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Variations in the Use of *Kusshon Kotoba* in Japanese Directives Speech

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Abstract

This paper investigates the variations in the use of *kusshon kotoba* (softening language) within Japanese directive speech, emphasizing its pivotal role in facilitating polite communication and navigating social hierarchies. Through a comprehensive analysis, we identify five distinct categories of directive speech: asking for time, refusing, proposing, denying opinion, and asking for opinion, each comprising a specific number of phrases that exemplify the nuanced application of *kusshon kotoba*. The study reveals that the utilization of these softening expressions is significantly influenced by contextual factors, including the social dynamics between speakers and listeners and the nature of the directives being communicated. Employing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, this research integrates socio-pragmatic frameworks and the SPEAKING model to elucidate the complexities underlying Japanese politeness strategies. The findings highlight the challenges Japanese language learners face in appropriately selecting *kusshon kotoba*, which is crucial for effective and culturally sensitive communication. Furthermore, the study advocates for the inclusion of *kusshon kotoba* training in advanced Japanese language curricula, positing that such education can enhance learners' comprehension of politeness in interpersonal exchanges. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of language politeness as a reflection of societal values in Japan, underscoring the importance of context-sensitive language use in fostering meaningful communication within Japanese culture.

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1. Introduction

Different vocabulary and grammar are used based on the level of respect, one of which is related to the speaker's position in relation to the person being spoken to. For example, the vocabulary used when communicating with colleagues, clients, bosses, friends, and family. For Japanese people, using respectful language is not easy. Japanese children are introduced to this language from an early age. This language variety is known as Keigo. In keigo there are expressions used to convey awkward feelings so they don't come off as too blunt. In Japanese, these words or expressions are called クッション言葉 (*kusshon kotoba*) which literally means “cushion words”.

The words or phrases has a softening effect when delivering bad news, making requests, or apologizing. Here is a lingual phenomenon regarding the use of *kusshon kotoba* in Japanese society.

(1). 恐れ入りますが、こちらの書類を確認していただけますか。

osore irimasu ga, kochira no shorui wo Kakunin shite itadakemasu ka
'I'm sorry, but would you mind checking these documents for me?'

workinjapan.today (December 21, 2023, 05:00 CIT)

Example (1) takes place in an office environment between a subordinate and a superior. The use of *kusshon kotoba* is marked by the words “osore irimasu ga”. Osore irimasu ga means “I’m sorry, but…” and is used before asking someone to do something. This is an expression of humility, and is usually used when speaking to someone older or someone who has a higher position than the speaker.

(2). お忙しいところ恐縮ですが、説明書をお送りいただけますでしょうか。

Oishogashii tokoro kyoushuku desu ga, setsumeisho wo ookuri itadakemasu deshou ka
'I'm sorry to bother you when you're busy, but could you send me the instructions?'

Workinjapan.today (December 21, 2023, 05:20 CIT)

Example (2) also takes place in an office environment between subordinates asking their superiors to do something. The use of *kusshon kotoba* is marked by the words “oishogashii tokoro kyoushuku desu ga”. The series of words is very long, “Oisogashii tokoro kyoushuku desu ga” means 'Sorry to bother you when you are very busy, but…' This is a bit of a long opening, but sometimes it's important to acknowledge that your coworker is busy but you really need their help.

(3). 悪いけど、電話に出てくれませんか。

Waruikedo, denwa ni dete kuremasen ka
'Excuse me, but could you answer the phone?'

oshiete.goo.ne.jp (December 21, 2023, 05:26 CIT)

Example (3) is conducted in a non-formal situation between friends. The use of *kusshon kotoba* is marked by the word “Waruikedo”. This word is used to initiate a request to the speaker to do something.

From several examples of lingual phenomenon above, it shows variations in the use of words or terms in *kusshon kotoba*. The use of these words is closely related to the situation and the speaker which is also associated with the level of politeness. This is also a challenge for Japanese language learners in determining the right term for the situation and the intent of the speech. In the Japanese Literature Study Program at Udayana University, starting in the 2022/2023 academic year, the course "Keigo no Torininggu" is offered for upper-level students. In this course, students are trained to use keigo properly and correctly, one of which is the correct use of *kusshon kotoba*.

