



## Linguistic Anomalies in Japanese: Forms, Causes, Their Grammatical, Semantic, and Cultural Dimensions

Tatang Hariri <sup>a, 1, \*</sup>, Takashi Hiraoka <sup>b, 2</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

<sup>b</sup> Gakkou Houjin Shizuoka Nihongo Kyouiku Sentaa, Shizuoka, Japan

<sup>1</sup> hariri39@ugm.ac.id; <sup>2</sup> hiraokatra@gmail.com

\* Correspondent author

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates anomalous sentences (*ijoubun*) in the Japanese language by examining their forms and underlying causes from grammatical, semantic, and sociocultural perspectives. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected from linguistic references and analyzed based on syntactic structure, semantic acceptability, and cultural appropriateness. The findings reveal three main categories of anomalies. First, grammatical anomalies, which arise from violations of structural rules, particularly incorrect particle usage (e.g., the misuse of *o* instead of *to* in *kekkon suru*) and inappropriate application of aspectual forms to stative verbs such as *sobieru*, *aru*, and *iru*. Second, honorific anomalies, caused by improper mixing of speech levels, especially between *kenjougo* and *keigo*, resulting in expressions that are structurally possible but pragmatically unacceptable. Third, sociocultural anomalies, where sentences are grammatically correct yet perceived as unnatural due to violations of Japanese cultural norms, including *uchi-soto* distinctions in greetings and contextual mismatches such as *shitsugen* in public discourse. These findings demonstrate that anomaly in Japanese cannot be explained solely by grammatical correctness, but must also consider semantic harmony and cultural context. The study contributes to Japanese linguistics by providing a clearer classification of anomalous sentences and by establishing a conceptual distinction between grammaticality, naturalness, and acceptability. This integrated framework offers practical implications for language teaching, particularly in helping learners understand the limits of “natural” Japanese usage beyond formal grammar rules.

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## Introduction

In Japanese, it is not uncommon to encounter sentences that are grammatically correct yet still perceived as unacceptable or unnatural by native speakers. This distinction reflects the difference between grammaticality and acceptability: grammaticality concerns conformity to syntactic rules, while acceptability relates to how natural or contextually appropriate an utterance sounds in communication. A sentence may therefore satisfy syntactic requirements but still appear odd because of semantic or sociocultural factors. This phenomenon is closely related to anomalous sentences. Dardjowidjojo (2014) explains that a sentence becomes anomalous when it fails to achieve semantic harmony. For example, sentence (1) Tutiek will marry Achmad next week is considered semantically unacceptable because the verb marry requires the semantic feature [+male actor], which is violated. Another example is sentence (2) Our green horse smoked a dozen oranges. This sentence is anomalous because several semantic

expectations are violated simultaneously: horses are not naturally green, horses do not smoke, and oranges cannot function as the object of smoke. Although both examples are syntactically well formed, their anomaly arises from semantic incompatibility. However, sentence (1) appears less strange than sentence (2) because the participants in marry still partially satisfy the semantic requirements of the predicate.

Dardjowidjojo (2014) further explains that the unacceptability of sentence (1) is also influenced by cultural considerations. In Indonesian culture, the expression of a woman marrying a man is traditionally considered less acceptable. This supports his definition of language as “an arbitrary system of spoken symbols used by a language community to communicate and interact among themselves, based on the culture they share.” Similar phenomena can also be found in Japanese, where sentences may be grammatically correct yet still sound anomalous because of semantic or sociocultural factors. This tendency is particularly visible in relational expressions such as *kekkon suru* (“to marry”), in which participant roles and sentence formulation influence perceived naturalness. One example can be found in Japanese marriage expressions, where sentence structure and meaning influence how natural an utterance is perceived by native speakers, as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Reciprocal Marriage Construction in Japanese

No	Sentence Structure			Translate
	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Predicate</i>	<i>Object</i>	
(3)	<u>Tarou wa</u> [1]	<u>Hanako to</u> [2]	<u>kekkon suru.</u> [3]	“Tarou menikah dengan Hanako”
	<u>Tarou</u>	<u>dengan Hanako</u>	<u>menikah.</u>	

This sentence is grammatically correct, semantically appropriate, and culturally acceptable because it follows the canonical argument structure of *kekkon suru*, using the particle *to* to mark a reciprocal relationship between the participants. As a result, the sentence sounds neutral and natural in Japanese. However, when the syntactic arrangement is modified through changes in particle usage or topicalization, the level of acceptability may change. Although the basic meaning remains understandable, the structural shift affects how native speakers perceive naturalness and contextual appropriateness. This shows that even small surface-level changes in Japanese sentence structure can influence pragmatic interpretation and acceptability, as illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Structural Variations of Japanese Marriage Expressions

