The Use of *Firaa* in “Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture” Textbooks for Beginner (A1) and Elementary (A2) Levels

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**ABSTRACT**

Filler, also known as *Firaa* in Japanese, is a discourse marker which frequently used by Japanese people in daily communication. However, Japanese learners are less likely to employ this discourse marker. This study aims to identify the types of *Firaa* and their functions in the textbook “Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture” for Beginner (A1) and Elementary (A2) levels. The data observed were collected from 217 audios of *chokai* (listening) and videos of *kaiwa* (conversation) as supplements in the Marugoto for Beginner (A1) and Elementary (A2) levels textbooks. The type of *Firaa* and their functions were then categorized using Yamane’s (2002) theory, and a total of 271 *Firaa* appear in conversations has been collected. The findings of this study showed that only six types of vowel sound *Firaa* type from the eight types of Yamane’s theory, namely the ‘Eeto’ *Firaa* type, the ‘Ko-So-A’ *Firaa* type, the ‘Hat’ *Firaa* type, the ‘N’ *Firaa* type, the ‘Maa’ *Firaa* type, and the ‘Saa’ type were found and introduced in the Marugoto textbooks at the beginner and elementary levels (A1 & A2). Moreover, it is found that the *Firaa* introduced to Japanese learners were based on their level of proficiency, so as the level increases, the *Firaa* types introduced in the textbooks also increase. Further, in the beginner level (A1), we found 74 times *Firaa* and five *Firaa* types, while at the elementary level (A2), the *Firaa* are used in much higher frequency. Hence, we can conclude that Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture for Beginner (A1) and Elementary (A2) levels has its’ own the criteria as textbooks which use communicative approach by introducing *Firaa* as one of the Japanese characteristic discourse markers from the beginner level.

**KEYWORDS**

Communicative approach; Discourse marker; Japanese filler; Marugoto Textbooks.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Sending messages from the sender to the recipient is a communication activity involving two or more persons. This communication process is sometimes disrupted, resulting in silence or a delay in speaking. In this case, the process of delay or silence is a pause or information barrier. If during the process of composing sentences in Japanese, there are obstacles, then *Firaa* usually appears in the form of words such as anoo, *Eeto*, and others (Yamane, 2002). According to Schiffrin (1987), *Firaa* is a discourse marker that plays an...
essential role in spoken language. *Firaa* is derived from an English word, filler or filled, which means ‘pause.’

According to Fujita (2001), *Firaa* is a form of discourse marker representing the speaker’s attempt to establish an interpersonal relationship with the interlocutor. In conclusion, discourse markers in Japanese are used as cataphoric markers or anaphoric markers to help the speaker focus on certain utterances that may be important to the interlocutor.

*Firaa* and *aizuchi* are two characteristics of Japanese culture, specifically spoken discourse, in which they are frequently used to improve communication fluency. *Firaa* is a signal marker used by the speaker in a conversation, while *aizuchi* is used by the listener. Yamada stated that the speaker pronounces *Firaa* such as で「(ー)」, *sonoo*「ぞの(ー)」, *anoo*「ぬの(ー)」, and え「えー」 when the speaker cannot find the right word. *Firaa* is also used as a signal to the interlocutor so that the interlocutor can predict what the speaker will say according to the context of the conversation (Watanabe, 2005; Watanabe, Hirose, Den, & Minematsu, 2005). It can be concluded that *Firaa* has a vital role in Japanese, especially in spoken discourse.

Linguists such as Daikuhara were involved in some of the *Firaa* studies. Daikuhara (2010) suggests that his research indicates that *Firaa* contributes to Japanese spoken grammar. As a result, *Firaa* should be introduced in Japanese language courses. Kim (2007) analyzed Japanese fillers as well. Let us look up words like *anoo* “Ano” or *eeto* “Eh” in a dictionary. We will find the term *kuuhaku-hojuugo* 「空白補充語」 with the explanation that the word is used to avoid silence in a conversation. Therefore, *Firaa* has an important communicative function, which Japanese people use to maintain harmony in communication in addition to its primary function as a filler for pauses or silences.

