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Quantitative Evidence from Japanese and American English

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A cross-cultural study of requests for a pen in Japanese and in American English provides empirical evidence for a common factor, Discernment, which we hypothesize operates in all sociolinguistic systems of politeness. We also propose a complementary factor, Volition, hypothesizing that differences in the weighting of the two factors afford one way to characterize sociolinguistic systems of politeness in different languages. The results of the study further offer empirical support for the theories of Brown and Levinson and Leech.

1. Introduction

The study reported here was undertaken as an empirical investigation of certain aspects of linguistic politeness in Japanese and American English. Our immediate aim was to obtain quantitative evidence as a basis for comparing the systems of sociolinguistic politeness in making requests in the two languages.

The long-term goal, toward which this study is just the first step, is to compare the overall systems of politeness in the two cultures and to identify the common elements and strategies, as well as to characterize the essential differences. We hope that such a series of comparative studies will not only supply concrete, statistically-supported details about two specific systems and provide empirical support for certain theoretical claims regarding politeness, but will also afford deeper insight into the sources of cross-cultural (mis)-communication.

The proximate starting point for our investigation is the concept of *wakimae*, which is fundamental to politeness in Japanese.[1] No single English word

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[1] The problem of the nature of politeness has been a major concern of Japanese linguists as well as of the general public and is represented in a voluminous scholarly and popular literature.

translates *wakimae* adequately, but 'discernment' reflects its basic sense.[2] In ordinary colloquial usage, *wakimae* refers to the almost automatic observation of socially-agreed-upon rules and applies to both verbal and non-verbal behavior. A capsule definition would be 'conforming to the expected norm'. (See Ide (1982) for a description of the part of this system in Japanese which is expressed by honorific language.)

In this aspect of politeness, which we will call Discernment, the speaker can be considered to submit passively to the requirements of the system. That is, once certain factors of addressee and situation are noted, the selection of an appropriate linguistic form and/or appropriate behavior is essentially automatic. Since Discernment is, in the Japanese context, clearly the most important factor in questions of politeness, and since it seems to have been assigned relatively little significance in western languages like English, we thought it would be illuminating to examine English from just this angle. In the process, we hoped to substantiate empirically the strong intuitive conviction of its overwhelming importance in Japanese.

Complementary to Discernment is the aspect of politeness which allows the speaker a considerably more active choice, according to the speaker's intention, from a relatively wider range of possibilities. We call this Volition.[3]

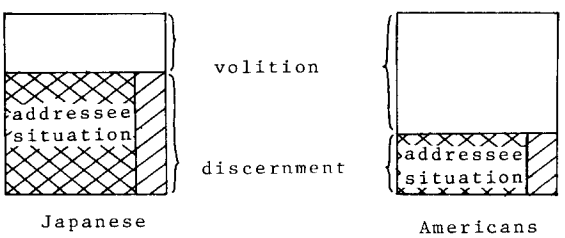

Fig. 1. A scheme of strategies for linguistic politeness.

Figure 1a illustrates schematically the relative prominence of Discernment over Volition in the polite use of language by speakers of Japanese. Conversely, Volition appears to predominate in the polite use of American English (figure 1b). Despite the differential weightings, however, both factors function in both languages, and — as we believe — in the socio-linguistic systems of all languages. Our purpose in this paper is to confirm the operation of Discernment in the two languages under investigation and to determine the differences in the strategies by which Discernment is employed.

[2] Other renditions include 'distinction', 'discretion', 'understanding', and 'knowledge', cf. Masuda (1974: 1943).

[3] All of 'positive politeness' and a good part of 'negative politeness' in Brown and Levinson's (1978) framework are matters of Volition.

2. Background

Before reviewing two major theories of universals in linguistic politeness, we will define the term as we use it here. Politeness is one of the constraints on human interaction, whose purpose is to consider others' feelings, establish levels of mutual comfort, and promote rapport.[4] Under this definition, a system for polite use of a particular language will exhibit two major aspects: the necessity for speaker Discernment and the opportunity for speaker Volition.

We view the approach taken in this paper as complementary to the recent theories of politeness articulated by Brown and Levinson (1978) and Leech (1983). Brown and Levinson provide a comprehensive theory of politeness phenomena encompassing both verbal and non-verbal behavior, though most of their discussion concentrates on the former. Basic to their model are two kinds of 'face': negative face and positive face. Viewing the need to (partially) satisfy face as a basic human want, they propose five politeness strategies available to speakers about to perform a 'face-threatening act (FTA)', the choice of strategy depending on the estimated 'risk of face loss' to speaker or hearer: (1) bald on record; (2) positive politeness; (3) negative politeness; (4) off-record, and (5) don't do FTA (1978: 67, 73).

The degree of threat posed by an FTA, according to Brown and Levinson, is calculated by members of a culture as the additive weighting (W) of three independent variables: the social distance (D) between speaker and hearer, their relative power (P), and 'the absolute ranking (R) of impositions in the particular culture' (1978: 79). In expanding on their concepts of P, D, and R, the authors take account of relatively stable characteristics (such as social rank, which can contribute to both P and D), but stress also that the three factors can (and in some cultures frequently do) alter with an altered context (1978: 85ff.).

Though modestly allowing an escape clause for exceptions ('in many and perhaps all cultures' (1978: 79)), Brown and Levinson believe their model offers a framework for comparing cross-cultural differences in politeness, according to the differing weights assigned to the factors P and D, and the number and kinds of impositions acknowledged via R, in individual societies (1978: 248ff.). These weightings allow a more specific identification of '"ethos", the affective quality of interaction characteristic of members of a society' (1978: 248). Further, by identifying the relative weights of D and P operating in the (publicly) predominant social dyad of a culture, Brown and Levinson are able to make predictions about the typical distribution of politeness strategies in that culture (1978: 254ff.). Thus, for Japan, which has

[4] This, of course, is the affirmative view of politeness. Once such conventions have been established, they can be manipulated for negative ends such as sarcasm or mockery.

high D relations, they predict symmetrical use of negative politeness and off-record strategies, while the western U.S. is taken as a probable example of the opposite: low D and P, with a consequent preference for bald on record and positive politeness strategies (1978: 256).

Leech makes no such specific predictions, but he does suggest that "one of the main purposes of socio-pragmatics (...) is to find out how different societies operate maxims in different ways, for example by giving politeness a higher rating than cooperation in certain situations, or by giving precedence to one maxim of the PP [Politeness Principle] rather than another" (1983: 80). Like Brown and Levinson, he sees his theory as providing the framework for future comparative studies (1983: 231). However, where they subordinate most linguistic devices as specific realizations of generalized politeness strategies, Leech approaches politeness through a theory of general pragmatics. This he divides into Textual Rhetoric and Interpersonal Rhetoric, each manifested by various principles. The Politeness Principle (PP) falls under Interpersonal Rhetoric and is itself further realized through the six maxims of Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy (1983: 15–17, 131ff.).

