

Person References of Japanese and American Children*

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1. Introduction

It has been pointed out by linguists, anthropologists, and psychiatrists alike that there is a great difference between the use of person designating terms in Japanese and that in Indo-European languages. Studies of such terms are mainly concerned with the first and the second persons: that is, on the one hand, there are words which speakers use to refer to themselves, such as *I* and first name and, on the other, there are also words which refer to the second person, such as *you* and names of the persons being addressed.¹

What makes this issue so important is the fact that the act of self-reference—that is how one refers to oneself in words—has a great influence on one's identity. To look at the linguistic expression of self in a language is to look at one's position in the culture concerned. Similarly, we can tell something about the speaker's attitude and position *vis-à-vis* others from his use of second person reference. If all this is true, it can be said that people who share the same pattern of language behavior, such as the acts for person references, must share the same worldview of self-identity for person-designation. This connection between language and culture is what explains the depth of present scholarly interest in Japanese person references, for in their lifestyle of expressions lie the clues to the way in which the Japanese behave.

What is so intriguing about Japanese person references? As Takao Suzuki (1973: 129-45) and Bin Kimura (1972: 129-46) have noted, among others, Japanese is rich in having so many person-designating terms with which to reflect relationships between speaker and hearer in varying situations. By

contrast, Indo-European languages usually have only one first person pronoun, like *I* in English, and one or two second person pronouns like *you* in English or *tu* and *vous* in French, and they seldom require other person-designating terms. This evidence has led researchers to conclude that personal identity is more consistent in the case of the speakers of Indo-European languages, because *I* is *I* wherever one is and whomever one is talking to, whereas in Japanese personal identity is flexible and dependent on the position of speaker in relation to hearer within a given situation. This flexibility of person references may be said to be a crucial determinant of social behavior of the Japanese.

In this paper, I would like to present some findings from research designed to test Japanese and American English uses of person-designating terms. The scope of research was confined to the earliest stage of language use, that is, to children six years old and under. Naturally, children acquire skill in the use of various person references as their socialization advances. Here, the use of person-designating terms among children was investigated so as to see how they function at the interactional level and to learn something more about the basic human behavior of personal identity in Japan and America.

As Kimura (1972: 136) states, Japanese children are slower than their American or European counterparts in acquiring personal pronouns. This is because in Japan other person-designating terms than personal pronouns are acquired earlier.

Bearing the distinction between personal pronouns and other person-designating terms in mind, I would like to present two kinds of inquiry into the problems of comparative language use.

First, I would like to compare the uses of various forms of first and second person designations by Japanese and American children and discuss the characteristics of such uses. It is posited that the Japanese make better use of external conditions in identifying themselves than their American counterparts, a behavior that is reflected in the patterning of first person references; a similar characteristic is to be seen in the patterning of second person references.

Second, I would like to compare the way in which the use of person-designating terms differs according to the sex of speaker in each language. It is hypothesized that the use of various forms of person references reflects on the sex consciousness of the user. Thus, by looking at how boys and girls differ in their use of person-designating terms in Japan and America, one might be

able to detect the fundamental differences in sex consciousness between the Japanese and the Americans.

2. Method

The method I employed consisted of three steps. First came the observation of children at nursery schools and kindergartens and the tape-recorded and transcribed data of the children's speech. The Japanese material was secured from the nursery school attached to the Japan Women's University. The English material, on the other hand, was taken from the Nishimachi International School in Tokyo and the University of Hawaii Laboratory School in Honolulu. The second step was my interviews with teachers at the nursery schools. Two questionnaires followed as the third step, one in Japanese and the other in English, copies of which were distributed to parents in various vocations, who had children six years and under.

Parents of the nursery school and the kindergarten children at the Japan Women's University were asked to fill out the questionnaire in Japanese after observing their children's speech for a week. In the same vein, parents of American children at the Nishimachi International School in Tokyo, together with parents of children six years old and under in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, North Carolina, Georgia, California and Hawaii were also asked to fill out the questionnaire in English. (One hundred and fifty out of two hundred copies distributed in Japan were returned, but only fifty out of one hundred and fifty copies distributed in the States came back).

Each questionnaire consisted of two tables. One table was for first person referential forms and the other, for second person referential forms. Each table had the possible variants of personal referential forms on the one axis, and a list of the possible variations of hearers on the other. The various referential forms in Japanese were *boku* 'I', *ore* 'I' and the like, for the first person, and *kimi* 'you', *anata* 'you', and the like for the second, while those in English were *I/me*, *name* and the like for the first person and *you*, *Mommy* and the like for the second. The other axis then contained items like *friend*, *same sex*, *same age*, and *friend*, *same sex*, *older*, etc.. Parents who observed their own children were asked to grade in each box of the table the children's frequency of usage according to a scale of four levels (always used, sometimes used, once or twice used, never used). In some cases two variants were found used in one column (that is, two different forms for the same hearer). Here, the parents were asked to supply an explanation of the conditions for the use of each

variant in the space reserved below the tables.

3. Result

Inspired by Ervin-Tripp's flow chart on address forms (1971: 18), the data used here were coded into flow charts so that the mechanism of the choice of variants could be best visualized. Since then the flow charts of referential forms used by Japanese children have also been attempted in Ide (1978a: 53-54, 60-61 and 1978b: 98-101).

