

An Analysis of Japanese Verb Conjugation Errors Among Students at Universitas Harapan Medan

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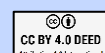
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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify and analyse the common verb conjugation errors among students in the Japanese Language Program at Universitas Harapan Medan. The research method utilised was the analysis of student essays, focusing on verb conjugation forms such as *~te*, *~ta*, *~nai*, and *~nakatta*. The collected data indicates that the most frequent errors occur in the *~te* and *~ta* forms, accounting for 43.37% and 42.17%, respectively. These findings suggest that students struggle with differentiating between positive and negative past forms. Errors in the negative forms *~nai* and *~nakatta* were also found at lower percentages. The results of this study indicate a need to improve the teaching methods of verb conjugation at the university.

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1. Introduction

During second language acquisition, students often encounter errors related to language rules. These language rules refer to the grammatical structures of the second language, which differ from the student's native language. Language rules are associated with grammar, which explains the linguistic rules used in that language. University-level students have already studied Japanese grammar (Gapur, Pujiono, et al., 2022; Gapur, Taulia, et al., 2022; Yusuf et al., 2023).

The Japanese grammar they study consists of sentences formed from several words. Words can be categorised into independent words (*jiritsugo*) and dependent words (*fuzokugo*). Within the categories of *jiritsugo* and *fuzokugo*, some words and words that do not change form can change form. Meanwhile, the words that change form can be found in both independent (*jiritsugo*) and dependent words (*fuzokugo*). These changing words are called conjugations (Gapur & Mulyadi, 2018; Rostini, 2013).

Conjugations consist of copulas, which are part of dependent words (*fuzokugo*), adjectives, and verbs, which are part of independent words (*jiritsugo*) (Sutedi, 2011). Conjugation refers to the morphological changes in Japanese words that express different meanings, such as politeness, ongoing actions, desires or intentions, and giving commands to others. The semantic structure of Japanese also includes elements such as subject, predicate, object, and adverbials. However, the sentence structure is subject,

adverbial, object, and predicate.

Errors in conjugation can be observed when novice learners of Japanese use sentences containing adjectives, verbs, or copulas. The primary function of the copula is to determine the predicate within the sentence. Errors in Japanese usage can be analysed through words that undergo morphological changes, known as conjugation or *katsuyou* (Taulia & Yusuf, 2023). Conjugation includes changes in verbs, adjectives, and copulas (Sutedi, 2015). Examples of verb conjugation errors can be seen in the following sentences:

- (1) 今朝日本の映画を見ました。
Kesa nihon no eiga wo mimashita
(I watched a Japanese movie yesterday)

- (2) 今朝日本の映画を見ませんでした。
Kesa nihon no eiga wo mimasendeshita
(I did not watch a Japanese movie yesterday)

The above sentences demonstrate syntactic errors in terms of function and word category. The underlined words function as predicates and belong to the category of verbs. The verb "*mimashita*" (watched) in the sentence (1) comes from the dictionary form "*miru*," which changes to the polite past form to indicate that the activity was completed. To indicate that an activity was not performed in the past, the form "*mimashita*" changes to "*mimasendeshita*." However, learners often fail to distinguish between the usage of these verb forms, leading to semantic errors. For example, when intending to state that an activity was performed, they use sentence (2).

- (3) 私は本を読みます。
Watashi wa hon wo yomimasu
(I read a book)

Sentence (3) indicates that the subject is performing the reading activity. The word "*watashi*" (I) as the subject is engaged in the activity of "*yomu*" (to read) while holding the book. However, the intended meaning is that the reading activity has been completed, so the correct sentence should be:

- (4) 私は本を読みました。
Watashi wa hon wo yomimashita
(I have read the book)

The above explanation indicates that students do not yet understand the difference between using verb forms for past and present times. This is due to insufficient practice in using these verb forms.