No	Sentence Structure			Translate
(4)	<u>Hanako wa</u> [1]	<u>Tarou to</u> [2]	<u>kekkon suru.</u> [3]	Tarou menikah dengan Hanako.
	<u>Hanako</u>	<u>dengan Tarou</u>	<u>menikah.</u>	
(5)	<u>Tarou wa</u> [1]	<u>Hanako o</u> [2]	<u>kekkon suru.</u> [3]	Tarou menikahi Hanako.
	<u>Tarou</u>	<u>Hanako</u>	<u>menikah.</u>	
(6)	<u>Hanako wa</u> [1]	<u>Tarou o</u> [2]	<u>kekkon suru.</u> [3]	Hanako menikahi Tarou.
	<u>Hanako</u>	<u>Tarou</u>	<u>menikah.</u>	

Sentence (4) is grammatically acceptable but sounds less natural because Japanese expressions often reflect sociocultural preferences, including the tendency to prioritize male referents in certain constructions. This shows that acceptability in Japanese depends not only on syntactic correctness but also on pragmatic and cultural conventions. In contrast, sentences (5) and (6) are considered unacceptable because they violate grammatical and semantic constraints, particularly through inappropriate particle usage that disrupts the argument structure of the verb *kekkon suru*. These examples demonstrate that anomaly in Japanese ranges from slight pragmatic unnaturalness to clear structural violations affecting meaning, with stronger semantic deviations producing higher levels of unacceptability, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Semantic Anomaly in Japanese Predicate Selection

No	Sentence Structure			Translate
(7)	<u>Waga midori no uma</u> [1]	<u>wa ichidaasu no mikan o</u> [2]	<u>sutta.</u> [3]	‘Kuda hijau kami merokok selusin jeruk’
	<u>Kuda hijau kami</u>	<u>selusin jeruk</u>	<u>merokok.</u>	

Although structurally complete, this sentence is semantically anomalous because it violates basic selectional restrictions and real-world knowledge. These examples demonstrate that sentence acceptability in Japanese cannot be determined solely by grammatical correctness. Instead, acceptability emerges from the interaction of multiple dimensions, including syntactic structure, semantic compatibility, and sociocultural appropriateness. This distinction between grammaticality and acceptability has also been discussed in pragmatic and interactional studies, which argue that acceptable utterances are shaped not only by syntactic well-formedness but also by discourse expectations and interactional context. In Japanese linguistics, sentence interpretation is strongly influenced by pragmatic alignment and sociocultural conventions in communication (Hayashi, 2010; Kaneyasu, 2020).

This distinction between grammaticality and acceptability has also been widely discussed in linguistic theory. Acceptability judgments are often gradient rather than absolute, since speakers may reject structurally grammatical sentences due to semantic implausibility, contextual mismatch, or pragmatic awkwardness (Sorace & Keller, 2005). From this perspective, sentence evaluation involves not only formal syntactic well-formedness, but also cognitive and discourse-based considerations. The phenomenon described above is commonly referred to as anomaly (anomalous sentences). According to Dardjowidjojo (2014), a sentence is considered anomalous when it fails to achieve semantic harmony, even if it is syntactically well-formed. He further illustrates that anomaly may arise not only from semantic incompatibility but also from cultural constraints embedded within a speech community. This perspective supports the broader view that language is inseparable from cultural context, as also emphasized by Sakakura (1987), who argues that Japanese linguistic structures are closely tied to the social norms of their speakers. Experimental studies on linguistic acceptability further demonstrate that acceptability judgments are often continuous rather than binary. Speakers may perceive certain constructions as marginally acceptable despite grammatical well-formedness, indicating that sentence evaluation involves gradient cognitive processing rather than strict categorical distinction (Sprouse, 2007).

In Japanese linguistics, sociocultural appropriateness is closely connected to the concept of discernment (*wakimae*), in which speakers are expected to select linguistic forms according to social relationships and contextual expectations (Ide, 1989). Consequently, linguistic expressions that are grammatically correct may still be perceived as inappropriate if they violate sociocultural norms of interaction. Studies on Japanese politeness and honorific systems further demonstrate that linguistic appropriateness in Japanese is deeply connected to social hierarchy, interpersonal relations, and culturally constructed notions of interactional harmony (Koyama, 2004). From this standpoint, anomaly should not be understood merely as a deviation from grammatical rules, but as a broader phenomenon involving the mismatch between linguistic form and meaning, as well as between language use and cultural expectations. This raises an important question: are anomalous sentences in Japanese primarily the result of grammatical violations, semantic inconsistencies, or sociocultural mismatches?

