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# APOLOGIES AND THANKS IN FRENCH AND JAPANESE PERSONAL EMAILS: A COMPARISON OF POLITENESS PRACTICES

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This article examines the ways in which politeness is used in French and Japanese personal emails (i.e. from one person to another). The data for the study consist of 411 emails from both communities and regrouped by criteria such as the correspondents' gender, age and relationship (close vs distant; hierarchical vs equal). Two widely studied acts, very present in the French and Japanese data, namely thanking and apologising, are analysed.

First of all, the notion of politeness is examined as it is understood in French and Japanese cultures, followed by a discussion of the positioning adopted by the various established approaches to this notion. This leads us to reconsider the concept of face as it is understood in Europe and Asia, the notion of discernment (Ide) and the theory of the territory of information (Kamio), as well as to re-examine the approach of politeness in the light of recent research findings. Following this overview, the paper proposes a framework where a distinction between politeness and civility is advocated. In this perspective, the means used to express politeness (*politeness* in its broader meaning) are based on personal choices: either due to politeness (in a specific meaning) or according to social obligations ascribable to civility. More specifically, politeness (in its specific meaning) in one side is linked to personal choice. In French for instance, this can result from language used: formal language vs common language (*convier* vs *inviter*); verbal choices (conditional verbs instead of indicative tenses: *je voudrais* vs *je veux*); syntax (inversion of the subject or not in questions), etc. In Japanese, politeness can be detected through the choice to use of the suffix *desu* (*kawaii desu* (*it is cute*)) when neutral or common language could be suitable (*kawaii* (*it is cute*)).

In the other side, civility refers to the obligation to respect social norms. In French, the speaker may have to use the pronoun of address *vous* (vs *tu*) as required by his and the hearer position, status, rank, etc. while his Japanese counterpart may have to use forms of humility or deference.

The two visions embrace the Western and Asian conception of politeness: they complement each other.

Furthermore, the impact of electronic devices on the evolution of writing practices is considered, with particular regard to the function of politeness discursive configurations such as apologies and thanks, and compared to another genre like letters. Thus the analysis of the writing styles shows the kind of patterns of linguistic behaviour chosen by cyberwriters of each language and culture.

Finally, the results of the analysis show that attention to the addressee leads to the use of apologies in Japanese where in French, attention to the speaker/writer leads to the use of thanks. In addition, some expressions seem to be used only in certain relationships.

**Key words:** Politeness, Civility, Apologies, Thanks, Japanese, French, Emails.

## INTRODUCTION

As in face-to-face situations, authors of personal electronic messages (from one individual to another) use all kinds of ritual and politeness formulas to open or close contact (opening and closing greetings). Such expressions are to be found in various places in email messages — unlike on internet forums or chats — whatever the profile of the writers, and whatever the nature of the emails.

It is often said that polite behaviour is widespread in Japan compared to other countries. It is also said that Japan is a society based on a collective orientation while France

is seen as a society based on an individual orientation. But, when confronted with social reality through empirical data, do these assumptions hold? In order to confirm or contradict these claims, we will, in this paper, try to answer the following questions: does polite linguistic behaviour in French and Japanese e-mails<sup>1</sup> enact comparable strategies? Which linguistic patterns are chosen by cyberwriters of each language and culture and how do they compare? Which genres do they refer to? For instance, would the letter or the conversation be the most relevant source?

In order to answer some of these questions and explore the issues they raise, two widely studied speech acts will be analysed, namely thanking and apologising (cf. in particular for Japanese Coulmas 1981; Kumatoridani 1999; Miyake 2002; and for French: Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1990; 1992; 1994; 2001a and b), as these are very present in the French and Japanese data. This is also the case for speech acts such as salutations, requests about health, project, auto-presentation, seasonal greetings, etc. that have already been studied (cf. Claudel 2012a; 2012b; 2014).

After a presentation of the theoretical framework adopted here and a description of the data, our paper will explore the way thanks and apologies are used in personal electronic messages in French and Japanese. It will result in a linguistic-discursive analysis of some configurations used to achieve both speech acts.

## **1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

In the field of human and social sciences, politeness is now a well-established research domain, as shown by the numerous studies dedicated to the subject. We will briefly review the mainstream approaches in Europe and Asia before presenting our own view.

### **1.1. Positions adopted in Europe and Asia**

The most widespread theories of politeness from the Anglo-Saxon and Japanese worlds show various attempts by researchers such as Lakoff, Leech, or Brown and Levinson on the one hand, and Ide and Kamio on the other, to develop their own theories with relatively little dialogue with one another. Alongside Brown and Levinson's general model of politeness, less comprehensive theories have been built based on more specific categories, such as the principle of cooperation Grice (Lakoff, Leech), discernment (Ide), the concept of face (Mao, Leech), etc.

#### **1.1.1. Face theory**

In the field of linguistic politeness, the model most widely used is that of Brown and Levinson. One of its central concepts is the concept of face, borrowed from Goffman (1967). Brown and Levinson ascribe two aspects to face: one positive, one negative. The need to preserve positive and negative face explains that various strategies are used to counter any threat to a person's face. Brown and Levinson view politeness as a means to soften verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Indeed, any behaviour, be it verbal or non-verbal, is seen as potentially involving an FTA (Face-threatening act). The perspective adopted by Brown and Levinson is that politeness is based on "volitional" strategies. In other words, it "is made up of conscious, voluntary, explicitly marked acts" (Barešová 2008: 34).

