

## Interference of Indonesian Language on Japanese Language in the Use of *Aizuchi* (相槌) by Japanese Language Students in Medan

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### ABSTRACT

Language interference or disorder often occurs in individuals who have acquired proficiency in multiple languages, including Japanese language learners at the college level. This research aims to analyze the interference of the Indonesian language in the use of *aizuchi* (backchanneling) in Japanese by Japanese language students in Medan, Indonesia. The study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. The data consists of transcriptions of conversations between students and lecturers that contain instances of *aizuchi* interference. Data collection is conducted through observation using techniques such as eavesdropping and note-taking. The collected data is analyzed through data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the interference of the Indonesian language in *aizuchi* in Japanese primarily occurs at the lexical level, specifically in the utilization of Indonesian words as *aizuchi* in Japanese conversations. An example of this interference is replacing the Japanese word "hai" with the Indonesian word "iya." The students' experiences influence the identified interference in learning foreign languages and cultural factors. This research contributes to a better understanding of the interference of the Indonesian language in the use of *aizuchi* in Japanese and provides insights for teaching the Japanese language at the tertiary level.

**Keywords:** *Aizuchi*, Interference, Japanese Learners, Japanese, Indonesian

## 1. Introduction

Language interference resulting from an individual's ability to master more than one language is often encountered daily. For example, an individual may mix Indonesian and English or Indonesian and regional languages. Interference resulting from contact between languages or bilingualism is called "interference."

Interference also occurs among foreign language learners in Medan City. Based on the researcher's pre-observation, the first language disorder of the second language being learned poses a significant obstacle in foreign language learning. Additionally, linguistic differences among languages can lead to habitual language use in one language that is not necessarily applied to another. One such example is the phenomenon of "*aizuchi*" in Japanese.

There is no single word that accurately captures the meaning of "*aizuchi*" in Indonesian, but in English, "*aizuchi*" is translated as "backchannel" (Cutrone, 2014; Pujiono et al., 2022). "*Aizuchi*" refers to a response to previous utterances or brief replies made to respond to the interlocutor's speech (Gapur et al., 2022; Sevira, 2018). Unlike the communication culture in Indonesia, which tends to consider listening to someone's words without responding excessively until the end of the conversation as a sign of politeness, in the Japanese language, providing responses while someone is speaking is regarded as something natural and commonplace.

This condition makes Japanese language students unaccustomed to using "*aizuchi*," thus leading to interference in the Indonesian language when students attempt to respond with "*aizuchi*," such as unconsciously responding by replacing the Japanese word "hai" (はい) with the Indonesian word "iya."

Therefore, this phenomenon can be studied to identify the types of "aizuchi" that experience interference and understand the causes of such interference.

Various recent studies have been conducted on "aizuchi," such as those by Dityandari & Aryanto (2020), LEE (2018), and Yuniastuti & Nila Sepni (2019), all of which focus on "aizuchi" in the form of data uttered in direct communication in Japanese or other languages used for comparison. In contrast, this study analyzes Indonesian language interference in Japanese during interactions between students and lecturers in a classroom setting. Meanwhile, studies on interference, such as those conducted by Pujiono (2015; 2022) and Gapur (2017), only generally examine interference in grammar and lexicon. Therefore, this study aims to continue previous research on interference and "aizuchi" using different data sources, specifically by focusing on interference in using "aizuchi" among Japanese language students in Medan.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Aizuchi (外来語)

*Aizuchi*, also known as backchannel behavior, is a linguistic phenomenon in the Japanese language. The term "aizuchi" is written with the kanji characters "相槌," where "相 (*ai*)" means together or mutual, and "槌 (*tsuchi*)" refers to a hammer. The kanji's meaning is rooted in alternating strikes with a hammer between a blacksmith and their apprentice (Miller, 1991; Nelson, 2011; Pujiono et al., 2022).

Speakers employ *Aizuchi* to indicate their attentiveness, understanding, and engagement with the speaker's discourse. It is also a way to convince the interlocutor of something and demonstrate active participation in a conversation or discussion. To avoid rigid conversations, *aizuchi* is necessary to respond to the topics brought up by the speaker. Therefore, during conversations in Japanese, the interlocutor often provides brief verbal reactions such as "hai," "un," "sou desuka," and others, which are not answers but rather *aizuchi*.

This is reflected in the following quotation: "In Japanese conversations, listeners often use short words such as 'hai,' 'un,' 'sou desu ne,' and others. These are not answers but are referred to as 'aizuchi,' which is crucial for smooth communication with Japanese people."

Improper use of *aizuchi* in Japanese conversations can lead to misunderstandings and may offend the interlocutor.

