

Reflexives and the Shift between First and Second Person: The Case of Japanese

The shift of person categories in personal pronouns is found in a wide range of languages, especially the one from third (often nouns) to first/second person: Thai *khâá* ‘(lit.) servant’ and Vietnamese *tôi* ‘servant’ for first person, and Vietnamese *thầy* ‘master’, Spanish *usted* (from *vuestra merced* ‘your grace’), and Portuguese *você* (from *Você Mercê* ‘your grace’) for second person (Cooke 1968; Mühlhäusler & Harré 1990). In addition to this cross-linguistically common change, it is reported in previous studies such as Whitman (1999) and Shibasaki (2005) that Japanese exhibits the shift between first and second person as well, as can be seen in the case of *ware* in (1).

- (1) a. *koto-na-gusi we-gusi ni ware wehinikeri*
matter-none-sake laugh-sake on ware got.drunk
‘On that blameless sake, that laughing sake, **I (ware)** got drunk.’
(Kojiki, 712)
- b. *ware ha miyako no hito ka. iduko he ohasuru zo.*
ware TOP capital GEN person Q where to go.HON EMPH
‘Are **you (ware)** from the capital? Where are you going?’
(Uji Shui Monogatari, 1218)

By examining historical texts, this study shows that cases like (1) do not exemplify the shift between first and second person by proposing that forms which allegedly underwent the shift are reflexives. Being morphologically invariable, Japanese reflexives can be used for any person category. This approach to the ‘shift’ has a number of advantages over that of previous studies. Both Whitman (1999) and Shibasaki (2005) note that the shift from first to second person is much more common than the other way round, but this fact remains unexplained by them. The approach of this study which treats the forms that underwent the shift as reflexives can explain this tendency, utilizing the notion of empathy: both reflexives and first person are empathy foci, outranking second person pronouns in the speech act empathy hierarchy (cf. Kuno & Kaburaki 1977). Therefore, these forms tend to be used for first person more often than for second person.

This is why the first person use tends to precede the second person use, as is the case in (1). The approach of this study is further supported by the fact that items are often used for both first and second person even after the shift has supposedly taken place (and in a very small chunk of discourse), as can be seen in (2).

- (2) *Isopo ga iu ni wa “Ware wa ningen de gozaru”.*
Isopo NOM say to TOP ware TOP human COP POL
Shanto ayasyuu iwa-ruru wa “Ware ni sore woba towa nu...”
Shanto suspiciously say-HON TOP ware to that ACC ask NEG
‘Isopo said that, “**I (ware)** am mankind. “Shanto suspiciously said, “I don’t ask **you (ware)** such an obvious thing.”’
(Amakusa Isopo Monogatari, 16C)

These observations offer no support for the shift between first and second person, and suggest that the seeming result of the shift is fossilization of the first/second person use of reflexives.

References

- Cooke, Joseph Robinson. 1968. *Pronominal reference in Thai, Burmese, and Vietnamese*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mühlhäusler, Peter, and Harré, Rom. 1990. *Pronouns and people: The linguistic construction of social and personal identity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Shibasaki, Reijirou. 2005. *Personal pronouns and argument structure: Discourse frequency, diachrony and Typology*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara.
- Whitman, John. 1999. Personal pronoun shift in Japanese: A case study in lexical change and point of view. In *Function and structure: In honor of Susumu Kuno*, eds. Akio Kamio, Ken-ichi Takami and Susumu Kuno, 357-386. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.