In discussing the Tact Maxim, Leech proposes five scales which have "a bearing on the degree of tact appropriate to a given speech situation" (1983: 123). It is at this point that his and Brown and Levinson's treatments of politeness most closely approach each other. Leech's scales of Social Distance and Authority are equivalent respectively to the D(istance) and P(ower) variables of Brown and Levinson. Imposition (their R) divides into two scales in Leech: Cost-benefit and Optionality, the former referring to actual, the latter to manipulated, apparent cost-benefit (1983: 107–109). Finally, what Leech gauges according to a scale of Indirectness (1983: 123–124) appears in Brown and Levinson's model as a ranking of politeness strategies from most to least indirect (1978: 65).

Our approach in this paper is complementary to these theories of politeness in the following way. Brown and Levinson and Leech formulate theories from the viewpoint of strategies or maxims which speakers utilize in order to be linguistically polite. They classify types of strategies and maxims and formulate systems of their functions. What we are concerned with is not these typologies or systems of strategies/maxims per se, but rather, the quantification of politeness resulting from specific applications of such strategies/maxims. Each situation calls for a certain degree of politeness, which is determined by factors of P, D, and R (according to Brown and Levinson), or Social Distance, Authority, Cost-benefit, and Optionality (according to Leech). Our approach is to examine the pattern of their interactions and quantitatively compare them. For reasons of practical methodology, the first phase of our research, reported here, focuses on Discernment (figure 1). The second phase, now in progress, attends more closely to Volition.[5]

[5] Both approaches eschew the term 'rule': "(...) there is a tendency, especially among linguists, to think of pragmatic (language-using) principles as *rules* ... But to posit specific and diverse universal

3. Hypothesis

Our hypothesis is that all human speakers use language according to politeness, which we believe is fundamentally determined by Discernment. Discernment, in turn, is determined by various factors, of which the major ones are the types of addressee and the situation.

Our broad claim is that in all sociolinguistic systems there exists a sub-system for polite use of language which has at least two components. The first is the operation of Discernment, the second, Volition. Discernment must be considered as first because to ignore its requirements brings social punishment; that is, violations of the rules of Discernment offend others and thus hurt the speaker's social image. Within the sociolinguistic system, one *must* observe the social rule of Discernment. We might say that this (set of) rule(s) defines one's *minimal* obligations within the polite-use sub-system. Volition, on the other hand, defines a range of permissible modifications to the former: one may, but need not, adopt an alternate use in order to be acceptably polite. That is, the criteria or considerations addressed by Volition are optional from the standpoint of universal pragmatic strategy. The specific strategies by which individual sociolinguistic systems implement Volition will, of course, differ.

In figure 1, the lower segment of each block represents the first component — Discernment — in Japanese and (American) English. Taken more specifically as schematizations of the polite use of language in making requests, the narrow single-hatched areas (lower right of block) represent the degree of imposition of a requesting act (DI). The double-hatched areas stand for the combined factors of a particular addressee in a particular situation. The two hatched areas taken together make up the component of Discernment, whereas the white areas form the second component, Volition.

In order to give an adequate account of politeness which is centered on addressee and situation, it will be useful to introduce the concept of Perceived Distance (PD). Perceived Distance is the distance perceived by a speaker to exist between the self and a particular addressee in a particular situation and operating in a shared sociolinguistic milieu. This perception is the fundamental element, we believe, which determines a speaker's specific choices in his/her polite use of language. PD also covers the additional factor of degree of imposition (DI) of a request, which has the effect of modifying the linguistic choice that consideration of addressee status and situation, operating alone, would produce. Thus PD is the sum of the factors of addressee status and situation and DI.[6] PD is useful as a measurable abstract concept for politeness,

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rules is to invent a problem to be explained, rather than to explain it" (Brown and Levinson (1978: 91)). Leech, too, (1983: 8–10) draws a distinction between rules to describe language proper and principles/maxims to characterize pragmatic phenomena. We agree that this is a valuable distinction, but confess that we feel quite comfortable discussing 'sociolinguistic rules', understanding them to evince the same flexibility as 'principles'.

[6] This PD is a device to measure Brown and Levinson's D(istance), P(ower), and R(ank) on a

since we view politeness as a matter of relative distance between people involved in interaction: the relationship is helped to operate smoothly when an appropriate degree of distance is marked out by use of the proper strategy.

There are at least two advantages in proposing the concept of PD. First, it allows us to establish a common concept of politeness cross-culturally, thus universally. The second advantage of PD is that it is a concept sufficiently abstract to be applied to linguistic politeness and to (non-linguistic) behavioral politeness as well. Thus it becomes possible to measure both broad categories of politeness with the same scale. Figure 2 shows such a scale. Its extremes are '(most) uninhibited' and '(most) careful'. Though other divisions are of course possible, we have chosen the common 5-point scale for our study, with 'most uninhibited' at the lower end (1) and 'most careful' at the upper (5). PD is gauged directly as the degree of inhibition/carefulness felt toward a person in a particular situation. PD is measured indirectly by the degree of inhibition/carefulness attributed by a speaker to specific expressions (see directions to Parts I and II of our questionnaire; appendix A).

4. Method

Our study focused on one aspect of polite use of language: making requests in Japanese and in American English. For this we designed a three-part questionnaire asking subjects to give (Part I) their judgments of the degree of carefulness[7] of certain request forms, (Part II) the distance they perceived

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unified scale. Although PD is designed to account for all three factors, in the research reported here we have chosen to hold DI (that is, Rank) constant in order to reduce the number of variables.

[7] The language here and elsewhere regarding 'carefulness' and 'inhibition' has been condensed in the interests of style, but the reader may experience a certain loss of clarity. In Part I, subjects were first instructed to identify the linguistic expression 'you would be most likely to use when you were being most careful in your speech and behavior', then the one they would use when being 'most uninhibited (relaxed)' in speech and behavior. Having thus established the extremes of their own scale, they were then instructed to rank every expression 'on the scale from "uninhibited" to "careful"'. A similar procedure was followed for Part II, subjects being first asked to identify the person toward whom they would be 'most careful' in their behavior, then toward whom they would be 'most uninhibited (relaxed)' in behavior. Finally they were instructed to 'rate how careful/uninhibited' they would be toward each person listed.