As one of the lecturers in this course, the researcher found that many students were still confused in choosing vocabulary in *kusshon kotoba* to describe certain situations. For this reason, this study was conducted. The title of this study is "Language Proficiency in the Use of *Kusshon kotoba* by Japanese Literature Study Program Students". This study uses the socio-pragmatic theory by Leech as the research umbrella and the SPEAKING theory by Dell Hymes as the main theory in analyzing the data.

This study combines quantitative and qualitative through the distribution of questionnaires to students of the Japanese Literature Study Program. This research collaborated with the Indonesian Association of Japanese Language Education Studies abbreviated as ASPBJI, translated into Japanese as Indonesia Nihongo Kyouiku Gakkai for the distribution of questionnaires to ASPBJI member students.

2. Literature Review

In this literature review sub-chapter, studies that have been conducted by previous researchers are presented which are related to and can be used as references for this research. Pradhana (2023) at The Third International Conference on Humanities, Education, Language and Culture (3rd ICHELAC) with the article title "Audio-Visual as a Keigo Learning Strategy for High School Students". This study examines the types of keigo which are then taught systematically to high school students in Klungkung Regency. The similarity between previous studies and this study is that they both examine keigo. Though on this research alone, it is further deepened with the *kusshon kotoba* and the data was obtained by distributing questionnaires to students of the Japanese Literature Study Program.

Elita (2017) in "The 3rd International Seminar on Linguistics (ISOL-3)" with the article title "Isogashii Tokoro from Hairyo Hyougen's Perspective: A Study of Japanese Society's Language Politeness", aims to describe the use of the phrase "isogashii tokoro" in Japanese society's language activities. The similarity between Elita's research and this research lies in the words analyzed being the *kusshon kotoba* type. However, this research also discusses other vocabulary and word production based on the understanding of Japanese Literature Study Program students so that the variations in use are increasing.

Dunn (2011) in the Journal of Pragmatics with an article entitled "Formal form or verbal strategy? Politeness theory and Japanese business etiquette training". This article analyzes the concept of politeness embodied in Japanese business etiquette training in relation to the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) and Ide (1989), Ide (2006). The similarity between Dunn's research and this research is that they both analyze polite language varieties or keigo, one of which is analyzing the term *kusshon kotoba*. The difference is in the theory used and the objects used as data.

3. Concept

A concept is a general idea or understanding of something. A theory is a scientifically credible general principle that explains a phenomenon. The basic concepts to support the reader's understanding in this study are as follows.

3.1 Keigo

The Japanese language is very closely related to culture and the context in which it is used. Therefore, the elements of speaker-interlocutor, context of place and situation are very much considered in communication in Japanese. This is reflected in the use of keigo (敬語).Keigo in English is known as Honorific speech in Japanese.

Iori (2000: 314) defines Keigo as follows.

敬語とは聞き手や話題の人物に対する敬意を表す表現です。

Keigo to wa kikite ya wadai no jinbutsu ni taisuru keii wo arawasu hyougen desu.

'respectful language is an expression that shows respect for the intended listener or subject.'

Generally keigo is a language used to soften language or a language that expresses respect for the person being spoken to, which functions to raise the status of the person being spoken to, which is used by the first person to respect the second person and the third person.

In general, keigo is divided into three groups. Nomura Masaaki and Koike Seiji in Nihongo Jiten (1992: 54) divide keigo into Sonkeigo, Kenjougo and Teineigo. Then Hirai Masao in Nandemo Wakaru Shin-kokugo Handobukku (1985) divides keigo into Teineigo, Sonkeigo, and kenjongo. Likewise, Ogawa Yoshio (1989: 228) in Nihongo Kyouiku Jiten divides keigo into Sonkeigo, Kenjougo, and Teineigo. So in general, keigo is divided into 3 types, namely:

a. Sonkeigo (respectful language by elevating the person you are talking to)
b. Kenjougo (respectful language by lowering the speaker)
c. Teineigo (Polite language in formal settings)

3.2. Kusshon kotoba

Literally kusshon comes from the English word "cushion" which means 'cushion'. While kotoba, which is in Japanese, means 'vocabulary'. So *kusshon kotoba* can be defined as cushion words to convey something. *Kusshon kotoba* can be equated in English with "soft words" or in other words, words that soften a situation. These words are meant to be as soft as a pillow, that's what it means. In Japanese, there are a lot of words like this, and these words are very useful in business situations or other sensitive situations. In Japanese culture, the use of *kusshon kotoba* is as follows: first, make sure to use cushion words when talking to friends and second, when talking to people with higher positions, make sure to use calming cushion words.

