



Cultural Interference in Indonesian Folktale Writing in Japanese

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ABSTRACT

This study examines cultural interference in Indonesian folktale writing in Japanese produced by university-level learners of Japanese as a foreign language. The research aims to identify patterns of cultural interference and to describe how Indonesian cultural concepts are transferred, adapted, or inadequately represented in Japanese narrative texts. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the study analyzes 39 folktales written by Indonesian students at intermediate to upper-intermediate proficiency levels. The data were analyzed at lexical, grammatical, and discourse levels using contrastive analysis, error analysis, interlanguage analysis, and contrastive rhetoric. The findings reveal that cultural interference occurs consistently across all texts. Lexical interference is reflected in inappropriate word choice and the use of culturally bound terms without adequate adaptation. Grammatical interference appears in inconsistent sentence-final forms, inaccurate tense and aspect marking, and frequent misuse or omission of particles. At the discourse level, interference manifests through abrupt subject shifts, non-natural sentence structures, and insufficient contextual introduction of characters and settings, which disrupt narrative coherence. The study demonstrates that cultural interference in foreign language writing extends beyond linguistic error and represents learners' ongoing intercultural negotiation. The findings highlight the importance of integrating cultural discourse awareness into Japanese language writing instruction, particularly in narrative-based learning contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

Language learning involves not only the acquisition of grammatical structures and vocabulary but also the internalization of cultural frameworks that shape meaning, interaction, and discourse. As language is inseparable from culture, the use of a foreign language inevitably reflects the cultural background of its users. Consequently, learners frequently experience cultural interference when producing texts in a second or foreign language, particularly when the cultural systems of the source and target languages differ significantly.

Cultural interference occurs when elements of the learner's first culture influence the use of the target language, leading to expressions that may be grammatically acceptable but culturally or pragmatically inappropriate. Previous studies have demonstrated that such interference is not limited to linguistic forms but extends to semantic interpretation, discourse organization, and rhetorical conventions (Iswary, 2011; McKay, 2003; Manuputty, 2014). This phenomenon highlights the close relationship between language, culture, and patterns of thought within a speech community.

In the context of Japanese as a foreign language, cultural interference presents particular challenges. Japanese language use is deeply rooted in cultural norms that emphasize contextual sensitivity, implicit subject reference, consistent sentence-final forms, and socially appropriate lexical choices. These characteristics contrast with Indonesian narrative conventions, which tend to favor explicit sequencing, flexible tense usage, and culturally specific expressions. As a result, Indonesian learners writing in Japanese often transfer narrative patterns and cultural assumptions from their native language into Japanese.

The issue becomes more prominent when learners are tasked with writing folktales. Folktales are culturally embedded narratives that convey values, social norms, and collective memory. Writing Indonesian folktales in Japanese requires learners to negotiate between preserving the cultural essence of the source narrative and adapting it to Japanese linguistic and cultural conventions. When learners lack sufficient intercultural awareness, this negotiation process frequently leads to cultural interference in written production.

Most previous research on language interference has focused on grammatical, phonological, or lexical aspects of second language acquisition (Galasso, 2002; Nugraheni & Syuhda, 2019). While several studies have examined cultural interference in spoken interaction and translation contexts (Bennui, 2016; McDonough & De Vleeschauwer, 2021), research on cultural interference in foreign-language narrative writing—particularly in Japanese as the target language—remains limited. Moreover, studies that specifically analyze student-written folktales as a medium of cultural transmission remain scarce.

This study aims to address this gap by examining cultural interference in Indonesian folktale writing in Japanese produced by university-level learners of

Japanese as a foreign language. The research focuses on how Indonesian cultural concepts are represented, modified, or inadequately conveyed in Japanese narrative texts. By analyzing students' written folktales, this study identifies patterns of cultural interference at the lexical, grammatical, and discourse levels.

Studies published in the *International Journal of Language, Humanities, and Education* have also addressed intercultural challenges in language education. However, research focusing specifically on culturally embedded narrative writing in Japanese as a foreign language remains limited. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on student-produced narrative texts that involve culturally rich content rather than isolated linguistic tasks. By positioning cultural interference as a multidimensional phenomenon in foreign-language writing, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intercultural challenges learners face. The findings are expected to offer pedagogical insights for Japanese language instruction, particularly in developing learners' cultural awareness and narrative writing competence.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine cultural interference in Indonesian folktale writing in Japanese. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the research focuses on describing and interpreting patterns of cultural interference manifested in written narrative texts rather than measuring variables quantitatively. The analysis emphasizes content and discourse features that reflect cultural transfer from Indonesian to Japanese.

Data and Data Sources

The data consisted of written folktales produced by 39 university students enrolled in a Japanese Language Education program. The participants were Indonesian learners of Japanese at an intermediate to upper-intermediate level of proficiency. Each student was assigned to write one Indonesian folktale originating from their local region and retell it in Japanese. The texts ranged in length from approximately 2,500 to 4,000 Japanese characters.

