

## A Contrastive Study in American and Japanese Addressing Strategies From the Perspective of Power and Solidarity

KANG Junying<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>School of Foreign Languages, Shanxi Normal University, Linfen, China

\*Corresponding author.

Supported by Shanxi Scholarship Council of China ([2002]16).

Received 25 September 2014; accepted 28 November 2014  
Published online 26 December 2014

### Abstract

Addresses play an important role in human communication, the choice of which are universally determined by various contextual factors such as power, solidarity, distance, face and politeness, etc. but due to the different perceptions of these factors, addressing strategies vary from one culture to another. A contrastive study in American and Japanese addressing patterns within the framework of power and solidarity reveals that differences between the two addressing systems mainly occur in two aspects: the use of T and V address forms and the linguistic treatment for in-group and out-group members in terms of addresses. It is pointed out that the choice of address involves not only the consideration of the discrepancy among the politeness models and language practices, but also the knowledge of the cultural expectation and requirement of different cultures.

**Key words:** Power and solidarity; In-and-out group distinction; T and V address forms

Kang, J. Y. (2014). A Contrastive Study in American and Japanese Addressing Strategies From the Perspective of Power and Solidarity. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 9(3), 161-165. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/6150>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/6150>

### INTRODUCTION

Addresses provide means for opening conversations,

establishing and maintaining social relationships, in many cases, they serve as the first message conveyed to the addressees, the address forms of a language are arranged into a complex address system with its own rules which need to be acquired if people want to communicate appropriately. As an indispensable constituent of communication, address has been heatedly discussed since Brown and Gilman (1968) (the initial publication was in 1960) published their paper, analyzing how power and solidarity semantics affect the choice of pronouns of address. To mention a few, Brown and Ford (1961) examined the nominal address in American English and suggested a model of the reciprocal and nonreciprocal patterns governing the way middle-class Americans address one another. Ervin-Tripp (1972) devised a flowchart to show how the social meanings are attached to address and the relationships between them. Chaika (1982) remarked that since 1980's, there appears a very strong tendency towards first-naming as many people as possible as soon as possible. Power and solidarity semantics also find wide applications in the study of Japanese addresses. Martin (1964) emphasized the importance of group identity, arguing that out groupness outweighs in-group hierarchy in the choice of address, and that four factors determining the choice of address are in the order of out groupness, position, age difference and sexual difference. Ishikawa et al assumed power semantics to be the most fundamental property of Japanese address system, observing that "the system reflects the power semantics in the hierarchical characterization of relationship as higher and lower with regard to age, sex, and role" (1981, p.139). Their studies reveal that while power, solidarity, face and politeness are universal phenomena and play a dominant role in determining the basic addressing patterns, their linguistic realizations are language-and-culture-specific.

Despite the above-mentioned studies on American and Japanese addresses, we find that a contrastive study is limited and thus of great necessity. Japanese culture which

emphasizes power and hierarchy, and out groupness is in striking contrast with American culture which values solidarity and equality, their addressing behaviors will undoubtedly be quite different, in cross-cultural communication, misuse of address can lead to feelings of offence and unpleasantness. In view of this, the present research is conducted with the intention to answer the following three questions:

- a) What are the main differences between the two address systems?
- b) What are the possible reasons to account for the existing differences?
- c) How Americans and Japanese differ in their perception of power, solidarity, face, politeness and their respective employment of addressing strategies?

---

## 1. POWER AND SOLIDARITY AS DETERMINERS FOR THE CHOICE OF ADDRESS

---

The theory of power and solidarity in semantic uses of pronouns by Brown and Gilman (1968) is fundamental to any later research concerning address systems and has been regarded as the initiators of modern sociolinguistic investigation of forms of address. They introduced several basic concepts and terminologies in addressing theory, such as power and solidarity semantics and so on.

By semantics, they mean “covariation between the pronoun used and the objective relationship existing between the speaker and the addressee” (1968, p.252). According to their research, the European development of two singular pronouns of address begins with the Latin *tu* and *vos*, they proposed to use the symbols T and V as generic designators for a familiar and a polite pronoun in any language. They pointed out that the choice of pronouns of address is affected by power and solidarity, two dimensions fundamental to the analysis of all social life. Power is a relationship between at least two persons, if one person is superior in physical strength, wealth, age, sex, role in church, the state, army, or within family to another, he can be said to have power over another. In the middle ages, European T/V usage was governed by a “power semantic” with mutual V/T between persons of roughly equivalent power, upper class speakers addressing each other with reciprocal V, lower class speakers with reciprocal T, and non-reciprocal T/V between persons of unequal power, this way of addressing prevailed up to 19<sup>th</sup> century.

