Japanese Ways of Addressing People[*]

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Abstract

This paper presents some Japanese forms of address. The use of correct forms of address in Japanese requires linguistic as well as social knowledge. Japanese people seem to avoid employing pronouns as address forms, employing other nouns instead. Family terms, place names, occupations, company names, shop names are popularly used as forms of address in everyday life. An important factor in choosing an appropriate form of address is the relationship between interlocutors. Thus, address forms can represent a referent's position in their society. The grammatical category of person is not exactly the same as its practical use.

1. Introduction

Forms of address can represent linguistic politeness as well as sociological factors; that is various relationships between the interlocutors which can be based on the property of power-solidarity, gender, age, degree of formality, and psychological factors, such as politeness and intimacy. Forms of address can illustrate these aspects of social identity. Consequently, if interlocutors do not have enough cultural knowledge, it can be difficult to choose an appropriate form of address. Even Japanese people often find it difficult to find appropriate forms to address strangers. Watanabe (1998:8) and Suzuki (1973:194-195) claim that they would never call their ex-teacher without a title, such as *sensei*[1] "teacher" or *kyōju* "professor". Watanabe assumes that there will be no institution in Japan in which a professor is addressed by her/his junior researchers without his academic title. This does not mean that the Japanese do not feel intimacy towards their old teachers nor their professors. They have stronger feeling of respect than intimacy. Also, the power relationship, once created, is unlikely to be changed. As a result, the Japanese way of addressing people seems unusual to North Americans and some Europeans. In this paper, various kinds of forms of address used in the Japanese language and how they are used will be discussed. Regional variations in use of addressing forms have been recognised and examples employed in this paper is based of Tokyo region. Consequently, differences can be found in different areas in Japan.

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[1] The transcription of Japanese into Roman script (*romanization*) used in this article is based on the Hepburn style. When the same vowel occurs consecutively, the following letters are used: *ā, ē, ī, ō* and *ū*.

2. Use of PERSONAL PRONOUNs

Since Japanese personal pronouns function more like ordinary nouns, the term PERSONAL PRONOUN, following the usage of Takubo (1997:13) and Suzuki (1973:130) is used in this article.

Personal pronouns are probably the most commonly used forms of address in some European languages. By comparison, PERSONAL PRONOUNs do not appear to be popular in the Japanese language. According to Maynard (1997:104) and Takubo (1997:13), the pronoun system in the Japanese language is not well developed and the system is used in a limited way. Consequently, the system also functions in different ways if it is compared to English. One of possible explanation for this is that at the beginning of the *Meiji* era[2], Japanese scholars tried to analyse the grammar of the Japanese language according to European grammatical categories. Suzuki (1973: 130) criticises the way scholars recklessly copied theories which were based on a different language and which were rather inappropriate for Japanese. Therefore, some nouns were categorised into personal pronouns in the Japanese language but they in fact, show small correlation to their European language counterparts. As a result, there are many PERSONAL PRONOUNs in the Japanese language. The Table 1 shows some examples of Japanese PERSONAL PRONOUNs which are recognised as a form of address in everyday life.

Hudson (1980:121) points out clear gender differences amongst Japanese PERSONAL PRONOUNs which were cased by social change in the Japanese history, since each PERSONAL PRONOUN originally had its own meanings. For instance, most PERSONAL PRONOUNs referring to 1st person singular were originally used as humble forms. Most PERSONAL PRONOUNs indicating 2nd person singular originally showed respect. However they lost this aspect over time and their meaning became rude. However, together with social change, PERSONAL PRONOUNs have been changed; as a result, they lost their original meanings. Yet, such features remain in the use of PERSONAL PRONOUNs; as a result, they cannot be just employed for addressing anyone in the Japanese society. For instance, some PERSONAL PRONOUNs are used by only one gender and circumstances also affect the use of PERSONAL PRONOUNs. The Table 1 represents examples of PERSONAL PRONOUNs and how they are used in restricted way is seen in the Table 2.