Studies on Japanese pragmatics further demonstrate that politeness and acceptability are highly context-dependent. Matsumoto (1988) argues that Japanese interaction emphasizes social positioning and relational awareness rather than individual face preservation alone. Therefore, expressions that ignore expected social alignment may be perceived as pragmatically anomalous despite being grammatically acceptable. Previous studies have addressed anomalous sentences from limited perspectives, particularly within error analysis (*goyou bunseki*), where they are largely treated as learner errors shaped by first-language interference and developmental processes, rather than as a linguistic phenomenon in their own right (Ichikawa, n.d.; Miyaji & Mizutani, 1989). Recent pragmatic research also suggests that linguistic forms in Japanese cannot be separated from interactional functions, since speakers continuously negotiate meaning, stance, and acceptability within conversation. This indicates that anomaly should be examined not only structurally, but also interactionally (Arita, 2021; Ono & Suzuki, 2018). On the other hand, Wijana (1996) approaches anomalous sentences from a pragmatic perspective, arguing that such sentences may still convey meaning when interpreted within appropriate lingual and extralingual contexts. In this view, anomaly does not necessarily imply meaninglessness, but rather reflects the complexity of language use in real communicative situations. Japanese discourse studies also emphasize that meaning construction in Japanese is highly dependent on speaker stance, interactional positioning, and contextual interpretation rather than sentence structure alone (Maynard, 1994).

Despite the growing body of research on anomalous sentences in Japanese, existing studies tend to approach the phenomenon from partial and fragmented perspectives. Research in error analysis (*goyou bunseki*) primarily treats anomalous forms as learner errors, focusing on factors such as interlanguage development and first-language interference, rather than examining anomaly as an inherent linguistic phenomenon. On the other hand, pragmatic approaches emphasize contextual interpretation, often overlooking the role of grammatical and semantic constraints in shaping sentence acceptability. As a result,

there remains a lack of a systematic framework that integrates grammatical structure, semantic compatibility, and sociocultural appropriateness in the analysis of anomalous sentences.

Previous research in Japanese linguistics has extensively discussed grammatical competence, discourse politeness, and pragmatic interpretation. However, these studies are often conducted separately, resulting in limited discussion regarding how grammaticality, semantic coherence, and sociocultural appropriateness interact simultaneously in determining sentence acceptability (Okamoto, 1999). Moreover, previous studies have not clearly distinguished between the related but fundamentally different concepts of grammaticality, naturalness, and acceptability in Japanese. This lack of conceptual clarity leads to an oversimplification of anomaly, reducing it either to formal grammatical deviation or to contextual inappropriateness. Consequently, the multidimensional nature of anomaly (where structurally correct sentences may still be unacceptable, and grammatically deviant forms may carry interpretable meaning) has not been adequately addressed. From a pragmatic perspective, an utterance may be grammatically possible while still becoming interactionally inappropriate or socially marked depending on context, participant relations, and discourse expectations (Cook, 2011; Koyama, 2004).

This study addresses previous research gaps by proposing a multidimensional framework for analyzing anomalous sentences in Japanese across grammatical, semantic, and sociocultural dimensions. Unlike earlier studies that viewed anomaly merely as error or pragmatic deviation, this research positions anomaly as a distinct linguistic category resulting from the interaction between linguistic structure, meaning, and cultural norms. The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach, which explains how grammatical correctness, semantic coherence, and sociocultural appropriateness dynamically shape sentence acceptability. Accordingly, this study aims to: (1) identify and classify the forms of anomalous sentences (*ijoubun*) in Japanese, and (2) analyze the factors causing them, including grammatical violations, semantic incompatibility, and sociocultural constraints. By addressing these objectives, this study aims to provide a clearer conceptual distinction between grammatical sentences, natural expressions, and acceptable utterances, as discussed in Kess & Nishimitsu (1989) and further elaborated in Japanese linguistic studies (Iori, 2001; Katou et al., 1991).

## Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate the forms and underlying causes of anomalous sentences (anomalous sentences) in the Japanese language. This approach is appropriate because the research focuses on interpreting linguistic phenomena (particularly grammatical, semantic, and sociocultural aspects) that cannot be adequately measured using quantitative methods. Qualitative descriptive research is particularly suitable for linguistic studies that aim to interpret meaning, contextual usage, and sociocultural dimensions of language phenomena rather than statistical relationships. In linguistic research, this approach enables researchers to examine how grammatical structure, semantic interpretation, and pragmatic context interact within naturally occurring language data (Sandelowski, 2000).