The study "Analysis of Japanese Verb Conjugation Errors Among Students of the Faculty of Language and Communication at Universitas Harapan Medan" is important because verb conjugation is crucial to mastering the Japanese language. University students learning Japanese are expected to have a deeper and more practical understanding of grammar, including verb conjugation. However, errors in conjugation

are still common and can hinder effective and accurate communication in Japanese. This research aims to identify common error patterns, understand their causes, and provide solutions and more effective learning strategies by analysing these errors. The results of this study are expected to significantly contribute to improving Japanese language teaching quality at Universitas Harapan Medan, helping students overcome their difficulties and achieve higher language proficiency, thus preparing them to compete at an international level.

Based on these phenomena and descriptions, the problems addressed in this article include common verb conjugation errors among students of the Faculty of Language and Communication at Universitas Harapan Medan when learning Japanese.

2. Method

This research employs a qualitative research design (Sugiyono, 2016). The method used is descriptive. Data in this study is analysed and described to address the research problems and objectives.

The participants of this study are students from the Japanese Language Program at Universitas Harapan Medan in North Sumatra. Ten second-year students were selected. The data in this study consists of written texts sourced from these participants, specifically from the Japanese Language Program at Universitas Harapan Medan. The data collection technique chosen is documentation. This approach was selected due to its suitability for collecting written data in the form of compositions from the students of the Japanese Language Program at Universitas Harapan Medan. The data collected includes texts produced by the participants, such as class assignments, diaries, or other writings reflecting the daily use of Japanese. The documentation technique allows the researcher to obtain authentic data that is not influenced by the researcher's presence, reflecting a more natural language use situation.

The study participants comprised ten second-year students from the Japanese Language Program at Universitas Harapan Medan. The data will be analysed to identify common verb conjugation error patterns, such as those found using past forms *~ta*, *~te*, and the negative form *~nai*. Following the research's conceptual framework, the analysis will focus on predetermined conjugation categories.

The documentation technique was employed by requesting participants to submit written compositions on topics pertinent to everyday use of the Japanese language. The collected data will be thoroughly analyzed to gain a deeper insight into the verb conjugation errors made by students. The findings from this analysis are anticipated to substantially contribute to enhancing the Japanese language teaching and learning processes at Universitas Harapan Medan.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Result

The results of this study indicate that there are four types of verb conjugation errors in the students' compositions: *~te* form conjugation, past tense *~ta* form conjugation, negative *~nai* form conjugation, and past negative *~nakatta* form conjugation.

Table 1. List of student verb conjugation errors

Respondents	Number of Errors Type of error
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	Conjugation of the form ~te	Conjugation of the form ~ta	Conjugation of the form ~nai	Conjugation of the form ~nakatta
Student 1	4	5	2	0
Student 2	5	6	1	1
Student 3	0	0	0	0
Student 4	7	5	1	2
Student 5	2	4	0	1
Student 6	7	4	0	1
Student 7	4	5	1	0
Student 8	1	2	0	0
Student 9	6	3	2	0
Student 10	0	1	0	0
Total	36	35	7	5

This study explores common verb conjugation errors among Japanese Language Study Program students at Universitas Harapan Medan. Data collected from ten second-year students reveal a variety of errors, particularly in the use of ~te and ~ta form conjugations. On average, students made ~te form conjugation errors 4.5 times and ~ta form conjugation errors 3.6 times in the compositions analysed. This indicates that errors in applying the past tense in Japanese require further attention.

The findings show that errors in the ~te form conjugation have a similar percentage of occurrence at 43.37% and the ~ta form conjugation at 42.17%. This suggests that students tend to confuse the use of positive and negative past tense forms in different contexts. Concrete examples of these errors can be found in their compositions, where there is often incorrect usage between verbs in the form of ~mashita (to indicate having done something) and ~masen deshita (to indicate not having done something).