We believe the training procedure before the actual ranking was adequate to show the subjects what we were asking them to judge. What we did *not* want to ask them for was a direct judgment of the 'politeness' of an expression, or the politeness due to a certain type of person. Our focus was on P(erceived) D(istance). However, in both colloquial English and Japanese, the term 'distance' itself carries connotations which could bias the responses. Therefore 'uninhibited/careful' seemed the best choice. Again for brevity, we sometimes refer to the scales used in Parts I and II with the cover term 'carefulness'. Similarly, we occasionally refer to the 'politeness' of various expressions. This is our interpretation of the underlying valuation of the expressions.

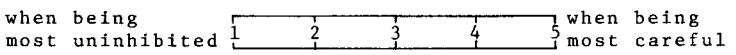


Fig. 2. 5-point scale used to measure PD.

between themselves and certain types of persons in typical situations, and (Part III) the actual request form they would use toward such persons.

Using a questionnaire with self-reported data is often considered less 'real' than collecting instances of actual speech. However, we were interested in getting a large sample, in two countries, of a specific request addressed to approximately 20 different types of people. This would have been virtually impossible under field conditions. Moreover, we wished to get judgments from the same subject populations regarding perceived politeness of forms (Part I) and Perceived Distance (Part II). A questionnaire eliciting self-reported data accomplishes all these aims.

Beyond the practical methodological advantages, self-reported data has theoretical advantages as well, precisely where it is often thought to be most vulnerable. The virtue of authenticity in naturally-occurring speech must be weighed against its reflection of speakers' sociolinguistic adaptations to very specific situations as well as their occasional sociolinguistic misjudgments. Using self-reported data enables us to obtain more stereotypic responses: that is, for each category, the prototype of the variants occurring in the individual's actual speech.[8]

The questionnaire focuses on politeness of requests in borrowing a pen. This keeps the imposition factor (DI) constant. A further advantage of this choice is that the request for a pen can be used in both Japanese and American contexts and with a variety of addressees. Finally, using the pen request allows for a great variety of linguistic forms to be used.[9]

The subjects in this study were college students enrolled at Japanese and American universities.[10] In a study such as this, dealing with sociolinguistic rules of politeness, the ideal would have been to choose subjects from a context more 'normal' for the adult population at large than that afforded by a university campus. However, in order to serve the comparative aim of this

[8] Hudson (1980: 80) suggests that prototype theory can account for "(...) how people categorise the social factors to which they relate language (...)". That this method is more likely to tap subjects' mental prototypes, while actual speech samples are more likely to include atypical items, is given support by a study briefly reported in Ide et al. (1984), which compares data elicited from the same subjects by questionnaire and by recordings of natural conversations.

[9] Asking for the time, which we also considered initially, can involve even more layers of indirection, and elicit fewer different expressions.

[10] The 525 Japanese subjects were students at Tokyo University of Foreign Languages, Tokai University, Meiji Gakuin University, Tokyo Municipal University, and Chiba University. The 490 American subjects were students at Southern Illinois University, Cornell, Yale, Pennsylvania, and Harvard.

investigation, it was important to have as much uniformity as possible in social status, educational background, and personal concerns. In these respects, Japanese and Americans most resemble each other at the university.

An exploratory study was conducted in Japan with approximately 30 American and 30 Japanese students. They were asked to respond to the following open-ended requests:

(1) List the people you commonly meet.
(2) List all the expressions you use in borrowing a pen.
(3) List all the expressions you use in asking the time.

The responses to these surveys provided the material for the linguistic expressions used in Part I of the questionnaire and the person/situation combinations in Part II. In order to achieve a well-balanced distribution in the final choice of expressions, we considered the frequency of particular responses as well as morphological and syntactic form and intuitively-judged degree of politeness. For the person/situation categories, our criteria were frequency of response and the need for a well-balanced distribution among factors of power and solidarity.

The resulting questionnaire is designed to provide three independent measures. Part I of the questionnaire measures the relative politeness of certain request forms, using a 5-point scale (see figure 2). Part II measures the relative PD of certain categories of addressee in typical situations. In other words, Part I provides information about linguistic rules of politeness and Part II, about social rules of behavior based on Discernment.

Part III measures the relative frequency with which specific request forms are used toward specific categories of addressee in typical situations. For comparability, the expressions and categories are the same as those in Parts I and II, but they are differently ordered; further, Part III was administered after a distractor break of 15–20 minutes. (See appendix A for the complete English version of the questionnaire.)

Rationale. The aim of this empirical study is to identify and compare the sociolinguistic rules of politeness for making requests in Japanese and in American English. Usually such studies focus on the product of the interaction of the relevant factors, namely: what is said to whom in which circumstances (our Part III). This, however, is merely a single measure of a complex phenomenon.

In order to break it down into manageable parts more susceptible of direct investigation, we hypothesize that polite communicative behavior depends on at least two types of rules: (i) linguistic rules of politeness, and (ii) social rules of polite behavior. It is these theoretically autonomous 'rules' which Parts I and II, respectively, are designed to get at. Though an admitted simplification, this approach of divide-in-order-to-conquer (or at least, to-get-in-a-wedge) has a respected history in scientific method. We trust that it has proven productive here too.