The written texts served as the primary data source and were analyzed as authentic learner-generated narratives. The folktales represent diverse cultural backgrounds from various regions of Indonesia, providing rich material for examining cultural interference in foreign-language writing.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques: classroom observation, writing assignments, and documentation. Classroom observation was carried out to ensure that students selected different folktale titles and to prevent

duplication of story content. The writing assignment was administered after students had finalized their chosen folktales and confirmed that their reference sources were valid and reliable. Documentation was conducted after all student texts had been collected and prepared for analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis involved several systematic steps. First, all student texts were read repeatedly to identify instances of cultural interference. The study focused on three levels of interference: lexical, grammatical, and discourse-level interference. These levels were examined by considering four analytical perspectives: contrastive analysis, error analysis, interlanguage analysis, and contrastive rhetoric.

To further interpret discourse-level interference, the study employed a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework based on Teun van Dijk's model. This framework was used to examine narrative structure, framing, subject reference, lexical choice, and coherence patterns that reflect cultural and ideological influences. Each instance of interference was identified, categorized, and described based on its form and potential cultural motivation.

Data Verification

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the analysis, data verification was conducted through peer discussion and cross-checking among the researchers. Interpretations of cultural interference were compared and reviewed to maintain consistency in classification. In addition, the data's accuracy was verified by rechecking the students' folktale titles, regional origins, and reference sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the analysis of cultural interference found in Indonesian folktale texts written in Japanese by university-level learners. The results are based on 39 written narratives produced by students and analyzed at the lexical, grammatical, and discourse levels.

Table 1 presents an overview of the folktale titles, respondent codes, and types of cultural interference identified in each text. As shown in the table, all analyzed texts exhibit at least one form of cultural interference, indicating that cultural transfer consistently occurs in learner-produced narrative writing.

Table 1. Types of Cultural Interference in Indonesian Folktale Writing in Japanese

No.	Respondent	Folktale Title	Identified Cultural Interference
1	R01	<i>Prabu Kian Santang: The Wise King</i>	Inappropriate kanji usage
2	R02	<i>Karang Bolong, Kebumen</i>	Typographical errors; unclear subject reference; incorrect word class usage; inappropriate kanji selection; misuse of demonstratives; overly general verbs; particle errors

3	R03	<i>Roro Jonggrang</i>	Non-Japanese sentence structure; inconsistent sentence endings; excessive use of connectors
4	R04	<i>The Origin of Semarang</i>	Non-Japanese sentence structure; inconsistent sentence endings
5	R05	<i>Si Pitung</i>	Unnecessary particle usage; incomplete sentences; inaccurate tense marking
6	R06	<i>The Oath of Sabda Palon</i>	Unnamed character reference; unnatural sentence construction; inconsistent endings
7	R07	<i>Situ Bagendit</i>	Incorrect modifier order; unconventional honorific usage; particle misuse
8	R08	<i>The Origin of the Word "Aok"</i>	Redundant lexical items; unnatural Japanese expressions
9	R09	<i>Jaka Tarub and the Seven Fairies</i>	Inaccurate past tense usage
10	R10	<i>The Legend of Nusa Kambangan</i>	Inappropriate verb–adjective selection; inconsistent endings
11	R11	<i>Jaka Poleng</i>	Inaccurate past tense usage
12	R12	<i>Bawang Merah and Bawang Putih</i>	Redundant lexical items; inconsistent endings
13	R13	<i>The Origin of Mijen Village</i>	Incorrect use of personal demonstratives
14	R14	<i>The Legend of the Bali Strait</i>	Incomplete phrases; particle misuse
15	R15	<i>The Origin of Lake Toba</i>	Inappropriate terminology selection
16	R16	<i>The Origin of Lake Sentani</i>	Inaccurate past tense usage
17	R17	<i>Panji Semirang</i>	Confusion between past and progressive forms
18	R18	<i>Joko Kendhil</i>	Redundant expressions; inappropriate terminology; demonstrative misuse
19	R19	<i>The Origin of the Bali Strait</i>	Omission of required particles
20	R20	<i>The Origin of Salatiga</i>	Inappropriate verb selection
21	R21	<i>The Lizard and the Nobleman</i>	Inaccurate past tense usage; particle omission
22	R22	<i>Cindelas</i>	Limited use of narrative expressions
23	R23	<i>The Legend of Princess Kemarau</i>	Unnecessary terminology
24	R24	<i>The Theft of Majin Kobel's Magic Sword</i>	Lack of terminological specificity
25	R25	<i>Prince Aryo Gajah of Situbondo</i>	Particle misuse
26	R26	<i>Umbul Tlatar</i>	Particle misuse
27	R27	<i>Telaga Warna</i>	Inappropriate lexical selection
28	R28	<i>Jangkar Dam Poo Awang</i>	Inappropriate lexical selection
29	R29	<i>Goa Kreo</i>	Spelling errors
30	R30	<i>Rawa Pening</i>	Unnecessary terminology
31	R31	<i>The Tragedy of Saturday Pahing</i>	Limited use of demonstratives
32	R32	<i>Ki Sondong Majeruk and Ki Sondong Makerti</i>	Redundant lexical items
33	R33	<i>The Legend of Batu Raden</i>	Inappropriate phrase selection
34	R34	<i>Keong Mas</i>	Inappropriate phrase selection
35	R35	<i>Prambanan Temple</i>	Inappropriate terminology
36	R36	<i>Sangkuriang and Mount Tangkuban Perahu</i>	Non-specific personal reference
37	R37	<i>The Origin of Mount Bugel</i>	Demonstrative misuse
38	R38	<i>Raden Pandan Arang</i>	Particle omission
39	R39	<i>Aji Saka and the Origin of Javanese Script</i>	Confusion between semantically similar verbs