Firstly, 1st person, *atai* was used by those people who belonged to *karyūkai*[3], by children and by people who lived in a particular district of Tokyo. Nowadays, girls who are social misfit often use this address term. *Atashi* is used by females to refer to themselves. *Atakushi* is less formal than *watakushi* and used rather by a married woman who thinks herself to be well educated and who belongs to a certain social sphere, such as the upper middle class and living in a certain district of Tokyo. During the *Tokugawa* era[4] *boku* meant "your servant" (Suzuki 1973:142). Yet, this address form has already lost its original meaning and nowadays, *boku* is used only by males and commonly used by boys. *Ore* is also a typical addressing form employed only by males. Though both of *boku* and *ore* are considered as informal but *ore* sounds rather rough. *Washi* is used by elder male speaker when talking to someone who is younger than him. However, this address form is rarely heard in Tokyo. *Watakushi* is the most formal and neutral form for the 1st person singular. In conversation, however, a speaker rarely addresses herself/himself with "I" unless s/he wants to put emphasis on "I". It is rather unnecessary to make use of "I" and in generally, often omitted.

A similar tendency is shown in a use of the second person singular. When a speaker addresses a hearer as *anata* "you", the hearer must be younger than the speaker or at a lower social status than the speaker. Or it can be the situation in which a speaker and a hearer do not know each other well. One foreign employee called her/his boss *anata* "you"; as a result, s/he was fired although s/he worked at a Japanese company at her/his homeland (Tanaka 1999:42). The use of *anata* probably made the boss feel slighted. Kabaya et al. (1998:207) claim that *anata* does not socially function as an honorific expression even though the word is officially categorised a polite word. When a woman used *anata*, it often sounds informal, represents a degree of psychological closeness and

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[2] Between 1868 and 1912.
[3] This is known as the *Geisha* society.
[4] Between 1603 and 1868.

indicates she is addressing her husband, or she belongs to a certain social group in which people always employ this address[5]. In comparison, when a husband calls his wife *anata*, it is rather formal and ironical in spite of indicating intimacy of his wife. *Anta* is informal and can be rough and insulting if it is compared to *anata*. *Kimi* is used the referent is younger than a speaker, or at the same or a lower social status. This form is stated in between *anata* and *omae*. When a female speaker uses *kimi* to refer to someone, she would sound like a male or bossy. *Kisama* was a word which showed the speaker's respects to a referent up to the middle of early modern century and was a commonly employed address form in the army referring to someone at the same status or a lower social status then the speaker. This is nowadays often heard when a male intends to insults someone. When a referent should be at the same social status or a lower in hierarchy than a speaker, *omae* can be employed representing intimacy. However, it depends on the situation, *omae* can be an insult.

A use of the third person singular, *kare* "he" and *kanojo* "she" are limited if they are compared to their English equivalents Mizutani and Mizutani (1973 III:20) claim. Two forms of address, *kare* and *kanojo*, are more often employed to address one's boyfriend or one's girlfriend rather than as *he* or *she*. Also, they are not used for addressing anyone who is superior or older than the speaker unless the speaker shows her/his disapproval towards the referent. Moreover, there is a recent tendency to use *kanojo* and *kare* as vocative referring to a second person. For example, *nē, soko no kanojo!* "lit.[6] Hi, she, over there." or "Hi, you, over there!", and *kanojo, hima*? "Are you free now?" These examples are recognised in a situation when the Japanese male person wants to chat up a girl. In such an occasion, *kanojo* is used to call the target girl. The former is rather a vocative use, and the latter is used as a referring form of address. In fact, the latter can be replaced by *anata*, 'you" since the speaker directly address the referent but the speaker purposely used *kanojo*. A use of *anata* in such a situation shows more formal or distant between interlocutors. Thus, it would not be suitable to chat up someone. On the other hand, a use of *kanojo* indicates over friendly manner, which might not be strange in such a situation the speaker wanted to chat up the referent. Moreover, the use of address, *kanojo/ kare* can be noticed when a speaker wants to take an attention of the referent but the speaker cannot find an appropriate address. *Soko no kanojo/kare, chotto* "lit. s/he over there, a little", "you, over there, come here for a moment." Address forms, appeared in examples, indicate the 3rd person singular in primarily but they have a secondarily use as referring 2nd person singular. Moreover, there is also a case in which a form of address form of the 1st person singular can also refer to the second person. For example, when an adult person asks a little boy, *boku dōshita no*? "lit. What is the matter with me?", "What is the matter with you, little boy?" can be employed. Those examples suggest that grammatical categories of person and their practical use are not always the same. The effects of social acceptability on use of PERSONAL PRONOUNs appear to be stronger than their grammar rules.

