



A CULTURAL STUDIES APPROACH TO KAIWA DRAMA SCRIPTS: CULTURAL VALUES AS AN OUTCOME OF CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING-BASED SPEAKING LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Japanese conversation (*kaiwa*) instruction often emphasizes grammatical accuracy while overlooking the cultural values underlying Japanese communication. This study aims to identify and map Japanese cultural values (*uchi-soto*, *honne-tatemae*, *enryo-sasshi*, *jouge kankei*, and *wa*) represented in *kaiwa* drama scripts produced through cross-cultural understanding-based speaking learning via Project-Based Learning (PjBL). A mixed methods design was employed: qualitative content analysis on representative scripts from an anthology of 17 student-produced bilingual (Indonesian-Japanese) drama scripts, combined with corpus-based frequency analysis of lexical-structural markers across the entire corpus ($\pm 244,600$ characters). The findings show that all five values appear consistently, manifested through register shifts toward lecturers, indirect refusals, gaps between verbal expression and characters' true feelings, in-group/out-group awareness, and harmony-oriented conflict resolution; frequency analysis of 905 markers shows *jouge kankei* and *enryo-sasshi* dominate (66.2% and 18.2%) due to their grammatical bound to *keigo*, while the remaining three values are manifested more implicitly through narrative structure. The study concludes that writing, translating, and performing drama scripts within PjBL functions as a vehicle for internalizing cultural values, positioning such values as a learning outcome rather than supplementary content.

Keywords: *cultural studies; kaiwa drama scripts; Japanese cultural values; project-based learning; cross-cultural understanding*

INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are two inseparable entities in foreign language learning. Indonesia is recorded as the country with the second-largest number of Japanese-language learners in the world after China, totaling 732,914 people out of 4,000,750 learners across 143 countries/regions (The Japan Foundation, 2024); however, this considerable interest is not necessarily matched by adequate mastery of pragmatic and cultural aspects. Speaking competence (*kaiwa*) in Japanese cannot be measured solely by grammatical accuracy or vocabulary range, but also by learners' ability to understand and apply the cultural norms that shape native speakers' interaction patterns, such as the choice of speech level, politeness strategies, and social-relationship management. Without this understanding, learners' utterances risk being grammatically correct yet pragmatically and culturally awkward, a phenomenon known as pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983).

One approach considered capable of bridging this pragmatic-cultural gap is cross

cultural understanding-based speaking learning integrated with the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model through drama-script production, since the process of writing and performing dialogue requires students to imagine themselves as Japanese speakers in various social positions (e.g., toward lecturers, peers, or strangers), thereby indirectly compelling students to make contextual pragmatic and cultural choices rather than merely memorizing grammatical rules. This approach is not new; it has been gradually pioneered and tested by Yuniarsih (2004, 2005), who showed that the application of drama in *kaiwa* teaching can improve students' communicative ability. During online learning, Yuniarsih, Ristiawati, and Fauziyyah (2021) demonstrated that drama-based PjBL in *kaiwa* courses effectively improved *kaiketsu nouryoku* (problem-solving competence), *ibunka rikai nouryoku* (cross cultural understanding competence), and *kadai suikou nouryoku* (task-completion competence) in line with the JF Standard, a finding further reinforced by subsequent research on the development of PjBL-based Kaiwa II teaching materials (Yuniarsih et al., 2022).

The five cultural values that are the focus of this article are *uchi-soto*, *honne-tatemae*, *enryo-sasshi*, *jouge kankei*, and *wa*. *Uchi-soto* refers to the cognitive and linguistic distinction between the in-group (*uchi*) and the out-group (*soto*), which influences the choice of language register and forms of address (Nakane, 1970). *Honne-tatemae* describes the duality between one's true personal feelings (*honne*) and the attitude displayed in public to maintain social harmony (*tatemae*) (Doi, 1971; Ishii et al., 2011). *Enryo-sasshi* is a paired concept of restraint in explicitly stating a refusal (*enryo*) matched by the interlocutor's ability to infer the implied intent (*sasshi*) (Lebra, 1976). *Jouge kankei* refers to awareness of hierarchical position, manifested in the choice of *keigo* as well as non-verbal behavior such as bowing (*ojigi*) (Nakane, 1970). *Wa* refers to the value of group harmony that prioritizes collective interests and the avoidance of open conflict (Lebra, 1976; Ivie, 2024).