This model is questioned by Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1992: 184; 1997: 11—17; 2001b: 74—77), who views relationships as less confrontational than in Brown and Levinson's model. Alongside FTAs, she introduces the notion of Face Flattering Acts (FFA). FFA are in some way similar to Bayraktaroglu's *face-boosting acts* (1991), *face giving acts* (cf. Lim 1994) and *face enhancing acts* (cf. Sifianou 1995; Koutlaki 2002). Like FTAs, FFAs testify for the relational implications of language acts produced in various situations and cultures (cf. Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2002: 440-441).

Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness, based on the notion of face, claims to be universal. Kerbrat-Orecchioni, among others, questions this claim to universality. Asian researchers, such as Matsumoto (1988, 1989), invite us to re-examine the notion of face in the light of the Japanese conception of social relationships. In addition, Ide (1989), Ide and Yoshida (1999) or Mao (1994) focus on the strategic dimension of politeness in relation to the preservation of face.

### 1.1.2. Discernment and theory of the territory of information

Other Japanese studies on politeness take into account the degree of knowledge that the speaker has of the various characteristics of the situation of communication (cf. Ide 1989, 1992), or of the information territory of the hearer, as illustrated by Kamio (1990, 1994, 1995).

The approach of Hill et al. (1986) and Ide (1989) is based on the rejection of a conception of politeness as being limited to inter-individual relations (or interactional strategies). It is also associated with the rejection of the idea that the speaker and addressee are essentially driven by the desire to maintain face. Hill and Ide's position is based on an approach to inter-individual relations as being regulated by social conventions. These social conventions are connected with the situation and the environment in which the encounter takes place. This conception is what they call politeness of discernment (*wakimae*). Ide's definition of *wakimae* is as follows:

*Wakimae* means social norms according to which people are expected to behave in order to be appropriate in the society they live in (1992: 298).

In other words, in the *wakimae* framework, the deployment of linguistic strategies by individuals is not determined by a universal system of politeness. It is imposed by the position each one has in the hierarchical and/or social context. In this perspective, the use of forms of politeness is inextricably bound up with the position occupied by the speaker and the addressee.

As for Kamio's theory of 'territory of information', it examines three domains of research: evidentiality, politeness and modality. According to Kamio, politeness can be achieved by the transmission of information in a roundabout way. Such is the case when the speaker favours the use of indirect forms when communicating information that is more familiar to the addressee than the speaker, because it belongs to the addressee's territory.

Thereby, Kamio's theory "seeks to establish the relationship between information, the speaker's/hearer's cognitive state of knowledge of information, and the forms of utterances" (1994: 68).

## 1.2. The third way, that of the placed analysis

However enlightening and interesting both Brown and Levinson's model and Ide and Kamio's framework may be, other studies, such as Cook (2006, 2011) or Geyer (2008), have shown that these conceptions of politeness require adjustments when applied to authentic data, collected in various circumstances. Accounting for more complex data has led to new orientations of research focusing on some elements of Brown and Levinson's model in order to challenge them (see in particular Eelen 2001, Geyer 2008, Mills 2011, Watts 2003).

Taking into account all the parameters of the situation of speech, these studies — based on natural data — led to questioning the claim according to which, for example, the use of the honorary is pre-determined. Studies such as those of Geyer or Cook thus underline the strict dependence of the use of such formulae on the way the interaction unfolds.

Our research on linguistic politeness in French and Japanese emails adopts this approach. It employs an analytical framework based on a discursive approach, analysing “politeness occurring in longer chunks of authentic discourse”, in contrast with Brown and Levinson's approach (cf. Kádár 2009).

There are various forms of expressions through which politeness can be expressed and the term politeness itself can have several meanings. In this paper, politeness has two different meanings: one large signification that embraces individual and social behaviours and another one, more specific, that concerns individual performances only.

Indeed, forms of politeness may display an orientation to individuality as well as a dependency on the social context, both in French and in Japanese. This phenomenon is hard to account for using either Ide's prism of discernment or Brown and Levinson's face theory. For instance, the use of humility or deferential (honorific) forms depends on statuses, positions, ranks, etc. of the participants. A French expression as: *Veillez agréer Monsieur le Directeur, l'assurance de ma haute considération* (Please accept, Sir, the expression of my highest consideration) to close a letter, depend upon the rank of the addressee. It is related to civility.

The linguistic and discursive operations used by cyber-writers, as indeed by all language users in any speech community, to express politeness are based on personal choices due to inter-individual politeness or to social obligations ascribable to civility. From our point of view, this approach to politeness allows us to identify two distinct practices. The first is *politeness*, which is a matter of personal will and can manifest itself in the choice of a language register: current vs formal — *vouloir* vs *daigner* (to deign) or *ôkii desu* vs *ôkii* (it is big). The second practice is *civility*, which is based on social requirements strongly enforced by rank, status, environment, etc.: such requirements may determine the choice, in French, of addressing one's interlocutor as *vous* rather than *tu*. And even if it is true that no one can be forced to respect social conventions, in many situations (job interview, employee-employer interaction, etc.), discernment (cf. above 1.1.2) leads the interlocutor to adjust his/her formulae to enhance communication.