In the present study, the flow charts for first and second person designations in each language were drawn separately. Since the second focus of our analysis is the relationship between sex and the choice of person-designating terms, the flow charts were also drawn separately for boys and girls; hence, eight figures obtain.

Some explanation on how the flow charts were drawn is in order here. Two factors function to indicate selections of the various person-designating terms; one may be called inter-personal factor and the other, intra-personal. The former is concerned with the social attributes of each dyadic partner (the hearer) which are derived from the axis of each table in the questionnaires containing *friend*, *same sex*, *same age*, *friend*, *same sex*, *older*, etc.. The latter is the speaker's psychological or behavioral attributes such as *self-assertion*, *dependency*, *active play*, etc.. These attributes were either observed in the course of the researcher's observation or given by parents in the space below each table in the questionnaire. It is these attributes (social as well as psychological) that were coded as selectors in the flow charts. Then, two steps were taken to map out the routines.

The first step was to decide whether attributes pertaining to the inter-personal factor should precede those pertaining to the intra-personal factor in the routines or vice versa. It was found through trial and error that for the first person designations, it would be convenient if the inter-personal should precede the intra-personal factor and that for the second person designations those attributes of the intra-personal factor would best serve the purpose in the routines if they interpose between two sets of attributes of the inter-personal factor.