According to Kim (2007), the key to harmonious Japanese cultural values dominates the Japanese lifestyle. It is based on the principle of not getting into trouble with other people, a traditional Japanese behavior pattern. As a result, instead of making the conversation clear or accurate, Japanese people tend to say it in a hazy and indirect manner (avoiding the clarity of verbal intervention).

Park (2019) conducted another study comparing the *Firaa* function of Japanese and Korean people. Park claims the two languages have similar functions, but Japanese people use them more daily than Koreans in intercultural situations. Meanwhile, Lukamto (2012) describes that discourse signs such as *anoo*, *kono*, *sono*, *eeto*, *nanka*, and *maa* are essential for smooth communication, and that discourse signs need to be actively taught to Japanese language learners (Higgins & Ikeda, 2021). However, after examining the actual conditions of how *Anoo*, *Kono*, *Sono*, *Eeto*, *Nanka*, and *Maa* are contained in Japanese textbooks, it turns out their use in textbooks is insufficient. According to Ohta, Kitaoka, and Nakagawa (2014), pauses between sentences filled with filled pauses (*Firaa*) can improve user understanding and increase the naturalness of the spoken dialogue system.

According to Nakajima (2009), *Firaa* has three functions based on location: the first is at the beginning of a speech, the middle position, and the end position of speech, all of which have different functions. The highest usage rate of the 1680 *Firaa* found in natural discourse recordings was 32.7 percent for KO-SO-A *Firaa*s, followed by vowel sounds at 18.3 percent and Nanka filler *Firaa*’s at 7.1 percent. Nakajima collects data from native Japanese speakers in the form of natural conversations.

Januarika (2018) conducted another study on the use of *Firaa* by non-native speakers. The use of *Firaa* by foreign Japanese speakers does not vary as much as it does by native speakers, according to Januarika’s research. Another research by *Firaa* related to Japanese language learners was conducted by Nagai (2017). The conclusion is that Japanese learners from Korea and China often use some *Firaa* unfairly compared to native Japanese speakers, so it is necessary to teach the use of natural *Firaa*.

However, the studies on Japanese *Firaa* used by Japanese language learners are still insufficient. In the fourth semester of the Japanese Language Education study program at the state university in Semarang, we conducted a preliminary study on the students. The result is that students admitted they did not understand the different types of *Firaa* and how they were used in conversation. As for the lack of understanding and use by learners like them, they are only used to using *Firaa*, *anou*, and *eeto*. The lack of understanding of Japanese language learners for this type and function of *Firaa* is a research gap that researchers want to see from the point of view of whether the textbooks that students have used are...
sufficient to illustrate that filler has been introduced or not.

Daikuhara (2010) observes Firaa concerning learning Japanese in Japanese language textbooks. Daikuhara data were drawn from sixteen Japanese textbooks and references ranging from elementary to advanced. It can be concluded that these references still lack an introduction to Japanese fillers.

Therefore, we try to analyze textbooks that use a different approach published by the Japan Foundation in 2013. Marugoto’s textbooks have been used by Japanese Language Education Study Program in a state university in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia since 2018. These textbooks focus on communication skills where the filler is found in live conversations. This study aims to identify the different types and functions of the Japanese language Fillers in Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture textbooks for Beginner Level (A1) and Elementary Levels (A2).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Firaa Types in Marugoto Textbooks

Based on the results of data analysis, 271 Firaa appear in 217 conversations in the video and audio of the Marugoto Japanese Language and Culture textbook. Yamane’s Firaa theory is used to investigate the classification of Firaa types in Nagai (2017). Table 1 shows the data on research findings of the different types of Firaa.

Table 1: Firaa types and variations in Marugoto Beginner (A1) and Basic Level (B1) (A2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firaa type</th>
<th>Variants of Firaa</th>
<th>Video Choukai</th>
<th>Video Kaiwa</th>
<th>Marugoto Beginner Level (A1)</th>
<th>Marugoto Beginner Level (A2)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vowel</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>6.6</td>
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<td>エー</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>エーー</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eto</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>えーっと</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Subtotal</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
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</tr>
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<td>26</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>104</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maa</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mea</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>N</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saa</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As presented in Table 1, the number of Firaa that appear in the Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture textbooks for Beginner Level (A1) was only 74, with variations in the types of Firaa, namely Vowel Sound, Eto, Ko-So-A, N, and Saa. Meanwhile, in the Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture Elementary Level (A2) textbooks, the
number of *Firaar* that appeared was 81 times (Marugoto Japanese Language and Culture Basic 1), and 91 times (Marugoto Japanese Language and Culture Basic 2).

