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# A Contrastive Analysis of Address Term Usage in English and Japanese

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The domain of address terms was selected for this study because the function of address terms reflects the values of the social system within which they are used.

According to Strick (1980), there are two dimensions—power or status vs. solidarity or acquaintanceship—used to describe social organization. The power or status dimension reflects an asymmetrical power relationship between the addresser and the addressee. In this dimension, superiors call their subordinates by their first names, while subordinates use a title plus the last name to address superiors. On the contrary, the solidarity or acquaintanceship dimension reflects a symmetrical relationship based on power equality. In this dimension, two persons at the same power level would call each other by their first names, while people at lower power levels would call people at higher levels by titles plus last names. Thus, people's attention to social organization underlies patterns of address term usage.

Kitao and Kitao (1985) describe both two perspectives for human relationships in the U.S. and Japan. In Japan, human relationships are vertical, and people are likely to adjust their speech to the perceived relationship between the addresser and the addressee. In contrast, American people consider human relationships to be horizontal, and people like to speak to others at an equal level.

Based on Strick's and Kitao and Kitao's descriptions, it is assumed that the Japanese social system employs the power or status dimension, whereas the American social system employs the solidarity of acquaintanceship dimension.

## ADDRESS TERMS

There are various ways to address people depending on the status, formality, intimacy, solidarity, and power of the situation and people involved.

In English, terms of address can be divided into five categories (Strick, 1980; Buren 1974). In this study, "titles" refers to anything other than Mr., Mrs., and Miss.

1. Titles (Dr. Sir).
2. Mr., Mrs., and Miss.
3. Kinship Terms.
4. Full First Name (FFN).
5. Affectionate First Name (AffFN).

In Japanese, the entire organization of address terms is more complex than English. In Japanese address term usage, terms, such as "san," "kun," and "chan" are placed after names, resulting in the following combinations.

1. Titles.
2. Full Last Name (FLN) + san or kun.
3. Kinship Terms.
4. Full Last Name (FLN).
5. Full First Name (FFN) + san.
6. Full First Name (FFN) + kun.
7. Full First Name (FFN) + chan.
8. Affectionate First Name (AffFN) + kun.
9. Affectionate First Name (AffFN) + chan.
10. Full First Name (FFN).

This variety also shows that Japanese people are very conscious of address terms when they address others. In both languages, these terms vary depending on the relationships of the addresser and the addressee.

Because address term usage is closely related to peoples' consideration to human relationships in their society, this usage is varied from one culture (language) to another. Consequently, L2 learners often fail to accomplish address term usage in terms of social appropriateness.

In communicative action, social appropriateness is necessary. If L2 learners knew adequately how to use address terms according to register variation,

they would be more socially accepted. This means that L2 learners must master a new culture as well as a new language.

In order to demonstrate the cross-cultural difference of address term usage, I will compare the address term usage in English and Japanese, and the difficulty acquiring the appropriate address term usage in both English and Japanese as a second language.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to answer the questions of which dimensions govern the address term usage in English and Japanese, and whether it is more difficult for native English learners of Japanese or native Japanese learners of English to acquire proper address term usage, a study was designed in which English and Japanese native speakers responded to two questionnaires asking which address terms should be used to address persons directly in certain L1 and L2 situations.

This study investigated how both native English and Japanese speakers change register according to the situation, age, status, familiarity, and sex of the addressee in L1 and L2.

## SUBJECTS

A total of 40 students participated in the experiment. There were twenty Japanese native speakers: ten male and ten female. There were also twenty English native speakers who had been in Japan for at least one and a half years. Ten were male and ten were female. The English native speakers were undergraduate and graduate students at Brigham Young University. The Japanese native speakers were ELC (English Language Center), undergraduate, and graduate students at Brigham Young University.

## INSTRUMENT

A questionnaire consisting of eighteen situations was designed to get a wide spread of variables. The variables taken into account were status, age, sex, and level of acquaintance. The 36 combinations are shown in Table 1.

All the questions were designed to simulate real-life situations. The order of the questions was ran-

domized. The questionnaire was prepared in English and Japanese. Both English and Japanese native speakers responded to the same English questionnaire. However, while Japanese native speakers answered questionnaires using "Kanji," English native speakers responded to questionnaires written only in "Hiragana" (the Japanese phonetic syllabary) to avoid excessive difficulty understanding the questions. All subjects responded to both English and Japanese questionnaires. All questions were open-answer so as to get actual language usage from the students.