Overview of Cultural Interference Occurrence

The results show that cultural interference appears in multiple linguistic forms across the dataset. The most frequently observed types of interference include inappropriate lexical choice, inconsistent sentence-final forms, misuse or omission of particles, inaccurate tense and aspect marking, and discourse-level irregularities such as abrupt subject shifts and non-Japanese narrative structures.

Lexical interference was identified in the form of vague or overly general word selection, misuse of culturally specific terms, and inappropriate use of demonstratives and personal references. Several texts contained terms that lacked direct equivalents in Japanese, resulting in either literal translation or the use of semantically approximate but culturally unsuitable expressions.

Grammatical interference was commonly reflected in inconsistent use of sentence-final forms, particularly the alternation between polite (*desu/masu*) and plain (*da/dearu*) styles within a single narrative. In addition, frequent errors were found in particle usage, tense marking, and verb–adjective distinctions, which affected sentence clarity and narrative coherence.

At the discourse level, cultural interference manifested through non-natural Japanese sentence structures, excessive use of connectors, incomplete sentences, and abrupt changes in grammatical subjects without sufficient contextual cues. These features disrupted narrative flow and reduced textual cohesion, especially in longer folktale narratives.

Distribution of Interference Types

Based on the analysis, cultural interference can be categorized into three primary levels: lexical, grammatical, and discourse-level interference. Lexical and grammatical interference appeared most frequently across the texts, while discourse-level interference, although less frequent, had a more significant impact on narrative comprehensibility.

Errors related to kanji usage were also identified in several texts. These included incorrect kanji selection, inappropriate contextual usage, and orthographic inconsistency. Such errors often occurred when learners attempted to represent culturally loaded concepts using kanji without sufficient awareness of pragmatic or cultural constraints.

Overall, the results indicate that cultural interference in Indonesian folktale writing in Japanese extends beyond surface-level linguistic inaccuracies to deeper narrative and discourse structures. These findings provide a foundation for further interpretation in the discussion section.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that cultural interference plays a significant role in Indonesian folktale writing in Japanese by L2 learners. The interference observed

extends beyond surface-level linguistic inaccuracies and reflects deeper cultural and cognitive transfer from the learners' first language and culture into the target language. This section discusses the results by examining patterns of cultural interference at the lexical, grammatical, and discourse levels and relating them to previous studies in foreign language learning and intercultural communication.

Lexical and Terminological Cultural Interference

Lexical interference emerged as one of the most prominent forms of cultural interference in the analyzed texts. Learners frequently employed vague, overly general, or culturally inappropriate lexical items when expressing concepts rooted in Indonesian culture. In many cases, students relied on literal translation strategies or semantic approximation when equivalent terms were unavailable in Japanese. This finding aligns with Iswary's (2011) assertion that lexical choices represent culturally specific categorizations of reality.

The difficulty in selecting culturally appropriate lexical items suggests limited intercultural awareness rather than insufficient vocabulary knowledge. Similar patterns have been reported in previous studies on foreign language writing, where learners tend to prioritize semantic equivalence over pragmatic and cultural appropriateness (Bennui, 2016; McKay, 2003). In the context of folktale writing, this tendency becomes more pronounced because culturally bound expressions are central to narrative meaning.

Grammatical Interference and Narrative Convention Transfer

Grammatical interference was primarily reflected in inconsistent sentence-final forms, misuse or omission of particles, and inaccurate tense and aspect marking. The frequent alternation between polite (*desu/masu*) and plain (*da/dearu*) forms within a single narrative indicates learners' limited awareness of Japanese narrative conventions, which require stylistic consistency. This phenomenon reflects transfer from Indonesian, where such grammatical distinctions are not encoded morphologically.

