

Japanese personal pronouns

The Japanese language has a bulk of personal pronouns with different degree of politeness, though they are at peripheral place in the language system. They are not frequently used.

Moreover, there are some holes in the system of Japanese personal pronouns: it has no 2nd person pronoun used to socially higher speakers and no 3rd person pronoun for things and animals.

1. Personal pronouns in the system of the Japanese language

1. 1. Properties

Level of politeness:

1. expressly respectful towards the listener
2. expressly polite in general
3. expressly familiar attitude
4. expressly superior
5. superiority in age

Relationship between speakers; social status of the listener towards the speaker

1. Superior
2. Familiar = addressee is in the speaker's in-group (*uchi*)
[in contrast to out-group (*soto*)]
3. Inferior

1.2. Subsystems in the Japanese language.

There are 4 subsystems in Japanese that differ by age and sex of speakers:

1. Older male speakers (45-50 and older)
2. Older female speakers (30 and older)
3. Younger male speakers
4. Younger female speakers

This is the classification made in the end of XX century, whilst the system of Japanese personal pronouns is continuously changing. So, these days there are not many speakers of older subsystems, but next generations could have inherited some features of their speech.

- Subsystems differ in number of pronouns.

For example, *boku* is used only by male speakers

boku mo watashi mo setsuyaku-se-yoo
I and I and economy-VRB-HOR
me(man), and me(women) will be economical
Poster at Tokyo's street

- One pronoun could have different gradations of meaning among different subsystems.

There are also differences in usage of pronouns among different social groups (see *jibun, atashi*)

Usage of some pronouns is conventionally established (for example, *anata* as address to the husband)

1.2.1 Older male speakers

<i>1st person pronouns</i>	watakushi	watashi	boku	ore	washi
expressly respectful towards the listener	+	-	-	-	-
expressly polite in general	+	-	-	-	-
expressly familiar attitude	-	-	+	+	-
expressly superior	-	-	+	+	+
superiority in age	0	0	-	-	+
Intensity	-	0	-	+	+

<i>2nd person pronouns</i>	no pronoun	anatasama	anata	kimi	anta	omaesan	omae	kisama
Superior	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	0
Inferior	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	0
Familiar	0	-	-	+	+	+	+	0
expressly superior	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	-
expressly familiar attitude	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-
expressly rude	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	+
Intensity	0	0	0	-	-	-	+	+

1.2.2. Younger male speakers

<i>1st person pronouns</i>	watakushi	watashi	boku	ore
expressly respectful towards the listener	+	+	-	-
expressly polite in general	+	+	-	-
expressly familiar attitude	-	-	-	+
expressly superior	-	-	-	+
Intensity	+	-	0	0

2nd person pronouns are the same as in previous subsystem minus *anatasama*

1.2.3. Older female speakers

<i>1st person pronouns</i>	watakushi	atakushi	watashi	atashi
expressly respectful towards the listener	+	-	-	-
expressly polite in general	+	-	-	-
expressly superior	-	+	-	+

<i>2nd person pronouns</i>	no pronoun	anatasama	anata	anta	omaesan	omae
Superior	+	+	-	-	-	-
Inferior	-	-	+	+	+	+
Familiar	0	-	+	+	+	+
expressly familiar attitude	-	-	-	+	+	-
expressly superior	-	-	-	-	+	+
expressly rude	-	-	+	+	-	-

1.2.4. Younger female speakers

<i>1st person pronouns</i>	watakushi	watashi	atashi
expressly respectful towards the listener	+	-	-
expressly polite in general	+	-	-
expressly familiar	-	-	+

<i>2nd person pronouns</i>	no pronoun	anata	anta	omaesan	omae	kimi
Superior	+	-	-	-	-	-
Inferior	-	+	+	+	+	-
Familiar	0	+	+	+	+	+
expressly familiar attitude	-	-	+	+	-	+
expressly superior	-	-	-	+	+	-
expressly rude	-	-	+	-	-	-

2. Characteristics of each pronoun

2.1. First person pronouns

In modern Japanese there are 8 1st personal pronouns: *watakushi*, *atakushi*, *watashi*, *atashi*, *washi*, *boku*, *ore*, *jibun*, although *atakushi*, *washi* and *jibun* are becoming old-fashioned.

2.1.1. Watakushi

- Used by both men and women
- The most polite pronoun
- Addressee is in the speaker's out-group and socially higher or equal
- Frequently used in official conversations

2.1.2. Watashi

- Women and Older Male subsystems: widely used in almost every situation
- Younger Male: expressively polite, almost the same as *watakushi*
- *Watashi* is tending to become neutral female pronoun.

2.1.3. Boku

- Male pronoun
- Formerly it was rather familiar (Older Male subsystem)
- Now it is used in almost every situation that doesn't imply expressively rude or polite attitude.
- *Boku* is tending to become neutral male pronoun.

2.1.4. Ore

- Male pronoun
- Addressee is in the speaker's in-group and socially lower or equal

2.1.5. Atashi

- Female pronoun
- Rarely used by younger male speakers
- Familiar attitude
- In the geishas' speech (and also women who work in night club or something) it can be used in almost every situation.

