

Classifying Question Types in Japanese Job Interviews at a Training Institution in Makassar: A Conversation Analysis Perspective

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengklasifikasikan pola pertanyaan yang digunakan pewawancara penutur asli Jepang dalam sesi wawancara kerja di Lembaga Pelatihan Kerja di Makassar. Dengan menerapkan pendekatan Conversation Analysis (CA) dan teori interogatif linguistik Jepang, penelitian ini menganalisis 167 pertanyaan yang diajukan selama proses wawancara kerja kelompok yang dimediasi interpreter. Hasil identifikasi menunjukkan tujuh kategori utama pertanyaan: はい/いいえ疑問文 (*yes/no questions*), 疑問詞疑問文 (*wh-questions*), 選択疑問文 (*alternative questions*), 明確化・追求疑問文 (*clarification/probing questions*), 確認・付加疑問文 (*confirmation/tag questions*), 動機・理由疑問文 (*motivational/reason questions*), serta 感情・心理・社会的疑問文 (*emotional/psychological/social questions*). Temuan memperlihatkan bahwa pewawancara tidak hanya fokus pada verifikasi data faktual, tetapi juga secara aktif mengeksplorasi motivasi, kesiapan mental, dan dimensi sosial-emosional kandidat. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi baru dalam studi interogatif, komunikasi profesional berbahasa Jepang, dan pelatihan wawancara kerja lintas budaya di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: pertanyaan, wawancara kerja, bahasa Jepang, Conversation Analysis, interpreter, interogatif, komunikasi lintas budaya

Abstract

This study aims to classify the types of questions used by native Japanese interviewers during job interview sessions at a Training Institution in Makassar. By applying the Conversation Analysis (CA) approach and Japanese interrogative linguistic theory, this research analyzes 167 questions posed during group job interview sessions mediated by an interpreter. The identification results reveal seven main categories of questions: はい/いいえ疑問文 (*yes/no questions*), 疑問詞疑問文 (*wh-questions*), 選択疑問文 (*alternative questions*), 明確化・追求疑問文 (*clarification/probing questions*), 確認・付加疑問文 (*confirmation/tag questions*), 動機・理由疑問文 (*motivational/reason questions*), and 感情・心理・社会的疑問文 (*emotional/psychological/social questions*). The findings indicate that interviewers do not only focus on verifying factual data but also actively explore the candidates' motivation, mental readiness, and socio-emotional dimensions. This research provides new contributions to

interrogative studies, professional Japanese communication, and cross-cultural job interview training in Indonesia.

Keywords: *questions, job interview, Japanese language, Conversation Analysis, interpreter, interrogative, cross-cultural communication*

1. Introduction

Job interviews were a form of institutional interaction that required specific communication strategies, in which questions (質問文 / *shitsumonbun* or 疑問文 / *gimonbun*) served as the main instrument for interviewers (面接官 / *mensetsukan*) to obtain information, assess character, and evaluate the competence of candidates (候補者 / *kōhōsha*). In practice, Japanese-language job interviews did not only focus on extracting data but also reflected Japanese communication values such as 調和 (*chōwa*: harmony), 上下関係 (*jōge kankei*: social hierarchy), and adherence to 制度規範 (institutional norms) (Hatano, 2013; Kinsui, 2012). Therefore, the question patterns used in 面接 (*mensetsu*) exhibited unique characteristics in terms of linguistic structure, pragmatic nuances, and interactional strategies (Hayashi, 2010; Usami, 2015).

Theoretically, this study was based on two main foundations: the theory of interrogatives in Japanese linguistics and Conversation Analysis (CA). The theory of interrogatives highlighted the classification, form, and function of *gimonshi* (疑問詞, question words) in Japanese, including *hai/iie gimonbun* (はい/いいえ疑問文, yes/no questions), *gimonshi gimonbun* (疑問詞疑問文, wh-questions), *sentaku gimonbun* (選択疑問文, alternative questions), and *fuka gimonbun* (付加疑問文, tag questions) (Kinsui, 2012; Lin, 2015; Oshika, 1990). Each type of question carried distinct structural, semantic, and social functions. Modern linguistic studies also emphasized the importance of *shūjoshi* (終助詞, sentence-final particles) such as *ka* (か), *no* (の), *ne* (ね), and *na* (な), which influenced the level of formality, clarity, politeness, and even the distribution of power in interaction (Hatano, 2013; Hayashi, 2010; Lin, 2015; Oshika, 1990). For instance, *ka* was used for formal questions, *no* for clarification and personal involvement, and *ne* for building intimacy and solidarity (Usami, 2015; Oshika, 1990).