### Data Source and Selection

The data in this study consist of Japanese sentences identified as anomalous (*ijoubun*). Data were collected through document analysis and literature review from various sources, including Japanese linguistic textbooks, grammar references, and relevant academic studies, such as Kabashima & Sakakura (1987) and Katou et al. (1991), which discuss standard Japanese structures and usage. The selection process followed several criteria to maintain consistency and relevance. First, the sentences had to represent authentic Japanese linguistic structures rather than mere translations. Second, they needed to show potential anomalies at grammatical, semantic, or sociocultural levels. Third, the sentences had to be analyzable within established Japanese linguistic frameworks. Finally, the selected data needed to align with the research objective of identifying and explaining anomalous constructions. Based on these criteria, the collected data were reduced, selected, and grouped into representative examples reflecting different types of anomalies.

### Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis employed a descriptive-analytical technique through several systematic stages. First, all collected sentences were identified and labeled as potential anomalous or non-anomalous forms based on initial observation. Second, the sentences were classified according to the type of anomaly observed, such as grammatical deviation, semantic incompatibility, or sociocultural mismatch. Third, each sentence was analyzed in detail using three dimensions adapted from Teramura (1987): grammatical structure, including sentence patterns, particle usage, and morphology; semantic acceptability, focusing on meaning compatibility and selectional restrictions; and sociocultural appropriateness, examining whether the expressions aligned with Japanese norms, honorific usage, and contextual appropriateness. Afterward, each

anomalous sentence was interpreted to determine whether the anomaly originated from grammatical, semantic, or cultural-contextual factors. Finally, the results were categorized and compared to distinguish between grammatical and ungrammatical sentences, acceptable and unacceptable sentences, as well as natural and unnatural expressions, while also clarifying the boundaries between anomalous (*ijoubun*) and non-anomalous (*hijoubun*) forms.

### Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity of the analysis, the findings were cross-checked against established linguistic theories and supported by relevant academic references. In addition, expert validation was conducted through consultation with a native Japanese speaker, as acknowledged in the acknowledgment section. This step was intended to minimize subjectivity and to ensure that the interpretation of acceptability reflects actual language use.

## Results and Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that anomalous sentences in Japanese (*ijoubun*) cannot be explained solely through grammatical violations, but rather emerge from the interaction between syntactic structure, semantic compatibility, and sociocultural norms. This multidimensional view is consistent with recent approaches in Japanese linguistics and pragmatics, which emphasize that sentence acceptability is shaped not only by formal structure but also by discourse context and social meaning (Matsumoto, 1988; Tsujimura, 2014). The analysis below demonstrates how these dimensions collectively determine whether a sentence is considered acceptable, natural, or anomalous. Recent pragmatic studies further suggest that sentence acceptability is jointly constructed through interactional interpretation and contextual inference rather than determined solely by syntactic well-formedness (Haugh, 2007).

If we revisit sentences (3), (4), (5), (6), and (7) presented in the introduction, a clear distinction can be observed between grammatical correctness and cultural naturalness. Sentence (3), *Tarou wa Hanako to kekkon suru*, is fully acceptable because it satisfies both syntactic and semantic requirements, particularly in terms of appropriate particle usage (*wa* and *to*) and the argument structure of the verb *kekkon suru*. In contrast, sentence (4), *Hanako wa Tarou to kekkon suru*, remains grammatically correct but appears less natural in Japanese discourse. This phenomenon reflects sociocultural conventions in which ordering patterns are influenced by implicit norms, such as gender hierarchy in conventional expressions. Such preferences demonstrate that linguistic acceptability is gradient rather than absolute, aligning with pragmatic theories that highlight the role of discourse conventions and shared expectations in shaping meaning (Huang, 2014; Leech, 1983). This is related to sociocultural conventions in which male referents tend to precede female referents, as seen in common expressions such as *otoko to onna*.

Therefore, sentence (4) is not anomalous in a strict grammatical sense but can be considered pragmatically less natural. This supports the view that acceptability in Japanese is not absolute, but rather gradient and influenced by discourse conventions (Miyajima & Nitta, 1998). Recent discourse-pragmatic research on Japanese conversation also suggests that utterance interpretation is shaped through alignment, affiliation, and shared contextual assumptions between speakers rather than grammatical structure alone (Kaneyasu, 2021). Cross-linguistic studies on Japanese conversation further demonstrate that acceptability is closely related to interactional responsiveness and discourse coordination, particularly through the use of reactive expressions and contextual alignment in conversation (Clancy et al., 1996). A different type of anomaly is observed in sentences (8) and (9), where particle misuse leads to semantic incompatibility can be seen in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Particle Misuse in Japanese Marriage Constructions

No	Sentence Structure			Translate
(8)	<i>Tarou wa</i>	<i>Hanako o</i>	<i>kekkon suru.</i>	<i>Tarou menikahi Hanako</i>
	[1]	[2]	[3]	
(9)	<i>Tarou</i>	<i>Hanako</i>	<i>menikahi.</i>	<i>Hanako menikahi Tarou</i>
	<i>Hanako wa</i>	<i>Tarou o</i>	<i>kekkon suru.</i>	
	[1]	[2]	[3]	
	<i>Hanako</i>	<i>Tarou</i>	<i>menikahi.</i>	