4. Theory

Theory is a scientifically credible general principle that explains a phenomenon. In general, the theory used in analyzing the formulation of the problem in this study is as follows.

4.1. Socio-Pragmatics (Leech)

In general, Leech (1983:16) argues that socio-pragmatics is the meeting point between pragmatics and sociolinguistics. In other words, socio-pragmatics utilizes pragmatic studies to uncover linguistic meanings used in certain social conditions. In addition, Leech also explains that sociopragmatics explains more specific "local conditions" regarding language use, or it can be interpreted that sociopragmatics focuses on any aspect of the social context that is specific to the pragmatic meaning of certain language use.

Socio-pragmatics is a development of pragmatics. Sociopragmatics is a study of local conditions. This is more specifically illustrated by the existence of the principle of cooperation and the principle of politeness that occurs in a changing manner in different cultures or diverse language communities, in different social situations and so on. In other words, sociopragmatics is the boundary of sociology. So, it is clear here how close the relationship is between sociopragmatics and sociology (Tarigan, 1986).

4.2. Speaking Theory (Dell Hymes)

The SPEAKING context theory is a concept that leads to the study of language and social meanings associated with language. This theory describes important aspects of language use, including physical, social, and cultural aspects that influence communication.

The SPEAKING theory aims to expand the concept of language to be more comprehensive and holistic. The SPEAKING concept shows that language does not only function as a means of communication, but also as a means of forming identity and expressing cultural values. In this case, the social, cultural, and physical environmental contexts are very important in understanding language and communication. The SPEAKING concept is an abbreviation of eight main elements in language use, namely Setting, Participants, Ends, Act of sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, and Genre.

5. Method

The research method is the main way used by researchers to achieve goals and determine answers to the problems raised (Sukandarrumidi, 2012: 111). Nazir (2014: 26) also stated that the scientific research method can be said to be a pursuit of truth that is governed by logical considerations. In this study, a mixed method was used; quantitative and qualitative. According to Creswell and Clark (in Sanjaya, 2015, p. 49) The mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) is a study that combines qualitative and quantitative approaches in every phase of the research process including in terms of guidelines for collecting and analyzing data.

This study used a questionnaire method in the data collection process. A questionnaire is a data collection technique that is carried out by giving a set of written questions to respondents to answer, which can be given directly or by post or the internet. There are two types of questionnaires, namely closed and open. The questionnaire used in this case is a closed questionnaire, namely a questionnaire that has been provided with answers, so that respondents only need to choose and answer directly (Sugiyono, 2008: 142).

Respondents who filled out the questionnaire in this study were a number of students who were Japanese citizens who were studying at renowned universities in Japan. The universities of origin of the respondents included Toyama University, Japan College of Foreign Languages, Kobe Women's University, Tsurumi University, and there were also alumni of Tsurumi University who also filled out the questionnaire in this study.

6. Result and Discussion

Directive speech acts are speech acts that are intended by the speaker so that the speech partner carries out the action mentioned in the speech (Rustono 1999:38). The types of directive speech acts include forcing, inviting, requesting, ordering, demanding, urging, pleading, suggesting, ordering, giving instructions, challenging and so on. This study focuses on several types of directive speech acts, including asking for time, refusing, offering, refuting opinions, and asking for corrections. The uniqueness of this study is that there is a relationship between directive speech and the use of *kusshon kotoba*. This is closely related to communication patterns in Japanese culture.

6.1 Directive Speech Asking for Time

In the directive type of speech requesting there are several types of use for kusshon kotoba which are commonly used in Japanese society, there are:

1. お忙しいところ恐れ入りますが

O isogashii tokoro osoreru rimasuga

I apologize for bothering you when you're busy, but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "**お忙しいところ恐れ入りますが**," where "**お忙しいところ**" means "in the middle of your busy time," and "**恐れ入りますが**" means "I apologize, but." This phrase is used to convey an apology while acknowledging the other person's business before ask お手数をおかけしますが

2. Oshousu o okake imasuga

I apologize for the trouble, but...