The misuse of particles further illustrates structural transfer from Indonesian, a language that does not employ case-marking particles. As noted by Nugraheni and Syuhda (2019), learners whose first language lacks certain grammatical features often struggle to internalize these features in the target language. Similar findings have been observed in studies involving Japanese language learners, where grammatical interference is closely linked to differences in linguistic systems (Natalia et al., 2022).

Discourse-Level Interference and Narrative Organization

At the discourse level, cultural interference manifested through abrupt subject shifts, excessive use of connectors, fragmented sentences, and non-natural Japanese sentence structures. These features indicate the transfer of Indonesian narrative logic into Japanese writing. Indonesian storytelling traditions often rely on explicit

sequencing and frequent repetition, whereas Japanese narratives tend to emphasize implicit cohesion and contextual continuity.

This finding supports the contrastive rhetoric perspective, which views discourse organization as culturally embedded (Bennui, 2016; McDonough & De Vleeschauwer, 2021). Learners' difficulty in maintaining consistent subject reference and narrative flow suggests that discourse-level competence requires not only linguistic proficiency but also familiarity with cultural storytelling norms in the target language (Lianna & Sutedi, 2020).

Cultural Interference in Kanji Usage

Errors related to kanji usage further illustrate cultural interference at the orthographic level. Learners often selected kanji based on surface meaning rather than contextual appropriateness, resulting in expressions that were semantically understandable but pragmatically unnatural. This reflects reliance on conceptual transfer rather than culturally grounded literacy competence (Eliastuti, 2016). Previous research has similarly noted that kanji misuse among foreign language learners often stems from limited exposure to authentic Japanese texts and cultural contexts (Lianna & Sutedi, 2020).

Pedagogical Implications of Cultural Interference

The findings of this study suggest that cultural interference should not be viewed solely as a deficiency but as evidence of learners' ongoing intercultural negotiation. Writing Indonesian folktales in Japanese places learners in a complex position, requiring them to balance cultural preservation and linguistic adaptation. From a pedagogical perspective, this highlights the importance of integrating cultural discourse instruction into foreign language writing curricula (Amri, 2023).

Explicit instruction on narrative conventions, character introduction strategies, and culturally appropriate lexical selection may help learners develop greater intercultural competence. As emphasized in previous studies, foreign language instruction that incorporates cultural awareness alongside linguistic training can reduce negative transfer and enhance communicative effectiveness (McKay, 2003; Wierzbicka, 1991).

Recent studies have similarly emphasized the importance of cultural awareness and discourse competence in foreign language learning, particularly in writing-based instructional contexts (Diani et al., 2019). These studies highlight that learners' difficulties in producing culturally appropriate texts are often rooted in limited exposure to target-language discourse norms rather than insufficient grammatical knowledge. The findings of the present study support this view by demonstrating that cultural interference in narrative writing reflects learners' ongoing process of intercultural meaning negotiation rather than mere linguistic deficiency.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated cultural interference in Indonesian folktale writing in Japanese produced by university-level learners of Japanese as a foreign language. Based on the analysis of 39 student-written narratives, the findings reveal that cultural interference occurs consistently and systematically across lexical, grammatical, and discourse levels.

At the lexical level, learners had difficulty selecting culturally appropriate terms, particularly when expressing culturally bound concepts that lack direct equivalents in Japanese. This resulted in literal translations, overly general expressions, and the use of semantically approximate but pragmatically unsuitable vocabulary. At the grammatical level, cultural interference was reflected in inconsistent sentence-final forms, inaccurate tense and aspect marking, and frequent misuse or omission of particles. These issues indicate a structural transfer from Indonesian, which differs significantly from Japanese in its grammatical encoding.

Discourse-level interference had the most substantial impact on narrative coherence. Abrupt subject shifts, non-natural sentence structures, excessive use of connectors, and insufficient contextual introduction of characters and settings disrupted the flow of the narratives. These patterns suggest that learners transferred Indonesian storytelling conventions into Japanese writing without fully adapting to the target-language discourse norms.

Notably, the findings demonstrate that cultural interference in foreign language writing is not merely a matter of linguistic error but reflects deeper intercultural negotiation. When learners retell culturally rich narratives, such as folktales, they must balance preserving the source culture with the linguistic and cultural conventions of the target language. In this process, interference arises as a natural consequence of limited intercultural awareness rather than solely inadequate language proficiency.

From a pedagogical perspective, this study underscores the need to integrate cultural discourse awareness into Japanese language instruction, particularly in narrative writing courses. Explicit teaching of narrative conventions, character introduction strategies, and culturally appropriate lexical selection may help learners reduce negative transfer and produce more natural target-language texts. Future research may expand this study by examining instructional interventions to improve intercultural writing competence or by comparing learners' writing across different target languages and cultural contexts.

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