In more detailed discussion, Oshika (1990) showed that the forms of questions in Japanese were basically very simple morphologically (for example, by adding *ka* at the end of a sentence, using rising intonation, or including question words), but they did not always directly represent a “question” in the typical sense. He emphasized the importance of distinguishing between “questions” as a grammatical category and their pragmatic functions, including in institutional contexts such as job interviews. Oshika (1990) also elaborated on three basic types of *gimonbun*: (1) questions based on pure doubt, (2) questions that combined doubt and a request for explanation, and (3) questions that simply asked for explanation without expressing doubt, which in real interactions often overlapped contextually.

Apart from syntactic aspects, studies by Hayashi (2010), Usami (2015), and Otake (2015) underlined that questions in Japanese discourse were not merely grammatical phenomena, but also social actions that were closely tied to power relations, speaker positioning, and the contextual negotiation of meaning. In institutional settings such as job interviews, questions were designed to control the flow of interaction, test the candidates’ responses, and create opportunities for the demonstration of knowledge and interactional alignment. Usami (2015) emphasized:

“Questions in Japanese discourse are not only grammatical phenomena, but also social actions that are deeply tied to power relations, speaker stance, and the ongoing negotiation of meaning in context. In institutional settings, such as job interviews, the act of questioning can serve to maintain control, challenge candidates’ responses, and create opportunities for the display of knowledge or alignment” (p. 3).

Furthermore,

“there is considerable variation in the forms and strategies of questions across different genres and interactional contexts, with interview data demonstrating how question design is adapted to institutional goals and the expected roles of participants” (Usami, 2015, p. 8).

Otake’s (2015) study highlighted the significant role of “why/how is it” question constructions in both Japanese and English, which were not merely used to seek reasons or methods, but also served as discursive strategies to raise issues that were already “presupposed” as shared conditions by the speaker and the interlocutor. This structure could also create a challenging impression, demand explanations, or invite deeper elaboration—highly relevant for institutional job interview practices that required argumentation, clarification of reasons, and reinforcement of opinions (Otake, 2015).

Methodologically, Conversation Analysis (CA) viewed questions as an integral part of the organization of turn-taking and adjacency pairs that constituted the sequence of institutional interaction (Heritage, 2012; Gavioli, 2014). CA paid particular attention to “action formation” and “territories of knowledge,” referring to who possessed the right, authority, and knowledge to ask or answer questions (Heritage, 2012). In interviews mediated by interpreters, the organization of questions and responses became more complex due to meaning negotiation and triadic coherence (Gavioli, 2014). Lester and O’Reilly (2019) emphasized:

“The study of institutional talk, such as job interviews, requires close attention to the sequential organization of questioning and responding. Conversation Analysis provides a framework for uncovering how questions function not simply as requests for information, but as actions that structure the interaction, manage the allocation of turns, and enact institutional agendas” (p. 19).

Furthermore, they added:

“Microanalysis of institutional questioning reveals the embedded power asymmetries and the ways in which interviewers employ particular formats or question types to achieve specific institutional outcomes” (Lester & O’Reilly, 2019, p. 33).

However, previous studies mostly focused on partial aspects—such as interviewer strategies or candidate perceptions—and had not systematically or comprehensively classified all types of questions (質問文) used in Japanese job interviews based on authentic data, whether in terms of linguistic form, structure, particles, or interactional functions (Tsuchiya, 2019; Sato & Matsumoto, 2021; Nakamura, 2022; Suzuki, 2023; Yamada & Shibata, 2024; Oshika, 1990; Otake, 2015). On the other hand, studies that were truly based on the CA framework and thoroughly examined the dynamics of question–answer sequences, the distribution of turns, and the strategic roles of questions in building power relations, maintaining politeness, and negotiating meaning among participants remained limited, especially in the multilingual context of Indonesia, which often involved interpreter mediation.

