

Toward a Typology of Person Shift

Osamu Ishiyama
Soka University of America

1 Introduction

The shift of person categories, a process where the referent of a person form shifts from one person category to another, is observed in a wide range of languages. Especially common is the shift from third (often nouns) to first/second person: e.g. Thai first person *khâá* ‘servant’ (Cooke 1968) and Spanish second person *Usted* from *Vuestra Merced* ‘your grace’ (Mühlhäusler & Harré 1990). The shift between first and second person is also reported, albeit in a more limited context: e.g. Japanese *konata* that shifted from first to second person. The shift from first/second to third person seems rare.

Despite its common occurrence, previous studies on person shift have been sporadic and unsystematic. This study works toward a typology of person shift by investigating mechanisms involved in various kinds of shift in Japanese and other languages. I show that there are three independent mechanisms responsible for different types of shift: (i) deliberate speaker innovation, (ii) linguistic empathy, and (iii) spatial semantics. None of them are originally constructed for explaining person shift.

The present study is organized as follows. Section 2 gives examples of person shift. Mechanisms of person shift mentioned above are discussed in Sections 3, 4, and 5. Section 6 summarizes the findings of this study and discusses directions for future research.

2 Examples of person shift

Before we discuss examples of person shift, it should be noted that the shift does not necessarily mean semanticization of the post-shift usage. It may just be a ‘temporary shift’ that occurs only in a particular context. Also, the case of vocatives is not considered in this study. Since vocatives are always used for second person, any noun (third person form) used as a vocative needs to be treated as a case of person shift according to the definition of person shift in this study.

Let us now turn to examples of person shift. The shift from third (often nouns) to first/second person is found in languages of the world. This is especially common among Asian languages where first person forms come from humble nouns such as ‘servant/slave’ and second person forms from respectful nouns such as ‘master/king’, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Common lexical sources of first and second person pronouns in Asian languages

Language	1st person ‘servant, slave’	2nd person ‘master, lord, king’
Achenese (Durie 1985)	<i>ulon</i>	<i>tuwan</i>
Burmese (Cooke 1968)	variations of <i>tyunv</i>	<i>hynv, minx</i>
Japanese	<i>boku</i>	<i>kimi, kisama</i>
Khmer (Siewierska 2004)	<i>khnum</i>	
Standard Malay (Siewierska 2004)	<i>saya, sahaya</i>	<i>tuan</i>
Thai (Cooke 1968)	<i>khâá</i>	<i>naaj’</i>
Vietnamese (Cooke 1968)	<i>tôi, tó</i>	<i>thây</i>

However, there are also some well-known European languages in which the so-called second person polite forms have clear lexical origins. For example, Spanish polite second person pronoun *usted* comes from the nominal form *vuestra merced* ‘your grace’ which is formally a third person form. The same type of development is suggested for several other languages such as Portuguese *você* (from *Você Mercê* ‘your grace’) and Italian *Lei* (from *la vostra Signoria* ‘your lord’) (cf. Head 1978; Mühlhäusler & Harré 1990). There are also languages like German where a third person pronoun rather than a noun is used for second person. Some languages have source nouns that are culture-specific. For example, according to Cooke (1968), Thai first person forms come from nouns relating to ‘hair’ (e.g. *phom* ‘hair’, *kramom* ‘crown (of the head)’) and second person forms from those meaning ‘foot’ (e.g. *tâajtháaw* ‘underneath foot’, *fàabàad* ‘sole of foot’). Japanese has a first person form *watakushi* which originally meant ‘private’.

In addition to the shift from third to first/second person, Japanese exhibits the shift between first person and second person. Consider the following examples.

- (1) a. *koto-na-gushi we-gushi 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) (from Whitman 1999: 358)
- b. *ware ha miyako no hito ka. idsuko 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) (from Whitman 1999: 358)

- (2) a. **konata** o omohi-te yomi-keri to miyu.
 konata ACC think-CONN compose-PST COMP appear
 ‘(He,) too, appeared to have composed his travel poems, thinking of me (konata).’
 (Izayoi Nikki, 1277)
- b. **Konata** wa nani o mi-te-gozaru.
 konata TOP what ACC look-CONN-ASP
 ‘What are you (konata) looking at?’
 (Edo kobanashi, 1773)

(from Ri 2002: 270)

(1) illustrates the shift from first to second person. *Ware* was used originally for first person, but later for second person. Similarly, (2) shows *konata*’s shift from first to second person.

Bsides the forms given above, there are several other forms that are said to have undergone the shift of person categories. See for example Whitman (1999) and Shibasaki (2005). In what follows, I will discuss three mechanisms that relate to the person shift phenomena.