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "**お手数をおかけしますが**," where "**お手数**" means "extra effort" or "inconvenience," and "**おかけしますが**" means "I will impose on you, but." This phrase conveys an apology for potentially troubling someone with a request, used to show politeness and appreciation for the other person's effort.

3. **お忙しいところ恐縮ですが**

O isogashii tokoro kyoushuku desuga

I'm sorry to bother you, but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "**お忙しいところ恐縮ですが**," where "**お忙しいところ**" means "amidst your busy time," and "**恐縮ですが**" means "I feel reluctant, but." This phrase implies a sense of reluctance before requesting someone's attention or assistance while acknowledging their business and apologizing for the inconvenience.

4. お忙しいところ大変申し訳ございませんが

O isogashii tokoro da hen mooshiwake gozaimasenga

I am very sorry for the inconvenience but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "**お忙しいところ大変申し訳ございませんが**," where "**お忙しいところ**" means "amidst your busy time," and "**大変申し訳ございませんが**" means "I am very sorry, but." This phrase shows a deep sense of guilt and apology for a request that may interrupt the other person's busy time, a highly polite way to express respect for their time.

5. **お手数ですが**

Otesuu desuga

I'm sorry to trouble you, but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "**お手数ですが**," where "**お手数**" means "trouble" or "inconvenience," and "**ですが**" means "but." This phrase implies an apology for causing a small inconvenience to the other person, used to request assistance while showing appreciation for the effort involved.

6. お手数をおかけしますが、こちらに金額をお書きください。

O shousuu o okake shimasu ga, kochira ni jiingaku o okaki kudasai

I apologize for the inconvenience, but please write the amount here.

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "**お手数をおかけしますが**," where "**お手数をおかけしますが**" means "I may trouble you, but." This phrase is used to ask a potentially inconvenient request, followed by the instruction "**こちらに金額をお書きください**", which means "please write the amount here", and is used to express politeness and appreciation for the assistance requested.

7. (**忙しいところ**)**申し訳ないんだけど**

(Isogashii tokoro) mooshiwakenain dakedo

I'm sorry for bothering in your busy time but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "(**忙しいところ**) **申し訳ないんだけど**," where "**忙しいところ**" means "in the midst of business," and "**申し訳ないんだけど**" means "I'm sorry, but." This phrase has a more casual tone, used to request help while acknowledging the other person's business and expressing an apology in a less formal manner.

8. 恐れ入りますが、お手数おかけしますが

Osoreruu rimasuga, o shou-suu okake shimasuga

I apologize for the incovenience I have caused

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "恐**れ**入**りますが**、**お**手数**おかけしますが**," where "恐**れ**入**りますが**" means "I apologize, but," and "**お**手数**おかけしますが**" means "I may inconvenience you, but." This phrase combines two strong expressions of apology to show deep humility before making a request, with a high level of respect for the other person's time and effort.

9. 恐れ入りますが･お手数ですが

Osoreruu rimasuga, o shousuu desuga

I apologize if it may inconvenience you but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "恐**れ**入**りますが**" and "**お**手数**ですが**," where "恐**れ**入**りますが**" means "I apologize, but," and "**お**手数**ですが**" means "it may be inconvenient, but." This phrase combines two expressions of apology to show appreciation for the other person's effort and to apologize for potentially causing inconvenience with a request.

10.お忙しいところ大変恐縮ですが

O isogashii tokoro da hen kyooshuku desuga

I am sorry to bother you at this time but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "**お**忙**しいところ**大変恐縮**ですが**," where "**お**忙**しいところ**" means "amidst your busy time," and "大変恐縮**ですが**" means "I feel deeply reluctant, but." phrase is used to convey a deep sense of humility and reluctance in requesting assistance from someone who is busy, showing politeness and high regard for their time.