The advantage of this approach is its ability to take into account Japanese key notions as *tatema* (facade) vs *honne* (reality) and *uchi* (inside) vs *soto* (outside), used to

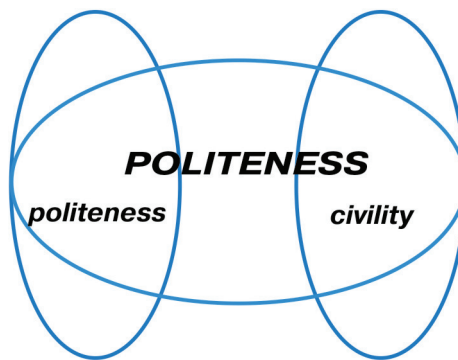
describe regulation of social behaviours. In Japan, degree of sincerity that comes with the expression of politeness is linked with the distinction between two different kinds of behaviours. Behaviours tied to conventions, therefore socially expected (*tatemae*, “facade”) and behaviours related to personal feelings, really perceived (*honne*, “the bottom of things”) (cf. Doi 1993: 29—36; Hayashi & Kuroda 1997: 48). One or the other behaviours might be adopted according to the individual and the interactive situation. “Facade” or *tatemae* is expected when the aim pursued is to maintain social organisation of the relations according to each member status or role. Behind *tatemae* “intimate feelings (*honne*) must be hidden except with the close relatives [...]” (Hendry 1994: 412).

Other indicator of social relationships, close to the distinction made between proximity and distance relations, contrasts in-group (*soto*) and out-group (*uchi*) members. From that basis derives a differentiated use of formulae or words as for instance the expressions of salutations *ohayô* (*good morning*) and *konnichiwa* (*good morning*). *Ohayô* is used with close circle (family members, friends). It is not the case for *konnichiwa* “as this expression does not promote the casual feeling sensed in the former expression” (Ide 2009: 20).

These Japanese notions underline the impact of socio-relational factors on politeness practices in Japan. In that country, every one is acutely aware that exchanges could be more or less constrained by social expectations. The regulation of encounters may set up in prescribed behaviours, but it may also be the result of individual choices depending on the interaction unfolding.

The distinction between manifestation of politeness in his most global meaning (in capital in the table 1 below) linked, on one hand, to volition (politeness) and on the other hand, governed by social imperatives (civility) enables a new reflexion.

The diagram below summarises this position:



Diagram

It is not possible to ascribe one of these orientations (politeness vs civility) to one community rather than another. Politeness and civility are relevant to both Western and Asian communicative practices. They are not in conflict but rather complement each other. As a result, our position retains both a vision of politeness oriented to individual initiative (which tends to be found in societies generally perceived as egocentric, such

as France) and an approach focused on community and the collective dimension (which is more frequently encountered in societies generally perceived as community-oriented such as Japan). As Triandis *et al.* point out “[c]orresponding to the collectivism continuum we have the personality attribute of *allocentrism*; corresponding to individualism we have the personality attribute of *idiocentrism*. In all cultures there will be both allocentrics and idiocentrics” (1993: 367).

Before developing this point, let us see how thanks and apologies can be defined.

## 2. MATRIX INTRODUCTION OF BOTH ACTS: THANKS AND APOLOGIES

Thanking (in bold) can be broadly outlined as:

♦ verbal or non-verbal action of A to the advantage of B **entailing a reaction from B** and being able to entail or not the acceptance of A.

And the apology (in bold) can be outlined as:

♦ verbal or non-verbal action of A affecting B **involving a reaction from A** being able to entail or not the acceptance of B (cf. Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2001b: 128).

In emails, the analyst has access only to the comments of B for thanks (see below examples 1 and 2) — either because he doesn’t have the follow-up emails, or because the event at the origin of the act occurred outside of the exchange — and he has only access to those of A for apologies (examples 3, 4a and 4b, below p. 138):

	A		B		A
	<b>no access</b>		<b>message</b>		<b>no access</b>
(1)	invitation	=>	(your invitation) + thanks		=> ∅
(2)	answer	=>	( <i>o-henji</i> — your answer) + thanks		=> ∅
		A <sup>2</sup>		B	
		<b>message</b>		<b>no access</b>	
(3)	errors of spelling + apologies		=> ∅		
(4a)	absence of news + apologies		=> ∅		

The Japanese formulae *sumimasen* are used both for thanks or apologies according to the context. Taking into account this precision, the distinction operated by Kumatori-dani (1999: 629) between the two speech acts (thanks or apologies) applies to these matrices. This is based on the following principle: the event connected to thanks the primary focus is on the speaker (the beneficiary of the “gift”); whereas, in the event concerning apologies, it is on the addressee (the victim of the ‘offence’).

This distinction is operational insofar as it is based on the capacity of the speaker to judge the event from a certain point of view, and to produce one act or another, as suited to the situation. The speaker can either see the event as unpleasant or offensive for the addressee and produce apologies, or pleasing for him/herself and produce thanks.