### 2.2. Aizuchi Forms

The following is a more organized description of the various types of *aizuchi* commonly used in everyday Japanese language, according to Koyama (Koyama 2003):

- *Unazuki* (うなずき)  
This *aizuchi* is used when the listener shares the same understanding or opinion as the speaker. For example, expressions like "ああ、やっぱり" (*aa, yappari*), which means "Ah, that's right" and "そうですね" (*sou deshou ne*), meaning "Seems like it, right?"
- *Odoroki* (驚き)  
This *aizuchi* has three uses. Firstly, it is used when the listener is surprised by the topic brought up by the speaker. For instance, "おや" (*oya*) means "Oh" and "まあ" (*maa*) means "Hm." Secondly, it is used by the listener to express exaggerated surprise towards the topic of conversation. For example, "あら大変" (*ara taihen*) means "Wow, that is terrible." Lastly, it is used by the listener to express both surprise and confusion. For instance, "あらあら" (*ara ara*) means "Oh dear."
- *Kido airaku* (喜怒哀楽)  
Used to express the listener's human emotions towards the topic brought up by the speaker. For example, "よかったですね" (*yokatta desu ne*), meaning "That's great, isn't it?" and "がっかりですね" (*gakkari desu ne*) meaning "Disappointing, isn't it?"
- *Kanshin o shimesu* (関心を示す)  
Used when the listener shows interest in the topic brought up by the speaker. For example, "なるほど" (*naruhodo*) means "I see" and "それからどうしました" (*sorekara dou shimashita*) meaning "So, what happened next?"
- *Ryokai* (了解)  
Used when the speaker acknowledges and understands a request or matter that has been discussed. For example, "わかりました" (*wakarimashita*) means "I understand" and "承りました" (*uketamawarimashita*) means "Understood."

- *Doui* (同意)  
Used when the listener politely agrees. For example, phrases like "異存はございません" (*izon wa gozaimasen*), meaning "I have no objections" and "まったくおっしゃるとおりです" (*mattaku ossharu toori desu*) meaning "I completely agree."
- *Jyouho* (譲歩)  
Used when accepting the listener's objection or opinion as a whole. For example, phrases like "お怒りはごもっともです" (*oikari wa gomottomo desu*), meaning "Your anger is completely justified" and "おっしゃることはごもっともです" (*osharu koto wa gomottomo desu*) meaning "Your statement is completely reasonable."

### 3. Method

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. The descriptive method is a research method that analyzes collected data from fieldwork and literature sources and then analyzes it based on the obtained data (Sutedi, 2011:48). The study was conducted in the Japanese Language Study Programs of the Universitas Sumatera Utara and Universitas Harapan Medan. The research took place from September to November 2022.

The data in this study consists of transcriptions of conversations between students and teachers that contain *aizuchi* interference. The data is in the form of clauses and phrases in the language unit. The data source is the interaction between students from these study programs. The selection of these two study programs is based on the fact that they are higher education institutions that teach Japanese language in Medan, thus representing advanced Japanese language learners in the city.

The data collection method used is observation, with basic techniques such as eavesdropping and note-taking. The observation method is employed by collecting new vocabulary related to COVID-19 in Japanese and Indonesian languages. Data is gathered through eavesdropping and recording sentences with *aizuchi* interference found in student conversations in class.

According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's explanations (2014), data analysis is conducted through three stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data condensation stage, the collected vocabulary is selected, classified, and analyzed based on the interference and *aizuchi* types. The data is presented in tabular form and described informally through sentence explanations to facilitate understanding of the research findings. Lastly, conclusions are drawn by comparing the usage of correct *aizuchi* with those experiencing interference. The analysis considers the situation and context of the conversation to understand the reasons for interference according to existing theories.

### 4. Result and Discussion

#### 4.1. Result

Interference of the Indonesian language on *aizuchi* in Japanese commonly occurs at the lexical level, which refers to the use of Indonesian words as forms of *aizuchi* in Japanese conversations. This happens due to the similarity in sound or meaning between these words in Indonesian and the words in Japanese that should be used as *aizuchi* in the form of *unazuki* and *ryoukai*.

Table 1. Indonesian vocabulary that interferes with students' Japanese

No	Indonesian words	Interfering forms of Japanese
1	<i>Iya or ya</i>	<i>Hai, sou desu.</i> becoming <i>Iya, sou desu</i>
2	<i>Bukan, engga</i>	<i>Iie, chigaimasu.</i> becoming <i>engga/bukan chigaimasu</i>
3	<i>Nah..</i>	<i>ee.. wakarimasu</i> becoming <i>nah.. wakarimasu</i>
4	<i>Oh begitu</i>	<i>Sou desu ne.</i>

		becoming “oh, begitu desu ne”
5	<i>Bagaimana ya..</i>	<i>Eetoo</i> becoming <i>bagaimana ya..</i>

#### 4.2. Discussion

The results of this research show that interference from the Indonesian language affects the use of *aizuchi* in Japanese by Japanese language students in Medan City when asked to practice conversations. This interference primarily occurs at the lexical level, where Indonesian words are used as forms of *aizuchi* in Japanese conversations.

Some examples of such interference include using "iya" or "ya" as a form of *aizuchi*, whereas the correct forms are "hai" or "sou desu." Additionally, there is interference in using the word "engga" or "bukan" as a form of negation, whereas the appropriate forms should be "iie" or "chigaimasu."