As was mentioned before, the European grammatical classification of the Japanese language creates complications. The fundamental rule in Japanese is that a speaker cannot use a PERSONAL PRONOUN to refer to a person who is older or superior than the speaker. On the other hand, when the referent is younger or inferior than the speaker, a PERSONAL PRONOUN can be used (Suzuki 1973:132.) Those changes are not only shown in PERSONAL PRONOUNs but it also appears in terms of respect of the Japanese language in English equivalents are Ms, Mr/s. They are seen in suffix which is in the Table 3 and Table 4 shows when these suffixes can be used. *–chan* is often used amongst children addressing each other or the referent is a child. It can be used amongst adults who have intimate relationships. *–kun* is mostly used when a referent is male person. When the relationship is personal, a speaker can be higher in hierarchy than a referent. However, using *–kun* seems to be a new tendency which started after the Second World War (Kitamura 1977, cited in Kobayashi 1998). Females did not use this term at all before the war. The word *-kun* was considered as only for males but this term is widely used even addressing females (Nomoto 1987:118.) In fact, females are sometimes addressed with this term at work by

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[5] Hayashi (1973: 167) cites that such use of *anata* does not exist in Kyoto dialect nor in the noble language. As a result, it is a problem for a wife how to address her husband.
[6] This is an abbreviation of literally.

their boss. When it is used in social relation, the term addresses for both gender and a speaker is higher in hierarchy than a referent. *–joshi* is a term for only females who have high social status and is a well-known person. Yet, nowadays, *–joshi* is less often used than *-shi* even though the referent is a female. When *–san* is used in public, social and personal relationships and the term indicates certain degree of respect. This is the most common term in everyday life. *–sama* is the most formal one amongst four and is mainly employed in public relation. A use of *-shi* is similar to *–san* and this can represent one's family, such as *Takeda-shi* "Takeda family" and "Ms/Mr Takeda". *–shi* is often seen in written form and not employed for addressing for a child.

3. Addressing people in everyday situations

The question then arises of how the Japanese address each other in daily life? Kobayashi (1998) carried out a survey at a high school in Tokyo to examine how pupils are addressed each other as well as by teachers, which is in Table 5[7]. Male teachers are likely to call male pupils without any suffix[8]. Male teachers probably show intimacy towards pupils, thus, they call pupils only their family names. On the other hand, female teachers tend to use family name with suffix *–san* for addressing girls and with *–kun* for addressing boys. These tendencies are similarly seen amongst pupils addressing each other. Both female teachers and female pupils may consider intimacy towards male pupils; as a result, the suffix *–kun* is used. Also, female teachers in socially higher rank than pupils and this also the reason for the use of *–kun*. Ozaki (1998) argues that there are pupils who feel uneasy when their teacher calls them with their family names. Accordingly, teachers' intimacy is only one-way direction.

The use of family terms

Family terms are a popular kind of address form in daily life and they are also used vocatively. Higa (1976: 109-110) suggests the use of forms of address reflects the complication of the Japanese society, especially family terms, because, family terms can also be used in more flexible ways than in some European languages[9]. Kinship terms are often employed for addressing someone, who is not a member of one's family, including complete strangers, and if the speaker does not know the referent's name. This sort of use of family terms is known as fictive use (Suzuki 1973: 158). The fictive use of family terms seems to have some rules, such as all family terms cannot be employed for referring to someone. Also, those family terms, which show lower in hierarchy than a speaker, such as younger sister, younger brother, my daughter, my son, my wife, and so on, cannot be used vocatively even though they can be used to refer to a person. Vocative use means term of respect but those terms mentioned above does not indicate showing respect but rather humbling. Accordingly, they are inappropriate for vocative use.