It is on this basis that the following analyses will bring to light the reason why thanks are used in French when Japanese prefer apologies.

Prior to this review, the next step consists in introducing the data.

### 3. DATA DESCRIPTION

#### 3.1. Distribution of the emails

The examination of writers' verbal activities was carried out over 411 emails written in Japanese and French. E-mails were classified according to the correspondents' gender, age and relationship (close *vs* distant; hierarchical *vs* equal) allowing us to take into account subcultures. The distinction drawn up must also be coordinated with expectations in the area of politeness. In French as in Japanese data, more formal conventions could be found between students and teachers than between friends.

Table 2

**Japanese corpus – distribution of the number of emails based on relationship, gender and age**

Relationship	Friends (124 emails)		Acquaintances (30 emails)		Colleagues (38 emails)		Family members (11 emails)		Student <-> Teacher (6 emails)	
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M
Age										
16/25	40	11	2	—	4	—	—	—	3	1
26/55	62	11	21	7	24	10	8	1	2	—
+ 55	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—
Subtotal	102	22	23	7	28	10	8	3	5	1
<b>209 emails (166 W – 43 M)</b>										

Table 3

**French corpus – distribution of the number of emails based on relationship, gender and age**

Relationship	Friends (95 emails)		Acquaintances (26 emails)		Colleagues (44 emails)		Family members (13 emails)		Student <-> Teacher (24 emails)	
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M
Age										
16/25	28	26	—	—	5	—	—	4	7	1
26/55	31	9	18	8	33	6	6	3	14	1
+ 55	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Subtotal	59	36	18	8	38	6	6	7	22	2
<b>202 emails (143 W – 59 M)</b>										

As far as the selection criteria of the corpora are concerned, we gathered quantitatively relevant data, sufficiently homogeneous to be compared, with enough heterogeneous aspects to contain elements of differentiation, and in sufficient quantity to allow for a comparative analysis.

### 3.2. Apologies and thanks in the data

Apologies and thanks are particularly interesting speech acts to study for the specific issues they raise. They are very present in the French and Japanese e-mails as we can see from the following table:

Table 4

Apologies and thanks in the data

	France (202 emails)	Japan (209 emails)
<i>apologies / excuses</i>	11.21% (23 occurrences)	22.48% (47 occurrences)
<i>thanks</i>	24.87% (51 occurrences)	26.3% (55 occurrences)
TOTAL	36.09 %	48.80%

The frequent use of these two acts further justifies the attention we give them in our analysis.

In what follows, we will describe the way apologies and thanks are used in our data.

## 4. APPROACH TO THANKS AND APOLOGIES

The investigation of thanks and apologies in the data focuses on the nature of the formulas (4.1), their distribution with regard to the interpersonal relationship between the correspondents (between friends, colleagues, acquaintances, teacher/student contacts, family members) (4.2), a comparison of their location (opening, closure or body of the email) with the practises suggested for writing letters (4.3), and the functioning of thanks and apologies (4.4).

### 4.1. Nature of the preferred formulas

The linguistic realisation of thanks and apologies observed in this research is always explicit. Counting the occurrences of these two acts in e-mails enables us to identify the preferences French and Japanese writers have for one or other of these politeness devices.

The most frequently occurring pattern for apologies in French is *désolé* (*sorry*) on its own (8 cases) or in an expression such as in *je suis désolé* (*I am sorry*) (3 cases), or with a formula including the word *excuse* (12 cases) in various forms depending on the level of politeness: *Veillez m'excuser...* (*would you [please]...*); *je vous prie de bien vouloir...* (*I would request that you...*); *Je tiens à m'excuser...* (*I wish to [apologise]...*); etc.

In Japanese, formulas often used to apologise are *gobusata* (*Excuse me [for my long silence]*) alone or with a polite or humble form (*shite-imasu/shite-orimasu*) (14 cases). By contrast the most used form in the data is *gomen* (*excuse me*) with or without final particle (*no / yo / yô*) or with the suffix *nasai* (15 cases).

In addition, thanks in French are almost exclusively achieved through *merci* (*thank you*) (45 cases), while in Japanese, the expressions mainly used are *arigatô* (*thank you*) on its own or in expressions with a humble form *gozaimashita* or *gozaimasu* (53 cases). Furthermore, a pattern frequently identified is the formula *môshiwake* (*I am sorry*) with suffixes involving levels of (im)politeness: *nai*, *arimasen*, *gozaimasen* (8 cases).



#### 4.2. Set expressions linked with interpersonal relationships of cyber correspondents

In French, apologies and thanks are used respectively in 11.21% and 24.87% of the corpus. In terms of the relationship between writer and addressee, the distribution of the expressions shows that it is between student and teacher that both acts are most frequent: 34.78% of cases for the apologies and 47.82 of cases for the thanks<sup>3</sup>. In addition, thanks are favoured between colleagues (45.65%). Thus, the results suggest that it is in a formal context that these acts are present in French.

In Japanese, 22.48% of the corpus contains an act of apologising and 26.79% an act of thanking. The close observation of the type of relationships where these acts are the most frequent have enabled us to establish that there are more apologies in emails between acquaintances (40%) than between colleagues (31.57%), whereas the formulas available for expressing thanks are frequently used in relationships between student and teacher (50%) and between colleagues (34.21%).