Although these sentences appear structurally correct, they violate the selectional restrictions of the verb *kekkon suru*, which requires the particle *to*. This indicates that syntactic well-formedness alone does not guarantee acceptability. From a broader linguistic perspective, this supports the view that argument structure and predicate–argument relations play a central role in determining sentence validity (Teramura, 1987; Tsujimura, 2014). This reflects a cross-linguistic difference, as Japanese does not encode “marry” as

a transitive verb, but rather as a reciprocal construction requiring the particle *to* (Jamashii, 1998). When these sentences are transformed into causative forms, the anomaly is resolved can be seen in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Causative Forms in Japanese Marriage Constructions

No	Sentence Structure			Translate
(8')	<u>Tarou wa</u>	<u>Hanako o</u>	<u>kekkon saseru.</u>	<i>Tarou mengizinkan/menyuruh Hanako menikah (dengan orang lain)</i>
	[1]	[2]	[3]	
(9')	<u>Tarou</u>	<u>Hanako</u>	<u>mengizinkan / menyuruh menikah.</u>	<i>Hanako mengizinkan/menyuruh Tarou menikah (dengan orang lain)</i>
	<u>Hanako wa</u>	<u>Tarou o</u>	<u>kekkon saseru.</u>	
	[1]	[2]	[3]	
	<u>Hanako</u>	<u>Tarou</u>	<u>mengizinkan / menyuruh menikah.</u>	

In these examples, the morphological marking of the verb plays a crucial role in determining syntactic acceptability. The causative form *saseru* shifts the verb *kekkon suru* into a transitive-like construction, thereby allowing an explicit agentive interpretation that is not available in the basic form. This modification demonstrates that what initially appears as an anomalous structure can become acceptable once the predicate morphology aligns with the required argument structure.

This shift indicates that the source of anomaly is not merely syntactic deviation, but rather a mismatch between verb semantics and its syntactic realization. In other words, the acceptability of a sentence depends on whether the lexical properties of the verb are compatible with the syntactic frame in which it appears. Once this compatibility is restored through morphological adjustment, the argument structure becomes coherent, and the sentence is perceived as acceptable. This observation further highlights the importance of predicate–argument compatibility and lexical constraint systems in Japanese grammar (Teramura, 1987). Further anomalies can be observed in passive constructions can be seen in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Passive Constructions in Japanese Marriage Expressions

No	Sentence Structure			Translate
(10)	<u>Hanako wa</u>	<u>Tarou ni</u>	<u>kekkon sareru.</u>	<i>Hanako dinikahi Tarou</i>
	[1]	[2]	[3]	
(11)	<u>Hanako</u>	<u>oleh Tarou</u>	<u>dinikahi.</u>	<i>Tarou dinikahi Hanako</i>
	<u>Tarou wa</u>	<u>Hanako ni</u>	<u>kekkon sareru.</u>	
	[1]	[2]	[3]	
	<u>Tarou</u>	<u>oleh Hanako</u>	<u>dinikahi.</u>	

Although these constructions are morphologically well-formed within Japanese passive morphology, they are generally judged as unacceptable in actual usage due to a mismatch between grammatical form and conceptual event structure. In other words, while the passive form *-sareru* is productive and syntactically valid, its application to the verb *kekkon suru* results in interpretations that do not align with conventional event representation in Japanese. This indicates that morphological well-formedness does not automatically guarantee semantic plausibility.

This phenomenon suggests that morphological productivity in Japanese is constrained by conceptual and lexical-semantic compatibility. Even when a sentence is structurally correct, it may still be rejected if it violates the expected conceptual mapping between participants and event structure. This supports previous findings that Japanese predicate structure is governed not only by syntactic rules, but also by semantic selectional constraints and lexical licensing conditions (Masuoka & Takubou, 1998; Tsujimura, 2014). When further transformed into causative-passive constructions, the structure becomes even more semantically marked can be seen in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Causative-Passive Forms in Japanese Marriage Expressions

No	Sentence Structure			Translate
(12)	<u>Hanako wa</u>	<u>Tarou ni</u>	<u>kekkon saserareru.</u>	<i>Hanako dipaksa nikah (dengan orang lain) oleh Tarou.</i>
	[1]	[2]	[3]	
(13)	<u>Hanako</u>	<u>oleh Tarou</u>	<u>dipaksa menikah.</u>	<i>Tarou dipaksa nikah (dengan orang lain) oleh Hanako.</i>
	<u>Tarou wa</u>	<u>Hanako ni</u>	<u>kekkon saserareru.</u>	
	[1]	[2]	[3]	
	<u>Tarou</u>	<u>oleh Hanako</u>	<u>dipaksa menikah.</u>	