   Kunihiro (1977:26) argues that the fictive use of family terms is unlikely to appear in the US. For instance, when the Japanese call a waitress, they often use *o-nē-san* "elder sister", and they call a waiter *o-nī-san* "elder brother". *O-nē-san* can be an elder sister, someone's elder sister, an elder sister in-law, a young female neighbour, who is older than the speaker, and a shop assistant. *O-nī-san* can be used in the same manner as *o-nē-san*. It does not matter whether a speaker knows the addressee or the referent or not, family terms are employed. The basic rule of the fictive use is that a speaker imagines what s/he would call the addressee or the referent if they were a member of his/her family. Then the speaker would choose the most appropriate family term (Suzuki 1973: 159). When a young male speaks to a little boy, the male person can use *o-nī-san* referring to himself. Yet, when the young asks the boy, *o-nī-chan dōshitano* "lit. what is the matter with elder

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[7] Only the most frequently used way is mentioned in the Table. Pupils are assumed to be at the same grade, because if they are in a different grades, *senpai* "senior", and *kōhai* "junior" are more likely to be employed as a forms of address.

[8] Kobayashi (1998) puts a remark that these are also seen in Yashioro's (1983) and Kanamaru's (1993) research.

[9] Family terms are also used in a similar manner in Korean, Thai, and Vietnamese.

brother?" it means "what is the matter with you?" Family terms which indicate a young boy are not appropriate; thus, the speaker imaged how the young boy could address himself and these two terms are chosen. However, a use of such family terms such as as *o-bā-san* "grandmother" or *o-jī-san* "grandfather" can cause a problem if the person addressed thinks that s/he is not old enough so referred to. That is to say, the speaker's perception and that of the person addressed differ.

To some extent, using family terms reflects group consciousness[10], because in certain extend, a speaker might perceive her/her society is a big family. Thus, one person is addressed with various kinship terms depending on a situation. For instance, a 40-year married man having a son, *Tarō*. Children, who do know him at all, are more likely to call him *oji-san* "Mr uncle". Friends of *Tarō* may call him *Tarō-kun no oji-san/-chan* "lit. *Tarō*'s uncle", "*Tarō*'s father", or *Tarō-kun no o-tō-san* "*Tarō's* father". An owner of the grocery shop in which his does shopping often, would call him either his family name with suffix –san or *danna* "lit. owner". He can be called with other address forms, too.

The use of family terms in a family

As was seen, how family terms can be used amongst strangers and now we shall analyse how family terms could be used in a family. To facilitate this examination a fictitious person named Mrs Hanako Tanaka will be employed. She has a family and she lives with her parents in law, her husband, her daughter and a son, who is younger than the daughter. They all live in Tokyo. Mrs Tanaka has a younger sister whose name is Kazuko. She has a daughter and lives with her parents in Yokohama[11]. Table 6 represents the typical way of address between the various members of the family as well as their neighbours. What do Mrs Tanaka's examples suggest? It seems that choosing a term does not depend only on the relationship between interlocutors. However, the addressee influences how a family member is addressed. As a result, although the same speaker addresses the same referent, it depends on the addressee that the referent has various address forms. That is to say, a speaker need to know the relationship amongst the speaker, the referent, and the addressee to choose an appropriate address form. This is known as egocentric particulars (Suzuki 1973: 164). For instance, an example of 1, 8, 9, 11, 15, and16, when children are involved, they become the centre figure for choosing the addresser. If there are situations like an example 5 and 6, being with two people whose address forms might be the same, the place name can be added with a family term in order to make clear distinction; e.g. *Yokohama no o-ba-san* "aunt in Yokohama". Family terms, which represented inside of a family, are so-called allocentric use of address terms (Suzuki 1973:169). An example 15 and 16 represents a speaker pretends as if she is using the child's term which is known as empathetic identification of the child's point of view. Suzuki (1973:168) hypothesises that a Japanese couple prefer to have a stable relationship between them. Therefore, when the couple have a child, in the presence of their children, they address each other *o-kā-san* and *o-tō-san* as well as they start to behave more as parents like figure than "wife" and "husband" like. Others also claim that such tendencies are strongly seen amongst women than men. It can be said that the Japanese behave according to their label. For instance, one woman has her own child, she is often called *o-kā-san* "mother" and starts behaving like a mother-like figure. Also, they probably expect others to behave as appropriately for the terms of address used with them.