6.2 Directive Speech Refusing

In the directive type of speech refusing there are several types of use for *kusshon kotoba* which are commonly used in Japanese society, there are:

1. 誠**に**申**し**訳**ないのですが**

Makotoni mooshiwakenai nodesuga

I am sincerely sorry but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "誠**に**申**し**訳**ないのですが**." "誠**に**" means "truly" or "sincerely," and "申**し**訳**ないのですが**" means "I feel very sorry, but." This expression shows a deep and sincere apology before making a request or decline, expressing high regard for the other person's feelings.

2. **せっかくですが**

Sekkaku desuga

I'm sorry to trouble you but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "**せっかくですが**." "**せっかく**" means "with great effort" or "a good opportunity," and "**ですが**" means "but." This expression conveys regret when having to decline or avoid a good opportunity, while still acknowledging the other person's effort or kind intentions.

3. 大変**ありがたいお**話**なのですが**

Taihen arigatai ohanashina nodesuga

I'm very grateful for the offer but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "大変**ありがたいお話なのですが**." "大変**ありがたい**" means "greatly appreciated" or "grateful," and "**お話なのですが**" means "this conversation, but." This expression shows high appreciation for an opportunity or offer but is paired with a polite decline.

4. 申し訳**ございませんが/あいにく**

Mooshiwakegozaimasen ga/ ainiku

I'm sorry/ unfortunately

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "申し訳**ございませんが/あいにく**." "申し訳**ございません**" means "I apologize," and "**あいにく**" means "unfortunately." This phrase expresses regret or apology due to circumstances or situations that make it impossible to fulfill the other person's request or expectations.

5. 申し訳**ないですが**

Mooshiwakenaidesuga

I'm sorry but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "申し訳**ないですが**." "申し訳**ない**" means "I feel bad," and "**ですが**" means "but." This expression is used to briefly convey regret or apology before rejecting or conveying a situation that may be contrary to the other person's expectations.

6. 申し訳**ございませんが**

Mooshiwakegozaimasen ga

I'm sorry however…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "申し訳**ございませんが**." "申し訳**ございません**" means "I apologize," and "**が**" means "however." This expression is used as a more formal apology before rejecting or delivering news that may disappoint the other person.

7. 大変申し訳**ございませんが**、今回**の**会議**には**出席**できません**。

Taihen mooshiwakegozaimasen ga, konkai no kaigi ni wa shusseki dekimasen.

I am very sorry, but I will not be able to attend this meeting.

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "大変申し訳**ございませんが**." "大変申し訳**ございません**" means "I am very sorry," and "**が**" means "but." This phrase conveys a profound apology before informing the listener that the speaker cannot attend the meeting this time, showing courtesy and respect.

8. **ん一**、申し訳**ないけど**

Nn, mooshiwakenaikedo

Hmm, I'm sorry…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "**ん一**、申し訳**ないけど**." "**ん一**" is an expression of hesitation or consideration, and "申し訳**ないけど**" means "I feel bad, but." This expression conveys a casual and light-hearted tone, while still showing slight reluctance or apology before delivering something that might disappoint the listener.

9. 申し訳**ないけど**、申し訳**ありませんが**

Mooshiwakenaikedo, mooshiwakearimasenga

Im sorry, I apologize but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "申し訳**ないけど**" and "申し訳**ありませんが**." "申し訳**ないけど**" means "I feel bad, but," and "申し訳**ありませんが**" means "I apologize, but." This phrase combines both casual and formal forms of apology to show deeper reluctance before making a request or delivering potentially unwelcome information.

10. 申し訳**ありませんが**

Mooshiwakearimasenga

I'm apologize but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "申し訳**ありませんが**." "申し訳**ありません**" means "I apologize," and "**が**" means "but." The meaning of this expression is to convey a polite apology before making a request, declining, or sharing potentially disappointing news.

11. 恐**れ**入**りますが**

Osoreirimasuga

Sorry to impose but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "恐**れ**入**りますが**." "恐**れ**入**ります**" means "I feel sorry" or "excuse me," and "**が**" means "but." This expression is used to show apology or respect before requesting assistance or sharing something that may cause inconvenience, expressing high regard and appreciation.

6.3 Directive Speech Proposing

In the directive type of speech proposing there are several types of use for *kusshon kotoba* which are commonly used in Japanese society, there are:

1. **もしよろしければ**

Moshi yoroshikereba

If it's alright with you

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "**もしよろしければ**." "**もし**" means "if," and "**よろしければ**" means "if it's alright with you." This phrase is used to make a suggestion or invitation with respect for the listener's feelings, implying that the decision is entirely up to them without any pressure.