## PROCEDURE

The subjects were instructed to answer in the most natural way probable for L1 and L2 situations. The subjects were also instructed to make their responses on the questionnaire in the form of a direct address to the hypothetical person. In addition to the written instructions and example, the students were orally instructed to consult the corresponding native language question when they had problems understanding the questions in the L2. It took at most ten minutes for most subjects to fill out both the L1 and L2 questionnaires.

## ANALYSIS

Using the categories of address terms for English and Japanese put forth earlier in this paper, each response assigned to one category. When there were more than two alternatives in subjects' answers, only the first answer was counted. Variation in affectionate first name usage was ignored.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Concerning the first question of this study, which dimension does each language employ in the use of address terms, native speaker responses are examined first.

Tables 2 and 3 show the number of address terms according to status of the addressee and level of acquaintance for English-speaking natives in English. English native speakers did not use titles when they addressed persons of higher status. Although the American subjects still used Mr., Ms., or kinship terms, and this tendency increased inversely with familiarity, the majority of persons

(46.7% to 99.1%) were addressed by their first names.

In contrast, Japanese native speakers changed their address terms according to the status of the addressee and level of acquaintance in Japanese (See Tables 4 and 5). In Japanese, native Japanese speakers tended to address people of higher status by using full last names with the titles and "san" or "kun," and people of lower status by using first names plus "san," "kun," or "chan." With respect to familiarity, the Japanese subjects typically addressed family members using kinship terms or first names plus "san," "kun," or "chan." In addressing people in the "Known" category, the use of title and the use of full last names plus "san" or "kun" were both common in spite of the familiarity between the addresser and the addressee. In the "Unknown" category, 64.2% of addressees were called by their last name plus "san" or "kun." The data also shows that people who were addressed only by their full first names or full last names had a very close relationship with the addresser, such as younger family members or close friends of equal status.

Tables 6 and 7 show the usage address terms by sex. There were no major differences between native English and native Japanese responses, except Japanese native speakers used more titles and kinship terms than English native speakers. That is, from 41.1% to 52.2% of the Japanese native speakers used titles, full last names plus "san" or "kun," and kinship terms, while from 11.1% to 24.4% of the English native speakers used forms equivalent to them. Interestingly, in English, when addressees were of the opposite sex, males used full first names to female addressees, while females used affectionate first names to male addressees. Also, females used more full first names in addressing females than males.

From these results, since when categorized by status or familiarity from 46.7% to 99.1% of the time native English speakers exchanged first names, it can be seen that American subjects adopted a solidarity dimension in terms of English address usage. On the contrary, since the Japanese native speakers tended to change address terms drastically according to the status of the addressee or level of familiarity, and they addressed the persons who were of higher status by their titles with few

exceptions, it can be also seen that the Japanese subjects employed a power dimension in their address term usage.

The next concern is which language learners have greater difficulty acquiring appropriate address term usage. Tables 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 show the comparison of native and non-native speakers' answers. In each table, the former figures are native's answers in the native language situations, and the latter figures are non-native's answers in the L2. For example, in Table 8, the former figures were American's answers in the English language situations, and the latter figures were Japanese answers in the English (=L2) language situations.

These tables show relatively identical figures between native- and non-native speakers. In the situations of status and level of acquaintance in English, Japanese ESL (English as a second language) learners tended to use more full first names where English native speakers used more affectionate first names. In the same situation in Japanese, American JSL (Japanese as a second language) Learners were not familiar with using titles and kinship terms, and they tended to use "san" or "kun" instead.

In the situations in which the sex of the addresser and addressee were different, Japanese male speakers used more full first names than male addressees did in English. English male speakers were not likely to use "kun" and "chan" in the same way as Japanese native speakers do in Japanese.

Even though Japanese native speakers tended to use full first names rather than affectionate first names, American JSL learners showed some problems in using appropriate terms in the situations of higher status, which might be more problematic in terms of social appropriateness. Therefore, native English speaking JSL learners might have a greater challenge acquiring socially appropriate address term usage than native Japanese speaking ESL learners.

