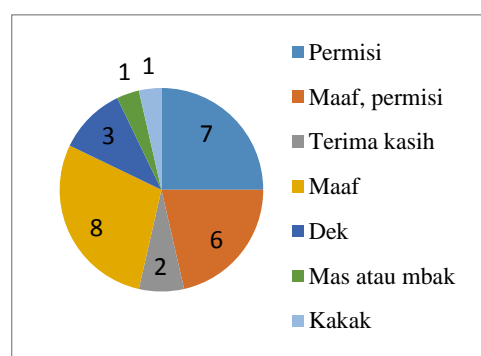


Figure 7 shows the result of expressions used to call a high school student when one's getting lost. From the figure, there are 24 Japanese people who answered "Sumimasen". However, as shown in Figure 8, only eight Indonesians say "MAAF". Next, there are seven people who use "PERMISI". The expression "PERMISI" is a commonly used word, and its meaning is similar to "Ano", but when the meaning of "PERMISI" is translated into Japanese, it becomes "Sumimasen". What I learned from this result is that many Japanese say "sumimasen" when speaking to people, and on the other hand, only few Indonesians who say "maaf".

Q : Suppose that you're visiting a friend's home and his/her mother is serving you a cup of tea. What do you say to your friend's mother?

The above figures show a scene where a friend's mother made tea for you when visiting a friend's house. In figure 9, most of the Japanese with 22 people answered only with "Thank you". In the same scene of figure 10, the case of Indonesian is also the same as in Japan. There are many who answered only "Thank you", with 19 people. The difference is that only one Japanese says "Thank you, I'm sorry," but there are 8 people in Indonesia saying "I'm sorry, thank you", more than Japan. According to Indonesian custom, when one visits someone's house, you always say "Thank you. I'm sorry for the inconvenience" to those who serve a tea. We can see the difference from this.

The next question is as follows.

Waiter : Could you please move to the table over there? This table is already booked.

Customer : Ah, sure.

Waiter : _____

The situation in a restaurant in Japan and Indonesia, where a person to be surveyed plays a role as a waiter. This is a scene that bothers people, so the Japanese and Indonesians clarified how they say when they bothered people. When apologizing to the customer, as a waiter, 9 Japanese people said "Moushiwake gozaimasen (sorry, in the polite language)". Still, some Japanese answered, "Sorry, thank you." It is nine people. In the case of Indonesia as shown in figure 12, the answers are almost the same. However, most of Indonesians, with 9 persons, answered "Thank you (TERIMAKASIH)" instead of "MAAF (Sorry)" or "MOHON MAAF (Sorry, polite language)".

Q : When you say "sorry", what kind of feelings do you express?

For Japanese, as shown in figure 13 about the feeling they express when they say "sumimasen (I'm sorry)", 25 people answered that it means "I did something bad to others." There were 28 people who answered "I'm bothering others", 27 people answered "I disturbed others" and 15 people answered "I was helped by others". The number of people who answered the last option, "When requesting something to others" is the highest with 29 answers. On the other hand, among the survey results of Indonesians in Figure 14, the most common one reached 26 people with the option of "(did something bad to others)". And the second most frequently appeared with 22 people is "bothered others", the third with 21 persons answered "disturbed people". In other words, when requesting something to others, the word "sumimasen" is

considered important by the Japanese, while for Indonesian, "MAAF" is considered an important word when one did something bad to the others.

Next, looking at the results of the question "Who do you say sorry to?", the writer's surprise, when apologizing to the parents, Japanese people do not say "sumimasen" too much. For the superiors and strangers, 30 Japanese answered "sumimasen". However, very few people answered "sumimasen" to the inferiors, friends, or even best friends. It turns out that there is no one who uses "sumimasen" either for the family or for the parents. On the other hand, Figure 16 shows that for Indonesian, apologetic expression "MAAF" is always used to everyone. This is because all the options were selected in approximately the same number. Six people who chose "others" in Chapter 16 answered "God", "people", "people who reproved". Furthermore, 3 people answered that they use "MAAF" to everyone regardless of their superior or inferior relationship. This may be because in Indonesian customs, parents are considered superior and should be respected.

Q : On average, how many times do you say "sorry" in one day?

There are 19 persons from the Japanese group who answered "less than 5 times" in a day, while there are 14 persons from the Indonesian group who answered so. Then, the number of Japanese people who answered "5-10 times" is 10, while it is fewer in Indonesian with 7. However, only one Japanese person who says "sorry" more than 10 times in a day, while there are 5 Indonesians, which is more than the Japanese.

Q : Please choose one politeness degree of apologetic expression "sorry".

When comparing the politeness of both apologetic expressions in this question, there are 18 people, which means most Japanese answered that the Japanese language "sumimasen" is polite, and as for Indonesia, most answer was with 16 persons who said "MAAF (sorry)". From here, it's clear that many Japanese think that "sumimasen" is a polite word, and that Indonesian people think that the apology expression "MAAF" is very polite. In terms of the level of politeness, the writer thought that Japanese "sumimasen" will be considered very polite more than Indonesian "Maaf", but it was in fact otherwise. This shows that "MAAF" is more polite than "sumimasen".

3 CONCLUSIONS

In this article, the writer examined situations in which apologetic expressions from Japanese "Sumimasen" and Indonesian "MAAF" are used. The following is a summary of what has become clear from the above. (1) Generally, when Japanese people do something wrong with their friends, they often use "gomennasai, gomen" rather than "sumimasen." However, Indonesian people say "Maaf" as it is in the same scene. (2) In the scene of a crowded train, when someone gives you a seat, there are relatively few Japanese and Indonesian who say "sumimasen" and "MAAF". (3) As predicted, "sumimasen" is considered to be a polite language by the Japanese. On the other hand, "MAAF" is considered to be a very polite word by Indonesians, and it can be used to anyone regardless of the relationship between them. (4) While Japanese people are saying "sumimasen", they express a request to others, but unlike that, Indonesian people express that they have done a bad thing to others so they say "maaf".

The writer thought that Japanese will answer "sumimasen" in each scene, but after actually distributing and collecting the questionnaire, the results show that Japanese don't use

“sumimasen” very often. They use it in the following situations: (1) When calling a person. (2) When causing trouble to others (3) When requesting something to others. (4) When disturbing others (5) When doing something bad to others. (6) However, in the scene where one stepped on friend's foot, more Japanese people say “gomen” rather than “sumimasen”. When this is compared with the result of the Indonesian, it is slightly different. Here is the scenes that Indonesians say "MAAF". (1) When doing something bad to a person as well as when you step on your friend's foot. (2) When causing trouble to people. (3) When disturbing others. From this, we know that there are more scenes to say "Sorry" in Japan than in Indonesia. Furthermore, Japanese think "Sorry" to be a polite word, but Indonesians think "MAAF (sorry)" to be a very polite word.

As mentioned above, in this research, it clarified about the difference of the scene where the apologetic expression of Japanese and Indonesian is used, as well as the situations. In the future, when researching the same subject, the next researcher needs more than 50 questionnaires from Japanese and Indonesian, and in many cases, the survey results will be spread and get further understood.

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