From a general point of view, in the French data, thanks are used between colleagues (21 occurrences), between friends (16 occurrences) and from student to teacher (11 occurrences). The expression used is *merci* (*thank you*). It can be modulated with *a lot*, *very much*, etc.

In Japanese, thanks are largely expressed through the word *arigatô* (*thank you*). This term is used alone in emails between friends; it is written with a humble form (*gozaimasu*; *gozaimashita*) when emails are between colleagues.

At the denotative level expressions like *arigatô* and *arigatô gozai-masu/gozaimashita* are alike.

At the social level they differ. The relationship (friends, colleagues, etc.) and the degree of familiarity (close *vs* distant relation) between the writer and the addressee, the situation (formal *vs* informal), the pragmatic features (intensity of the thanks more or less consequent according to the service provided), etc. can dictate the need or not to use a suffix of politeness. The act of thanking must respect these various parameters. Accordingly, its use cannot be theoretically interpreted, without taking these variables into account. That is why *arigatô* will not be less polite than *arigatô gozaimashita*; in certain contexts, *arigatô gozaimashita* could be even considered as unsuitable.

This is why, in electronic messages exchanged between colleagues, the expression *arigatô gozaimasu shita* is preferred, whereas in more intimate situations, *arigatô* is essentially used. In this context, it is not civility, but politeness that is mobilized.

In other relational situations, the number of thanks is too low to allow us to draw conclusions on their distribution expression by expression.

In French, the apology is completely absent from emails exchanged between family members. In other types of relationships, apologies may be used, but they are slightly more present in emails between student and teacher. In that kind of relationship, the expression can express a certain distance: *Je vous prie de bien vouloir m'excuser* (*I beg you to...*).

In the Japanese corpus, the apology was only found in emails exchanged between friends, colleagues and acquaintances. In other relational levels (between student and

teacher and between family members), this speech act was absent. This can be explained as follows. On one hand the number of emails of an educational nature is very small, and on the other, it confirms the notion that the apology may not be a speech act suitable for close relationships in Asia.

The following table (table 5) shows that some expressions are specific to a type of relationship, while others seem more multi-purpose. As we can see, *gomen* with or without particle — as it is used in face-to-face situations — is the usual form between friends, while between colleagues, compositions with *moshiwake* are chosen. On the other hand, between acquaintances, an apology involves the expression: *go-BUSATA*, a way of apologising for not having been in contact for a while:

Japanese corpora

Table 5

Apologies expressions depending on the relationship

	Friends (amis)	Colleagues (collègues)	Acquaintances (camarades)
<i>gomen (ne / yo / yô)</i>	13		
<i>gomen nasai</i>	1		1
<i>shitsurei</i>	2	1	3
<i>moshiwake nai</i>	1	3	
<i>moshiwake arimasen</i>	1	1	1
<i>sumimasen</i>	2	3	2
<i>go-BUSATA shite-imasu</i>	1	1	5
<i>go-BUSATA shite-orimasu</i>	2	1	2

The differences observed between Japanese and French in the use of the apology have to be linked with specific formulae in Japanese (cf. Claudel 2012b). That is the case of *yoroshiku*. This expression expresses a sense of gratitude after a request — in a relationship between superior and subordinate as is the case in an educational situation (student/professor), for example.

Thus, in French and Japanese languages and cultures, when pleasant events happen, instead of thanks, apologies may be preferred as Ide (1998), Kumatoridani (1999), Miyake (2002), etc. have shown for Japanese. As for French, apology as *Il ne fallait pas* or *Vous n'auriez pas dû* (that could be translate in Japanese into: *môshiwake arimasen; kyô shaku desu* (men language) or, *osore-irimasu* (woman language)) may occurred instead of thanks.

Theses formulae are words of gratitude but most of all, they suggest a kind of embarrassment. As a result, they are used to achieve apology to the addressee for what he has done for the benefit of the hearer.

The analysis also shows that even when both languages introduce comparable acts of language — in this particular case, the apology — their frequencies, conditions of use and expression change.

**4.3. Occurrences of apologies and thanks in emails and letters**

The analysis of occurrences of both acts also highlights recurring tendencies. In French, an apology mainly appears in opening sequences, whereas thanks are more fre-

quently used in email closures. In Japanese, apologies and expressions of thanks are usually introduced in opening sequences of emails. This way of writing is similar to the practices recommended for writing letters.

Thus, in French, in its overall composition, the structure of a letter is based on “phatic sequences of opening and closing on the one hand, transactional sequences constituting the body of the interaction, on the other” (Adam 1998: 41). The exordium and the peroration, included in transactional sequences are optional. Given our research perspectives however, we will examine these.

In Japanese, models of letters are provided in numerous guides for natives or for learners of Japanese (e.g. *Tegami, hagaki no kakikata* 1996; *Tatemastu et al.* 1997). The formulas introduced in these handbooks present expressions to be used in letters, listed according to the linear organisation of a letter (see table 6, below).