In addition, there is such a moment when the speaker addresses an older member or a superior member of family, a speaker can make use of family terms but cannot use the addressee's or referent's first name. In comparison, when s/he addresses someone who is younger or inferior than the speaker, one's first name is used, instead of a family term. When a speaker talks to someone, who is younger than her/him, the speaker ca form of address herself/himself with a family term. In comparison, when a speaker talks to a superior or older member of the family or in her/his group, the speaker addresses herself/himself with *watashi*, or *boku* "I" or with her/his first name. Further,

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[10] This illustrates that one is not respected as an individual but is perceived as a member of one's group (Shibata 1977: 75).

[11] A city in the East Japan.

when a speaker talks to a person A, who is a younger or an inferior family member, the speaker ca form of address herself/himself with a family term which is the same term as the person A calls the speaker (Suzuki 1973: 189). Therefore, the use of family terms is asymmetrical.

4. Other forms of address

That which is necessary has a name. The Japanese seems to use various names as forms of address in order to avoid using PERSONAL PRONOUNs when address forms are necessary. As was shown in Tanaka's examples, a place name can be added with a family term but in fact, place names are also commonly used as address forms. For instance, when 38 Japanese people working in 29 different countries attended a course, they found it difficult to remember their names at once, yet, they could easily recalled which country others were from. Thus, the beginning of the course, they addressed each other, including vocative use, country + -*san*/-*kun*, such as *Keniya-kun* "Mr Kenya", and *Iran-san* "Ms/Mr Iran". Later, they found it more difficult to memorise real names after having been familiar with this system of addressing each other. This is not unusual for the Japanese to use a place name as a form of address in daily life, but the problem is as mentioned, people are less likely to recall the real name.

Occupations can be used as address forms in the Japanese. *Sensei* is probably the most frequently used example for this. It literally means "teacher"; thus it is an occupational term and can be also used vocatively. *Sensei* is theoretically employed for addressing those who work at a school, or those who have respectful occupation. Nonetheless, due to overuse of the term, it sounds as if there are plenty of teachers everywhere in Japan. The meaning of *sensei* is extended and people, who engage in diverse occupations such as actors, dentists, lawyers, medical doctors, politicians, and writers are all classified into this category. Nowadays, the term *sensei* is also used when people do not know how to address others or those who do not like being addressed by their occupations. Consequently, due to its handiness, *sensei* has been used more and more although this usually has been criticised as the wrong use of the term. The National Language Committee has been encouraging public not to overuse *sensei* but to use -*san* "Ms/ Mr" the public protested it because calling someone with -*san* appeared to be less respectful than with *sensei*. Additionally, this term can be used by a speaker referring to her/himself when the speaker speaks to her/his pupils.

Shachō(-*san*) "(Ms/Mr) (company) president" is one of the most popular (and overused) forms of address. It has also a vocative use. The Japanese overuse this and address shop owners, and owners of a flat or a parking place with it. This term is also employed when people have problems finding a good form of address; as a result, when a man walks in certain places in Tokyo, many people call him *shachō(-san)* in order to catch his attention. However, this term cannot be used by the speaker who addresses her /himself.

Both *sensei* and *shachō* are likely to be used for addressing a man, when people are unsure of what else to call him. On the other hand, a woman is rather labelled *o-nē-san* or *oku-san* "one's wife", which does not depend on whether the woman is married or not[12]. This usage reflect stereotypes of Japanese society.

Another peculiar feature of Japanese forms of address is that a company or an institution name with -*san* is often used as a form of address as well as vocatives in a business setting; e.g. *Panasonic-san* "lit. Ms/Mr Panasonic"; and *NEC-san* "Ms/Mr NEC". When the Japanese introduce themselves or someone, they would rather mention where they belong to than giving their occupation. For instance, if someone works as a designer at Seiko company, s/he is likely to be introduced as a person X of Seiko but not a person X working as a designer. The Japanese could feel more secure when they can belong to a company; since their company can be their identity. Accordingly, they feel emptiness after they retire from a company and they become only themselves. The company is considered like family in Japan. Another explanation for this phenomenon is that an institution or a company to which a person belongs or has belonged has a social status; therefore, people are eager to work at a well-known company. They are then proud of

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[12] It depends on how the woman looks. When she looks young, she will be called *o-nē-san*.

their company or even of the school from which they graduated; conversely, people carry an advertisement of their company and school. Mizutani (1979:131) claims that who belongs to where or to whom things belong is a fundamental concept of the Japanese mind; thus, the Japanese tend not to perceive an object as the object itself, but the object and the owner. This idea is obviously reflected in Japanese language use.