In addition, five different *Firaar* types were discovered in the Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture for Beginner Level (A1) textbooks, namely Eeto, Ko-So-A, N, and Saa vowel sounds. Meanwhile, *Firaar* Hai and Mau are two types of *Firaar* found in the basic level Japanese language and culture Marugoto textbook (A2) but not previously introduced in the beginner level Japanese language and culture Marugoto textbook (A1). The types of *Firaar* in the beginner-level Japanese language and culture Marugoto textbook (A1) and the Elementary level in Marugoto Language and Culture textbook (A2) are divided into the following classifications based on the findings in Table 1.

**Vowel sound type (Boon-gata)**

We found the examples of sentences using *Firaar* boon-gata as follows.

1. **K01**: あ、金曜日、生花コンテストがありますよ。
   - Kinyōbi, seika kontesuto ga arimasu yo.
     Ah, Friday, there’s a flower arrangement contest.
   - K02: ああ、いいですね。先生は今に行きますか。
     Aa, idesu ne. sensei ha ima ni ikimasu ka.
     Oh that’s good. Will you come to see it?
   - K01: はい、いつも行きます。今年も多分</p> 

2. **K02**: えー、すみません。ハンバーガー1つとコーヒー2つください。
   - Sumimasen, hanbāgā hitotsu to kōhī futatsu kudasai.
   - Mmm, excuse me, I ordered 1 hamburger and 2 coffee.
   - K01: いらっしゃいませ。
     Irasshaimase.
     Welcome
   - K02: えー、すみません。ハンバーガー1つとコーヒー2つください。
     Ee, sumimasen, hanbāgā hitotsu to kōhī futatsu kudasai.
   - Mmm, excuse me, I ordered 1 hamburger and 2 coffee.
   - K01: すみません、たいしかんです。行くときを思いやってください。
     Sumimasen, tai shikān ni ikaiyatte kudasai.
     Excuse me, I want to go to the embassy.

The *Eeto-gata* variation is found in the middle of the speech, as shown in the example of conversation (3) above. Regarding the *Eeto-gata* writing style, we distinguish between the ‘Eeto’ and ‘Eetto’ forms. ‘Eeto’ is a word or phrase that comes to mind as you consider the next word or thing to say. It became “Hmm” in the translation we discovered in Marugoto’s textbook. This type of *Firaar* usually appears at the start of a speech, but it can also appear in the middle, as shown in the conversation example (3).

**Ko-So-A type (Ko-so-a gata)**

The Ko-So-A gata is the most common type of *Firaar* found in Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture textbooks, accounting for 53.1 percent of all *Firaar* found in both beginner (A1) and
The Use of Firaa in “Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture” Textbooks for Beginner (A1) and Elementary (A2) Levels

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elementary (A2) levels. The most varied forms of the Ko-So-A gata are ‘soudesune’, ‘ano’, and ‘anoo’. The following is an example of its use in conversation.

(4) K01: あのう、ここからもうこううまくどうやって行きますか。

K02: ここは電車がいいですよ。便利です。

K01: じゃあ、電車で行きます。どうもでもさん。

K02: ここは電車がいいですよ。便利です。

(5) K01: キムさんは、どんなエコ活動を

しているか。

K02: エコですか？そうですね。わたしは

料理をするときだいどころから

あぶらをながさないようにしてますよ。

The forms of Ko-So-A gata found in the Marugoto: Japanese Language, and Culture textbook are examples of conversation (4) and conversation (5). When the type of Firaa ‘Anoo’, a word used when calling someone, is translated into English, many of the equivalents are “excuse me/sorry/hmm,” as shown in the example conversation (4). According to the data in Table 1, the Firaa ‘Anoo’ type has the highest frequency of occurrence compared to the other types, at 38.3 percent.

In the example conversation (5), the type of Firaa ‘Soudesune’ denotes the speaker’s approval or affirmation of the other party. This Firaa also used when someone thinking and doubting something.