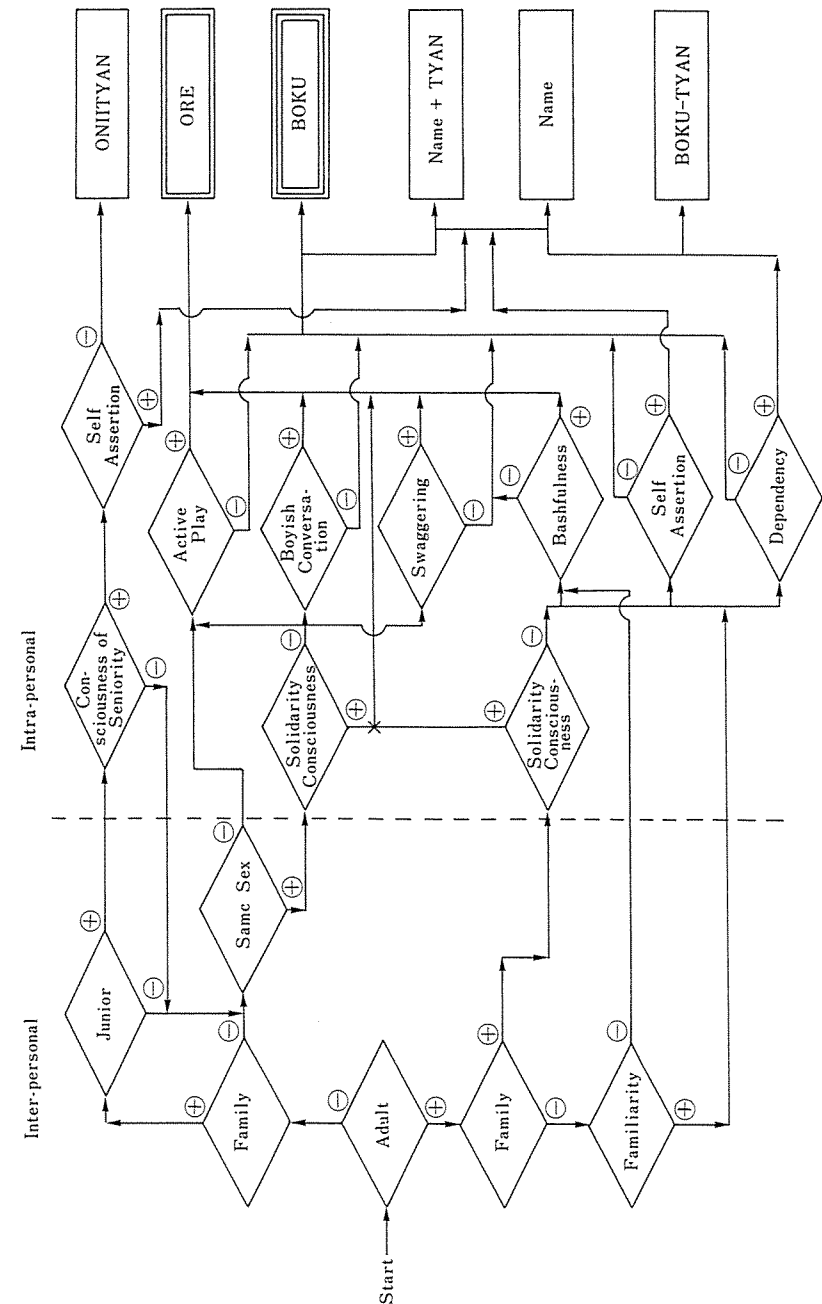


Figure 1: Japanese Boys' First Person Reference

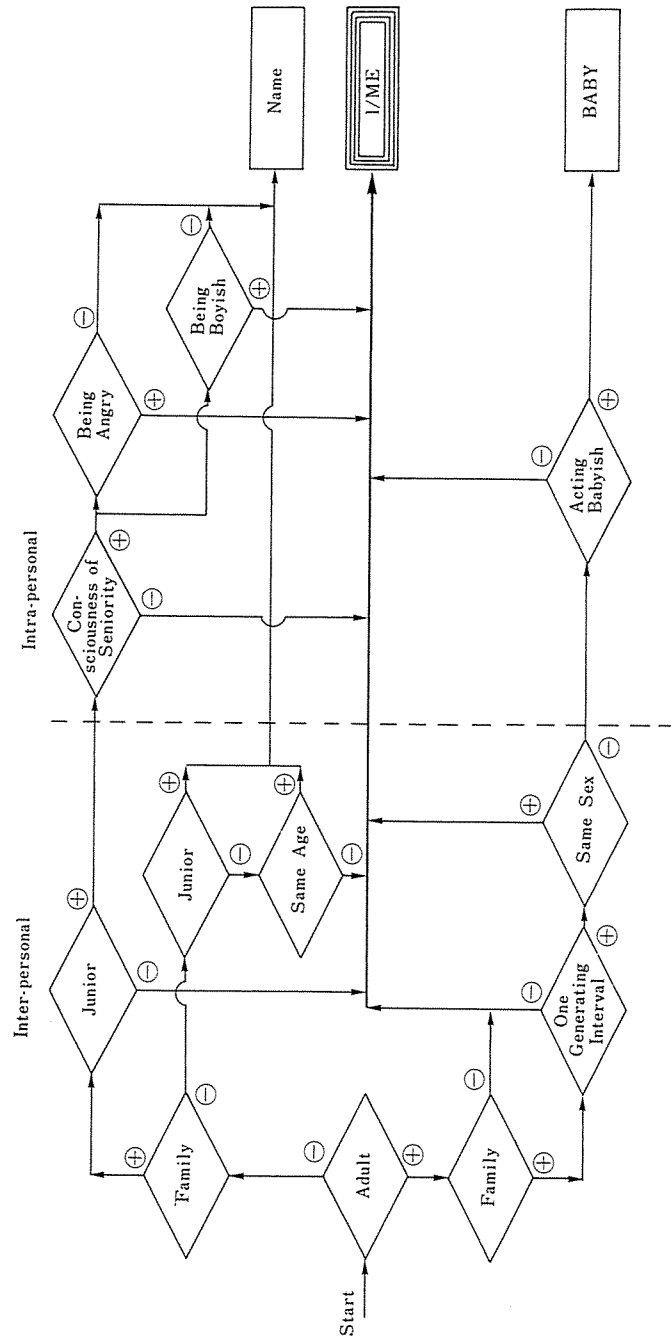


Figure 2: American Boys' First Person Reference

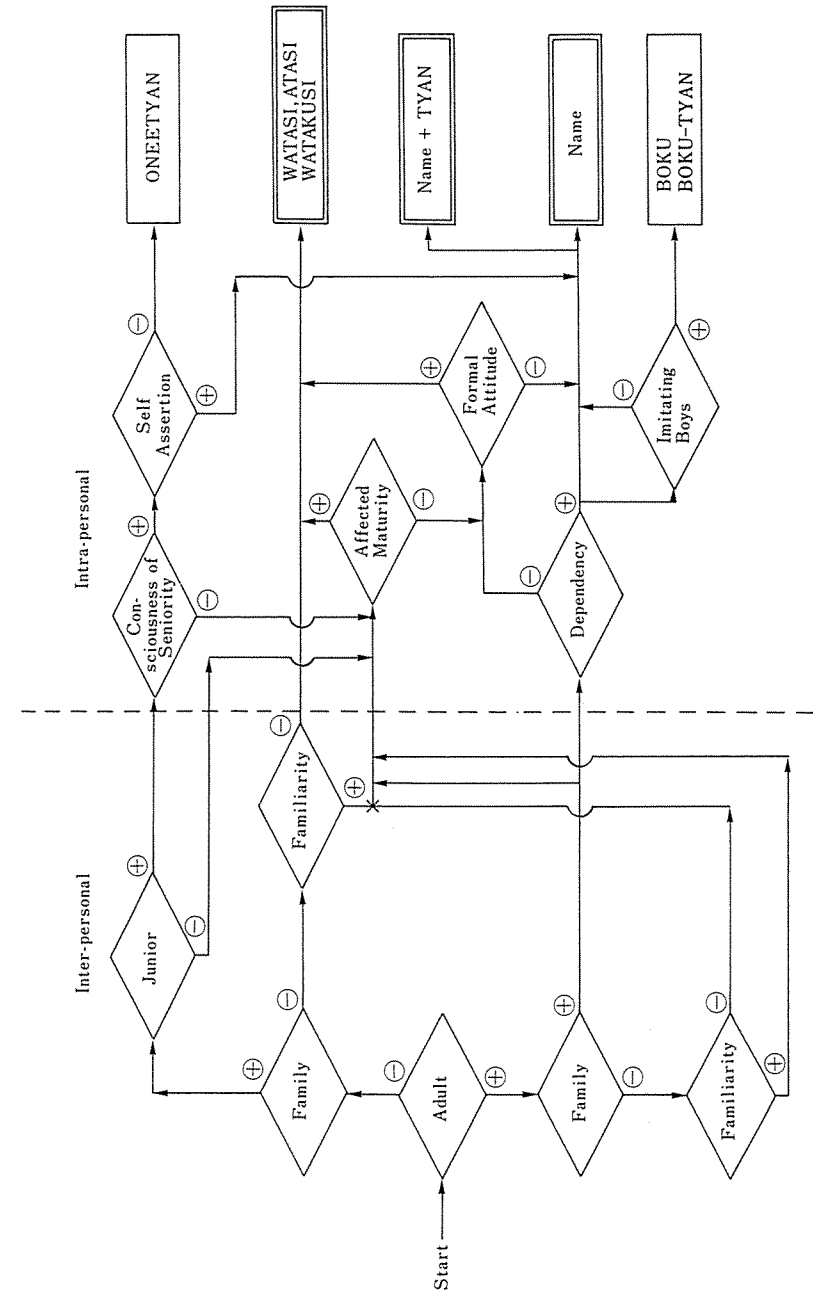


Figure 3: Japanese Girls' First Person Reference

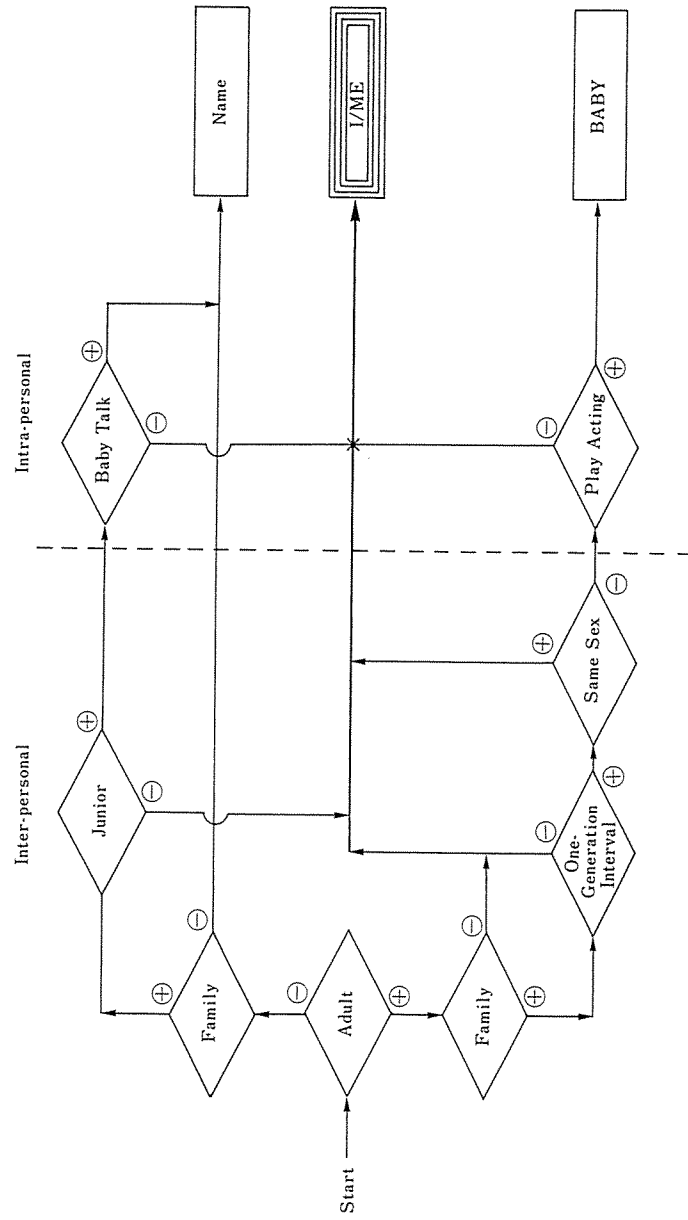


Figure 4: American Girls' First Person Reference

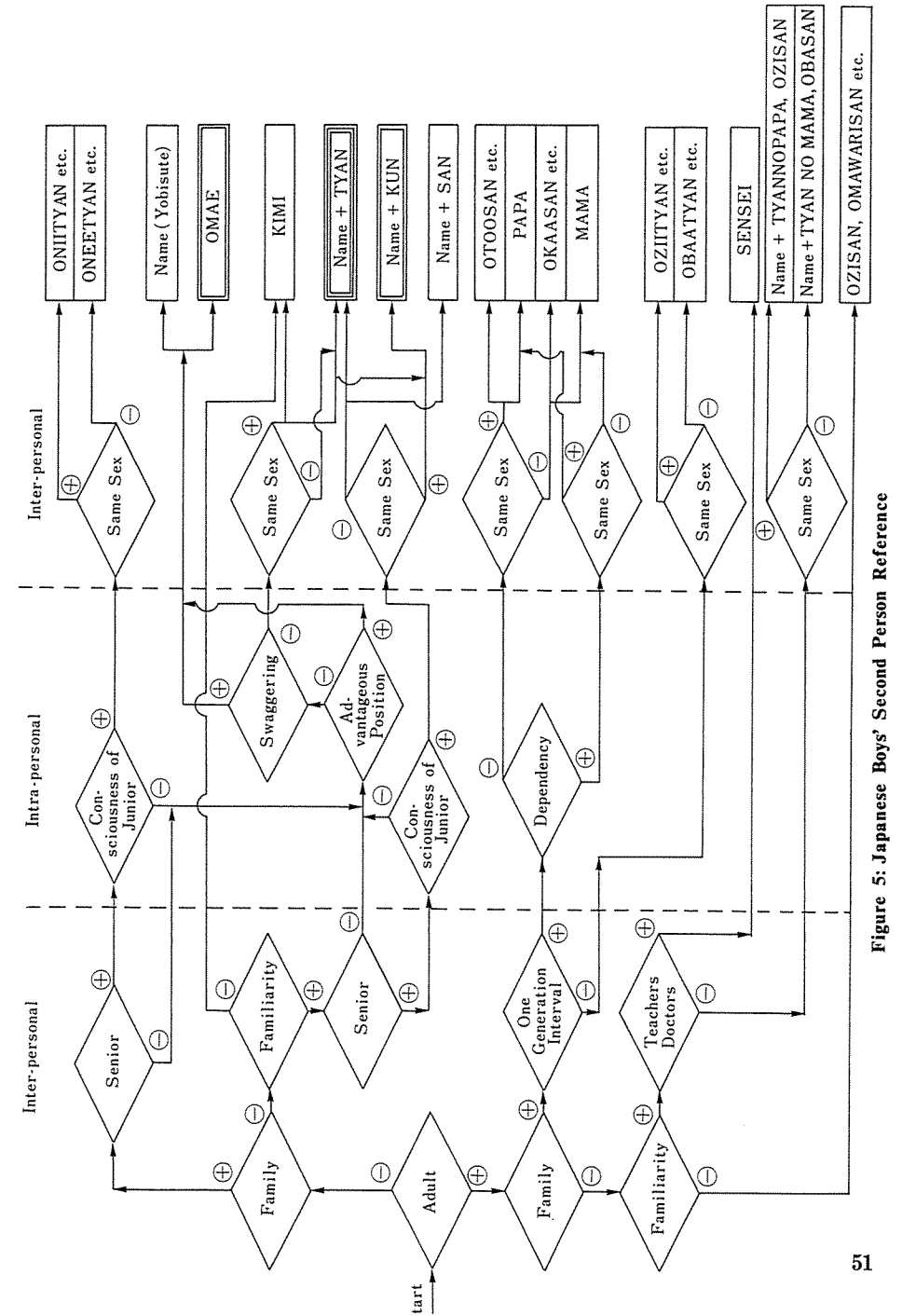


Figure 5: Japanese Boys' Second Person Reference