This series of studies on the effectiveness of drama-based PjBL has validated the process and outcomes of general speaking competence, but has not specifically examined which cultural values are embedded in the scripts produced as PjBL outputs. A methodological precedent of content analysis on culture points in Japanese-language teaching materials (Suzuki, 2001) shows that content analysis is an appropriate method for systematically mapping cultural representation in instructional texts, yet it has not been applied to drama scripts produced by students themselves. Meanwhile, pragmatic studies on *uchi-soto*, *honne-tatemae*, and similar concepts noted above generally examine native speaker discourse or popular-media data rather than the language-learning products of JFL students. The research gap addressed by this article lies at the intersection of these three lines of research: shifting the focus from measuring general speaking competence toward an in depth cultural-studies reading of the cultural values embedded in the scripts, while also mapping them quantitatively through corpus analysis.

Based on the foregoing, the purpose of this study is to identify and describe the representation of the cultural values of *uchi-soto*, *honne-tatemae*, *enryo-sasshi*, *jouge kankei*, and *wa* in *kaiwa* drama scripts resulting from cross-cultural understanding-based speaking learning through PjBL, while also mapping the frequency distribution of their occurrence across the entire script corpus and discussing its pedagogical implications.



METHOD

This study employs a cultural studies approach with a mixed-methods design: qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018) as the dominant method, and corpus-based frequency analysis as the less-dominant, complementary method, following an embedded QUAL(uan) design in which the frequency counts represent a quantizing of the qualitative textual data (Sandelowski, Voils, & Knafl, 2009). The data source is an anthology of 17 bilingual (Indonesian-Japanese) *kaiwa* drama scripts entitled “*Kizuna no Shokutaku: Gakusei-tachi no Monogatari*,” the final product of cross-cultural understanding-based speaking learning through the PjBL model.

The qualitative analysis focused on the scripts that most richly display indicators of the five cultural values as illustrative-representative data, through close reading and purposive sampling of scenes containing lexical markers (e.g., *sensei*, *senpai*, *nakama*), register shifts, elliptical utterances, non-verbal descriptions, and conflict resolutions, following the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). To map the distribution of cultural values comprehensively, a frequency count of lexical-structural markers for each cultural value was also carried out across all 17 scripts using computer-assisted content analysis (Python, regular expressions) on the complete corpus transcript ($\pm 244,600$ characters), normalized per 10,000 characters to control for differences in script length (ranging from 6,350–22,649 characters).

With regard to research ethics, the data used in this study are drawn from an officially published book (ISBN-registered), making them publicly available secondary data rather than primary data obtained directly from human research participants. Accordingly, the analysis and citation of excerpts from the anthology follow standard academic conventions for the scholarly use of published literary/instructional works, rather than the consent procedures typically required for primary human-subjects research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the seventeen *kaiwa* drama scripts shows that the five cultural values are consistently present, both through diction and speech-level choices and through stage directions and plot structure. Table 1 summarizes representative findings before the discussion of each value is elaborated.