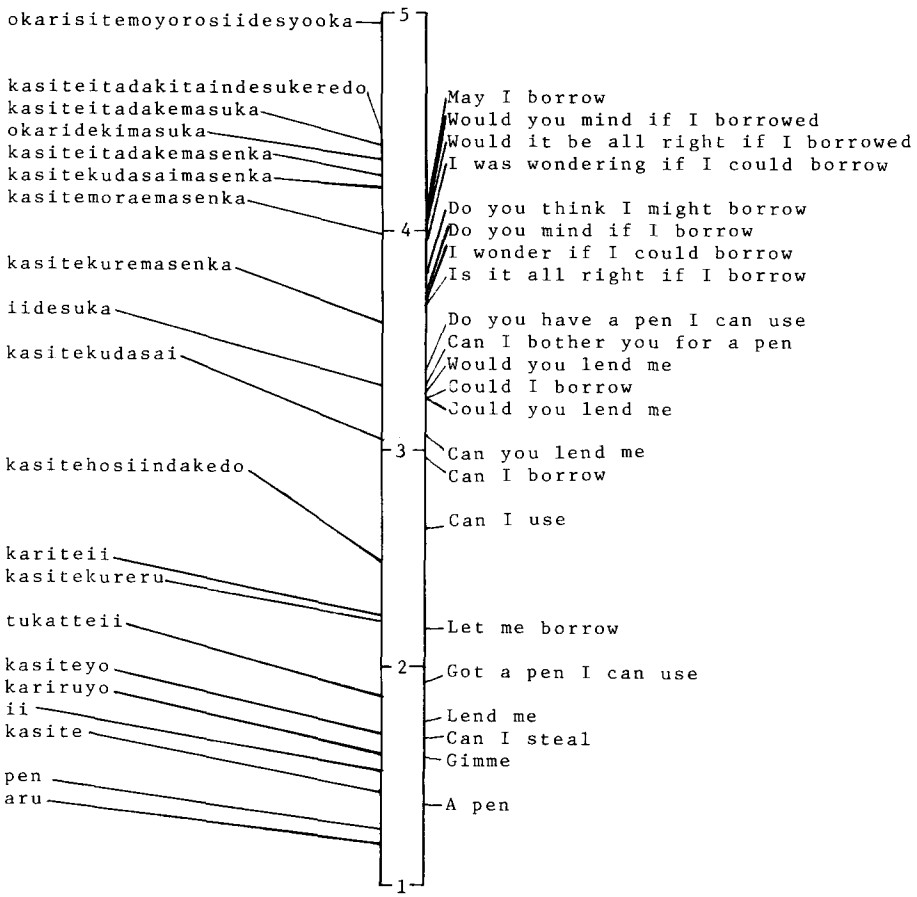


Fig. 3. Ranking of politeness of request forms (Part I).[11]

[11] Glosses for the Japanese forms in figure 3:

aru	'is (there)'
pen	'pen'
kasi-te	*kasi-* = 'lend', *-te* = progressive aspect
ii	'(is it) all right'
kariru-yo	*kariru* = 'borrow', *yo* = confirmatory particle
tukat-	'use'
kureru	'let me'
hosii	'(I) want'
da-ke(re)do	*da* = copula, *ke(re)do* = 'but'
kudasai	imperative of *kudasaru*, the honorific humble form of *kureru*
desu-ka	*desu* = formal form of *da*, *ka* = question particle
-masen	*-mas-* = formal auxiliary, *-en-* = negative
morae-	'you hand down to do'
itadake-	honorific humble form of *morae-* 'I humbly receive'
o-	honorific prefix
deki-	'be able'
-tai-	'wish'

As we will show in section 5, the separate measures in Parts I and II give strong independent support to the combined measure in Part III. (We do not exclude the possibility that additional factors besides those examined in I and II contribute to the findings in III. In our results, the former substantially, but not completely, account for the latter.)

5. Result

The responses to the questionnaires were coded, then processed and analyzed by computer using the package program GLAPS devised by Ogino

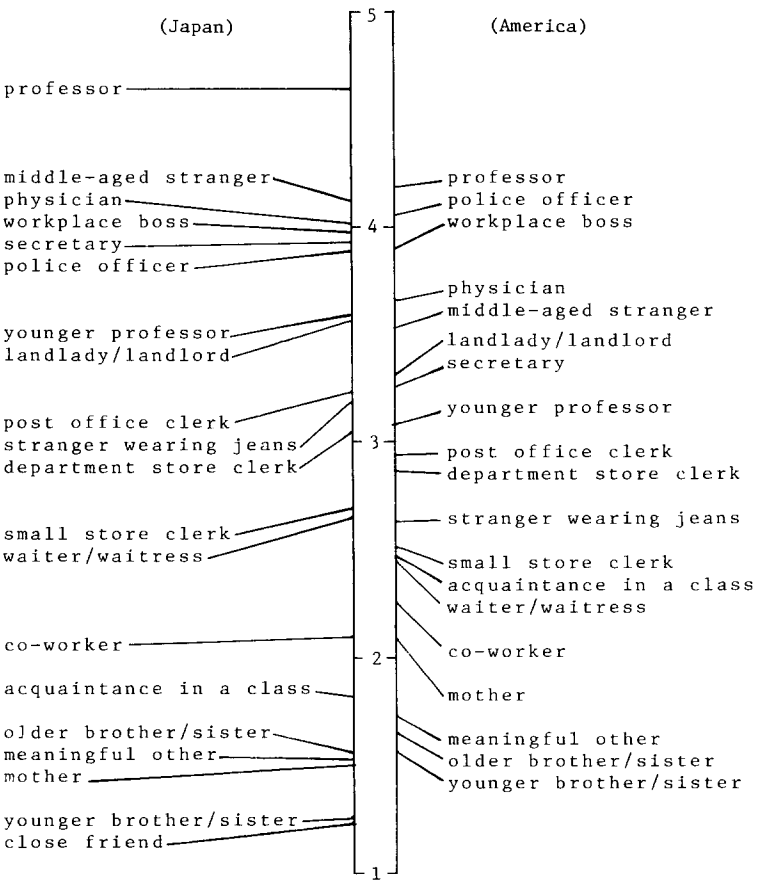


Fig. 4. Ranking of politeness of people/situation categories (Part II).