However, later the selection of T and V comes to be determined by factors other than power, the criterion now is whether speakers have something in common (T pronoun) or not (V pronoun). This re-evaluation of social features is called “solidarity semantic”, it leads to the reciprocity of address with mutual T of solidarity and mutual V of formality and distance. Solidarity exists between individuals who are similar in such aspects as

political membership, family, religion, profession, sex, and birthplace. Like-mindedness or similar behavior dispositions seem to be important in determining whether two people are solidary enough to use mutual T. The symmetrical or reciprocal T of solidarity can also be produced by frequent contact as well as by objective similarities.

---

## 2. A CONTRASTIVE STUDY ON THE DIFFERENCES IN THE TWO ADDRESS SYSTEMS

---

### 2.1 Difference in the Use of T and V Address Forms

Based on the analysis of power and solidarity in semantic uses of pronouns, Brown and Ford (1961) investigated the occurrence of first name and title plus last name (shortened as FN and TLN thereafter) in American plays, some interviews and a Boston firm, the data show that the great majority of dyads follow a reciprocal pattern, using mutual FN in addressing each other, mutual TLN is used only at the beginning of acquaintances. Thus intimacy and distance seem to determine the use of address forms FN and TLN in symmetrical relationships.

In non-reciprocal pattern, one member of the dyad uses FN to the other but is addressed back by TLN, this non-reciprocity is caused by differences in age or professional status. Power is realized in the form of age and social status. In general, reciprocal forms of address occur between status equals, and non-reciprocal forms are typical of unequal or power relationships.

However, 1980's America witnessed a strong tendency towards first-naming each other as soon as possible (Chaika, 1982), which reflects the increasing informality and casualness in social relations and social behaviors. Even complete strangers come to speak to each other on a FN basis within minutes. The young generation seems more eager to establish solidarity relationship with others even for their first meeting, for example:

- (1) Ann: Oh, Jane, we've brought a friend with us. This is Bill Brown.  
Jane: Very pleased to meet you, Bill.  
Bill: How do you do, Mrs. Davis?  
Jane: Please call me Jane. OK, everybody, how about a drink first?

(*College English, Focus Listening 1*, 1997, p.18)

In America, it is very common for two people to know each other, but not to know each other's LN, simply because that TLN is seldom used may it be official or occupational titles, LN alone is not often used either except in army. In fact, except for the social titles “sir”, “madam” and “Mr+LN”, “Mrs+LN” and “Miss+LN”, only a few official and occupational titles such as “President”, “Your Excellency”, “Father”, “Doctor”,

“Professor”, etc. are used as address (Ervin-Tripp, 1972).

However, LN is more often used as address in Japan, as Pan remarked, “...アメリカの場合は、苗字の呼び捨てはごく一部にしか見られないの対し、日本の場合は、苗字の呼び捨ては広汎に使われていることがいえる。主な場所は、学校、会社、そして役所である。また女性同士ではあまり見られないで、男性同士に著しいのが目立つ” (1986, p.80). The same thing occurs with use of titles, “titles are used much more frequently in Japanese than in English” (Hough, 1988, p.40). Among the ordinarily used address forms listed below (Ide, 1986, p.115), type A and E which are the equivalent of TLN and T in American address of power are most frequently used, all the other types expressing solidarity and intimacy of different degrees have got very limited use.