2.1.6. Washi

- Belongs to Older Male subsystem
- Old-fashioned
- Superiority in age
- Long social distance
- Expressively rude

2.1.7. Atakushi

- Belongs to Older Female subsystem
- Old-fashioned
- Superiority in age
- Addressee is inferior (female equivalent of *washi*)

2.1.8. Jibun

- Military man's pronouns
- Used in official conversations

2.2. Second person pronouns

There are 7 2nd personal pronouns in Japanese: *anata*, *anta*, *kimi*, *omae*, *kisama*, *anatasama*, *omaesan*, although *anatasama* and *omaesan* are rarely used and *kisama* sometimes is considered to be substandard.

2.2.1. Anata

- Mostly female pronoun
- Formerly it was considered rather polite
- Now it is tending to become familiar female pronoun (the same as male *kimi*)
- In male speaker's speech it is becoming less polite and rarely used (*kimi* is usual for the same cases of use)
- Used to be address to the husband

2.2.2. Anta

- Mostly female pronoun
- Addressee is in the speaker's in-group and socially lower or equal
- Male subsystems: more familiar, even rude pronoun

2.2.3. Kimi

- Male pronoun
- Addressee is in the speaker's in-group; expresses familiar attitude
- Not used with lower family members (for example, husband speaking with wife)

2.2.4. Omae

- Used by both men and women
- More rude than 1-3
- Expressly superior
- Appropriate only in family: used with lower family members
- In other cases shows long social distance

2.2.5. Kisama

- Male pronoun
- The most rude pronoun
- Expresses unfriendly attitude

2.2.6. Anatasama

- Old-fashioned
- The most polite pronoun
- Addressee is socially higher

2.2.7. Omaesan

- Old-fashioned
- Addressee is in the speaker's out-group and socially lower

2.2.8. No pronoun

- Etiquette politeness

2nd person pronouns are not used when you need to show your politeness, social etiquette except rare uses of *anatasama* and uses of *anata* towards socially equal or higher people from speaker's out-group. What is more, 2nd pronouns tend to be omitted, although rude and familiar pronouns are still used rather frequently. It looks like there are two cases: absence of personal pronoun is generally polite or neutral whilst rude and familiar pronouns show special attitude (i.e. they are expressives).

3. Combination of 1st and 2nd person pronouns and their correlation with verb forms

There are some principles of combination of personal pronouns with

- addressive (polite) or
- non-addressive (impolite or with no defined addressee) verb forms.

These are not very strict: there are some conventionally established exceptions.

There are also some principles of combination 1st and 2nd pronoun forms.

2 nd person	1 st person	Verb forms
<i>anata</i>	<i>watashi boku atashi</i>	addressive and non-addressive
<i>anta</i>	<i>atashi watashi</i>	non-addressive
<i>kimi</i>	<i>boku watashi ore washi</i>	non-addressive
<i>omae</i>	<i>ore</i>	non-addressive
<i>kisama</i>	<i>ore washi</i>	non-addressive
<i>anatasama</i>	<i>watakushi</i>	addressive
<i>omaesan</i>	all but <i>watakushi</i>	non-addressive
no pronoun	<i>watakushi watashi boku atakushi atashi jibun</i>	addressive

4. Potts's properties

Potts's properties could be applied to Japanese pronouns as well as to Russian and German, although Japanese pronouns could express much more gradations of politeness.

Japanese pronouns differ by degree of politeness, so some of them are more or less expressive than others.

Approximate scale from politest 2nd person pronoun to the most rude:

amaesan – anata , kimi – anta – omae – kisama

The same for 1st person pronouns: *watakushi – watashi , boku – ore – atashi – atakushi , washi*

4.1. Independence

The propositional content is the same in each case but the expressive setting — the indicated relationship between speaker and addressee — is different.

Kisama	wa	dare	da?
you(rude)	COP	who	COP.PRS

Kimi	wa	dare	da?
you(familiar)	COP	who	COP.PRS

However, the pronoun should correspond to the verb forms of the sentence, although the rules of such combination are not very strict (see paragraph 3). It's inappropriate to mix polite verb forms and impolite pronouns or the other way round.

Atashi mo i-ita-I wa yo
I and say-DSD-PRS PRT PRT
I also want to say something! (*sister to brother*)

? Watakushi mo i-ita-i wa yo

4.2. Nondisplaceability and perspective-dependence

Kimi	wa	i-na-katta	soo	des-u	ne
you(familiar)	TOP	be-NEG-PST	EVD	COP.ADR-PRS	PRT

i. "It is said that you weren't at home"
ii. "I'm speaking with you familiar"

The attitude of pronouns refers to the utterance time, but not to the past. The attitude is relativized to the speaker.

4.3. Descriptive ineffability

Speakers are never fully satisfied when they paraphrase expressive content using descriptive, i.e., nonexpressive, terms. When pressed for definitions, they resort to illustrating where the words would be appropriately used.

As Potts mentioned, it is generally accepted that pronouns of address are governed by a complex system of conditions on their use, but it is often unclear how stated rules generalize to new situations. It's also true for Japanese pronouns, and rules of their use are even more tangled.

4.4. Immediacy

Expressives achieve their intended act simply by being uttered.

For example, using *kisama* - the most expressive pronoun – is similar to using of such words as *bastard*. So, it is insult to the listener.

4.5. Repeatability

If a speaker repeatedly uses an expressive item, the effect is generally one of strengthening the emotive content, rather than one of redundancy. - challenging property, as well as in the case of Russian and German pronouns.

5. Bibliography

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