## CONCLUSION

The specific purpose of this minor research was to investigate how English and Japanese native speakers use address terms appropriately according to sex, age, and degree of familiarity in both L1 and L2.

Even though a limited number of subjects was used, the general picture of address term usage in both languages can be seen. That is, Japanese people seem to employ a power dimension in terms of address term usage. Americans, on the other hand, seem to employ a solidarity dimension in their use of address terms. The second concern, which language learners have greater difficulty acquiring appropriate address term usage, might also be seen. American JSL Learners seem to have more problems in using socially appropriate address terms in the case of addressees of higher status.

There are some limitations to this study. Address term usage is a delicate issue which shows significant sensitivity to various factors. As some subjects pointed out, the addressee's preference also influences the address term usage. For example, when one prefers to be called by his/her full first name, people would be more likely to call him/her by his/her full first name regardless of the level of familiarity.

As an implication for teaching a second language, address term usage should not be taught by itself, but might best be taught in the context of the appropriate socio-cultural background.

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Table 1

## Questionnaire Variables

<u>Sex</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Level of Acquaintance</u>
F=female M=male	H=higher E=equal L=lower	F=family W=known U=unknown
M-M	H	F
M-M	H	W
M-M	H	U
M-M	E	F
M-M	E	W
M-M	E	U
M-M	L	F
M-M	L	W
M-M	L	U
M-F	H	F
M-F	H	W
M-F	H	U
M-F	E	F
M-F	E	W
M-F	E	U
M-F	L	F
M-F	L	W
M-F	L	U
F-M	H	F
F-M	H	W
F-M	H	U
F-M	E	F
F-M	E	W
F-M	E	U
F-M	L	F
F-M	L	W
F-M	L	U
F-F	H	F
F-F	H	W
F-F	H	U
F-F	E	F
F-F	E	W
F-F	E	U
F-F	L	F
F-F	L	W
F-F	L	U

Table 2

Number of address terms used by native English speakers in English according to the status of the addressee  
( ) Percentage

Address Terms	Higher	Equal	Lower
Titles	—	—	—
Mr, Ms..	39 (32.5)	—	1 ( 0.9)
Kinship Terms	25 (20.8)	—	—
FFN	38 (31.7)	47 (39.2)	55 (45.8)
AfFN	18 (15.0)	71 (59.2)	64 (53.3)
Others	—	2 ( 1.6)	—

Table 3

Number of address terms used by native English speakers in English according to the level of acquaintance  
( ) Percentage

Address Terms	Family	Known	Unknown
Titles	—	—	—
Mr. Ms.	1 ( 0.9)	10 ( 8.3)	29 (24.2)
Kinship Terms	25 (20.8)	—	—
FFN	54 (45.0)	44 (36.7)	42 (35.0)
AfFN	40 (33.3)	64 (53.4)	49 (40.8)
Others	—	2 ( 1.6)	—

Table 4

Number of address terms used by Japanese native speakers in Japanese according to the status of addressee  
( ) Percentage

Address Terms	Higher	Equal	Lower
Titles	33 (27.5)	—	—
FLN + san or kun	45 (37.5)	42 (35.0)	13 (10.8)
Kinship Terms	40 (33.4)	—	—
FFN + san	2 ( 1.6)	3 ( 2.5)	13 (10.8)
FFN + kun	—	12 (10.0)	30 (25.0)
FFN + chan	—	18 (15.0)	37 (30.9)
AfFN + kun or chan	—	17 (14.2)	15 (12.5)
FFN or FLN	—	28 (23.3)	12 (10.0)

Table 5

Number of address terms used by Japanese native speakers in Japanese according to the level of acquaintance  
( ) Percentage

Address terms	Family	Known	Unknown
Titles	—	33 (27.5)	—
FLN + san or kun	—	23 (19.1)	77 (64.2)
Kinship Terms	40 (33.2)	—	—
FFN + san	1 ( 0.9)	1 ( 0.9)	16 (13.2)
FFN + kun	11 ( 9.2)	17 (14.2)	14 (11.7)
FFN + chan	27 (22.5)	22 (18.3)	6 ( 5.0)
AfFN + kun or chan	20 (16.6)	12 (10.0)	—
FFN or FLN	21 (17.5)	12 (10.0)	7 ( 5.8)