- A. 姓+称号(先生), 姓+敬称(さま、さん)
- B. 姓(呼び捨て)
- C. 名+敬称(さん、ちゃん), 名+称号(先生)
- D. 名(呼び捨て), ニックネーム
- E. 称号(社長、先生), 職業名(運転手)
- F. 称号+敬称(社長さん), 職業名+敬称(運転手さん)

The use of type B and C requires intimacy and familiarity between the interlocutors. In terms of the use of FN, American and Japanese ways of addressing manifest significant difference. According to the Japanese addressing etiquette, type D (FN and nickname) is mainly used within the family circle, and is also used to address people who are equal or lower in rank when intimacy has increased (Ishikawa et al., 1981). Although there is a strong tendency to use FN in America, in Japan, “一人の日本人が家族外の人達から名前、例えば‘太郎’で呼び捨てられる傾向は、一生通算しても、この人の接触や交際の如何にかかわらず、上昇しないばかりか、おそらく落ちる可能性さえあるのである” (Pan, 1986, p.79). In brief, the Japanese address system is characterized by the much more frequent use of V forms of power, distance and formality, and very limited use of T forms of solidarity and intimacy.

## 2.2 Possible Reasons for the Differences

### 2.2.1 Different Conversational Etiquettes

Conversational etiquette from different cultures reveals sharp difference in priorities. Americans prefer to use FN to address each other, for in American culture, individuality and equality are emphasized, not only are distinctions in status less marked and less emphasized, but they have less bearing on the form of remarks. In Japanese culture, the vertical ranking governs the choice of words in communication, virtually all official-and-occupation-linked titles are used on formal occasions to identify people and their positions. A member of Japanese society is always surrounded by superiors and subordinates, and the presence of either modifies the way he phrases himself. The relative status, organizational affiliation of each communicant must be known, which is essential in fixing

the appropriate mode of address and form of remarks.

### 2.2.2 Different Perceptions of Face and Politeness

People’s perception of face and politeness, and their preferred politeness strategies are partly responsible for the difference. Negative face which emphasizes the individual’s basic desire to defend his own territory from the encroachment of others has been widely acknowledged as playing a dominant role in European and American culture, however, in Japanese society, the acknowledgement of interdependence is encouraged. Juniors show respect for seniors to acknowledge their dependence; seniors, in return, feel their responsibility to take care of the juniors. This is contradictory to the western negative face which refers to the desire for non-imposition based on individual rights (Matsumoto, 1988, p.410).

The most striking preoccupation of Japanese people in social interactions is not the personal territory, but the concern with occupying the proper place, the position in relation to the others in the group and acceptance by those others. As an individual person, one must understand where he stands in relation to other members of the group or society and must acknowledge his dependence on the others. Acknowledgement and maintenance of the relative position of others, rather than preservation of an individual’s proper territory, governs all social interaction. Preservation of face in Japanese culture is bound up with showing recognition of one’s relative position and with the maintenance of the social ranking order. Loss of face is usually caused by others’ perception that one has not comprehended and acknowledged the hierarchical structure of the group.

In hierarchy-and-group-oriented Japanese culture, it is polite for people to use LNT/T or LN+ honorific suffix to show that they recognize the position and seniority and save the face of senior colleagues, which means that they are doing well in preserving their and the others’ face in communication. It is impolite and face-threatening to use FN to address senior colleagues, as indicated in the following example:

(2) “うちの家内は最近、こちらに引っ越すために長年勤めた会社もやめてちょっと落ち込んでるみたいなんです。家内は‘これまでは、ずっと苗字で呼ばれてきたのに、あなたと一緒にあって、人から下の方の名前で呼ばれるようになってしまったじゃないの’などと不満げに言うんですよ。” (Kakutami, 2001, p.191)

In this case, LN+san is a polite address for colleague of seniority. “下の方の名前” is the FN, she has worked quite long and deserves a V address, FN from others makes her feel that she is not respected and her face as a senior employee is threatened. In Japan, position and seniority are important variables affecting the choice of address. To a certain degree, the addressing behavior in Japanese society is the linguistic signal of power which comes from age and status, for the choice of address must



recognize the hearer in his specific social status or role and define the social relation between the interlocutors, while in individualism-and-equality-oriented American society, face-saving comes from being not imposed from others, position and seniority are not as important as in Japan, addressing behavior is mainly a means to show “solidarity”, people usually exchange FN to show friendliness and solidarity. In fact, one of the greatest concerns one finds in American popular press about human relationships is how to keep any relationship from taking on hierarchical characteristics. The word “relationship” has come to almost exclusively horizontal.