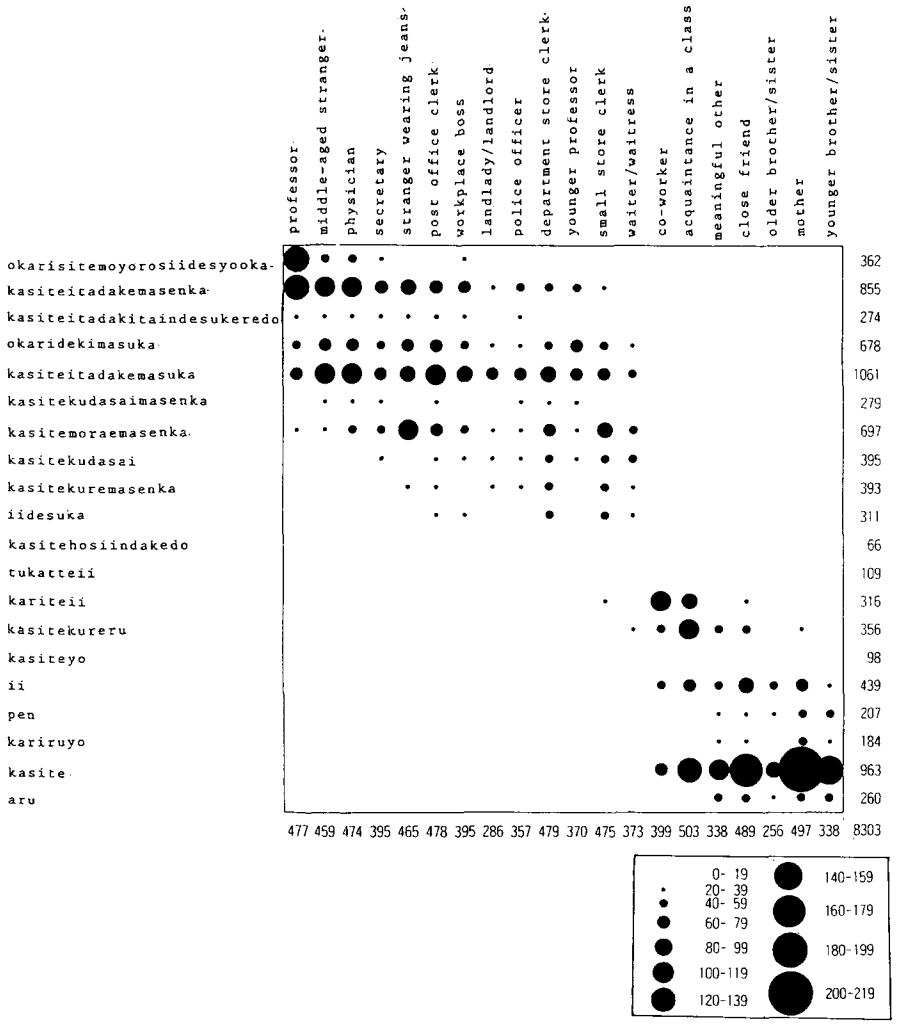


Fig. 5. Correlation of request forms and people/situation categories – Japanese (Part III).

(1986).[12] The analysis of the data obtained from Part III of the questionnaire is summarized in figures 5 and 6.[13] Comparison of the two figures reveals that the fundamental pattern for the Japanese and the American subjects is the

[12] The program GLAPS (Generalized Linguistic Atlas Printing System) was devised to analyze quantitative sociolinguistic data. Among other statistical analyses, it facilitates the computation of the degree of politeness attributed to linguistic forms and owed to categories of persons, based on the intensity of correlation of these variables.

[13] The linguistic forms (vertical axis) and person categories (horizontal axis) are arranged according to the degree of politeness as computed by GLAPS.

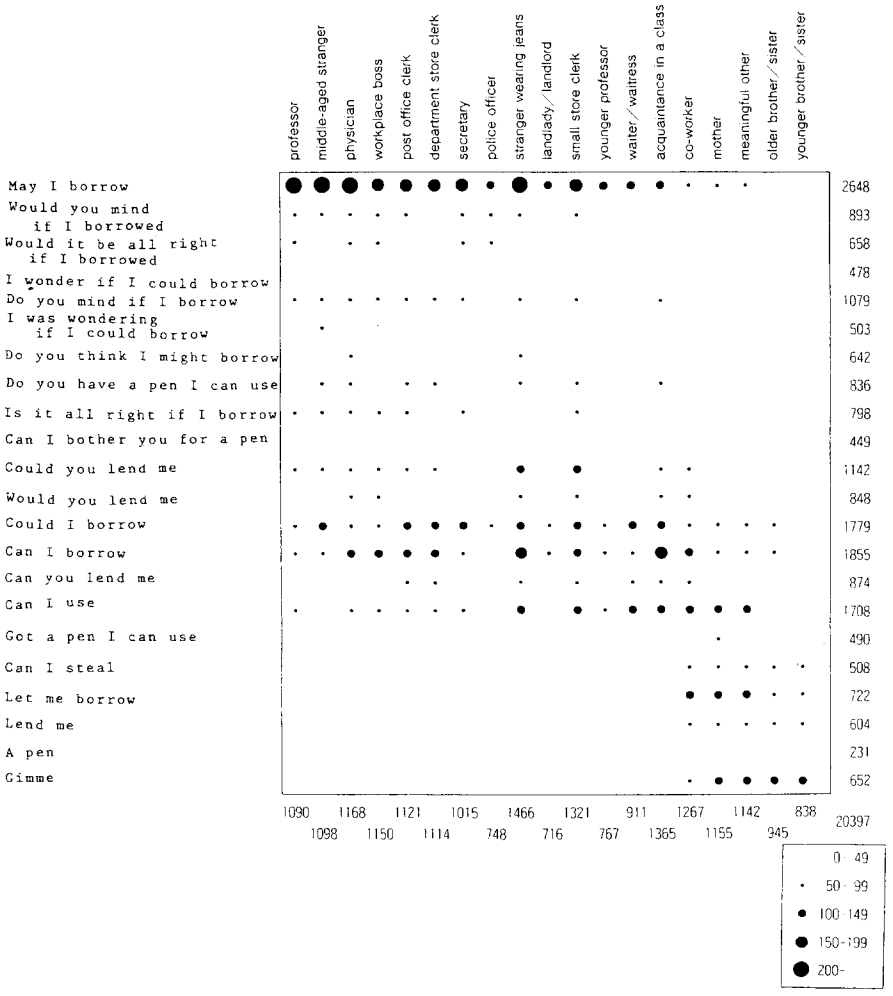


Fig. 6. Correlation of request forms and people/situation categories – Americans (Part III).

same; that is, both groups show graded responses in which choice of request form correlates with person/situation. No form in either Japanese or English is reserved by our subjects for one person/situation category exclusively. However, for both groups of subjects, request forms judged as relatively uninhibited are not addressed to those toward whom subjects report being relatively careful; conversely, forms judged as relatively careful are not addressed to those toward whom subjects felt relatively uninhibited (note white areas in the figures).

This pattern, by which the relative ranking of an addressee correlates with the relative politeness/ranking of request form, in both Japanese and English, reflects the operation of the factor we have called Discernment. The results of our study (Part III) confirm its presence in the sociolinguistic functioning of Japanese and of American English.

Beneath the broad similarities in our statistical results for the two languages there are, of course, differences. These are equally interesting, as they provide clues to the degree and nature of the differences in the Discernment factor in the polite use of the two languages. In particular, we note that the Japanese responses are more tightly clustered than those of the American subjects (cf. figures 5 and 6). The latter — though still within the two major groupings and like the former not falling in the upper right or lower left — show almost no further subgrouping of responses.[14] In contrast, Japanese responses cluster more tightly within the two larger groupings.

For the differences in concentration of responses from Japanese and American subjects to Part III, we considered five possible explanations:

(1) There is a smaller difference in the degree of politeness among the English request forms than among the Japanese request forms.
(2) In the United States, there are fewer differences in the degree of politeness owed to the various person/situation categories than there are in Japan.
(3) Both 1 and 2 are the case.
(4) Both 1 and 2 plus some additional factor(s) are the case.
(5) Neither 1 nor 2, but some different factor(s) are (is) the case.

The results of Part I (request forms) strongly support the validity of the first proposed explanation. These are shown in figure 3. On a 5-point scale, from expressions used when being 'most uninhibited' (1) to those used when 'most careful' (5), Japanese request forms are distributed fairly evenly, with the lowest and highest average scores nearing the absolute extremes. The average scores for the American forms, however, are relatively unevenly distributed, and within a shorter span of the scale. In particular, one is struck by the close clustering of the eight most 'careful' forms, which we interpret as the most polite.