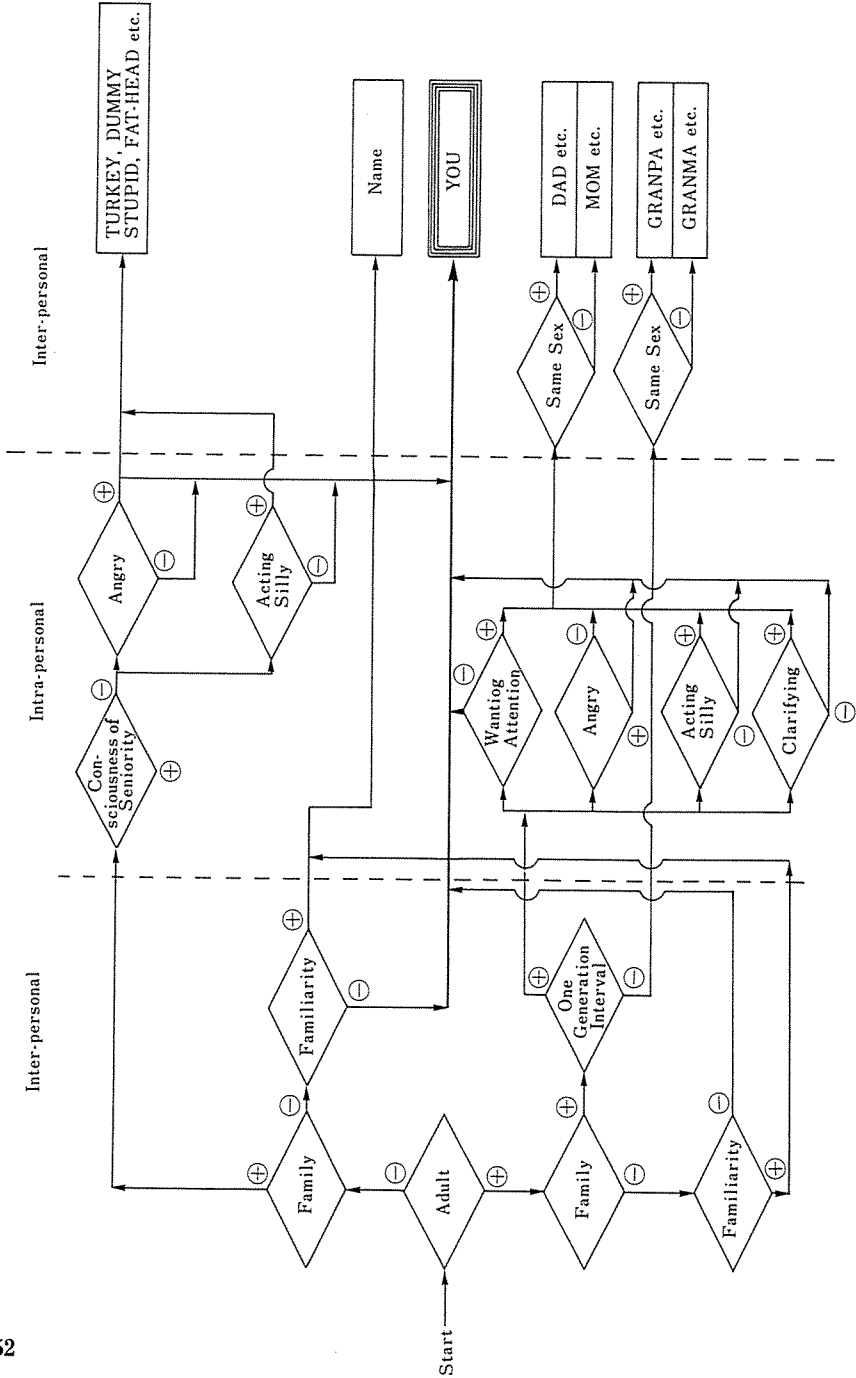


Figure 6: American Boys' Second Person Reference

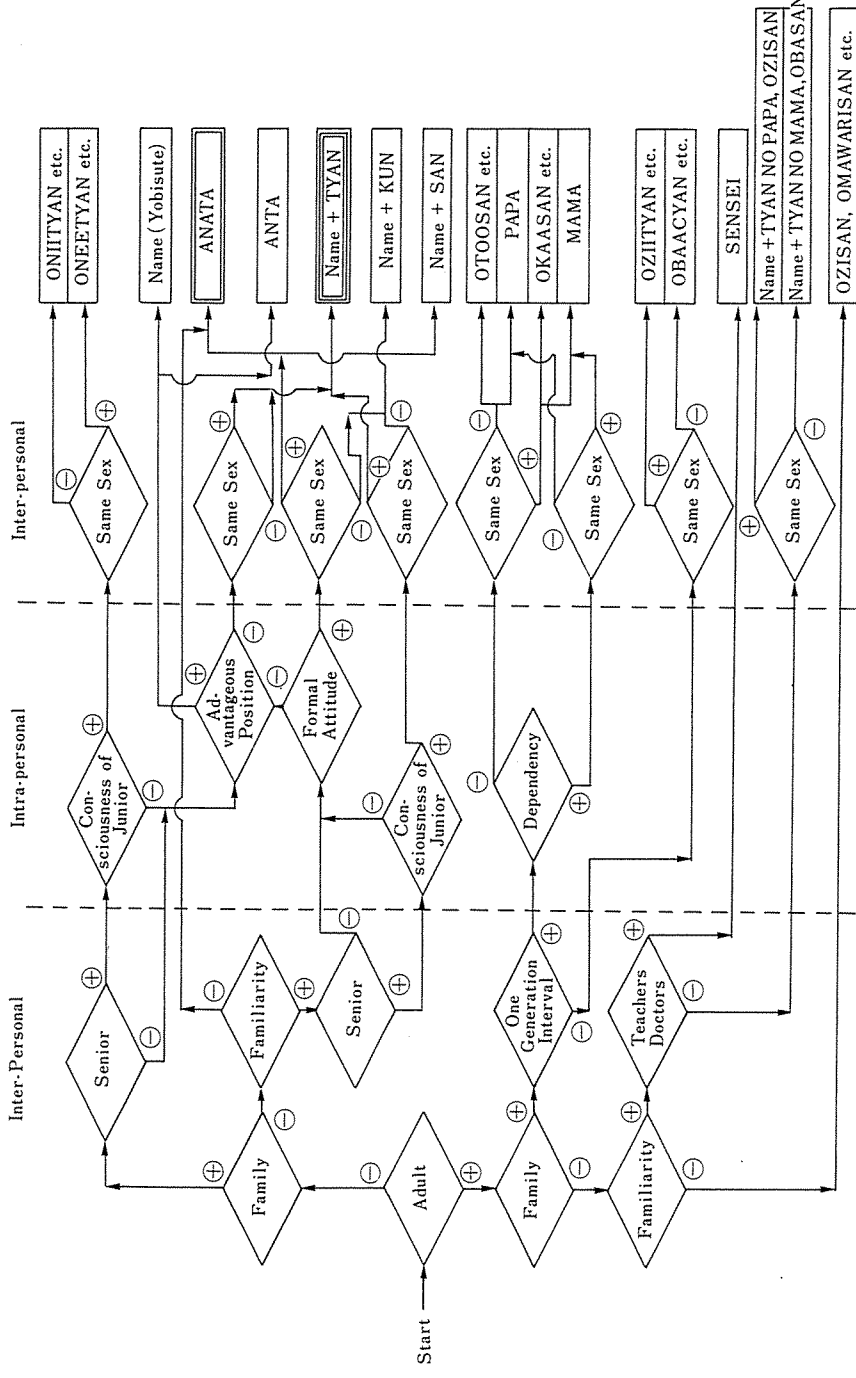


Figure 7: Japanese Girls' Second Person Reference

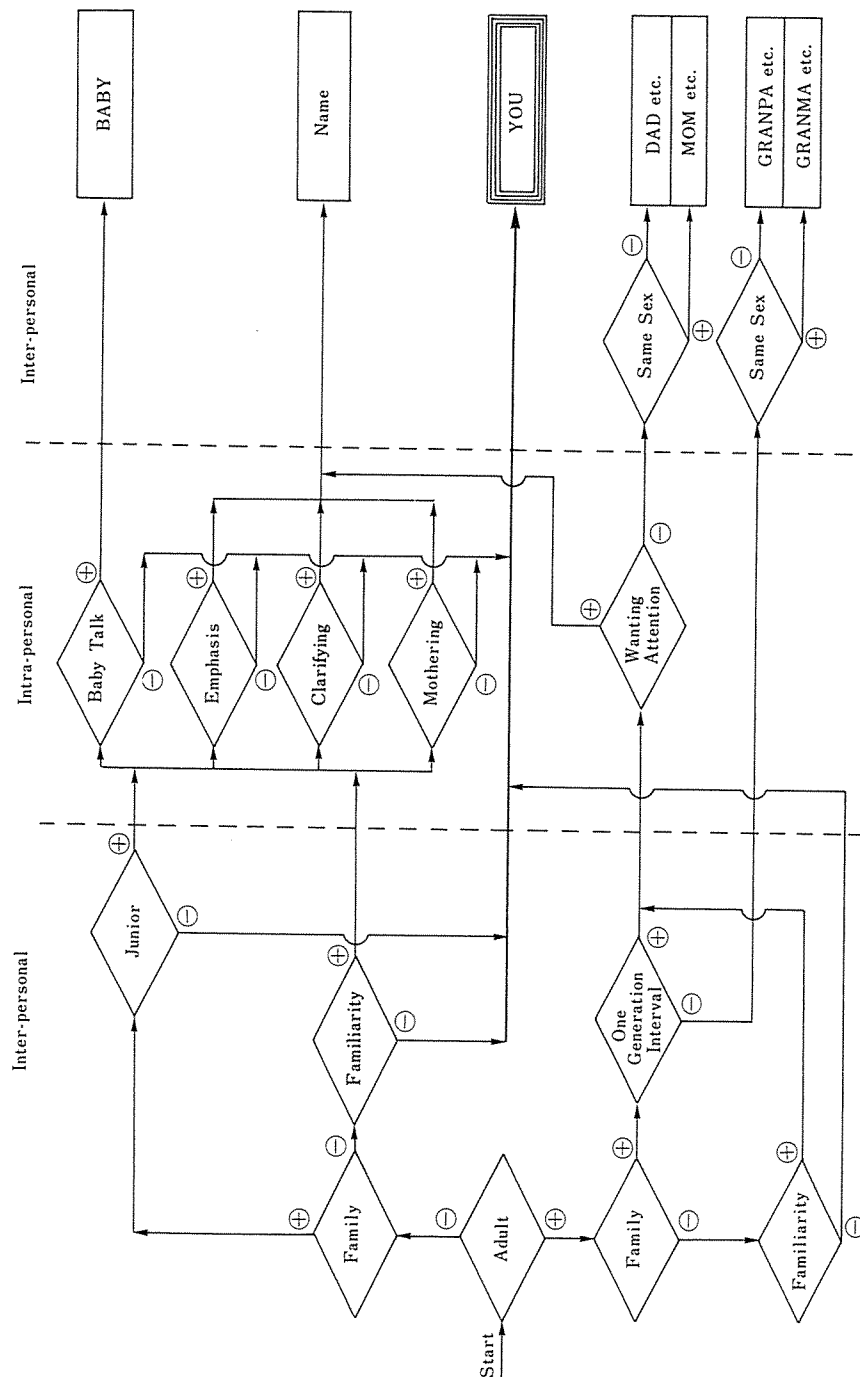


Figure 8: American Girls' Second Person Reference

The next step was to arrange each attribute into a binary selector (with a \oplus or a \ominus exit) in such a way that the selectors could be connected as proper routines in each flow chart. However, because of the limited data, no more than a hypothesis about the mechanisms by means of which the choice of different person-designating terms is arrived at can be proposed here. It goes without saying that not every possible mechanism of person references by Japanese and American children is attempted.

The \oplus and \ominus signs of inter-personal selectors read as follows :

Table 1
Reading of the \oplus and \ominus Signs
in the Selectors

Selectors	\oplus	\ominus
<i>Adult</i>	adult	non-adult
<i>Family</i>	family	non-family
<i>Junior</i>	younger than speaker	same as speaker or older
<i>Senior</i>	older than speaker	same as speaker's age or younger
<i>Same sex</i>	same as speaker's sex	opposite to speaker's sex
<i>Same age</i>	same as speaker's age	different from speaker's age
<i>Familiarity</i>	person familiar to speaker, e.g., teacher, doctor	person unfamiliar to speaker
<i>One generation interval</i>	one generation apart	more than one generation apart

The intra-personal selectors, by contracts, are fairly descriptive of speaker's psychological attributes, so much so that an example will probably suffice to illustrate how to read the \oplus and \ominus signs. To wit: \oplus *consciousness of seniority* means that the speaker is conscious of being senior to the hearer and \ominus means without such consciousness.