Table 1. Summary of Cultural Value Representation in Kaiwa Drama Scripts

Cultural Value	Script / Scene	Verbal/Nonverbal Indicator	Pedagogical Function
<i>Uchi-Soto</i>	“Teman Baru” (New Friend), Scene 1	Ridwan’s internal monologue doubting his acceptance into the group (“ <i>minna nakayoshi de ii na... boku mo nakama ni ireru no kana</i> ”); use of the word <i>nakama</i> (in-group member)	Trains sensitivity to in group/out-group boundaries and verbal strategies for building social membership

<i>Honne-Tatema</i>	“Friends Don’t Lie”, Scenes 7–8	Ishmah’s polite expression of gratitude (<i>tatema</i>) when praised in comparison to Alya by the teacher in public, concealing jealousy (<i>honne</i>) that later leads to an incident	Trains understanding that surface-level verbal expression does not always reflect genuine feelings
Cultural Value	Script / Scene	Verbal/Nonverbal Indicator	Pedagogical Function
<i>Enryo-Sasshi</i>	“Kepedulian” (Care), Scene 2	Muflih’s elliptical sentence when declining the lecturer’s invitation: “ <i>benkyōkai ga chotto...</i> ” without a closing predicate	Trains production/comprehension of indirect refusal (<i>enryo</i>) and inferring intent from context (<i>sasshi</i>)
<i>Jouge Kankei</i>	“Kisah Ikatan” (The Bond), Sc. 2; “Kepedulian”, Sc. 1	Register shift (<i>keigo</i> /desu-masu toward the lecturer vs. casual speech among peers); bowing (<i>ojigi</i>)	Trains appropriate use of speech levels (<i>keigo</i>) according to hierarchical relationships
<i>Wa</i>	“Lapar” (Hungry), closing scene	Peaceful resolution of a payment shortfall through Marshaliani’s initiative; Shamil’s utterance “Kore ga yūjō da yo!...”	Trains collective orientation and conflict resolution that preserves group harmony

Uchi-Soto: Awareness of Group Boundaries in the Script “Teman Baru” (New Friend)

The value of *uchi-soto* is clearly illustrated in the script “Teman Baru,” which portrays Ridwan, a shy new student, as he observes the closeness of a group of fellow students.

RIDWAN (internal monologue): “They all seem so close... I wonder if I could join their group too...”

(Minna nakayoshi de ii na... boku mo nakama ni ireru no kana...)

The use of the word *nakama*, which lexically refers to an “in-group member,” underscores that social membership in Japan must be socially acknowledged by the *uchi* group. This script trains students to recognize the linguistic markers of group membership as well as the verbal strategies commonly used by Japanese speakers to soften the *uchi-soto* boundary.

Honne-Tatema: The Gap between Expression and Feeling in “Friends Don’t Lie” The script “Friends Don’t Lie” portrays the dynamics of *honne-tatema* through the character Ishmah, who is repeatedly compared unfavorably to her friend Alya by their teacher in front of others.

ISHMAH: “Thank you, sensei.” (Arigatō gozaimasu, sensei.)



This polite surface attitude conceals Ishmah's true *honne* (suppressed pressure and jealousy), which is only revealed later through a destructive act toward Alya. This representation trains students to understand that verbal politeness in public does not necessarily reflect one's genuine feelings.

Enryo-Sasshi: Indirect Refusal in the Script "Kepedulian" (Care)

The value of *enryo-sasshi* stands out in the script "Kepedulian," when Muflih replies to Teri Sensei's message with a deliberately unfinished sentence.

MUFLIH: "Sensei, we have a student council meeting tomorrow, so we can't make it."
(Sensei, ashita wa gakuseikai no kaigi ga aru node, benkyōkai wa chotto...)

The phrase "*benkyōkai wa chotto*" is deliberately left hanging without a closing predicate, a typical elliptical pattern that represents *enryo* while simultaneously requiring *sasshi* from the lecturer to infer the intended refusal from context.

Jouge Kankei: Register and Ojigi in Lecturer-Student Relations

The value of *jouge kankei* is consistently visible through two main markers: shifts in language register and the non-verbal act of bowing (*ojigi*). In the script "Kepedulian," when several students unknowingly joke rudely in front of Teri Sensei, they immediately change their attitude.

MUFLIH, ADHIT (bowing): "We're sorry, Teri Sensei." (Sumimasen, Terī sensei.)