On the other hand, the results of Part II of the questionnaire equally support the second explanation. These are shown in figure 4. Here again, the Japanese responses space the person/situation categories along a significantly greater span of the 5-point scale than the American responses do.

[14] 'May I borrow (your pen for a minute?)' stands out not only for its exceptional density of response, but also for its wide separation from the other interrogative modals 'could?/can?/would?': see figure 3. The prominance of this form of the pen request is most likely due to the emphasis laid by many school teachers and parents on the putative semantic distinction between 'may' and 'can'.

Thus both 1 and 2 are the case, thus 3, thus not 5. However, the results of Parts I and II are not significant enough to account completely for the results obtained in III. Therefore there must be some additional factor or factors affecting the American choices.

One possible case is that the American subjects all have sociolinguistic rules of politeness which apply to the request for a pen, but that they do not all necessarily have the same rules; whereas there is more tacit concensus among the Japanese subjects. This supposition is supported by some interesting statistics derived from the data. In Part III, the average number of American responses for each person/situation category was 2.55, while the Japanese subjects averaged 1.01. Many Americans gave just one response each, but a significant minority listed up to the maximum 22, whereas almost all Japanese respondants gave only one.

The difference in average number of responses for each person/situation category might suggest that Americans are less prone to differentiate the use of expressions according to different person/situation categories. To examine this possibility we checked another statistic: the variability of responses, i.e. the number of different response sets used in the questionnaire by individual subjects. The average number of different response sets used per American subject in Part III was 9.90 (out of a possible 19), while that for Japanese was 7.30 (out of a possible 20).[15] The large Ns of the two subject pools make this a statistically significant difference. These figures are counter-evidence to our provisional assumption that Americans do not differentiate expressions according to person/situation. Indeed, Americans do use more different expressions in each person/situation.

In puzzling further over this phenomenon, we observed another revealing statistic: the distribution of the variability of responses across persons showed a larger range for the Americans (standard deviation 4.60) than for the Japanese (SD 2.68). This shows that among the Americans, there was greater variability from subject to subject in the choice of response sets. That is, the greater variability evidenced in the American responses is attributable not simply to variation within subjects (as discussed above), but must be assigned in part to variation across subjects.

To summarize the statistical evidence for the difference in the density of figures 5 and 6: compared to the Japanese, Americans (1) did use greater

[15] The typical Japanese subject provided just one expression for each of the 20 items, usually with repetitions. Take as an abbreviated example a subject who answered 1 = a, 2 = b, 3 = c, 4 = c, 5 = b, 6 = a, 7 = f, 8 = b, 9 = v, and 10 = v. The number of different response sets in this case is five: a, b, c, f, v. When a subject provided several expressions for an item, that group was counted as a unit response; only identical combinations were counted as repetitions of that response. Thus, an abbreviated example typical of American subjects might show 1 = abc, 2 = abc, 3 = a, 4 = c, 5 = f, 6 = f, 7 = ab, 8 = abc, 9 = f, and 10 = abc. The number of different response sets in this case is also five: abc, a, c, f, ab.

average number of responses for each person/situation, (2) did use greater average number of different response sets per single subject, and (3) did exhibit a greater range of responses (SD) over Part III of the questionnaire.

Besides evincing more rules with less consensus than their Japanese counterparts, it may also be the case that the American subjects, in applying their rules, tried to consider additional factor(s) not provided by the information in the questionnaire. If so, these unaddressed factors would have contributed to the observed variation (i.e. their greater number of responses in individual categories and greater number of different response sets). For instance, these subjects may have tried to consider how they wanted to deal with the various persons in the given situations, based on their own intentions (i.e. Volition) in making such a request. In that case, they might need additional information about the addressee, such as present mood, nature of previous encounter, etc. That this may be so is suggested by our original reasoning that the generalized person/situation combinations would elicit prototypical responses. In effect, the results show that there are fewer compelling prototypes for our American subjects, as far as the persons and situations are defined in the present questionnaire, than for the Japanese.

6. Discussion

The common shape of the overall patterns of the Japanese and American results (figures 5 and 6) of this first comparative study supports our claim that Discernment — a recognition of certain fundamental characteristics of addressee and situation — is a factor in the polite use of both languages.

The common instrument and the large subject pools in this study allow us to examine the equally interesting issue of the differences in the way the Discernment factor is manifested in the two languages. We see that when addressees are characterized in terms of occupation/status, relative age, degree of acquaintance with the speaker, and particular situation, Japanese subjects show very high agreement on the appropriate form(s) for making a certain request (see figure 5). The American subjects, on the other hand, show a more diffuse correlation between these particular person/situation features and the appropriate form of a request. This suggests that, while the Discernment factor operates in both sociolinguistic systems, it satisfies a proportionately greater share of the decision-making for Japanese speakers than it does for American English speakers. Conversely, Americans may — or must — take into greater account the factor of Volition.

We propose that Americans and Japanese follow the same overall model of polite use of language, but differ in the weight assigned to the various factors subsumed under Discernment and Volition. Interestingly, in attempting to draft a process model applicable to both, we encountered a small conflict

which seems to bolster our claim: the Japanese in our group wanted to begin with Discernment; the American opted for Volition. Accordingly, we propose the following model for sociolinguistic rules of politeness and hypothesize its universal applicability:

(1) *p*. Decide the desired degree of politeness (Volition). *q*. Assess the factors designated as relevant (Discernment).
(2) Read the rule specifying the order and optionality for *p* and *q* in the particular language being used.
(3) Produce an appropriate linguistic form according to the sociolinguistic rules of the language.

In effect, this is simply a process-reading of figure 1. As universal factors, *p* and *q* are unordered. For any one language, however, the order and the options will be specific.

For Japanese, *q* is obligatory and primary; *p* is optional and secondary. Once the factors of addressee status and general situation relative to speaker's own have been assessed, specific linguistic forms, at a conventional level of politeness, are available.

For American English, by contrast, the factors of addressee status and (typical) situation define a very broad range of polite usage. Discernment (*q*) functions chiefly to prevent gross breaches of politeness, and not — as in Japanese — to identify specific correct choices. Thus *q* is obligatory for American English, but secondary. What guides the American speaker to a specific utterance is Volition (*p*). That is, the speaker must (consciously or otherwise) choose just how much politeness to use. This is not to suggest that the Japanese speaker does not have the same choice, but that s/he need not take it in order to select an utterance. For the American, *p* is obligatory and primary.

7. Conclusion

In this paper we have reported the results of a Japanese and American study of the sociolinguistic rules of politeness for asking to borrow a pen. Just as 'This is a pen' has been the opening example of so many language textbooks, we hope that our study will prove to be but the first of many such empirical quantitative cross-cultural investigations.