3 Speaker innovation

Deliberate speaker innovation explains various shifts oriented toward politeness because the speaker’s objective is not just to be understood, but to be socially successful in communication (Haspelmath 1999). Speaker innovation has been given a variety of names such as “expressivity” (Hopper & Traugott 2003), “extravagance” (e.g. Haspelmath 1999), and “innovative use” (e.g. Traugott & Dasher 2005). The emphases of these terms differ from each other to a certain degree, but they are alike in that they all describe a situation where forms are used in the way that is not predictable in a straightforward manner from their original meanings and functions: e.g. using Japanese *kimi* (originally ‘lord’) for someone who does not hold such a social position. These notions are said by some researchers to play a crucial role in grammaticalization and semantic change (e.g. Lehmann 1995; Haspelmath 1999). Using humble nouns such as ‘servant’ for speakers and respectful nouns such as ‘lord’ for addressees when they actually do not hold such a social position is expressive, extravagant, or innovative. The shift from nouns to first/second person forms is semanticized once that innovation is accepted by the majority of the speech community (cf. Keller 1994). In this sense, items in Table 1 are typical examples that arose as first and second person pronouns due to speaker innovation in that their initial innovation is rather ‘ear-catching’. Let us call this type ‘strong extravagance’.

However, the role that deliberate speaker innovation plays is less noticeable in the development of some items than the case mentioned above (i.e. ‘slave’ for first person and ‘master’ for second person). For example, Japanese first person *watakushi* was originally a noun meaning ‘private’. This is especially clear in (3a) where *watakushi* is juxtaposed with

ohoyake which means ‘public’. The former is ‘one’s personal matter’, whereas the latter indicates ‘one’s social obligation’. *Watakushi* later gives rise to a pragmatic inference such as ‘personal’. *Watakushi* in (3b) can be interpreted literally as ‘private’, but it is clear in the context of utterance that ‘private’ refers to the speaker (i.e. my possession). It appears that the pragmatic inference is semanticized in (3), since its interpretation is no longer simply ‘private’, as can be seen from the English translation.

- (3) a. *Toshigoro, ohoyake watakushi oom itoma naku te,*
 several.years public watakushi HP free.time not.exist CONN
 ‘having been taken up by his own affairs (watakushi) or those of the court.’
 (Genji Monogatari, Akashi, 1002)
- b. *Iro koso sonjite-soorae domo imada watakushi ni sooroo.*
 color EMPH damage-HUMBL but still watakushi LOC exist
 ‘Although the color is damaged, it is still in private (watakushi) possession.’
 (Taiheiki, Book 18, 14C)
- c. ***Watakushi*** *wa wakai toki ni Harima no kun Akashi ni*
 watakush TOP young time at Harima GEN country Akashi in
arishiga,
 live
 ‘When I (watakushi) was young, I lived in Akashi in the Province of Harima.’
 (Koushoku Ichidai Onna, Book 3: Chapter 2, 1686)

I argue that innovation associated with the development of *watakushi* is less obvious than that of ‘servant/master’ type. Therefore, I propose to make a distinction between strong and weak extravagance. The former is a very common pattern cross-linguistically, particularly in Asia, while the latter typically involves source nouns that are culture-specific. It seems reasonable to assume that Thai first/second person forms relating to ‘hair’ and ‘foot’ also developed out of weak extravagance.

Extravagance also applies to politeness strategies in the sense of Brown & Levinson (1987) where certain features are ‘displaced’: e.g. German *Sie* (third person form for the second person singular referent). Other examples include Japanese *anata* ‘that way’, originally a speaker-and-addressee-distal demonstrative used for third person and later shifted to second person. The former exemplifies a politeness strategy of displacement in terms of person and the latter in terms of space. It is innovative in that there is no semantic motivation to use a third person and a speaker-and-addressee-distal form for the addressee.

Whitman (1999) suggests that the shift from nouns to first/second person forms is particularly common in Japanese and other Asian languages (e.g. Korean, Thai) because of their lack of morphological person agreement on the verb. A complete shift from nouns to first/second person forms first involves the shift from a mere discourse entity (i.e. third person) to a speech act participant, and then a change in verbal agreement, thus making the

process more costly in languages with overt morphological agreement than in those without it. The second part of this argument needs to be examined in more depth since pronouns that are clearly used for second person singular do not necessarily conjugate as such in many languages (e.g. German, French). In fact, this very morphological mismatch seems to be the central part of why they are recruited for second person reference in the first place, namely for the purpose of politeness. Therefore, it appears that a change in morphological agreement is not a necessary condition for the shift from nouns to first/second person forms.