In this case, the sentences become interpretable only by shifting the underlying meaning from a neutral marriage event to a coercive or externally caused action. This demonstrates that morphological complexity does not guarantee naturalness, and that acceptability is highly sensitive to the interaction

between grammatical form and conceptual interpretation. Thus, anomaly may emerge when grammatical structures extend beyond the limits of conventional event construal in Japanese. A more explicit case of semantic anomaly can be observed in sentence (14), where the violation occurs at the level of world knowledge and lexical compatibility can be seen in Table 8.

**Table 8.** Semantic Anomaly and World Knowledge Violation

No	Sentence Structure			Translate
(14)	<i>Waga midori no uma wa</i> [1] <i>Kuda hijau kami</i>	<i>ichidaasu no mikan o</i> [2] <i>selusin jeruk</i>	<i>sutta.</i> [3] <i>merokok.</i>	<i>Kuda hijau kami merokok selusin jeruk.</i>

This sentence is syntactically well-formed in terms of Japanese structure, yet it is semantically impossible due to violations of selectional restrictions and real-world knowledge constraints. The incompatibility between the subject (*horse*), the object (*oranges*), and the predicate (*smoked*) results in a breakdown of interpretability. Such cases are typically classified as pure semantic anomalies, where grammatical structure remains intact but meaning collapses at the level of conceptual coherence. This aligns with semantic theories that emphasize the role of selectional restrictions and world knowledge in sentence interpretation (Allan, 1986; Huang, 2014). From a lexical-semantic perspective, semantic anomaly emerges when predicate structures violate expected selectional compatibility between lexical items. Such incompatibility disrupts conceptual interpretation despite syntactic completeness (Pustejovsky, 1991). Beyond semantic mismatch, anomalies in Japanese also emerge from sociolinguistic and pragmatic factors, particularly in the use of honorific expressions can be seen in Table 9.

**Table 9.** Honorific Misalignment in Japanese Expressions

No	Sentence Structure		Translate
(15)	<i>Ashita orare</i> [1] <i>Besok</i>	<i>masukaka?</i> [2] <i>apakah ada</i>	<i>'Apakah besok ada?'</i>

This sentence results from mixing humble (*kenjougo*) and honorific (*keigo*) forms inappropriately. Although structurally possible, the mismatch in politeness level leads to sociolinguistic inconsistency. Recent studies on Japanese honorific interaction further demonstrate that the interpretation of honorific expressions depends heavily on social positioning and contextual expectations, meaning that grammatically correct utterances may still generate pragmatic inconsistency when honorific forms are perceived as socially inappropriate (Akagi et al., 2020). Studies on Japanese honorific interaction demonstrate that the selection of honorific and non-honorific forms is strongly influenced by situational relationships and social positioning, meaning that grammatically possible expressions may still be pragmatically inappropriate (Okamoto, 1999). This finding supports sociolinguistic studies of Japanese honorifics, which emphasize that politeness is not merely grammatical but socially constructed and context-dependent (Cook, 2011). Thus, anomaly in this case emerges from a misalignment between linguistic form and social relationship (Izumi, 1999). Recent studies on Japanese irony and honorific usage demonstrate that pragmatic inappropriateness may arise when honorific forms violate socially expected interactional balance, even when the utterance itself remains grammatically correct (Obana & Haugh, 2021). Historical and sociolinguistic studies of Japanese honorifics further indicate that *keigo* functions not only as a grammatical system, but also as a mechanism for indexing social identity, hierarchy, and interpersonal distance within Japanese society (Wetzel, 2004).

Recent research in Japanese sociopragmatics shows that honorific interpretation is strongly mediated by socio-contextual variables such as speaker relationship, social hierarchy, and communicative intention. In many cases, honorific forms cannot be evaluated solely as grammatical markers, because their acceptability depends on whether the form aligns with socially embedded expectations in interaction. Studies on honorific processing further demonstrate that even syntactically correct honorific constructions may yield different pragmatic interpretations depending on contextual cues such as power distance and interpersonal familiarity. This confirms that Japanese honorific usage operates at the intersection of grammar and social cognition, where linguistic form is continuously adjusted according to socio-pragmatic constraints (Sekizawa & Yanaka, 2023). Aspectual constraints further illustrate how anomalies arise from semantic restrictions can be seen in Table 10.