Thus, this study offered an original contribution by providing a comprehensive

classification and analysis of the question patterns used by interviewers in Japanese-language job interviews, with an emphasis on the integration of linguistic forms, interactional functions, and the dynamics of multilingual communication in Indonesia. This study was expected to enrich research on interrogative constructions (*gimonbun kenkyū*), the teaching of professional Japanese (*senmon nihongo kyōiku*), and cross-cultural job interview training practices.

2. Method

This research was conducted at an official Training Institution (Lembaga Pelatihan Kerja/LPK) in Makassar, South Sulawesi, which has been operating since 2019 and was registered as a Sending Organizer (SO) since 2023. The LPK provided intensive training in Japanese language and workplace culture for prospective Indonesian migrant workers, particularly in the hotel, carpentry, and agricultural sectors. The researcher gained full access to the interview process through institutional support and professional networks with the LPK.

The research subjects consisted of 33 candidates (23 males and 10 females) aged 18–29 years, originating from various regions in South Sulawesi as well as several participants from Brebes, Central Java. All candidates had undergone Japanese language training for two to six months. The interviewer was a senior executive of Japanese nationality who did not speak Indonesian; therefore, all interactions were conducted in Japanese with the assistance of a professional interpreter. This triadic arrangement among the interviewer, interpreter, and candidates was highly relevant for exploring question patterns in the context of institutional interaction in Japanese.

Primary data were collected through video recordings of group job interview sessions, involving a native Japanese interviewer, an interpreter, and five to ten candidates per session. The interviews were conducted in a designated room, with the camera placed in a corner to minimize disturbances and protect participants' privacy. Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained verbal consent from the LPK, the interviewer, and all candidates; full audio recording was permitted for the interviewer, while visual recordings of the candidates were taken from a distance without explicitly capturing their faces. Participants' identities were kept confidential, and all data were used solely for research purposes.

The interviews were conducted institutionally, with the interviewer calling candidates by their identification numbers. The topics addressed included self-introduction, family background, experiences in learning Japanese, and motivations for joining the internship program. The total duration of the recorded data was 1 hour, 4 minutes, and 37 seconds, which was then transcribed verbatim for analysis. All utterances were sequentially numbered to facilitate the process of sequential analysis.

Data analysis was carried out using the Conversation Analysis (CA) approach to identify the question patterns used by the interviewer, the organization of turn-taking, and the role of the interpreter in managing both triadic and group interactions. The transcripts were analyzed to classify the types of questions that appeared—such as yes/no questions, wh-questions, alternative questions, probing/clarification, confirmation/tag questions, and motivational as well as psychological questions—by referring to the theory of Japanese linguistic interrogatives and CA (Lin, 2015; Kinsui, 2012; Heritage & Clayman, 2010).

The analysis was conducted sequentially by examining adjacency pairs, clarification and repair mechanisms, as well as the interviewer's strategies in organizing the flow of questions and candidates' responses. This study also observed the selection of sentence-final particles (*ka*, *no*, *ne*, *na*), the choice of question words (*gimonshi*), and the interpreter's contribution in bridging meaning and renegotiating messages. Each segment of interaction was coded according to the category of question patterns, allowing the distribution and function of

each type of question to be mapped within the structure of job interviews mediated by an interpreter.

The use of video recordings enabled the researcher to repeatedly observe key moments such as turn-taking, pauses, overlaps, and nonverbal elements (gaze, gestures) that also influenced the dynamics of institutional communication (Wadensjö, 1998; Baraldi & Gavioli, 2012).