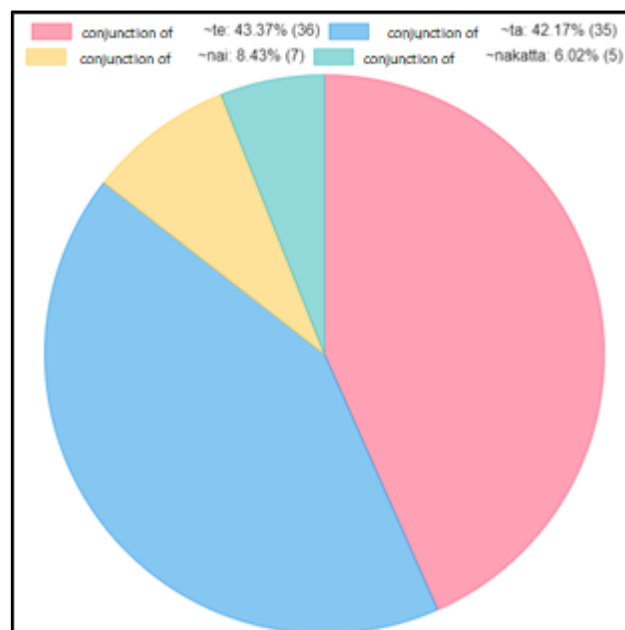


Figure 1. Percentage of types of errors in Japanese verb conjugation

Also, errors were found in using *~nai* and *~nakatta* form conjugations, although in lower proportions. This reflects additional challenges in understanding and applying negative forms in present and past contexts. For example, some students had difficulty constructing negative sentences using the *~nai* form to indicate that an activity was not being performed.

The results of this study provide a deeper understanding of the common verb conjugation error patterns among students in the Japanese Language Study Program. This analysis highlights the aspects that most need improvement in the teaching curriculum and emphasises the importance of more intensive training in the accurate use of Japanese grammar. Therefore, efforts to enhance the understanding and application of verb conjugation are expected to improve students' overall communication skills in Japanese.

3.2. Discussion

The results of this study reveal that students in the Japanese Language Study Program at Universitas Harapan Medan frequently make errors in verb conjugation. These errors were identified in student essays on the theme "Traveling (*Ryoko*)," which served as the data source for this research. This discussion will elaborate on two examples of errors for each identified conjugation type: *~te*, *~ta*, *~nai*, and *~nakatta*.

3.2.1 Errors in *~te* Conjugation

In the "Traveling" essays, one student wrote:

"昨日、東京に行って、友達に会いました。"
(*Kinou, Tokyo ni itte, tomodachi ni aimashita*).

This sentence intends to convey that the student went to Tokyo yesterday and met a friend. However, errors were found, such as:

昨日、東京に行いって、友達に会いました。
(*Kinou, Tokyo ni iitte, tomodachi ni aimashita*).

This error arises from the incorrect conjugation of the verb "*iku*" (to go) to "*itte*" in the *~te* form. The term "行いって" (*iitte*) is not correct in Japanese.

Another error in *~te* conjugation is found in the sentence:

"旅行で、たくさんの場所を見て、おいしい食べ物を食べました。"
(*Ryokou de, takusan no basho wo mite, oishii tabemono wo tabemashita*).

The student wrote:

"旅行で、たくさんの場所を見て、おいしい食べ物を食べました。"
(*Ryokou de, takusan no basho wo mitte, oishii tabemono wo tabemashita*).

Here, "見って" (*mitte*) is an incorrect form of the verb "*miru*" (to see), which should be conjugated as "みて." This indicates a lack of understanding of the correct *~te* form transformation.

3.2.2. Errors in ~*ta* Conjugation

Errors in ~*ta* conjugation are also common in student essays. For example, the sentence:

"私は昨日、新しい靴を買いました。"

(*Watashi wa kinou, atarashii kutsu wo kaimashita*)

means, "I bought new shoes yesterday." Some students wrote:

"私は昨日、新しい靴を買ったました。"

(*Watashi wa kinou, atarashii kutsu wo kattamashita*),

Where an unnecessary addition to the conjugation "*katta*" resulted in "*kattamashita*," an error.