The table 6 indicates in bold where apologies and thanks are supposed to occur in French (cf. Adam 1998: 42; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1998); and Japanese (cf. *op. cit.*):

Table 6

Apologies and thanks in letters

Recommended behaviour in French		Recommended behaviour in Japanese	
in letters			
<i>Opening</i>	<i>Closing</i>	<i>Opening</i>	<i>Closing</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ greetings</li> <li>◆ comment on the spatial framework</li> <li>◆ acknowledgment</li> <li>◆ <b>thanks</b></li> <li>◆ reproach</li> <li>◆ <b>apologise</b></li> <li>◆ request for a reply</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ justification</li> <li>◆ regret</li> <li>◆ promise</li> <li>◆ <b>thanks</b></li> <li>◆ response to appeal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ seasonal greeting</li> <li>◆ recipient new request</li> <li>◆ transmission of new information</li> <li>◆ <b>thanks</b></li> <li>◆ <b>apologies</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ transmission of good wishes for health</li> <li>◆ transmission of a message</li> <li>◆ solicitation of an answer</li> <li>◆ request for advice</li> <li>◆ rejection of a proposal</li> <li>◆ accompany solicitation</li> <li>◆ transmission of greetings to third party</li> </ul>

This overview of the expected formulas in Japanese written correspondence highlights ways of saying which are similar to the French approach.

Given the use of apologies and thanks in Japanese messages (at opening), the rules like those fixed for letters seem to influence e-mails. Furthermore, these two acts are seldom used in other sequences of emails. In French, the impact of the letter on e-mail is also obvious, as shown in the preceding analysis.

#### 4.4. The functioning of the acts

##### 4.4.1. Reactive acts or ritual acts?

As indicated in another paper (Claudel 2012a: 86), unlike language acts such as requests about health or the reminder of a long period without contact, thanking is developed in the continuity of an exchange. It is generally a reactive act for a person at the origin of the action — verbal or non verbal — implemented by the one for whom this act is intended. As for apologies, they accompany or follow an instance of behaviour — verbal or non verbal — on the part of the speaker that draws a reaction from them.

Thus apologies and thanking exchange structures are different, as the following sequences illustrate:

- 1) Chère + prénom,  
Merci pour ton invitation. Je serai ravi que nous dînions ensemble samedi soir [...] (*Dear + first name, Thank you for your invitation. I shall be delighted to have dinner together on Saturday evening [...]*)
- 2) X san, o-henji arigatô gozaimashita. Tasukarimasu.  
*(X san, Thank you for your answer. It helped me a lot.)*
- 3) Là, c'est la fin de la soirée "désintégration" qui a débutée [sic] après un tournoi de torball. Je te demande donc de pardonner mes fautes d'orthographe car depuis une semaine et demi [sic] ma moyenne de sommeil doit être de 5 H.  
*(Right now, it is the end of the evening of "disintegration" which began after a tournament of torball. So please forgive my spelling mistakes as I've only had about 5 hours of sleep each night for the past week and a half.)*
- 4a) onshinfutsû, gomen yo gomen yo.  
*(Excuse me, excuse me for not having been in touch.)*
- 4b) henji ga okuremashita môshi wake arimasen.  
*(Sorry for the late answer.)*

— Statement 1 contains the possessive of second person **ton (your)** — which refers to the correspondent — followed by the mention of the event of gratification **invitation** from which the writer benefited thanks to the correspondent;

— Statement 2 contains the prefix **o** — which indicates the correspondent — followed by the mention of the event of gratification **henji (answer)** from which the writer benefited on behalf to the correspondent;

— Statement 3 contains the possessive of the first person **mes (my)** referring back to the writer, followed by the mention of the event at the origin of the damage **spelling mistakes** with which the addressee of the email is confronted;

— Statements 4a and 4b contain the mention of the potentially harmful behaviour for which the writer is responsible **onshinfutsû (not to give news)** and **henji ga okureru (to delay answering)** and the addressee a victim.

In the studied context, it is difficult to characterize thanks and apologies according to the opposition initiative/reactive. For instance, even if the apologies seem to anticipate a possible criticism, they cannot be seen as an initiative ritual. Thus, we see the use of the two acts (thanks and apologies) in emails as a kind of more or less obligatory behaviour whose realisation is recommended, as previously mentioned, in the standard format for a letter in Japanese — and not a reactive act.

#### 4.4.2. An event of contentment directed to the writer

The event of contentment giving way to thanks is generally indicated in the statement as previously noted, in French (5) and in Japanese (6):

- 5) Merci pour le CR. (*Thank you for the CR.*)  
Merci pour ton message. (*Thank you for your message.*)

Merci beaucoup **pour ton travail de rédaction** [...] (*Thank you very much for your editorial work [...]*)

Tout d'abord un grand merci **pour ta lettre** [...] (*First of all a big thank you for your letter [...]*)

Merci encore **de ton coup de main** !! (*Thank you again for your help!!*)

Ce petit message cariooca pour te remercier **des coordonnées de X**. (*This small message cariooca to thank you for the contact details of X.*)

- 6) **shashin** arigatô! (*Thank you for the pictures!*)  
**hagaki** arigatô. (*Thank you for your post card.*)  
**hoteru no yotei** dômo arigatô. (*Thank you very much for the hotel booking.*)  
**messêji** arigatô gozaimashita. (*I thank you for your message.*)  
**genkô todokimashita. Oisogashii tokoro** wo arigatô gozaimashita. (*Thank you for sending the manuscript at a time when you are so busy.*)

However, it may happen that the action at the start of the gratification is not specified.