4 Linguistic empathy

The notion of empathy explains the shift of reflexive-based forms from first to second person. Kuno defines empathy as “the speakers identification, which may vary in degree with a person/thing that participates in the event or state that he/she describes in a sentence” (2004: 316). Historically, Japanese pronouns can also be used reflexively, that is, they can be used as markers of self. In fact, some researchers have even argued that there is no need to treat personal pronouns and reflexives separately at least in Pre-Modern Japanese. For example, in his grammar of classical Japanese, Vovin classifies personal pronouns and reflexives as a single category, using the term ‘personal-reflexive pronouns’ because “in the language of Classical Japanese prose most of them can be used in both functions” (2003: 97).

I argue that what looks like a shift from first to second person on the surface is simply a reflection of the reflexive function. Kuno’s work shows that first person is ranked the highest in the speech act empathy hierarchy, which states that it is easiest to describe an event from the perspective of the speaker (cf. Kuno 2004). Plus, in linguistic communication speakers generally talk about themselves more often than they talk about others. Previous studies on binding also show that reflexives act as empathy foci (Kuno & Kaburaki 1977). In other words, both reflexives and first person are high empathy items. As a result, the first person interpretation of reflexives is much more common than the second person interpretation. In Japanese, the use of reflexives for second person is generally limited to questions and orders: e.g. ‘Did you (self) give him a book?’ and ‘(Self) do it!’ I argue that this bias toward the first person interpretation is the reason for the so-called shift from first to second person in examples like (1a) and (1b). Since the use for first person is natural (thus common) in linguistic communication, the first person use often precedes the second person use. That is why it looks like there is a shift from first to second person.

Empathy-related person shift phenomena between first and second person pronouns can also be seen in what Suzuki (1978) calls “empathetic identification”. In Japanese, first person *boku* can be used for the addressee when the addressee is a small boy as shown in (4). This shift involves an act of taking the perspective of the youngest member in the addressee’s ‘imagined’ family. Thus, if the speaker thinks that the boy is old enough to have younger siblings, terms such as ‘older brother’ is used to address him: the boy is an older brother from the perspective of his younger brother/sister. However, if the speaker decides that the boy is too young to have younger siblings, a first person pronoun is used because the boy

himself is the youngest member. A similar example is also reported in French in (5) where first person *je* is used for second person reference.

- (4) *Boku doo shita no?*
 I how did Q
 ‘What happened to you (boku=I)?’
- (5) *Comme j’ai de beaux yeux, moi!*
 how I.have with beautiful eyes me
 ‘What beautiful eyes you (je=I) have!’
 (Aoki 1999)

This type of utterance occurs only in limited contexts where the speaker is vastly more powerful or significantly older than the addressee. Notice also the so-called medical-*we* in English (first person plural for second person) where the status difference is also apparent. The directionality, namely first person pronoun for second person, not the other way around, is consistent with explanation based on empathy.

5 Spatial semantics

Spatial semantics explains the shift of the so-called demonstrative-based pronouns such as Japanese *konata* ‘this way’ that shifted from first to second person, as shown in (2a) and (2b). Let us first give an overview of the Japanese demonstrative system. Modern Japanese exhibits three-way distinctions based on the spatial relationship between the speaker/addressee and a referent. Synchronically, it is accepted that the demonstrative stem *ko-* is used for referents proximal to speaker (S-PROX), *so-* for referents proximal to addressee (AD-PROX), and *a-* for referents proximal to neither speaker nor addressee (S/AD-DIST).¹ The demonstrative stems are combined with a variety of category identifiers. For example, the category identifier *-chira* which indicates ‘direction’ combines with the stems to yield *kochira* ‘this way (proximal to speaker)’, *sochira* ‘that way (proximal to addressee)’, and *achira* ‘that way (proximal to neither speaker nor addressee)’. The following table shows a list of demonstrative forms found in Modern Japanese.

¹In this sense, Japanese is an example of what Anderson & Keenan (1985) call a ‘person-oriented’ system where the second term indicates ‘near addressee’ rather than a ‘distance-oriented’ system where the second term refers to ‘medial distance’. However, the ‘medial distance’ use appears when the perspective of speaker and addressee are identical (e.g. speaker and addressee standing side by side and looking at a referent in some distance together).