Hai type (Hai gata)

This type of Hai gata is also found in the conversational data. Here is an example of its use.

(6) K01: おー。

K02: はい、私はどくしょが好きです。

K01: あのう、先生きょうが好きですか。

K02: どんな音楽が好きですか。

K01: ジャズが好きです。

K02: そうですね。

The ‘ha’ firaa that appears in conversation (6) does not appear as a form of aizuchi but rather as a Firaa that is used to attract the interlocutor’s attention. ‘Hai’ type of Firaa can be paired with ‘yes’ in English in the Marugoto Japanese Language and Culture textbooks for beginners (A1) and elementary (A2). This type of Firaa ‘hai’ does not appear in the middle or at the end of a speech; instead, it predominately appears at the start of a speech, as in the example of conversation (6).

Maa type (Maa Gata)

This type of Firaa Maa-gata or type of Maa is the type of Firaa with the fewest occurrences among others, only 0.4 percent. The following is an example of the occurrence of the Firaa Maa type in the conversation data (7).

(7) K01: かわいいセーターですね。

K02: あっ、ありがとうございます。

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The Firaa ‘Maa’ utterance is a speech used when someone is impressed by something, such as a conversation example (7). Both beginner level (A1) and elementary level (A2) of the Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture textbook are combined into English to form ‘Wow.’ This type of Firaa Maa-gata only appears at the beginning of the speech and not in the middle nor at the end of speech.

N type (N gata)
This type of Firaa N-gata appears more than the type of Firaa Boon-gata, which is as much as 13 percent. The following is an example of using N-gata in conversation (8).

(8) K01: あのう、ちょっといいですか。
　この言葉の使い方がよくわかりません。
　説明してくださいませんか。
Anou, chotto iidesu ka. kono kotoba no tsukaikata ga yoku wakarimasen. setsumeteshitekudasaimasen ka.
Excuse me, can I speak for a moment? I do not understand the use of this vocabulary. Would you please explain?
K02: この言葉ですか？うーん、難しいですね。私もよくわかりません。
　すみません。
Kono kotobadesuka? ūn, muzukashi desune. watashi mo yoku wakarimasen. sumimasen.
This vocabulary huh? Hmm, that’s hard. I also don’t understand. I’m sorry.

K01: あ、そうですか。じゃあ、先生に聞きます。
A, sō desuka. jā, sensei ni kikimasu.
Oh, I see. Then I ask the teacher.
(Marugoto Elementary 1 A2 Rikai, Lesson 9, Audio 148, 00:01-00:27)

There is only one variation of the N-gata type in the Marugoto Japanese Language and Culture textbook for both beginner level (A1) and elementary level (A2), which is Firaa ‘Un’. In conversation (8), the meaning of Firaa ‘Un’ is when the speaker tries to say something but gets stuck on a word or thought, usually followed by negative speech as described above. The English equivalent word of this type of Firaa, ‘Un’, is usually translated as “hmm...no.” This type of N-gata Firaa is found not only at the start of a speech but also in the middle of a speech, such as in a conversation example (8).

Saa type (Saa gata)
The last type of form is Firaa Saa-gata. This type of Firaa occurred much more than Maa-gata Firaa which is 0.7%. Below is an example of Saa-gata Firaa in conversation (9).

(9) K01: のう、ルパさん何がいいですか。
Saa, Rupa san nani ga ii desuka?
K02: ええっと。
Eetto.
K01: 私がいつも食べるのはよせなべです。
Watashi ga itsumo taberu no wa yose nabedesu.
tori niku to yasai ga takusan wa itemassyo.
What I always eat is Yosenabe. There is some chicken and vegetables on it.
(Marugoto Elementary 1 A2 Rikai, Lesson 9, Audio 148, 00:01-00:27)

The only variation of this Firaa Saa-gata is the ‘Saa’ form. Firaa ‘Saa’ is a word used by the speaker when surprised, happy, or confused, according to the dictionary. Conversation (9), for example, demonstrates that the meaning is a muddled form of speech. This type of ‘Saa’ Firaa is frequently combined with other English words to form “Hmm...”, “Come on,” “lets go,” and “okay.” This type of Firaa does not appear near the end or in the middle of the speech. It is only found at the start of a speech, such as in the example of a conversation (9).