7) X chan arigatô! (*Dear X Thank you!*)

8) X chan, sankyû de—su ☺ (*Dear X Thank you ☺*)

In any case, as shown by Kumatoridani (1999: 629), the event entailing the thanks is indeed directed to the writer who is the beneficiary, in Japanese and in French.

#### 4.4.3. Acts directed to the speaker in French vs towards the addressee in Japanese

##### 4.4.3.1. 'Thank you in advance' or 'par avance' in French

In French, thanks can also occur in an anticipated way with the use of the adverbial phrase *in advance* (or its equivalent 'par avance'). In the present examples, they only appear in the closures of emails (*Thank you in advance*) and are linked to a request. This linguistic form is mainly used between colleagues (9) or from a student to a teacher (10, 11):

9) Merci **d'avance** et à très bientôt. (*Thank you in advance and see you very soon.*)

10) Merci **d'avance** pour votre réponse. (*Thank you in advance for your answer.*)  
Cordialement, (*Best Regards,*)

11) je vous remercie **par avance** de votre compréhension et vous renouvelle mes excuses pour ce retard.  
ci-joint mon adresse mail: [...]  
veuillez agréer mes sincères salutations  
(*I thank you in advance for your understanding and renew my excuses for this delay.*  
*Attached my e-mail address: [...]*  
*sincerely yours*)

This expression raises a problem of politeness insofar as it pushes the addressee to answer favorably to the request which is being made. The more or less direct invitation made to the addressee to accomplish something for the benefit of the writer can hinder his/her freedom of action. In that way, it can damage his negative face. That is why any act of early thanks risks compromising its pragmatic impact.

#### 4.4.3.2. Preference for apology over thanking in Japanese

The scenario consisting in soliciting the addressee to do something — which, as we have just seen, can be associated with anticipated thanks in French — occurs in other types of polite sentences in Japanese, among which apology (12, 13):

- 12) o-isogashii tokoro wo **taihen môshiwake arimasen**. shikyû to iu koto de wa nai node, o-jikan no aru toki ni o-henji wo itadakereba to omoimasu. [...] orikaeshi kochira kara okake naoshimasu.

*(I kindly request you to forgive me for the disturbance at a moment when you must be so busy. As it is not urgent, the best thing would be to answer me when you have time. I will call you back.)*

- 13) 15 nichi no kuraianto nihon wo tatteshimau tame, **katte nagara** narubeku hayaku o-henji wo itadakemasu yô o-negai môshiagemasu.

*(As our customer leaves Japan on the 15th, I am really sorry but I have to ask you to answer me as quickly as possible.)*

The request forces the addressee to react and not the speaker. That is why, in Japanese e-mails, all kinds of linguistic formulae are used linking thanks or apologies to a specific expression of request: *yoroshiku* (cf. above and Claudel 2012b), containing a form of early thanks (14, 15):

- 14) o-hikiuke itadakereba hontô ni arigataku, kasanete **yoroshiku** o-negai itashimasu.

*(I would be extremely grateful to you for taking responsibility for this on my behalf, and once again, I leave it up to you.)*

- 15) makotoni bushitsukena mêru wo sashiage kyôshuku desu ga dôzo **yoroshiku** o-negai itashimasu.

*(I apologise for sending you such a message and I thank you in advance for what you will be able to do for me.)*

As we can see, apologies are favoured in Japanese where thanks are preferred in French. This distinction could be linked to a different vision of interactional goals. Indeed as underlined by Coulmas:

The Japanese conception of gifts and favors focuses on the trouble they have caused the benefactor rather than the aspects which are pleasing to the recipient (1981: 83).

Moreover, the configurations are in this case, very specific. Only the expressions *bushina* and *moshiwake nai* are concerned. People over 25 years old use these expressions in any kind of relationships: between colleagues, between friends or acquaintances.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this comparison shows that the number of different ready-to-use rituals is more important in Japanese e-mails than in French ones. Indeed, in Japanese, fixed expressions are widely involved (e.g. *hisashiburi*, *go-busata*, *môshiwake arimasen*). Therefore the variety of common expressions available to Japanese writers could explain the quantitative difference observed between the French and Japanese data. Indeed *arigatô*, *sumimasen*<sup>4</sup>, *o-sewa ni naru*<sup>5</sup>, etc. can express thanks; and *gomen nasai*<sup>6</sup>, *orei môshiagemasu*, *môshiwake*<sup>7</sup>, *shitsurei*, *gobusata-itashimashita*<sup>8</sup>, etc. can express an apology.

The diversity of formulae in Japanese could be interpreted as an indication of the importance of the relationship and of the need felt by the writer to act carefully. The extensive choice of expressions can be seen as a demonstration, for Japanese interactants, to have much needed linguistic resources that can help people to live together peacefully. However, a historical approach would be necessary to explore this claim.