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Table 2: Demonstrative forms in Modern Japanese

	Thing	Place	Direction	Condition	Manner	Determiner
<i>ko</i> -series (S-PROX)	<i>kore</i>	<i>koko</i>	<i>kochira</i>	<i>konna</i>	<i>koo</i>	<i>kono</i>
<i>so</i> -series (AD-PROX)	<i>sore</i>	<i>soko</i>	<i>sochira</i>	<i>sonna</i>	<i>soo</i>	<i>sono</i>
<i>a</i> -series (S/AD-DIST)	<i>aore</i>	<i>asoko</i>	<i>aochira</i>	<i>anna</i>	<i>aa</i>	<i>ano</i>

We saw in (2a) and (2b) that *konata* shifted its referent from first to second person. This directionality of shift makes sense given its spatial semantics. Being a speaker-proximal form, *konata* can always be used for the speaker, but speaker-proximal forms can also be used for the addressee because speaker-proximal forms can preempt the use of addressee-proximal for the addressee. That is, this shift is possible because the addressee can be designated by speaker-proximal forms as long as he/she is near the speaker. That spatial semantics is responsible for this type of shift can be seen in how demonstrative-based forms are used for the speaker and addressee in the history of Japanese. Table 3 represents the distribution of demonstrative-based forms listed in Tsujimura (1968) in terms of their referent.

Table 3: Distribution of demonstrative-based forms

1st person			2nd person		
<i>ko</i> -	<i>so</i> -	<i>a</i> -	<i>ko</i> -	<i>so</i> -	<i>a</i> -
<i>koko</i>	—	—	<i>konasama</i>	<i>soko</i>	<i>are</i>
<i>kokomoto</i>			<i>konata</i>	<i>sore</i>	<i>areni</i>
<i>konata</i>			<i>konasan</i>	<i>sokomoto</i>	<i>anata</i>
<i>kore</i>			<i>konan</i>	<i>sonata</i>	<i>anta</i>
<i>konohoo</i>			<i>konta</i>	<i>sonohoo</i>	
<i>kochito</i>				<i>somoji</i>	
<i>kochitora</i>				<i>soresama</i>	
<i>kochira</i>				<i>sosama</i>	
<i>kocchi</i>				<i>sochitora</i>	
				<i>sonomoto</i>	
10	—	—	5	11	4

The use of the *ko*- and *so*- is completely in accordance with their demonstrative functions. Only *ko*-series forms are listed for first person forms, which makes perfect sense given their spatial semantics of speaker-proximal. The speaker is always speaker-proximal and the use of speaker-proximal forms for the speaker cannot be preempted by other forms. Similarly, the majority of second person forms are *so*-series forms which are addressee-proximal. Some *ko*-series forms are used for second person, but this can also be accounted for by their spatial

semantics because addressee-proximal forms can be preempted by speaker-proximal forms.² The same can be said for Barke & Uehara’s (2005) list of second person forms presented in Table 4. The majority are *so*-series forms with some *ko*-series as expected by their spatial semantics.

Table 4: List of demonstrative-based forms from Barke and Uehara (2005)

2nd person		
<i>ko</i> -	<i>so</i> -	<i>a</i> -
<i>konata</i>	<i>soko</i>	<i>are</i>
<i>konan</i>	<i>sore</i>	<i>anata</i>
<i>konasa</i>	<i>sochi</i>	<i>anta</i>
<i>konasama</i>	<i>somōjii</i>	
<i>konasan</i>	<i>sonata</i>	
<i>konatasama</i>	<i>sonohoo</i>	
	<i>sochira</i>	
	<i>sochitora</i>	
	<i>sokomoto</i>	
	<i>sonatasama</i>	
	<i>soresama</i>	
	<i>sosama</i>	
	<i>socchi</i>	
6	13	3

6 Conclusion

In this study, I argued that there are three independent mechanisms that are responsible for person shift. First, deliberate speaker innovation explains the development of first/second person pronouns from nouns such as ‘servant/lord’ where speakers’ desire to be successful in communication is apparent. However, I have also argued that there is a case in which speaker innovation is more subtle as in the case of Japanese *watakushi* ‘(lit.) private’. I called the former strong extravagance and the latter weak extravagance. Second, linguistic empathy is responsible for the shift of reflexive-based forms, because reflexives are used more often for first person than second person. Third, spatial semantics triggers the shift of demonstrative-based forms because speaker-proximal forms can be used for both the speaker and the addressee.

²The use of *a*-series forms such as *anata* can be explained by the politeness strategy of distancing (see Ishiyama, forthcoming)

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Findings of this study suggest that there may be a qualitative difference between the shift from third (nouns) to first/second person on the one hand and the shift between first and second person on the other. The former is found commonly in languages of the world. On the other hand, the latter does not seem to be common cross-linguistically. In addition, it appears that it almost always involves empathy-related expressions or demonstratives. The shift between first and second person is also unlikely to semanticize, especially those related to empathetic identification. However, given the scope of this paper, I will of course leave the task for another opportunity.

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Osamu Ishiyama

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Soka University of America
Language & Culture Program
Pauling Hall 411
1 University Drive
Aliso Viejo, CA 92656

oishiyama@soka.edu