Table 6

Number of address terms used by native English speakers in English according to sex addresser-addressee  
( ) Percentage

Address Terms	M-M	M-F	F-M	F-F
Titles	—	—	—	—
Mr. and Ms.	13 (14.4)	10 (11.1)	13 (14.4)	4 (4.4)
Kinship Terms	7 (7.8)	3 (3.3)	9 (10.0)	6 (6.7)
FFN	17 (18.9)	57 (63.4)	12 (13.3)	54 (60.0)
AffFN	51 (56.7)	20 (22.2)	56 (62.3)	26 (28.9)
Others	2 (2.2)	—	—	—

Table 7

Number of address terms answered by Japanese native speakers in Japanese according to sex addresser-addressee  
( ) Percentage

Address Terms	M-M	M-F	F-M	F-F
Titles	10 (11.1)	8 (8.9)	8 (8.9)	7 (7.8)
FLN + san or kun	24 (26.7)	19 (21.1)	27 (30.0)	30 (33.3)
Kinship Terms	10 (11.1)	10 (11.1)	10 (11.1)	10 (11.1)
FFN + san	—	9 (10.0)	—	9 (10.0)
FFN + kun	26 (28.9)	30 (33.3)	16 (17.8)	—
FFN + chan	—	—	—	25 (27.3)
AffFN + kun or chan	14 (15.5)	7 (7.8)	10 (11.1)	1 (1.1)
FFN or FLN	6 (6.7)	7 (7.8)	13 (21.1)	3 (3.3)

Table 8

Comparison of number of address terms used in English by native English and Japanese speakers according to the status of the addressee  
( ) Percentage

Address Terms	Higher	Equal	Lower
Mr. and Ms.	39 / 41 (32.5) / (34.2)	0 / 1 (0.0) / (0.9)	1 / 0 (0.9) / (0.0)
Kinship Terms	25 / 13 (20.8) / (10.8)	— / —	— / —
FFN	38 / 54 (31.7) / (45.0)	47 / 71 (39.2) / (59.1)	55 / 77 (45.8) / (64.2)
AffFN	18 / 12 (15.0) / (10.0)	71 / 48 (59.2) / (40.0)	64 / 43 (53.3) / (35.8)
Others	— / —	2 / 0 (1.6) / (0.0)	— / —

Table 9

Comparison of number of address terms used in English by native English and Japanese speakers according to the level of acquaintance  
( ) Percentage

Address Terms	Family	Known	Unknown
Mr. and Ms.	1 / 0 (0.9) / (0.0)	10 / 17 (8.3) / (14.2)	29 / 25 (24.2) / (20.8)
Kinship Term	25 / 13 (20.8) / (10.8)	— / —	— / —
FFN	54 / 78 (45.0) / (65.0)	44 / 53 (30.7) / (44.2)	42 / 71 (35.0) / (59.2)
AffFN	40 / 29 (33.3) / (24.2)	64 / 50 (53.4) / (41.6)	49 / 24 (40.8) / (20.0)
Others	— / —	2 / 0 (1.6) / (0.0)	— / —



Table 10

Comparison of number address terms used in Japanese  
by native Japanese and English speakers  
according to the status of the addressee  
( ) Percentage

Address Terms	Higher	Equal	Lower
Titles	33 / 12 (27.5) / (10.0)	— / —	— / —
FLN + san or kun	45 / 73 (37.5) / (60.8)	42 / 36 (35.0) / (30.0)	13 / 18 (10.8) / (15.0)
Kinship Terms	40 / 27 (33.4) / (22.5)	— / —	— / —
FFN + san	2 / 7 (1.6) / (5.8)	3 / 18 (2.5) / (13.3)	13 / 11 (10.8) / (9.2)
FFN + kun	— / —	12 / 17 (10.0) / (14.2)	30 / 28 (25.0) / (23.3)
FFN + chan	— / —	18 / 22 (15.0) / (18.3)	37 / 33 (30.9) / (27.5)
AfFN + kun	— / —	0 / 5 (0.0) / (4.2)	2 / 9 (1.6) / (7.5)
AfFN + chan	— / —	17 / 6 (14.2) / (5.0)	13 / 18 (10.8) / (13.3)
FFN or FLN	0 / 1 (0.0) / (0.9)	28 / 18 (23.3) / (15.0)	12 / 5 (10.0) / (4.2)