2. **お**忙**しいところ**恐**れ**入**りますが**

O isogashii tokoro osoreiri masuga

I apologize if you're busy but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "**お**忙**しいところ**恐**れ**入**りますが**." "**お**忙**しいところ**" means "while you are busy," and "恐**れ**入**りますが**" means "I apologize, but." This phrase shows humility and respect for the listener's time, acknowledging that they may be busy while gently requesting their attention or help.

3. **よろしければ**/差し支**えなければ**

Yoroshikereba/ sashitsukaenakereba

If you don't mind

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "**よろしければ**" and "差し支**えなければ**." "**よろしければ**" means "if it's okay," and "差し支**えなければ**" means "if it doesn't inconvenience you." Together, these expressions allow the speaker to make a polite request or suggestion while showing high consideration for the listener's comfort and convenience.

4. 恐縮**ですが**

Kyooshuku desuga

I'm sorry to trouble you with this but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "恐縮**ですが**." "恐縮" means "I feel reluctant or doubtful," and "**ですが**" means "but." This phrase is a humble expression used to introduce a request or statement that might trouble the listener, conveying the speaker's sense of hesitance and respect.

5. 恐**れ**入**りますが**

Osoreirimasuga

Sorry to impose but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "恐れ入りますが." "恐れ入ります" means "I apologize" or "excuse me," and "が" means "but." This expression is used before making a proposal or request, expressing empathy and respect by acknowledging that it might be causing a slight inconvenience for the listener.

6. もしよろしければ、来週の講義に参加していただけませんか？
Moshi yoroshikereba, raishuu no koogi ni sanka shite itadakemasen ka?
If you don't mind, could you attend next week's lecture?

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "もしよろしければ." "もし" means "if," and "よろしければ" means "if it's alright with you." This phrase introduces a gentle invitation to participate in next week's lecture, showing respect for the listener's preferences by allowing them the choice without pressure.

7. もしよかったら、
Moshi yokattara,
If you would like

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "もしよかったら." "もし" means "if," and "よかったら" means "if it would be good." This expression is a polite and casual way of making a suggestion, showing that the speaker is open to the listener's decision and respects their comfort in deciding.

8. 私の意見ですが
Watashi no ikendesuga
In my opinion

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "私の意見ですが." "私の意見" means "my opinion," and "ですが" means "but." This phrase is a humble way to introduce one's personal viewpoint, signaling that the speaker respects the listener's views and does not intend to impose their opinion.

9. よろしければ
Yoroshikereba
If you don't mind

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "よろしければ." "よろしければ" means "if it's all right with you." This polite expression is used to introduce a request or suggestion, emphasizing the speaker's deference to the listener's preferences or willingness.

10. もし宜しければ
Moshi yoroshikereba
If you don't mind at all

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "もし宜しければ." "もし" means "if," and "宜しければ" is a polite form of "if it's okay." This phrase is used to gently propose an idea or invitation, giving full consideration to the listener's comfort in accepting or declining.

6.4 Directive Speech Denying Opinion

In the directive type of speech denying opinion there are several types of use for *kusshon kotoba* which are commonly used in Japanese society, there are:

1. 差し出がましいようですが
Sashidegamashii yoodesuga
I don't mean to intrude but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "差し出がましいようですが." "差し出がましい" means "as if I am intruding," and "ようですが" means "it seems." This expression is used when the

speaker wants to say something that might seem intrusive or overly assertive, but still aims to show respect for the listener's feelings.

2. 失礼を承知で申し上げますが

Shitsurei o shoochi de mooshiagemasuga

I don't mean to be rude but

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "失礼を承知で申し上げますが." "失礼を承知で" means "I am aware that this may be rude," and "申し上げますが" means "I would like to say, but." This phrase is used to introduce something that could be seen as rude or sensitive, while showing awareness and respect for the listener's feelings.

3. 個人的な意見ですが

Kojin-tekina ikendesuga

In my personal opinion

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "個人的な意見ですが." "個人的な意見" means "personal opinion," and "ですが" means "but." This phrase is used to share a personal opinion modestly, without imposing the opinion on the listener.