**Table 10.** Aspectual Constraints in Japanese Stative Verbs

No	Sentence Structure	Translate
(16)	<i>Yama ga sobieteiru.</i> [1] [2] <i>gunung menjulang tinggi.</i>	'Gunung menjulang tinggi'
(17)	<i>Yama ga sobieru.</i> [1] [2] <i>gunung akan menjulang tinggi.</i>	'Gunung akan menjulang tinggi'
(18)	<i>Yama ga sobieta.</i> [1] [2] <i>gunung telah menjulang tinggi.</i>	'Gunung menjulang tinggi'

Among the three variations presented in Table 10, only sentence (16) is considered acceptable in Japanese usage. This is because the verb *sobieru* inherently encodes a stative or continuous property, describing a natural characteristic rather than a dynamic event. As a result, it is incompatible with temporal inflections that suggest future or completed action. The application of non-stative tense forms in (17) and (18) therefore produces semantic incongruity, leading to anomalous interpretations.

This observation highlights that aspectual marking in Japanese is tightly constrained by the lexical aspect of the verb. In other words, tense and aspect morphology cannot be freely applied without considering the inherent semantic class of the predicate. This reflects a broader theoretical distinction between stative and dynamic predicates, where grammatical aspect must align with the lexical semantics of the verb to produce acceptable sentences (Masuoka & Takubou, 1998; Tsujimura, 2014). A similar constraint can be observed in existential constructions, where the compatibility between verbs and aspectual marking is also strictly regulated can be seen in Table 11.

**Table 11.** Aspectual Misuse in Japanese Existential Constructions

No	Sentence Structure	Translate
(19)	<i>Niwa ni neko ga iteimasu. (=iru)</i> [1] [2] [3] <i>di halaman kucing ada.</i>	'Di halaman sedang ada kucing'
(20)	<i>Tsukue no ue ni pasokon ga atteimasu. (=aru)</i> [1] [2] [3] <i>di atas meja komputer ada.</i>	'Di atas meja sedang ada komputer'
(21)	<i>Watashi wa ima okane ga itteimasu. (iru)</i> [1] [2] [3] [4] <i>saya sekarang uang memerlukan.</i>	'Saya sekarang sedang memerlukan uang'

The sentences in Table 11 are considered anomalous because they involve the inappropriate application of the aspectual form *-te iru* to verbs that inherently denote states of existence or necessity. Verbs such as *iru* ('to exist' for animate objects), *aru* ('to exist' for inanimate objects), and *iru* ('to need') do not typically express dynamic or progressive actions, and therefore are incompatible with the aspectual marking that implies an ongoing process. As a result, the use of *-te iru* in these cases creates semantic incongruity, even though the morphological formation itself appears grammatically possible. This confirms that aspectual marking in Japanese is semantically constrained, not purely morphological (Tsujimura, 2014). Research on Japanese aspectual systems also indicates that the interpretation of *-te iru* depends on lexical aspect and verb semantics, particularly the distinction between stative and dynamic predicates (Shirai, 2000). To resolve this anomaly, these verbs must be used in their basic form, as shown in Table 12, where the sentences become acceptable by aligning the verb form with its inherent semantic properties.

**Table 12.** Acceptable Existential Constructions in Japanese

No	Sentence Structure	Translate
(22)	<i>Niwa ni neko ga imasu.</i> [1] [2] [3] <i>di halaman kucing ada.</i>	'Di halaman ada kucing'
(23)	<i>Tsukue no ue ni pasokon ga arimasu.</i> [1] [2] [3] <i>di atas meja komputer ada.</i>	'Di atas meja ada komputer'
(24)	<i>Watashi wa ima okane ga irimasu.</i> [1] [2] [3] [4] <i>saya sekarang uang memerlukan.</i>	'Saya sekarang memerlukan uang'

These findings reinforce that Japanese verb usage is governed by both tense and aspectual compatibility. Based on the examples discussed above, and referring to the literature discussed by Ichikawa, it can be tentatively concluded that anomalous sentences in Japanese are not marginal phenomena (Kudou et al., 1995; Nitta et al., 1989). Rather, they can be broadly characterized as follows. These findings reinforce that anomaly in Japanese extends beyond formal grammatical deviation and must be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon. This has important implications for Japanese language pedagogy, particularly in distinguishing between grammatical correctness and pragmatic appropriateness. First, there are sentences that conform to standard grammatical rules but appear culturally unusual without reaching the level of anomaly. Second, some sentences are semantically unacceptable due to violations of constituent compatibility, such as cases where predicate verbs cannot take direct objects marked by the particle *o* or cannot be passivized despite morphological possibility. Third, anomalies may also arise from contextual and cultural factors beyond purely linguistic structure.