Table 11

Comparison of number of address terms used in Japanese  
by native Japanese and English speakers  
according to the level of acquaintance  
( ) Percentage

Address Terms	Family	Known	Unknown
Titles	— / —	33 / 12 (27.5) / (10.0)	— / —
FLN + san or kun	0 / 9 (0.0) / (7.5)	23 / 35 (19.1) / (29.2)	77 / 83 (64.2) / (69.2)
Kinship Terms	40 / 27 (33.3) / (22.5)	— / —	— / —
FFN + san	1 / 9 (0.9) / (7.5)	1 / 8 (0.9) / (6.7)	16 / 17 (13.3) / (14.2)
FFN + kun	11 / 17 (9.2) / (14.2)	17 / 17 (14.2) / (14.2)	14 / 11 (11.7) / (9.2)
FFN + chan	27 / 27 (22.5) / (22.5)	22 / 24 (18.3) / (20.0)	6 / 4 (5.0) / (3.3)
AfFN + kun	2 / 9 (1.8) / (7.5)	0 / 5 (0.0) / (4.1)	— / —
AfFN + chan	18 / 13 (15.0) / (10.8)	12 / 9 (10.0) / (7.5)	— / —
FFN + FLN	21 / 9 (17.5) / (7.5)	12 / 10 (10.0) / (8.3)	7 / 5 (5.8) / (4.1)

Table 12

Comparison of number of address terms used in English  
by native English and Japanese speakers  
according to sex addresser-addressee  
( ) Percentage

Address Terms	M-M	M-F	F-M	F-F
Mr. and Ms.	13 / 10 (14.4) / (11.1)	10 / 11 (11.1) / (12.2)	13 / 14 (14.4) / (15.6)	4 / 7 (4.4) / (7.8)
Kinship Terms	7 / 1 (7.8) / (1.1)	3 / 2 (3.3) / (2.2)	9 / 5 (10.0) / (5.6)	6 / 5 (6.7) / (5.8)
FFN	17 / 52 (18.9) / (57.8)	57 / 67 (63.4) / (74.5)	12 / 27 (13.3) / (30.0)	54 / 56 (60.0) / (62.2)
AfFN	51 / 27 (56.7) / (30.0)	20 / 10 (22.2) / (11.1)	56 / 44 (62.3) / (48.8)	26 / 22 (28.9) / (24.4)
Others	2 / 0 (2.2) / (0.0)	—	—	—

Table 13

Comparison of number of address terms used in Japanese  
by native Japanese and English speakers  
according to sex addresser-addressee  
( ) Percentage

Address Terms	M-M	M-F	F-M	F-F
Titles	10 / 5 (11.1) / (5.6)	8 / 4 (8.9) / (4.4)	8 / 2 (8.9) / (2.2)	7 / 1 (7.8) / (1.1)
FLN + san and kun	24 / 25 (26.7) / (27.8)	19 / 29 (21.1) / (32.2)	27 / 38 (30.0) / (40.0)	30 / 37 (33.3) / (41.1)
Kinship Terms	10 / 8 (11.1) / (8.9)	10 / 6 (11.1) / (6.7)	10 / 6 (11.1) / (6.7)	10 / 7 (11.1) / (7.8)
FFN + san	0 / 4 (0.0) / (4.4)	9 / 14 (10.0) / (15.6)	0 / 6 (0.0) / (6.7)	9 / 10 (10.0) / (11.1)
FFN + kun	26 / 23 (28.9) / (25.5)	30 / 0 (33.3) / (0.0)	16 / 22 (17.8) / (24.4)	—
FFN + chan	0 / 1 (0.0) / (1.1)	0 / 29 (0.0) / (32.2)	—	25 / 25 (27.8) / (27.8)
AfFN + kun	2 / 5 (2.2) / (5.6)	—	0 / 9 (0.0) / (10.0)	—
AfFN + chan	12 / 3 (13.3) / (3.3)	7 / 5 (7.8) / (5.8)	10 / 5 (11.1) / (5.8)	1 / 9 (1.1) / (10.0)
FFN or FLN	6 / 16 (6.7) / (17.8)	7 / 3 (7.8) / (3.3)	19 / 4 (21.1) / (4.4)	8 / 1 (8.9) / (1.1)