

## GREETING AND FAREWELL SPEECH ETIQUETTE IN JAPANESE AND ENGLISH: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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### **Abstract**

Speech etiquette reflects the cultural values, social norms, and communicative practices of a society. Among its various aspects, greeting and farewell expressions are fundamental components of interpersonal communication, as they establish, maintain, and conclude social interactions. This paper presents a comparative analysis of greeting and farewell speech etiquette in Japanese and English. It examines the linguistic forms, cultural meanings, levels of politeness, and contextual usage of common expressions in both languages. The study demonstrates that while English greetings and farewells are generally direct and relatively informal, Japanese expressions are deeply influenced by social hierarchy, respect, and situational context. Understanding these differences is essential for successful intercultural communication, foreign language education, translation studies, and cross-cultural business interactions.

**Keywords:** speech etiquette, greetings, farewells, Japanese language, English language, intercultural communication, politeness, pragmatics.

### **1. Introduction**

Language serves not only as a means of exchanging information but also as a tool for expressing respect, maintaining social harmony, and building interpersonal relationships. Every culture has developed its own conventions of speech etiquette that guide appropriate language use in different social situations. Greeting and farewell expressions are among the first communicative skills acquired by language learners because they are used in everyday interactions.

Japanese and English differ considerably in their systems of speech etiquette. While English-speaking cultures often emphasize friendliness, equality, and efficiency in communication, Japanese society places greater importance on politeness, social hierarchy, group harmony (*wa*), and context-sensitive language use. These cultural differences are reflected in the vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatic functions of greetings and farewells.

The aim of this study is to compare greeting and farewell etiquette in Japanese and English, identify their similarities and differences, and discuss their significance for intercultural communication.

## 2. Literature Review

Speech etiquette has been widely studied in sociolinguistics and pragmatics because it demonstrates the relationship between language and culture. Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987) argues that speakers employ various linguistic strategies to maintain social relationships and protect each other's "face."

Japanese politeness has been extensively discussed through the concepts of *keigo* (honorific language), *wakimae* (discernment), and social hierarchy. Scholars have shown that Japanese communication often prioritizes respect, indirectness, and awareness of social status. In contrast, English politeness is generally characterized by directness, positive interpersonal engagement, and flexibility across social contexts.

## 3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative approach. Common greeting and farewell expressions in Japanese and English are analyzed according to: linguistic structure, level of politeness, social context, cultural meaning, pragmatic function. Examples are drawn from authentic language use, grammar references, and intercultural communication studies.

## 4. Greeting Etiquette

### 4.1 Greetings in English

English greetings are generally simple and adaptable to different situations. Common greetings include:

Hello

Hi

Good morning

Good afternoon

Good evening

How are you?

Nice to meet you.

In English-speaking cultures, greetings often serve as conversation openers rather than genuine requests for detailed personal information. For example, the question “*How are you?*” is commonly answered with brief responses such as “*I’m fine, thank you.*” or “*Doing well, thanks.*” English greetings tend to remain relatively stable regardless of the speaker's age or social position, although more formal expressions are preferred in professional settings.

#### 4.2 Greetings in Japanese

Japanese greetings are considerably more complex because they reflect respect, social relationships, and context.

Some of the most common greetings include:

おはようございます (*Ohayō gozaimasu*) — Good morning

こんにちは (*Konnichiwa*) — Good afternoon/Hello

こんばんは (*Konbanwa*) — Good evening

はじめまして (*Hajimemashite*) — Nice to meet you

よろしくお願いします (*Yoroshiku onegaishimasu*) — A polite expression requesting a good relationship or cooperation.

Unlike English, Japanese greetings are often accompanied by bowing (*ojigi*), which communicates respect and humility. The depth of the bow depends on the relationship between speakers and the formality of the situation.

Japanese greetings also include expressions specific to particular contexts:

いってきます (*Ittekimasu*) — Said when leaving home.

いってらっしゃい (*Itterasshai*) — Response to someone leaving.

ただいま (*Tadaima*) — Said upon returning home.

おかえりなさい (*Okaerinasai*) — Welcome back.

## 5.2 Farewells in Japanese

Japanese farewell expressions vary according to context, social status, and the expected length of separation.

Common expressions include:

さようなら (*Sayōnara*) — Goodbye (often used when the next meeting is uncertain or after a long separation)

じゃあ、また (*Jā, mata*) — See you later

また明日 (*Mata ashita*) — See you tomorrow

お疲れ様でした (*Otsukaresama deshita*) — Thank you for your hard work

失礼します (*Shitsurei shimasu*) — Excuse me (used when leaving an office, classroom, or formal gathering)

Among colleagues, *Otsukaresama deshita* serves not only as a farewell but also as an acknowledgment of shared effort and mutual respect. There is no exact equivalent in English, making it a culturally distinctive expression.

## 6. Comparative Analysis

Several similarities exist between English and Japanese speech etiquette. Both languages use greetings to initiate communication, express politeness, and strengthen interpersonal relationships. Both also distinguish between formal and informal situations.

However, important differences can be observed.

First, Japanese greetings and farewells are strongly influenced by social hierarchy, age, occupation, and group membership. English expressions are comparatively less dependent on these factors.

Second, Japanese frequently combines verbal etiquette with non-verbal communication such as bowing, while English speakers generally rely on handshakes, smiles, eye contact, or, in informal situations, casual gestures.

Third, Japanese possesses numerous situational expressions that have no direct English equivalents, especially those used in family life and the workplace. English tends to employ more general expressions that can be used across different situations.

Finally, Japanese politeness is closely connected with honorific language (*keigo*), whereas English politeness relies more on tone, modal verbs, indirect requests, and courteous vocabulary.

### **7. Importance for Intercultural Communication**

Understanding greeting and farewell etiquette is essential for successful intercultural communication. Language learners who focus solely on grammar and vocabulary may unintentionally violate cultural norms, leading to misunderstandings or unintended impoliteness.

For business professionals, educators, translators, and diplomats, knowledge of speech etiquette contributes to effective communication, stronger professional relationships, and greater cultural sensitivity. As international cooperation continues to expand, pragmatic competence has become just as important as grammatical competence.

### **8. Conclusion**

Greeting and farewell expressions are essential elements of speech etiquette that reflect the cultural values of a society. Although English and Japanese share the common purpose of initiating and ending communication politely, they differ significantly in their linguistic forms, levels of politeness, and cultural meanings.

English speech etiquette emphasizes simplicity, friendliness, and conversational efficiency, whereas Japanese etiquette places greater importance on respect, social hierarchy, and contextual appropriateness. These differences highlight the close relationship between language and culture and demonstrate the importance of intercultural awareness in language education and international communication.

Future research may explore speech etiquette in digital communication, business interactions, or multilingual environments to further understand how cultural norms influence language use in an increasingly interconnected world.

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