3. Result

Based on the analysis of 167 explicit questions posed by native Japanese interviewers (NSJ) during group 面接 (mensetsu) sessions at the Training Institution (LPK) in Makassar, the patterns of 疑問文 (*gimonbun*/questions) that emerged could be classified into seven main categories: yes/no questions (はい/いいえ疑問文), wh-questions (疑問詞疑問文), alternative questions (選択疑問文), clarification/probing questions (明確化・追求疑問文), confirmation/tag questions (確認・付加疑問文), motivational/reason questions (動機・理由疑問文), and emotional/psychological/social questions (感情・心理・社会的疑問文). The distribution details for each category are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Interviewer Question Patterns

No	カテゴリー (Category of Question)	例 (Example Question)	頻度 (Frequency)	割合 (%)
1	はい/いいえ疑問文 (Yes/No Questions)	家族は日本に行くことを賛成してありますか? (Kazoku wa Nihon ni iku koto o sansei shitemasu ka?)	51	30,5
2	疑問詞疑問文 (Wh-Questions)	なんで大工になりたい? (Nande daiku ni naritai?) 何で切るの? (Nani de kiru no?)	38	22,8
3	選択疑問文 (Alternative Questions)	1 個? 2 個? (Ikko? Nikko?)	8	4,8
4	明確化・追求疑問文 (Clarification/Probing)	え? (E?) 何? (Nani?)	22	13,2
5	確認・付加疑問文 (Confirmation/Tag Questions)	大丈夫? (Daijoubu?) 本当か? (Hontouka?)	19	11,4
6	動機・理由疑問文 (Motivational/Reason Questions)	なんで日本に雇用と思った? (Nande Nihon ni koyou to omotta?)	17	10,2
7	感情・心理・社会的疑問文 (Emotional/Psychological/Social)	家族は大丈夫? (Kazoku wa daijoubu?) 寂しいね。 (Sabishii ne.)	12	7,1
	合計		167	100

This classification revealed that はい/いいえ疑問文 (yes/no questions) were the most frequently used type of question by interviewers (30.5%). This pattern indicated the interviewers' strong need to verify administrative facts, such as confirming family approval for working in Japan, readiness of documents, and the candidates' personal conditions. The main function of this category was to avoid ambiguity and to expedite the confirmation of basic

information, thereby ensuring the efficiency of the interview process.

Furthermore, 疑問詞疑問文 (wh-questions) appeared as the second most common category (22.8%). Questions such as “なんで大工になりたい?” (*Nande daiku ni naritai?* / Why do you want to become a carpenter?) or “何で切るの?” (*Nani de kiru no?* / What do you use to cut it?) aimed to explore the candidates’ motivations, reasons, and personal experiences. This type of question demonstrated the interviewer’s effort to delve into the background, thoughts, and reflective abilities of the participants. These findings underscored the role of wh-questions as instruments for eliciting deeper and more personalized information.

The category of 明確化・追求疑問文 (clarification/probing questions), which accounted for 13.2%, demonstrated how interviewers actively adapted their communication strategies when encountering ambiguous, unclear, or incomplete responses. Brief questions such as 「え?」 (*e?*) and 「何?」 (*nani?*) were often used to prompt candidates to clarify or correct their answers. This strategy also constituted a form of repair within the framework of Conversation Analysis (CA), indicating real-time negotiation of meaning and the maintenance of interactional flow.

Interviewers also frequently used 確認・付加疑問文 (confirmation/tag questions), such as 「大丈夫?」 (*daijoubu?* / Are you okay?) and 「本当か?」 (*hontouka?* / Is that true?), accounting for 11.4% of the questions. The function of these tag questions was to ensure shared understanding, validate the candidates’ responses, and maintain face-saving for the candidates so that they did not feel cornered when required to provide additional explanations.

In the category of 動機・理由疑問文 (motivational/reason questions) (10.2%), questions focused on probing the candidates’ deeper motivations, such as their reasons for joining the internship program, future aspirations, and readiness to face the challenges of working abroad. This indicated that Japanese job interviews were not merely administrative formalities but were also rich in the assessment of the candidates’ affective and cognitive aspects.

The category of 選択疑問文 (alternative questions) (4.8%) was used when interviewers wished to provide options or narrow the scope of the candidates’ responses to be more specific, such as with the question 「1個? 2個?」 (*Ikko? Nikko?* / One? Two?). This strategy made it easier for the interviewer to steer the topic and adjust expectations for the responses.