There are some more examples of forms of address that often appear in everyday life. *O-kyaku-san* "visitor, or invitee" is a widely employed form of address as well as vocative and it applies to clients, customers, and passengers. For instance, visitors at a home, clients of a law firm, customers in a shop, passengers in a public transport, and people staying at a hotel are called *o-kyaku-san*.

An honorable expression, which has become a form of address is *o-taku* "lit. an honourable house", "your house" or simply "you". This is one of the most commonly employed forms of address in daily conversation. Yet, *o-taku* is only used in social or intimate relationships between a speaker and a hearer. Since a house is a small unit of group and the speaker's house and the hearer's house are two different groups. Therefore, the speaker knows her/himself to be an out-group member. When it is used in a business setting, *o-taku* can mean an addressee's company. When it is shown in a personal conversation, *o-taku* means "you" without the meaning of respect and it is rather informal. It can be used as *taku no sujin ga…*" my husband…" This example again, suggests the use of the Japanese language could be based on Japanese stereotypes.

5. Conclusions

According to Suzuki (1973: 164), forms of address, including Japanese PERSONAL PRONOUNs are egocentric particulars. Egocentric particulars show the relationship between interlocutors. Consequently, forms of address may differ depending on the interlocutors' relationship and a situation even though the addressee is the same person. Egocentric particulars also represent some Japanese social behaviour patterns, such as politeness and a use of *keigo* "the honorific language of the Japanese language".

As we see in family terms, there should be certain rules in the use of forms of address in Japanese. Such rules are also found the use of other address forms, which are as follows.

i)   Grammatical category of address forms is not always the same as their practical use.

ii)   PERSONAL PRONOUNs such as *anata* or *kimi* "you" are very limited in use and they are employed only for addressing a person younger or inferior to the speaker. Moreover, the use of *kimi* can be very offensive since the word sounds inferior.

iii) When a referent is superior to or older than a speaker, the addressee's or the referent's position or title is employed as forms of address, and the addressee's or the referent's family name can be added in front of the title. However, the addressee or the referent is hardly called by only family name with *–san* unless the person does so in advance. Thus, *Honda-shachō* "President Honda" and *Suzuki-kyōju* "Professor Suzuki" are used instead of *Honda-san* and *Suzuki-san*. In comparison, this is unlikely to be used of a person who is inferior to or younger than a speaker which is explained in the *senpai* "senior" and *kōhai* "junior" relationship (Mogi 2001:83).

iv)   A younger or inferior person could address herself/himself with her/his family name when s/he speaks to her/his superior or older people than her/him; e.g. Mr Tanaka says *Tanaka ga* in place of saying *watashi ga* "I". On the contrary, an older or superior speaker does not do this.

v)   When a speaker addresses herself/himself to children, the speaker may use her/his title or occupation as a form of address. For example, a doctor can say *o-isha-san ga …* "lit, doctor …" instead of saying *watashi ga* "I …" On the other hand, if the hearer is an adult, this would only rarely happen.

To sum up, as was shown, address forms are related to linguistic politeness and psychological factors such as apathy, intimacy, and respect. However, it is also seen that intimacy can be

perceived differently between a speaker and a referent. Japanese forms of address seem to have stronger correlation to social factors than their grammatical rules. Thus, the ways to choose forms of address also can reflect choosing one's position in one's the society. The position appears to have some indication to the social hierarchy. Consequently, one can be addressed by various terms depending on to which sphere the referent belongs. Then, the person seems to be aware of how s/he is perceived by others, because s/he is expected to behave according to the form of address which was given.

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