The stage direction "without hesitation, both of them bowed" confirms that *jouge kankei* is manifested both verbally (*keigo*) and kinesthetically (*ojigi*) as a symbol of acknowledging hierarchy.

Wa: Collective Harmony in Conflict Resolution in the Script "Lapar" (Hungry)

The value of *wa* is clearly evident in the script "Lapar," when two characters run short of money to pay for their food, yet the character Marshaliani immediately takes the initiative to resolve the problem in order to preserve a sense of togetherness.

SHAMIL: "This is what friendship is! Even if we're a little short, we help each other." (Kore ga yūjō da yo! Chotto tarinakute mo, minna de tasukeau nda.)

Shamil's utterance explicitly articulates the value of *wa* as a principle of "mutual help" that prioritizes group harmony over individual embarrassment, a pattern that recurs in other scripts as a mode of conflict resolution.

Quantitative Analysis: Frequency Distribution of Cultural Values across the 17 Scripts

To complement the qualitative analysis, a frequency count of lexical and structural markers was conducted across all 17 scripts. Table 2 presents the number of occurrences of markers for each cultural value per script, and Table 3 presents a summary of the proportion and average occurrence per 10,000 characters.

Table 2. Frequency of Cultural Value Markers per Script

Script	<i>Jouge Kankei</i>	<i>Enryo- Sasshi</i>	<i>Honne Tatemaie</i>	<i>Uchi-Soto</i>	<i>Wa</i>
1. Lost	24	16	8	3	1
2. Friends Don't Lie	31	6	9	3	4
3. Waktu yang Menyenangkan (Fun Time)	18	10	4	1	7
4. Jani yang Bersinar (Jani, Shining Bright)	30	16	9	0	1
5. Quality Time	43	8	1	1	3
6. Lapar (Hungry)	0	7	1	5	7
7. Ikatan Persahabatan (Bond of Friendship)	12	11	7	5	5
8. Lidah yang Tertipu (The Deceived Tongue)	10	8	1	2	4
9. Kisah Ikatan (The Bond)	59	23	2	4	2
10. Ayo Makan Bersama (Let's Eat Together)	27	1	1	0	1
11. Kedai Ramen Dewa Kematian (Death God's Ramen Shop)	31	8	3	1	0
12. Teman Baru (New Friend)	24	3	1	0	4
13. Kehangatan Sepulang Sekolah (Warmth After School)	10	3	0	1	2
14. Kepedulian (Care)	176	18	5	4	1
15. Hari yang Dijanjikan (The Promised Day)	35	4	2	0	1
16. Teman (Friend)	30	4	1	10	1
17. Jalan-Jalan (Wandering)	39	19	0	0	2
TOTAL (17 scripts)	599	165	55	40	46



Table 3. Summary of Proportion and Average Occurrence of Cultural Values across the Corpus

Cultural Value	Total Markers	Proportion	Average / 10,000 Characters
<i>Jouge Kankei</i>	599	66.2%	24.49
<i>Enryo-Sasshi</i>	165	18.2%	6.75
<i>Honne-Tatemaie</i>	55	6.1%	2.25
<i>Uchi-Soto</i>	40	4.4%	1.64
<i>Wa</i>	46	5.1%	1.88