Lastly, 感情・心理・社会的疑問文 (emotional/psychological/social questions) (7.1%), although smaller in percentage, were highly important for assessing the candidates’ mental preparedness, emotional adaptation, and social resilience such as their readiness to leave their families or cope with loneliness in a new country.

Overall, these data indicated that native Japanese interviewers were highly adaptive and flexible in utilizing various types of 質問文 (*shitsumonbun*), whether for informational purposes, clarification, or psychological and social exploration. The combination of these seven categories of questions reflected a complex and multilayered communication pattern, capable of meeting both institutional demands and individual needs in multilingual and multicultural 面接 (*mensetsu*) situations.

These results also revealed the existence of specific interactional strategies in triadic communication (interviewer–interpreter–candidate), in which the interviewer not only utilized the strengths of Japanese linguistic structures (particles, *gimonshi*), but also needed to be responsive to the dynamics of participants’ responses and the presence of the interpreter as a mediator of meaning. The distribution patterns identified above reflected the uniqueness of Japanese-language job interview practices in Indonesia and opened up new avenues of research on cross-cultural communication strategies in institutional contexts.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study affirmed that the question patterns (質問文/*gimonbun*) used by native Japanese interviewers in job interviews (面接/*mensetsu*) at the Training Institution (LPK) in Makassar represented a combination of Japanese institutional communication strategies and pragmatic adaptation to the multilingual context in Indonesia. The predominance of はい/いいえ疑問文 (yes/no questions) and 疑問詞疑問文 (wh-questions) indicated the interviewers' priority on two main objectives: the verification of administrative facts and in-depth exploration of candidates' motivation and readiness. These findings were consistent with the theory of Japanese linguistic interrogatives (Kinsui, 2012; Lin, 2015), which posited that these two types of questions form the foundation of effective communication in formal situations such as employment recruitment.

The repeated use of はい/いいえ疑問文 (yes/no questions) demonstrated a tendency to ensure clarity of responses and manage the potential risk of misinterpretation. This was particularly crucial in multilingual interactions involving an interpreter (通訳/*tsūyaku*), where shifts in meaning and loss of nuance could occur during the translation process (Wadensjö, 1998). In addition to serving as a tool for verification, this form of question also functioned to mitigate risk, reinforce the interviewer's control over the flow of interaction, and clarify institutional expectations to the candidates.

Meanwhile, 疑問詞疑問文 (wh-questions) were used not only to probe candidates' reasons and motivations but also to assess their reflective capacities and initiative. Interviewers tended to pose open-ended questions such as 「なぜ日本で働きたいですか？」 (*naze Nihon de hatarakitai desu ka?* / Why do you want to work in Japan?), which allowed candidates to construct their own personal narratives. This strategy was in line with the findings of Sato & Matsumoto (2021), which demonstrated that wh-questions serve as a primary instrument for evaluating candidates' communication skills and cognitive flexibility in institutional interaction settings.

Interestingly, the significant proportion of 明確化・追求疑問文 (clarification/probing questions) and 確認・付加疑問文 (confirmation/tag questions) indicated the interviewer's adaptive response to candidates' limited Japanese language proficiency and the potential ambiguity of their answers. The use of clarification questions such as 「え？」 (*e?*) or 「何？」 (*nani?*) functioned as triggers for repair and represented proactive efforts to maintain smooth communication (Heritage & Clayman, 2010; Suzuki, 2023). Similarly, tag questions such as 「大丈夫？」 (*daijoubu?* / Are you okay?) or 「本当か？」 (*hontouka?* / Is that true?) served as tools for confirmation, face-saving reinforcement, and mitigation of institutional tension—a practice also identified by Suzuki (2023) in studies of recruitment in Japanese companies.

The categories of 動機・理由疑問文 (motivational/reason questions) and 感情・心理・社会的疑問文 (emotional/psychological/social questions) demonstrated that Japanese job interviews were not solely oriented toward technical abilities, but also emphasized candidates' mental preparedness, social adaptability, and human values. Interviewers actively asked about readiness to face challenges, separation from family, and participants' long-term orientations. This approach was consistent with the findings of Nakamura (2022) as well as Yamada & Shibata (2024), who stressed the importance of integrating humanistic values and rapport-building strategies in the multilingual recruitment process.