### 2.2.3 Difference in the Employment of Face and Politeness Strategies

Among three face and politeness strategies of deference, solidarity and hierarchy (Scollon & Scollon, 1995), which are based on whether there is a power difference (+P, -P) and distance difference between participants (+D, -D), Americans lay emphasis on a face system of symmetrical solidarity in which participants use predominantly politeness strategies of solidarity. However, Japanese prefer hierarchical asymmetrical system which manifests power difference. Power semantics is the most fundamental property of Japanese addresses system (Ishikawa, 1981). The Japanese interactions used to and to a large extent, still do place the priority on “power” more than on “solidarity”, on the basis more of whether or not the relation between two persons is superior-inferior rather than whether or not it is solidary-non-solidary. They emphasize in-group solidarity, however, for out-group members, they remain at a respectful distance by using formal addresses and hope to be treated in the same way.

Not knowing the differences in the employment of politeness strategies is likely to cause miscommunication. A Japanese student studying abroad felt awkward and unhappy when his professor’s wife addressed by FN “Tarou”, he thought that the proper way is LN+*san*, for in Japan, the use of FN is limited only to the intimate circle of friends or family. By calling him “Tarou”, the speaker not only suggests a relationship of symmetrical in-group solidarity, but also has crossed over a gap between family and intimate communication, and that with people outside of his own immediate social group. As Pan remarks, “一人の日本人が家族外の人達から名前、例えば‘太郎’で呼び捨てられる傾向は、一生通算しても、この人の接触や交際の如何にかかわらず、上昇しないばかりか、おそらく落ちる可能性さえあるのである” (Pan, 1982, p.79). For Americans, the use of FN is really a sign of friendliness and intimacy which result from frequent contacts.

### 2.3 Difference in Address for In-Group and Out-Group Members

Japanese addresses are affected by four factors which are outgroupness, position, age difference and sex difference (Martin, 1964). “Outgroupness” is the most important one

and determines the speaker’s evaluation of his relationship with and attitude toward his interlocutor. “聞き手が話し手と同じグループに属するのか、そうでないのかによって、言葉使いが異なっている...” (Ministry of Culture, 1996, p.51). In/out-groupness is so important for Japanese interaction that people will be at a loss as to how to talk without defining their relationship vis-à-vis the addressee in terms of the group affiliations, relative social positions, etc. because speech interaction in Japanese makes it virtually impossible for people to talk in a neutral manner, they are obliged to resort to complicated ways of speaking in order not to offend other interlocutors. The operation of this kind of mentality is well illustrated in the choice of address.

In the case of in-group communication, position and seniority are important variables affecting the choice of address. When speaking to the boss, an employee would use exalted, formal address LNT or T and speak in a deferential style, appropriate to his own position and that of his boss, and when talking with fellow workers, he would use exalted, formal address to refer to the boss, but a polite term and a plain style to talk to his colleague. Nevertheless, hierarchy in any large group is subordinated to the more important principle of group solidarity in the face of an out groupness (Moeran, 1988, p.433). Differentiation among individuals based on social position, age and sex within a group is always subordinated to the principles of in/out-groupness distinction. According to Fukudaeiichi et al (1990), “内部と外部で、敬称の有無を使い分ける。例えば、社内の人を指して、社内では敬称（さん、殿、肩書）を使うが、対外的には呼び捨てる” (p.71). When an outsider calls to ask about the section chief, the secretary should use a humble address to refer to her superior to signify the outsider’s superior status, for example:

- (3) A: はい、安藤貿易でございます。  
B: 私 加藤と申しますが、橋本部長をお願いします。  
A: 申し訳ありません。橋本は ただいま、席をはずしております。

However, nobody is ever absolutely in an inferior or a superior position, the boundary between in-group and out-group is flexible and changes with situations. For example, when the secretary got a call from her boss’s wife, comparatively speaking, the secretary has become an outsider, she should use exalted expression to talk about her boss while the wife should use humble address to refer to her husband to indicate the in-group solidarity.

- (4) A: もしもし、中本はおりますでしょうか。  
B: 失礼ですが、ご家族の方ですか。  
A: 家内です。  
B: 中本社長はいらっしゃいますので、少々お待ちくださいませ。ただいま、おつなぎします。

In contrast, in American culture, people do not make such rigorous in-and-out-group distinction

when referring to their superiors or spouses, what address terms to use is not affected by the factor of out groupness.