Here are some more examples of conversations that occurred among the students:

S.A: こんにちは、元気ですか？  
(*Konnichiwa, genki desu ka?*)  
Hello, how are you?

S.B: はい、元気です。  
(*Hai, genki desu.*)  
Yes, I'm fine.

S.A: よかったですね。  
(*Yokatta desu ne*)  
That's great, isn't it?

S.B: あ、*iya, sou desu.*  
(*A, iya, sou desu*)  
Oh, yes, that's right.

Another example:

S.A: この週末は何か予定がありますか？  
(*Kono shuumatsu wa nanika yotei ga arimasu ka?*)  
Do you have any plans for this weekend?

S.B: うーん、*gimana ya* まだ決めてないけど。。。  
(*Uun, gimana ya mada kimetenai kedo...*)  
Hmm, I'm not sure yet...

S.A: **oh begitu..** そうですね。私たちは映画を見に行くつもりです。  
(*Oh begitu.. Soudesu ka. Watashitachi wa eiga wo mi ni iku tsumori desu.*)  
Oh I see. We plan to go watch a movie.

S.B: Iya...それは楽しそう。  
(*Iya...Sore wa tanoshisou.*)  
Yes...that sounds fun.

S.A: 君も一緒に来る？  
(*Kimmo isshoni kuru?*)  
Do you want to come along too?

Language interference occurs in the conversation above because the phrase "*gimana ya*" is used by Student B (S.B.) as *aizuchi* or a response to indicate that they are thinking about their answer. The phrase "*gimana ya*" is an abbreviation of the phrase "*gimana caranya ya,*" which is a common expression in Indonesian to express doubt or uncertainty in making a decision or giving an answer. In Japanese, a similar expression can be

expressed using words like "*eeto.. sou desu ne*" or "*sore wa muzukashii ne*" (that's difficult, isn't it).

In this conversation context, the use of "*gimana ya*" by Student B indicates the interference of Indonesian in the Japanese language. Using Indonesian words in Japanese is not common, but it can happen when Indonesian speakers speak in Japanese and mix it with vocabulary or expressions from their native language to convey a more appropriate or clear message.

In the first conversation, the expression "*iya*" (should be "*uun*") used by Student A can be categorized as a form of *aizuchi* called *unazuki*. *Unazuki aizuchi* refers to short responses used to indicate that the listener understands or agrees with what the speaker has said.

The expression "うーん" (*uun*) is typically used in situations where the listener is pondering or thinking hard in responding to the speaker, as in the example conversation above where Student B hasn't made a decision regarding the weekend plan. This expression can also be used as a response to indicate that the listener has thoughts or feelings about the topic being discussed.

In addition, the expression "そうですか" (*soudesuka*) can be categorized as a form of *aizuchi* called *ryoukai*, which denotes agreement or acknowledgment. *Ryoukai aizuchi* is commonly used to indicate that the listener understands and accepts the message or information the speaker gives. This *aizuchi* receives lexical interference from Indonesian by adding the phrase "*oh begitu*" followed by the repetition in Japanese, "*soudesuka*." This demonstrates the use of *kurikaeshi* (repetition) form in the *aizuchi* the student uses in the form of interference (2022).

The expression "そうですか" is often used in situations where the speaker provides new or essential information, and the listener wants to show that they are paying attention and understanding the message. This expression can also show politeness and kindness when speaking to others.

Interference in *aizuchi* generally occurs due to the following factors:

- Exposure or experience

The student's exposure to and experience in learning foreign languages can influence the use of foreign words as *aizuchi*, in Japanese conversations. If someone has more experience using Indonesian than Japanese, the student will likely tend to use Indonesian words as *aizuchi* in Japanese conversations.

- Cultural influence

Cultural influences can also affect the use of foreign words as *aizuchi* in Japanese. Someone may feel more comfortable using foreign words because they are frequently heard in their media or social environment.

Therefore, Japanese language learners need to pay attention to and learn Japanese vocabulary and grammar correctly in order to avoid language interference in *aizuchi* and other aspects of Japanese conversation. Learners should also practice speaking Japanese with native speakers to improve their proficiency and fluency in the language.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, language interference occurs in the conversation of Japanese language learners in Indonesia when the students incorporate *aizuchi* from the Indonesian language into the context of Japanese conversations. The usage of Indonesian words indicates the influence of the native language in Japanese conversations and can hinder understanding and fluency in communication between Indonesian and Japanese speakers.

Suggestions for further research include conducting a more comprehensive study on language interference in conversations between Indonesian and Japanese speakers. This research could involve both native speakers of Japanese and Indonesian to facilitate a comparative analysis aimed at understanding the factors contributing to interference and exploring effective strategies to address this issue. More extensive research and a deeper understanding of language interference in conversations between Indonesian and Japanese speakers make it possible to develop more effective learning approaches and solutions to minimize communication barriers and enhance fluency in intercultural communication.

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