Furthermore, the role of the interpreter in triadic interactions was not limited to translating messages, but also involved mediating meaning and facilitating renegotiation

(Wadensjö, 1998; Gavioli, 2014). The presence of the interpreter often led interviewers to repeat, simplify, or adjust their questions to ensure that the candidates' responses aligned with institutional objectives. Such triadic interactions enriched CA analysis by revealing mechanisms of repair, turn-taking, and the adaptation of questioning strategies within a more complex and dynamic context.

Compared to previous studies, this research offered a comprehensive classification of question patterns in Japanese job interviews, based on empirical data from Indonesia a dimension that had not been extensively explored in the international literature. In addition to identifying the frequency distribution and variety of question functions, this study also demonstrated the relationship between questioning strategies, interviewer adaptation, and the factors of linguistic and cultural mediation. Thus, the results of this research not only strengthened the theories of interrogatives and Conversation Analysis, but also broadened the practical horizon for professional communication training, interview simulations, and the design of LPK training programs that are more responsive to cross-cultural communication needs.

This research also had broad implications for education and human resource training in the Japan–Indonesia employment sector. The detailed mapping of question categories (質問文 / gimonbun) could serve as a reference for LPK trainers, Japanese language instructors, and HRD staff in Japanese companies to better understand the real dynamics of job interview interactions and to design training scenarios and assessments based on authentic practices. The findings of this study encouraged the integration of multilingual institutional communication training into the curriculum, so that graduates would be better prepared to face the complexities of professional interactions in the era of globalization.

Finally, although this study strived to provide a comprehensive classification, there remained ample room for future research particularly to expand the data to include other regions, sectors, or models of interaction, as well as to conduct comparative analyses of candidates' responses and experiences in facing the questioning strategies of both native and non-native Japanese interviewers.

5. Conclusion

This study successfully identified and classified the question patterns (質問文 / gimonbun) used by native Japanese interviewers (面接官 / mensetsukan) during Japanese-language job interview (面接 / mensetsu) sessions in the institutional context of Indonesia. Through the application of Conversation Analysis (会話分析 / CA) and the theory of interrogatives in Japanese linguistics, it was revealed that interviewers actively combined seven main types of questions—namely, はい/いいえ疑問文 (yes/no questions), 疑問詞疑問文 (wh-questions), 選択疑問文 (alternative questions), 明確化・追求疑問文 (clarification/probing questions), 確認・付加疑問文 (confirmation/tag questions), 動機・理由疑問文 (motivational/reason questions), and 感情・心理・社会的疑問文 (emotional/psychological/social questions) with varied distributions according to the needs of the interaction.

The results of the study showed that はい/いいえ疑問文 (yes/no questions) and 疑問詞疑問文 (wh-questions) were the most dominant types of questions. This pattern indicated the interviewers' tendency to balance the need for factual data verification with a deeper exploration of candidates' motivation and background. In addition, the use of 明確化・追求疑問文 (clarification/probing questions) and 確認・付加疑問文 (confirmation/tag questions)

demonstrated an adaptation of communication strategies to the candidates' language limitations and the dynamics of triadic interaction involving an interpreter (通訳 / tsūyaku). Interviewers not only focused on administrative and informational aspects, but also highlighted humanistic, motivational, and socio-psychological dimensions, as reflected in the 動機・理由疑問文 (motivational/reason questions) and 感情・心理・社会的疑問文 (emotional/psychological/social questions) categories.

The original contribution of this study lay in its comprehensive classification based on authentic data from multilingual job interview interactions in Indonesia—a dimension that had not been widely explored in previous research as well as in the full application of Conversation Analysis (会話分析 / CA) to examine the dynamics of questioning and answering, meaning negotiation, and turn-taking management in Japanese institutional workplaces. These findings may serve as a new reference for the development of interrogative studies (疑問文研究 / gimonbun kenkyū), the enhancement of professional Japanese communication education (専門日本語教育 / senmon nihongo kyōiku), and the formulation of training and cross-cultural recruitment strategies in the global era.

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