4. 申し訳ございませんが/申し上げにくいのですが

Mooshiwakegozaimasen ga/ mooshiage nikui nodesuga

I'm sorry to tell you this but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "申し訳ございませんが/申し上げにくいのですが." "申し訳ございません" means "I apologize," and "申し上げにくいのですが" means "I find it hard to say, but." This phrase expresses an apology or reluctance before delivering information that may be disappointing or difficult for the listener to hear.

5. 貴重なご意見ありがとうございます、私は

Kichoona go iken arigatou gozaimasu, watashi wa

Thank you for the valuable opinion but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "貴重なご意見ありがとうございます." "貴重なご意見" means "valuable opinion," and "ありがとうございます" means "thank you." This phrase is used to sincerely appreciate the other person's view or suggestion before expressing one's own opinion, showing respect for the listener's perspective.

6. 大変恐縮ですが

Taihen kyooshukudesuga

I am deeply sorry but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "大変恐縮ですが." "大変恐縮" means "I am very humbled," and "ですが" means "but." This phrase shows respect and humility before making a request or expressing an opinion that might inconvenience or differ from the listener's expectations.

7. 大変申し上げにくいのですが、その提案にはいくつかの問題点がございます。

Taihen mooshiage nikui nodesuga, sono teian ni wa ikutsu ka no mondaiten ga gozaimasu.

It is very difficult for me to say this but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "大変申し上げにくいのですが." "大変申し上げにくい" means "I find it very difficult to say," and "のですが" means "but." This phrase is used to express that there are issues with the proposal, with a sense of humility and sensitivity toward the listener's feelings.

8. なるほどね、私はなんだけど、(あくまで私の意見なんだけど)

Naruhodo ne, watashi wa nandakedo,(akumade watashi no iken'na ndakedo)

I see, I understand what you mean, though in my opinion…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "私はなんだけど" and "あくまで私の意見なんだけど." "私は" means "according to me," and "あくまで私の意見" means "only my opinion." This phrase shows that the speaker is sharing a personal viewpoint in a casual tone, emphasizing that it is not intended to be forceful.

9. そうとも言えますが、
Sou tomo iemasuga,
You could say that but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "そうとも言えますが." "そうとも言えます" means "that could also be said," and "が" means "but." This expression is used to acknowledge the listener's perspective respectfully, while subtly suggesting a differing view.

10. 申し上げにくいのですが
Mooshiage nikui nodesuga
It deeply troubles me to say this but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "申し上げにくいのですが." "申し上げにくい" means "it deeply troubles me to say," and "ですが" means "but." This phrase conveys the speaker's reluctance to say something, yet aims to do so in a polite manner.

11. お言葉ですが
O kotoba desuga
With all due respect but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "お言葉ですが." "お言葉" means "with all respect," and "ですが" means "but." This phrase is used to politely introduce a disagreement or different perspective, showing respect for the listener's opinion while indicating that the speaker holds a differing view.

6.5 Directive Speech Asking for Correction

In the directive type of speech asking for correction there are several types of use for *kusshon kotoba* which are commonly used in Japanese society, there are:

1. こちらの都合ばかりで恐れ入りますが
Kochira no tsugo bakari de osoreirimasuga
I apologize about the inconvenience but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "こちらの都合ばかりで恐れ入りますが." "こちらの都合ばかりで" means "all about our situation," and "恐れ入りますが" means "I apologize, but." This phrase shows that the speaker feels a bit awkward because their own situation may inconvenience the listener, but they are still trying to ask for help politely.

2. 説明が足りず恐縮ですが
Setsumei ga tarizu kyōshukudesuga
I'm sorry for the lack of explanation but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "説明が足りず恐縮ですが." "説明が足りず" means "my explanation is lacking," and "恐縮ですが" means "I feel uneasy, but." This phrase is used when the speaker realizes that their explanation might be insufficient and expresses humility before adding more information or making a request respectfully.

3. 細かいことではございますが
Komakai kotode wagozaimasuga
This is a small matter but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "細かいことではございますが." "細かいこと" means "a small matter," and "でございますが" means "but." This phrase is used to bring up a minor detail that may seem trivial, but the speaker still wants to address it politely without appearing overly fussy.