We believe that our research framework, in both theory and execution, is applicable to other cultures. Previous empirical studies of polite use of language have tended to limit investigation either to questions of who says what to who in certain conditions (our Part III), or to ranking the relative politeness of linguistic forms (Part I). By including a coordinated investigation of the perceived distance (PD) toward various addressees (Part II), we have

been able to look at the question of sociolinguistic rules of politeness from several different angles. Moreover, having the linguistic evaluation (I) and the social evaluation (II) separate from the sociolinguistic response (III) gives answers that would otherwise be unavailable and helps identify the interaction, if not the precise nature, of still other elements contributing to the whole. The large numbers of subjects in each of the sub-groups being compared, and the comparability of the subject populations and the instrument, all of which increase the reliability of the resulting data, are further advantages to our approach.

Most importantly, our comparison of one type of request behavior in Japanese and American English provides empirical evidence that these superficially different sociolinguistic systems share the factor we call Discernment. These findings, though couched in our own terminology, lend empirical support to the hypotheses of Brown and Levinson that D(istance) and P(ower) are two major elements operating in all sociolinguistic systems of politeness and that the weights or priorities assigned to each will vary from group to group.

Our findings also lend empirical support to the theory of Leech, that languages employ the same range of politeness maxims, but differ in the weights assigned and the consequent implementation strategies.

We look forward to more such cross-cultural investigations to clarify further the nature of politeness strategies in individual human languages.[16]

8. Appendix A

Questionnaire

This is part of a cross-cultural investigation being conducted by the Japan–U.S. Sociolinguistics Research Group. The results of the study will contribute to our knowledge of how people use language in certain contexts, and thus will help in the resolution of practical communication problems. Your participation in this work is very much appreciated.

The following information is needed for the analysis of responses.
Age: ☐ Sex: M ☐, F ☐
Undergraduate ☐, Graduate ☐
University or college you are now attending: ☐
Major: ☐
The state in which you have lived longest (if U.S. citizen):
☐
Home Country (if not U.S. citizen): ☐

[16] See appendix B for Swedish responses to Part III.

Part I

1. Suppose that someone with whom you are interacting has a pen that you want to borrow. Below is a list of expressions you might use in such a situation. If there are any expressions on the list which you would NOT use under ordinary circumstances, please cross them out, e.g.: ~~Your pen or your life~~

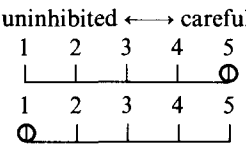
PLEASE IGNORE THIS BOX UNTIL YOU REACH QUESTION 4.

		1	2	3	4	5
a	Can you lend me your pen for a minute?					
b	Gimme your pen for a minute.					
c	I was wondering if I could borrow your pen for a minute.					
d	Would you lend me your pen for a minute?					
e	Do you have a pen I can use for a minute? (You already know that the person does have one.)					
f	Let me borrow your pen for a minute.					
g	May I borrow your pen for a minute?					
h	Can I bother you for a pen?					
i	Would you mind if I borrowed your pen for a minute?					
j	Can I use your pen for a minute?					
k	Do you think I might borrow your pen for a minute?					
l	Lend me your pen for a minute.					
m	Can I steal your pen for a minute?					
n	I wonder if I could borrow your pen for a minute.					
o	Can I borrow your pen for a minute?					
p	Would it be all right if I borrowed your pen for a minute?					
q	Could you lend me your pen for a minute?					
r	Could I borrow your pen for a minute?					
s	Is it all right if I borrow your pen for a minute?					
t	Got a pen I can use for a minute? (You already know that the person does have one.)					
u	A pen!					
v	Do you mind if I borrow your pen for a minute?					

2. Of the expressions now left on the list, which one do you think you would be most likely to use when you were being most careful in your speech and behavior? Please write its letter in the box: ☐

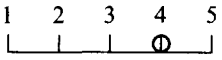
3. Of the expressions now left on the list, which one do you think you would be most likely to use when you were being most uninhibited (relaxed) in your speech and behavior? Please write its letter in the box: ☐

4. If we have a scale of 1 to 5, the expression you chose as 'most careful' represents a 5, and the one you chose as 'most uninhibited' represents a 1.



With this scale in mind, please refer back to question 1. Examine each expression which you have not crossed out and rate its rank on the scale from 'uninhibited' to 'careful' (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5). Circle the appropriate number on the scale at the right of the expression.

For instance, if a particular sentence seems 'careful' but not 'very careful' you would rate it as a 4:



WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED RATING THE EXPRESSIONS IN QUESTION 1, PLEASE GO ON TO PART II.

Part II

5. Below is a list of people and situations. If there are any on the list totally foreign to your experience, CROSS THEM OUT. e.g. ~~The Queen of England, behind you in a supermarket line.~~

PLEASE IGNORE THIS BOX UNTIL YOU REACH QUESTION 8.

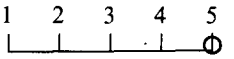
		1 2 3 4 5
A	The professor who is your academic adviser, in his/her office.	
B	A middle-aged, well-dressed stranger standing behind you in line at the bank.	
C	A physician in his/her office, after an examination.	
D	A clerk in a large department store.	
E	Your current landlady/landlord presenting a lease for renewal.	
F	A stranger wearing faded-blue jeans, standing behind you in line at the bank.	
G	A city police officer issuing you a parking ticket which you know you deserve.	
H	Your department secretary giving you an appointment with a professor.	
I	A clerk in a small store at which you shop regularly.	
J	A younger brother/sister with whom you're talking at home.	
K	A younger professor with whom you have a small class, who is sitting with you in the department lounge.	
L	A person who works with you at your regular/part-time job.	
M	A waiter/waitress at the place where you go most often to have coffee.	
N	Your workplace supervisor/boss on the job.	
O	An older brother/sister with whom you're talking at home.	
P	An acquaintance in a small class you attend, while you're waiting for class to begin.	
Q	A clerk in a post office.	
R	Your 'meaningful other' (spouse, lover, etc.), talking in your room/appartment.	
S	Your mother with whom you're talking at home.	

6. Of the people left on the list in the situations given, towards whom would you be most careful in your behavior? Please put the number of that person in the box: ☐

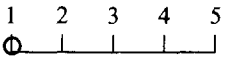
7. Of the people left on the list in the situations given, towards whom would you be most uninhibited (most relaxed) in your behavior? Please put the number of that person in the box: ☐

8. On this scale from 1 to 5, the person to whom your attitude is 'most careful' represents 5:

uninhibited ⟷ careful

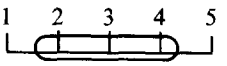


The person to whom your attitude is 'most uninhibited' (most relaxed) is a 1 on the same scale:

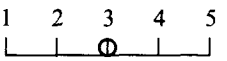


With this scale in mind, look back at the people listed in Question 5 whom you have not crossed out. Imagine yourself dealing with those people in those situations, with no one else listening in on a conversation. Rate how careful/uninhibited you would be.