Another example is the sentence:

"友達と一緒に、映画を見ました。"

(*Tomodachi to issho ni, eiga wo mimashita*).

Students incorrectly wrote:

"友達と一緒に、映画を見ました。"

(*Tomodachi to issho ni, eiga wo mitamashita*).

This error arises from mixing the past tense form "*ta*" with "*mashita*," indicating a misunderstanding of the correct conjugation structure.

3.2.3. Errors in ~*nai* Conjugation

Errors in the negative ~*nai* form were also identified in several essays. For instance, in the sentence:

"私は週末、旅行に行きません。"

(*Watashi wa shuumatsu, ryokou ni ikimasen*),

Which means "I do not go on vacation on weekends," errors occurred when students wrote:

"私は週末、旅行に行いません。"

(*Watashi wa shuumatsu, ryokou ni iinimasen*),

"*iku*" should have been conjugated to "*ikanai*" in the negative ~*nai* form.

Another example is: "友達はまだ、東京に行かない。"

(*Tomodachi wa mada, Tokyo ni ikanai*),

meaning, "My friend has not gone to Tokyo yet." The error is:

"友達はまだ、東京に行かない。"

(*Tomodachi wa mada, Tokyo ni iinai*),

where the student incorrectly used the negative form of "*iku*."

3.2.4 Errors in *~nakatta* Conjugation

Errors in the negative past form *~nakatta* were also identified. For example, in the sentence:

"去年の夏、海に行きませんでした。"

(*Kyonen no natsu, umi ni ikimasendeshita*),

Which means "I did not go to the beach last summer," some students wrote:

"去年の夏、海に行かなかったました。"

(*Kyonen no natsu, umi ni ikanakattamashita*),

adding an unnecessary "*mashita*" to "*ikanakatta*."

Another example is:

"旅行中、雨が降りませんでした。"

(*Ryokouchuu, ame ga furimasendeshita*),

meaning "It did not rain during the trip." Students incorrectly wrote:

"旅行中、雨が降らなかったました。"

(*Ryokouchuu, ame ga furanakattamashita*),

indicating an error in the correct negative past form conjugation.

These errors underscore the necessity for a better grasp of Japanese verb conjugations among students. The most common errors are found in *~te* and *~ta* conjugations, with rates of 43.37% and 42.17%, respectively, while errors in *~nai* and *~nakatta* conjugations are less frequent, at 8% and 6%, respectively. This analysis suggests that more comprehensive teaching methods and intensive practice are required to improve students' Japanese language proficiency. Educators can create more effective teaching strategies by identifying these error patterns, such as incorporating additional conjugation exercises across different sentence contexts and providing targeted feedback on specific mistakes. Such measures are expected to enhance students' verb conjugation skills and overall Japanese communication abilities.

4. Conclusion

This study has identified that verb conjugation errors are common among students in the Japanese Language Study Program at Universitas Harapan Medan. Analysis of student essays revealed that the most frequent errors occurred in the *~te* and *~ta* conjugation forms, with error rates of 43.37% and 42.17%, respectively. Students often struggle to differentiate between positive and negative past tense forms. Errors were also found in negative conjugation forms *~nai* and *~nakatta*, though these were less prevalent. These errors reflect significant challenges in understanding and applying various conjugation forms in Japanese.

Overall, the study provides important insights into the familiar patterns of verb conjugation errors among students and the underlying factors contributing to these errors. The findings underscore the need for enhanced student understanding of verb conjugation through more intensive and targeted practice. Consequently, it can be concluded that there is an urgent need to improve the teaching methods for verb conjugation at Universitas Harapan Medan to develop students' competence in using Japanese effectively and accurately.

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