In addition, the use of apologies and thanks in e-mails shows that neither of the two communities are more or less (im)polite than the other, but the set expressions available in Japanese (see table 5, above) are more diversified than in French. Where attention to the addressee seems to lead to the use of apologies in Japanese, in French attention to the speaker/writer apparently leads to the use of thanks. Furthermore, some expressions seem to be used only in some relationships. At this point, the difference between politeness and civility (see table 1, above) plays its full role. In formal relationships, as between colleagues or between student and teacher, civility dictates the need for using more distant expressions — consisting in the adjunction of humble or honorary suffixes or formulae — rather than politeness.

Therefore, the analysis conducted through the present study allows us to suggest that the conception French and Japanese communities have of politeness is not entirely identical, even if some behaviours are shared or comparable.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> My research interests focus on the comparative analysis of French and Japanese languages and cultures. French is my first language and Japanese is the other language I have chosen to study.

<sup>2</sup> Possibility:

B	A	B
sending a fax	apology	minimization
<i>B-san kino fakkusu okutte oita kara.</i>	<i>Doomo sumimasen deshita.</i>	

<sup>3</sup> The percentage is calculated according to the number of occurrences in the emails characterized by the same interpersonal type of relation.

<sup>4</sup> To gain an insight into the value of *sumimasen* (*I'm sorry*) as apology or thanks, see Miyake (2002) and Kumatoridani (1999).

<sup>5</sup> “*Osewa ni naru* literally means ‘to be taken into care’” (Mizutani *et al.* 1985: 76). In reality, this expression is used to express thanks.

<sup>6</sup> When used (except for family members), the expression *gomen nasai* (*excuse me*) is found in close relationships, as in family because it is less formal than *shiturei-shimasu* (*Excuse me — I have been rude*) (Mizutani *et al.* 1988: 14).

<sup>7</sup> まことに申し訳ありません : *I am very sorry. I beg your pardon. I do apologise.*

<sup>8</sup> “[It] is an expression of apology for not having written or called on the other person” (Mizutani *et al.* 1986: 103).

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## РЕЧЕВЫЕ АКТЫ «ИЗВИНЕНИЕ» И «БЛАГОДАРНОСТЬ» ВО ФРАНЦУЗСКОЙ И ЯПОНСКОЙ ЛИЧНОЙ ЭЛЕКТРОННОЙ ПЕРЕПИСКЕ: СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ ТРАДИЦИЙ ВЫРАЖЕНИЯ ВЕЖЛИВОСТИ

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В статье исследуются способы реализации стратегий вежливости во французской и японской личной электронной переписке. Материалом исследования послужили 411 электронных писем. При анализе полученных данных принимались во внимание такие критерии, как пол, возраст респондентов, а также степень горизонтальной и/или вертикальной дистанции между ними. На основе полученных данных в работе исследуются два широко изученных речевых акта — «Извинение» и «Благодарность».

В статье рассматриваются интерпретации понятия *вежливость* во французской и японской культурах; исследуются различные точки зрения и способы изучения данного концепта, что вызывает необходимость переосмыслить содержание концепта *лицо* в сознании представителей европейских и азиатских культур, понятие *учтивость* (*Ide*), а также теорию информации (*Kamio*). Вслед за обзором академических трудов в работе предлагается разграничение дефиниций *вежливость* и *учтивость*. Согласно изложенной точке зрения, языковые средства реализации вежливости (в ее самом широком понимании) основаны на личном выборе индивидуума, который руководствуется понятием *вежливость* (с точки зрения ее этнокультурной специфики) или социальными установками, приписываемыми концепту *учтивость*. Таким образом, вежливость в ее специфическом понимании всегда определенным образом связана с личным выбором индивидуума. Во французском языке, например, это реализуется в виде использования различных стилей языка, например: официальный vs разговорный (*convier vs inviter*), а также в выборе глагольных форм (условное наклонение вместо изъявительного: *je voudrais vs je veux*), синтаксисе (инверсия подлежащего или употребление отрицания в вопросительных предложениях: *je voudrais vs je veux* и т.д. В японском языке реализацию стратегий вежливости можно проследить на основе использования суффикса

*desu* (*kawaii desu* — это мило), в тех случаях, когда нейтральный или разговорный стиль речи был бы более уместен (*kawaii* — это мило). С другой стороны, учтивость сопряжена с неизменным соблюдением социальных норм поведения. Во французском языке говорящий может испытывать необходимость употребления местоименной формы обращения *vous /вы* (вместо *tu /ты*), как это предписывает его положение, статус, ранг или статусная позиция его собеседника. Японскому коллеге в аналогичной речевой ситуации может потребоваться использование тех языковых средств, которые подчеркивают его покорность или почтительное отношение.

В дальнейшем в работе рассматривается влияние электронных средств коммуникации на письменную речь; анализируется использование различных стратегий вежливости в речевых актах «Извинение» и «Благодарность». На основе проведенного анализа делается вывод о том, что в японском языке внимание к адресату передается через речевой акт «Извинение», в то время как во французском языке внимание к говорящему/пишущему реализуется с помощью речевого акта «Благодарность», что свидетельствует о разном понимании вежливости в японской и французской лингвокультурах.

**Ключевые слова:** вежливость, учтивость, извинение, благодарность, японский язык, французский язык, электронные письма.