#### 2.4 Possible Reasons for the In-and-Out Group Distinction

It is necessary to point out the cultural differences in the assumptions about “self” before dealing with the different ways of treating in-group and out-group members. As mentioned previously, the idea of “self” in America is highly individualistic and self-motivated, whereas in Japanese culture the “self” is a more collectivistic “self”, more connected to membership in basic groups. When using addresses to differentiate themselves and their interlocutors, the Japanese are frequently making group distinctions rather than distinctions between individuals, regarding themselves and other in-group members as representatives of such groups.

The creation of group solidarity through various means is undoubtedly significant in Japanese culture. When referring to or addressing out-group members, one uses honorific and formal forms to show respect for their superiority, while one usually uses humble terms to refer to in-group members to indicate that they belong to the same household, company section or even whole company, thus emphasizing the in-group solidarity.

Another means of creating in-group solidarity is by using role terms or LNT to address or refer to one’s superior which is to identify and possibly to emphasize the hierarchical relations within the group, it also serves to stress that relationship between them is framed in the context of the company, creating the sense that they belong to the same group.

---

#### CONCLUSION

The discussion so far indicates that differences in the American and Japanese addressing strategies are mainly manifested in the choice of T and V forms, and addresses for in-and-out-group members. These differences result from their respective interpretation and understanding of face and politeness, and power and solidarity, and their choice of addressing strategies. We also come to realize face as “one of the constraints in human interaction, whose purpose is to consider others’ feelings, establish levels of mutual comfort, and promote rapport” (Hill et al., 1986, p.349), and people’s desire to maintain and save face can be realized through a spectrum of styles.

In cross-cultural communication, foreign language learners must be aware that although the choice of address is constrained by the same factors, different cultures may put different degrees of weight on each of them, the actual choice of address may vary from language to language, even from person to person.

In addition, only by allowing cultural variability

can we obtain a satisfactory politeness theory, since the constituents of face and thus the objects of people’s concern in conversational exchange are affected by cultural expectation and requirement. Therefore, the appropriate choice of address in cross-cultural communication requires careful consideration of the discrepancy among face and politeness models, the interpretations of power and solidarity, and language practices in different cultures.

---

#### REFERENCES

- Brown, R., & Gilman, A. (1968). The pronouns of power and solidarity. In Fishman (Ed.), *Readings in the sociology of language*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Brown, R., & Ford, M. (1961). Address in American English, *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, (62), 375-385.
- Ervin-Tripp, S. (1972). Sociolinguistic Rules of Address. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Chaika, E. (1982). *Language: The social mirror*. Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, INC.
- Martin, S. E. (1964). Speech levels in Japan and Korea. In D. Hymes (Ed.), *Language in culture and society* (pp.407-15). New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Ishikawa, A., et al. (1981). Address terms in modern Japanese: A Sociolinguistic analysis. *Sophia Linguistica*, (8), 129-141.
- Pan, F. C. (1986). A sociological analysis of address—A contrastive study of Japanese and English. In Kunitotetumi (Ed.), *Culture and society—Lectures on contrastive study in Japanese and English (Vol.5)*. Tokyo: Daisyuukan Publishing House.
- Hough, D. A. (1988). *Telephone Japanese*. Tyokyo: The Japan Times Ltd.
- Idesyouko. (1986). Gender differences in honorific language. In Kunitotetumi (Ed.), *Culture and society—Lectures on contrastive study in Japanese and English (Vol.5)*. Tokyo: Daisyuukan Publishing House.
- Matsumoto, Y. (1988). Reexamination of the universality of face: Politeness phenomena in Japanese. *Journal of Pragmatics*, (12), 403-426.
- Kakutamie. (2001). *Understanding different cultures in Japanese class*. Tokyo: Kurosio Publishing House.
- Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. W. (1995). *Intercultural communication*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Ministry of Culture. (1996). *New language series 4—A collection of language-related problems—An edition about honorific language (2)*. Ookurasyou Publishing House.
- Moeran, B. (1988). Japanese language and society: An anthropological approach. *Journal of Pragmatics*, (12), 427-443.
- Fukudaeiichi & Fukedayuuji. (1990). *Internationalization of Japan and the U.S. and linguistic relativity*. Fukuokasi: Asi Publishing House.
- Hill, B., et al. (1986). Universals of linguistic politeness: Quantitative evidence from Japanese and American English. *Journal of Pragmatics*, (10), 347-371.