If you deal with a number of different individuals in one of the people-categories (for example, you may be relaxed with some co-workers and careful with others), your answer may cover a range. In such cases, indicate the range thus:



On the other hand, many of your answers may be represented by a single point on the scale. In such cases, circle that point.



WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED RATING THE NAMES IN QUESTION 5, PLEASE PUT YOUR PENCIL DOWN AND LOOK UP.

Part III

Suppose you want to borrow a pen from the people listed below on the right, in the situations given. In each case, imagine that the pen is nearby, visible to both of you (on the desk, in a shirt pocket, etc.).

Below, on the left, is a list of expressions you might use in such situations. For each person, please choose the expression(s) you think you would be MOST LIKELY to use and write the appropriate letter(s) in the space given at the far right.

e.g.	Clerk	s
	Waiter	a,b,t

Cross out any category with which you have no contact.

e.g.	E.T.	

	Expressions	Person categories	Your choice of expression(s)
a	May I borrow your pen for a minute?	A stranger wearing faded-blue jeans standing behind you in line at the bank.	
b	Do you think I might borrow your pen for a minute?	A clerk in a small store at which you shop regularly.	
c	Let me borrow your pen for a minute.	A person who works with you at your regular/part-time job.	
d	Could you lend me your pen for a minute?	Your workplace supervisor/boss on the job.	
e	A pen!	An acquaintance in a small class you attend, while you're waiting for class to begin.	
f	Can I bother you for a pen?	Your mother with whom you're talking at home.	
g	Would you lend me your pen for a minute?	A physician in his/her office, after an examination.	
h	Lend me your pen for a minute.	A clerk in a post office.	
i	Can I borrow your pen for a minute?	The professor who is your academic adviser, in his/her office.	
j	Got a pen I can use for a minute? (You already know that the person does have one.)	An older brother/sister with whom you're talking at home.	
k	Gimme your pen for a minute.	Your current landlady/landlord presenting a lease for renewal.	
l	Do you mind if I borrow your pen for a minute?		
m	Can you lend me your pen for a minute?		

Expressions		Person categories	Your choice of expression(s)
n	I was wondering if I could borrow your pen for a minute.	A middle-aged, well-dressed stranger standing behind you in line at the bank.	
o	Is it all right if I borrow your pen for a minute?	Your "meaningful other" (spouse, lover, etc.), talking in your room/apartment.	
p	Can I steal your pen for a minute?	A city police officer issuing you a parking ticket which you know you deserve.	
q	Would you mind if I borrowed your pen for a minute?	A clerk in a large department store.	
r	Do you have a pen I can use for a minute? (You already know that the person does have one.)	A younger professor with whom you have a small class, who is sitting with you in the department lounge.	
s	Could I borrow your pen for a minute?	A waiter/waitress at the place where you go most often to have coffee.	
t	I wonder if I could borrow your pen for a minute.	Your department secretary giving you an appointment with a professor.	
u	Can I use your pen for a minute?	A younger brother/sister with whom you're talking at home.	
v	Would it be all right if I borrowed your pen for a minute?		

9. Appendix B

A Swedish translation of the English version of the questionnaire was prepared and administered to approximately 300 students through the kind offices of Prof. Åke Daun, Institute of Ethnology, Stockholm University. Preliminary analysis of Part III indicates that the distribution of responses shares with the Japanese and American responses the same broad pattern, which we have interpreted as indicating the operation of Discernment in the latter languages.

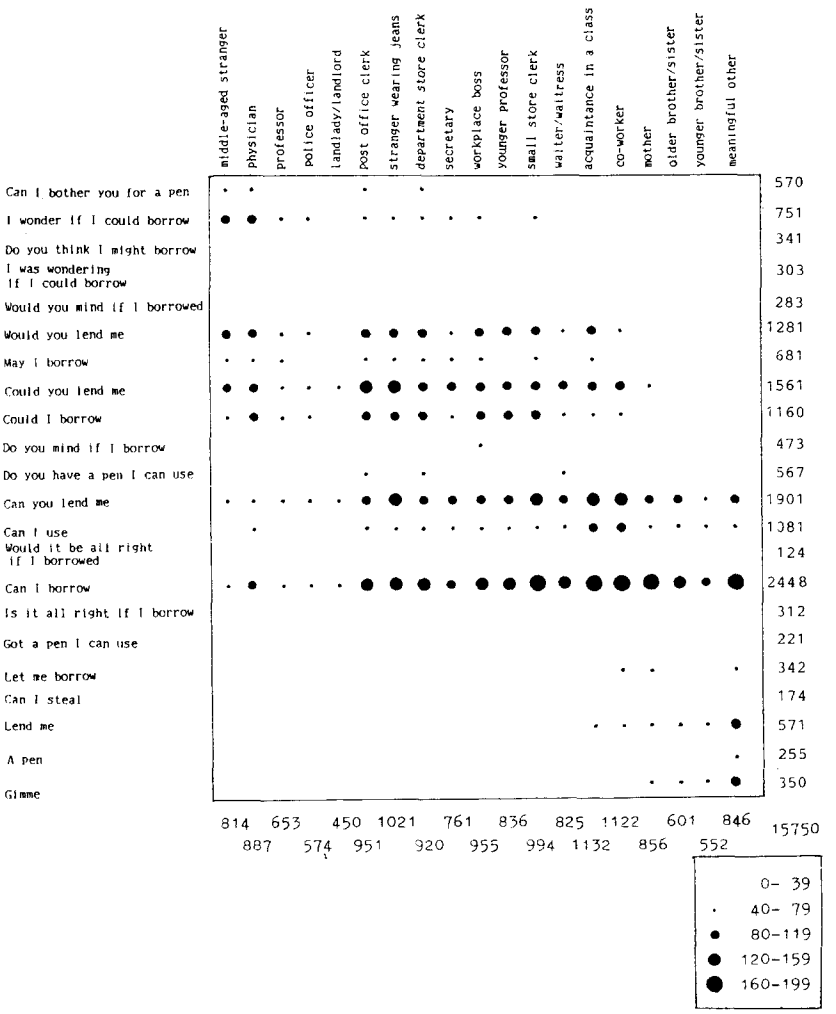


Fig. B1. Correlation of request forms and people/situation categories – Swedes (Part III).

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