Functional Analysis on The Types of Firaa
Table 2 summarizes the research findings on the functions of Firaa types. In Januarika (2018), Yamane’s theory is used to analyze the classification of functions of Firaa types. According to Yamane (2002) and Xinyan (2015) in Januarika (2018), the functions of Firaa including 1) Discourse adjustment function, which is divided into four variations: (FG1) Starting a topic or speech; (FG2) Defend the right to speak; (FG3) Time generator; and (FG4) Change of speaker. 2) The interlocutor’s adjustment function is divided into three variations: (FG5) refining, (FG6) doubts, and (FG7) common understanding.
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Table 2: Types of Firaa and the Functions of Types of Firaa in Marugoto Beginner Level (A1) and Elementary Level (A2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firaa Type</th>
<th>Firaa Variation</th>
<th>Firaa’s type function</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FG 1</td>
<td>FG 2</td>
<td>FG 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vocal</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>73</td>
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</table>

Table 2 shows that there are only six types of Firaa introduced in Marugoto textbooks on Elementary Japanese Language and Culture (A1) and Beginner Level (A2), namely 1) Discourse adjustment function, with three variations of functions, including (FG1) Starting a topic or speech, with 75 occurrences (28 percent); (FG2) Defending the right to speak, with 3 occurrences (1.1 percent); and (FG3) Time generator, with 103 occurrences (38 percent). 2) Interlocutor adjustment function, with three variations: (FG5) Smoothing, with 73 occurrences (27 percent); (FG6) Doubt, with 13 occurrences (4.8 percent); (FG7) Mutual understanding, with 4 occurrences (1.5 percent).

According to data analysis, the Discourse Adjustment function (the function of starting a topic or speech, the function of defending the right to speak, and the function of producing time) was used more than 181 times (66.8 percent) compared to the adjustment function with the other person (smoothing function, function of indecision, and the function of mutual understanding), which was used 90 times (33.2 percent). We discovered Firaa “Saa” in the Marugoto: Elementary Japanese Language and Culture textbook (A2), which has a function to begin a topic or speech (FG 1) and a function to express doubt (FG6).

Moreover, the types of Firaa and their functions that most often appear in the Marugoto: Beginner Level (A1) and Elementary Level (A2) textbooks are the Ko-So-A type, especially the ‘ano’ Firaa, which carries the function of starting a topic or speech (FG1), used as many as 55 times (20.3 percent) occurrences and the type of ‘Eeto’ carrying the time generating function (FG3) was used 42 times (15.5 percent).

CONCLUSION

The benefits of communication skills-oriented textbooks such as the Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture are that the types of Firaa and the functions of the types of Firaa were sufficiently varied to be introduced from the beginning, namely at the Beginner Level (A1) and Elementary Level (A2). The sound of Firaa types, the other types of Firaa such as ‘Eeto’ type, ‘Ko-So-A’ type, ‘hai’ type, ‘n’ type, ‘maa’ type, and ‘saa’ types are all included in the Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture textbook for Beginner (A1) and Elementary (A2) levels.

The functions of the types of Firaa in the Marugoto Japanese Language and Culture textbook for Beginner (A1) and Elementary (A2) levels include 1) to start topics and speeches, 2) to defend the right to speak, 3) function as time generator, 4) to refine, and 5) to show hesitation (Yamane, 2002; Momose, 2022). There is no Firaa with a speaker switching function in the Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture textbooks for Beginner (A1) and Elementary (A2) levels. This is because the Firaa with this function is usually found at the end of the sentence (Nakajima, 2009), while of all the Firaa introduced in the Marugoto: Japanese Language, and Culture textbook for Beginner (A1) and Elementary (A2) levels, there is no Firaa that is located at the end of the sentence was introduced.

The level of Japanese language education has an impact on the Firaa presented to Japanese language learners. This is demonstrated by differences in the number and variety of Firaa types found in the Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture textbooks for Beginner (A1) and Elementary (A2) levels. As can be seen from the results and analysis in this study, the Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture textbooks for
Beginner (A1) and Elementary (A2) levels have included Firaa in the teaching materials. As a result, additional research is required to determine whether the communicative approach used in this reference book represents one of the communicative textbooks.

REFERENCES