4. お手数ですが

Otesūdesuga

Im sorry for inconveniencing you but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "お手数ですが." "お手数" means "inconvenience to you," and "ですが" means "but." This phrase is used to show that the speaker is aware that the request might inconvenience the listener, but it is still made with respect and an acknowledgment that it may require some effort or time.

5. して頂きありがとうございます、恐れ入りますがこちらの訂正をお願い致します

Shite itadaki arigatōgozaimasu, osoreirimasuga kochira no teisei o onegaiitashimasu

Thank you for that, but please correct me here…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "恐れ入りますが." "恐れ入ります" means "I apologize, but," and "お願い致します" means "I kindly request." This phrase is used to thank someone for their previous help, followed by a polite request for correction, showing respect and humility.

6. お手間おかけ致しますが

Otema okake itashimasuga

I'm sorry for the trouble I have caused but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "お手間おかけ致しますが." "お手間" means "your time or effort," and "おかけ致しますが" means "I am causing you trouble, but." This phrase indicates that the speaker is aware of the inconvenience they may cause the listener but still makes the request politely.

7. 電話番号がちがいます。恐れ入りますが、もう一度ご確認いただけますか？

Tenwabangō ga chigaimasu. Osoreirimasuga, mouichido go kakunin itadakemasu ka?

The phone number is different. We apologize for the inconvenience, but could you please check again?

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "恐れ入りますが." "恐れ入ります" means "I apologize, but," and "ご確認いただけますか" means "could you please check again?" This phrase asks for a re-check in a respectful tone, even though it may be inconvenient for the listener.

8. 言いにくいんだけど、申し訳ないんだけど

Ii nikui ndakedo, mōshiwakenai ndakedo

I hate to say this, I'm sorry but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "言いにくいんだけど" and "申し訳ないんだけど." "言いにくい" means "hard to say," and "申し訳ない" means "I am sorry." This phrase shows reluctance and an apology before delivering potentially unpleasant or sensitive information to the listener.

9. お手数おかけしますが

Otesū okake shimasuga

We apologize for the inconvenience but…

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "お手数おかけしますが." "お手数" means "inconveniencing you," and "おかけしますが" means "I will trouble you, but." This phrase shows that the request might inconvenience the listener, but it is still expressed politely to maintain respect.

10. すいませんが

Suimasenga

Excuse me but

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "すいませんが." "すいません" means "sorry," and "が" means "but." This expression is a simple and informal apology commonly used in everyday conversation to make a request or statement politely without being overly formal.

11. 失礼ですが、

Shitsureidesuga

Excuse me

The use of *kusshon kotoba* is indicated by "失礼ですが." "失礼" means "impolite," and "ですが" means "but." This phrase is used to introduce something that may be considered impolite or sensitive, with respect to the listener by acknowledging the boundary of politeness and hoping the listener will understand.

7. Conclusions

This study explores the use of kusshon kotoba in Japanese directives and how it plays a crucial role in softening communication, ensuring politeness, and accommodating social hierarchy. The variations in kusshon kotoba usage depend on factors such as the social context, the relationship between the speaker and listener, and the type of directive being issued. Through this study there are five types of directive speech to classify the groups of phrases. First, directive speech asking for time, there are 11 phrases in total. Second, directive speech refusing, there are 11 phrases in total. Third, directive speech proposing, there are 10 phrases in total. Fourth, directive speech denying opinion, there are 11 phrases in total. And fifth, directive speech asking for opinion with 11 phrases in total. This study highlights the challenge for Japanese language learners in selecting appropriate kusshon kotoba based on situational and interpersonal nuances, which is essential for achieving effective and culturally appropriate communication.

Through a blend of quantitative and qualitative analysis, including the socio-pragmatic and SPEAKING theories, this research provides valuable insights into the complexities of Japanese politeness strategies. The study's implications suggest that incorporating kusshon kotoba training into Japanese language education can enhance learners' understanding of politeness in interpersonal communication, especially for students in advanced Japanese language programs. These findings underscore the importance of context-sensitive language use in Japanese culture and contribute to a deeper understanding of language politeness as a reflection of societal values in Japan.

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