Finally, anomalies may arise purely from contextual and cultural factors, as illustrated by the phenomenon of *shitsugen*. In Japanese society, *shitsugen* refers to the act of unintentionally producing inappropriate or socially unacceptable utterances. This highlights that anomaly can occur at the level of discourse pragmatics, where meaning is shaped by context and social expectations (Huang, 2014). According to the Goo Dictionary (n.d.) (<https://dictionary.goo.ne.jp/word/>), *shitsugen* denotes utterances that should not have been said. In psycholinguistic terms, this phenomenon is often associated with what is known as a slip of the tongue or verbal slip. While such utterances may be inconsequential in everyday interaction, they can become highly problematic when produced by public figures, such as politicians or officials, whose speech is subject to public scrutiny, such as politicians or officials, whose speech is subject to public scrutiny. In such cases, *shitsugen* may lead to reputational damage, loss of position, or public criticism.

This indicates that anomaly may also emerge at the level of discourse pragmatics, where an utterance that is grammatically and semantically acceptable becomes problematic due to its misalignment with sociohistorical context. Thus, anomaly in Japanese extends beyond sentence-level analysis and must be interpreted within broader communicative frameworks. More recent approaches in societal pragmatics emphasize that Japanese honorific expressions function not only as grammatical markers of politeness, but also as socially situated actions shaped by hierarchy, familiarity, and communicative intention (Oishi, 2025). Relevance-theoretic approaches further suggest that utterance interpretation depends heavily on contextual inference and cognitive expectations, meaning that formally acceptable sentences may still fail pragmatically when contextual relevance cannot be successfully established (Sperber & Wilson, 1995).

Ogasawara Haruka, in a Huffington Post Japan Article (2019, April 25), documents various instances of *shitsugen* during the Heisei era (1989–2019), highlighting controversial statements by political figures on issues such as gender discrimination and disaster response (Henshūbu, 2019). One notable example is the statement delivered by Prime Minister Mori Yoshiro at an informal political gathering on May 15, 2000, which triggered widespread criticism, declining public support, and ultimately contributed to his resignation. Can be seen in Table 13.

**Table 13.** Sociocultural Anomaly in Political Discourse

No	Sentence Structure	Translate
(25)	[1] <i>Nihon no kuni</i> , [2] <i>masani Tennou o chuushin ni shiteiru</i> [3] <i>kami no kuni de aru</i> [4] <i>to iu koto o</i> [5] <i>kokumin no minasan ni</i> [6] <i>shikkari shouchi shite itadaku</i> . [1] Japan [2] with the Emperor [3] is a God's Country [4] that fact [5] to all Japanese people [6] sincerely hope to be understood well.	'We sincerely hope that the Japanese people will understand that Japan is a God's Country with the Emperor ( <i>Tennou</i> ) at the center.'

From a grammatical and semantic perspective, the utterance is acceptable. However, within its sociopolitical context, it becomes problematic, indicating that acceptability in Japanese cannot be evaluated solely at the sentence level. This supports pragmatic theories emphasizing that meaning is determined not only by linguistic form but also by extralinguistic factors (Wijana, 1996; Allan, 1986; Leech, 1983). Studies in interactional pragmatics further show that Japanese modal expressions often function not merely as grammatical markers, but as interactional resources for negotiating stance, alignment, and interpersonal positioning in conversation (Kaneyasu, 2020). Overall, the analysis demonstrates that anomalous sentences in Japanese can be categorized into several types, including culturally unnatural yet grammatically correct expressions, semantically incompatible constructions, morphologically possible but conceptually invalid forms, and context-dependent anomalies. Consequently, anomaly should not be understood merely as error,

but as an analytical lens for examining how language structure, meaning, and cultural norms interact in actual language use (Huang, 2014; Tsujimura, 2014).

## Conclusion

This study identified and classified anomalous sentences (*ijoubun*) in Japanese into three categories: grammatical, semantic, and sociocultural anomalies. The findings show that anomaly in Japanese cannot be explained solely by grammatical violations, but emerges from the interaction between syntactic structure, semantic compatibility, and sociocultural norms, meaning that sentence acceptability is highly context-dependent. This study contributes to Japanese linguistics by offering an integrated framework that connects grammaticality, semantic coherence, and sociocultural appropriateness, while also providing practical implications for Japanese language teaching by emphasizing that grammatical accuracy alone does not guarantee natural language use. However, because this study relied on selected written data and qualitative interpretation, future research is encouraged to use larger and more diverse datasets, including spoken corpora and real interactions, to further examine how anomalous sentences are perceived and produced in authentic contexts.

## Declarations

- Author contribution** : Tatang Hariri and Takashi Hiraoka were responsible for the conceptualization and implementation of the entire research project. They performed data collection, conducted qualitative analysis, and were jointly responsible for the writing and revision of the manuscript. Both authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.
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