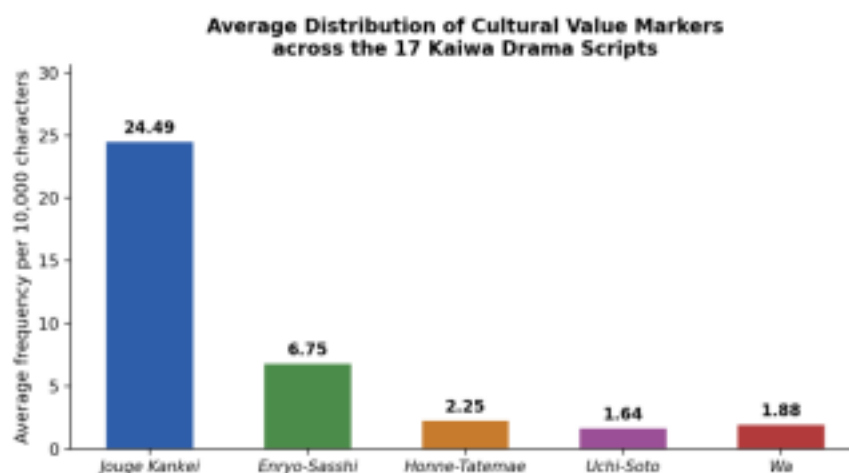


Figure 1. Average distribution of cultural value markers per 10,000 characters

Of the 905 markers identified in total, *jouge kankei* dominates by a wide margin (599 markers, 66.2%), followed by *enryo-sasshi* (165 markers, 18.2%), while *honne-tatemaie* (55, 6.1%), *wa* (46, 5.1%), and *uchi-soto* (40, 4.4%) appear at much lower frequencies. The dominance of *jouge kankei* is consistent with the corpus's narrative structure, which frequently positions the *sensei*/lecturer character as an authority figure, so that honorific forms (*keigo*) recur in almost every script; the script “Kepedulian” shows the highest

frequency (176 markers), whereas “Lapar” shows no *jouge kankei* markers at all, since all of its characters hold equal status. The low lexical frequency of *honne-tatema*, *uchi-soto*, and *wa* should be interpreted with caution: these three values are often realized through plot structure and conflict resolution that are not always marked by explicit lexical cues, making them prone to under-representation by word-based counting methods, unlike *jouge kankei* and *enryo-sasshi*, which are directly bound to obligatory grammatical rules (*keigo* and performative ellipsis patterns).

Cultural Values as an Outcome of PjBL Based on Cross-Cultural Understanding

The findings above show that the five cultural values are organically embedded in the narrative and linguistic decisions students make throughout the PjBL process. The process of composing and translating *kaiwa* drama scripts, which requires students to imagine themselves as Japanese speakers in various social positions, functions as a learning experience that fosters the experiential internalization of cultural values. Cultural values are therefore more appropriately positioned as an outcome of cross-cultural understanding-based speaking learning through PjBL, rather than merely as material taught prior to speaking practice.

Limitations of the Study

The data analyzed are the final products (drama scripts), without accompanying data on the learning process for the specific cohort that produced this anthology; the claim that PjBL generates these cultural values rests on a series of prior studies on the effectiveness of drama-based PjBL (Yuniarsih, 2004, 2005, 2021; Yuniarsih et al., 2022), so direct triangulation with process data from this cohort is recommended for future research. This study also did not include a non-PjBL comparison group, and the lexical-structural markers used in the quantitative analysis are a proxy that is potentially polysemous and has not yet been validated through inter-rater coding. Given these limitations, the findings should be read as an exploratory-descriptive study at an early stage, rather than as conclusive causal evidence.

CONCLUSION

This cultural studies examination of seventeen *kaiwa* drama scripts in the anthology “*Kizuna no Shokutaku: Gakusei-tachi no Monogatari*” shows that the five Japanese cultural values (*uchi-soto*, *honne-tatema*, *enryo-sasshi*, *jouge kankei*, and *wa*) are consistently represented through diction choices, speech levels, non-verbal stage directions, and patterns of conflict resolution within the scripts. Frequency analysis of 905 markers confirms that *jouge kankei* and *enryo-sasshi* dominate due to their binding to *keigo* grammatical rules, while *honne-tatema*, *uchi-soto*, and *wa* are more often manifested implicitly through narrative structure.

These findings affirm that cross-cultural understanding-based *kaiwa* speaking learning integrated with PjBL can position students as producers of cultural texts, such that Japanese cultural values become internalized as a learning outcome. Future research is recommended to develop inter-rater validation instruments and to examine student perceptions of the process of internalizing cultural values through reflective interviews.

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