Figure 1 charts the use of the forms for first person designation. The figure is to be read like a computer flow chart. There is one input that begins on the left in each flow chart. And the circuit continues, resulting in various outputs on the right. The outputs constitute a list of person-designating terms. Thus, if a boy is talking to a dyadic partner and if that partner is a non-adult, he exits through the \ominus sign from the *adult* selector and takes the line going up which leads him to the next selector of *family*. The \oplus sign of the family selector means brother or sister. In this case, if the dyadic partner in the next selector is a younger brother or a sister (\oplus) and the speaker is conscious of his seniority (\oplus) without self assertion (\ominus), he chooses *oniityan* 'older brother' to refer to himself at the output. On the other hand, if the speaker has rejected the *family* selector, i.e., has exited at the \ominus sign, which means he is dealing with a dyadic partner who is not a family member, this takes him to the selector, called *same sex*. If he accepts this selector (\oplus), i.e., talking to a boy, he is led to another choice at *solidarity consciousness*. From here through the \oplus sign, for example, the speaker can reach the output at *ore* 'I'. The rest of the choices in the flow chart work in a similar fashion. Mention should be made, however, that it is important for a Japanese boy to identify himself as a member of a gang, his play group; this group consciousness is clearly reflected in the kind of play, behavior, and language boys tend to associate with.

When the speaker is talking to a dyadic partner who is a girl, or even to a mixed group, he rejects (i.e., takes the \ominus sign of) *same sex*, thereby arriving at *active play* which can lead him to *ore* 'I' through the \oplus sign or to *boku* 'I' through the \ominus sign. And when he has no solidarity feeling towards the people he is facing, he rejects the *solidarity* selector (\ominus). In so doing, he arrives at the three selectors called *active play*, *boyish conversation* and *swaggering*. From any one of these three selectors, by way of the \oplus sign, he can arrive at *ore*, if not, *boku* or one of the *name* variants. *Ore*, a male first person pronoun with a masculine and tough-sounding connotation, and *boku*, another male first person pronoun, are thus used by boys at an early age.

4. General Differences

Before I turn to the comparison of these flow charts and the discussion of the hypotheses, I must first point out an important matter that cannot be derived from the flow charts, something that I would like to call 'zero output'. My observations show that Japanese children often do not employ person-

designating terms; children at the nursery school would go for as much as half an hour without using any such terms. The same is not true of American children, however, because English requires the use of personal pronouns as in "I'm making X," "Look at *me* . . .," "Julia, where are *you*?" To convey the same things, a Japanese child would most likely say "*X o tukutte iru no*," "*Mitee*," and "*Zyuria, doko ni iru no*," respectively. Note that these Japanese sentences have no personal pronouns *boku* 'I' or *anata* 'you' but they still carry the same meaning as their English counterparts. If we include 'zero output' as one of the variants, it would have the highest frequency in Japanese, but not in English where it is in fact rare. Zero occurrence of person-designating terms is one of the main characteristics which makes Japanese sociolinguistically different from European languages. While this topic will not be pursued any further here, albeit highly interesting and relevant, it will be of help if this important characteristic is kept in mind when one looks at the charts.

Another interesting fact that needs to be pointed out, before detailed discussion of the flow charts can begin, is that neither American nor Japanese children use personal pronouns when they first begin to talk. Thus, the term for first person designation that is acquired earliest is the child's own name, because it is the form which also has been used in addressing the child from the time the child was born (Ide 1978a, b).

5. Discussion

As was stated further above, each flow chart has been arranged in such a way as to make it easy to compare the uses of person-designating terms by Japanese and American children. The degree of frequency of use for each form is roughly indicated by the number of layers in each square box enclosing the form. In English, *I/me* and *you* are used most frequently. By contrast, the Japanese children do not seem to prefer any highly particular referential form in either the first or the second person.

What is most striking in this respect is the fact that Japanese has a far more complicated mechanism for selecting the variants. It is not too surprising to see this evidence in Kimura (1972) and Suzuki (1973), among others, as well. However, it must not be overlooked that English also has a certain variety of person-designating terms which American children can choose. When pronouns alone are considered it may be concluded that English has only *I* and *you* and the like, whatever the situation may be. This gives rise to the

impression that English is static with reference to the first and second persons. However, when person-designating terms other than the personal pronouns are taken into account, variations become quite obvious even in English; these variations, such as names, kinship terms, as well as pronouns are of particular avail to children when referring to others. It follows that the more complicated routines in the Japanese flow charts are, as have been pointed out, due to the complexity of person references in Japanese.

Now, even though there is diversity in English, the fact remains that the basic forms, that is, *I/me* and *you*, are preferred by children; the heavy line which runs through the center of each flow chart leading to *I/me* and *you* is indicative of this trend. Careful observation makes it possible to find other person-designating terms like *name* or *baby* under certain conditions. On the other hand, as was mentioned above, no particular personal referential form is preferred by Japanese children; boys have to choose a variant form among *boku* and *ore* etc., for the first person and *name+tyan*, *omae*, etc. for the second person; and girls have to choose one out of several, such as *name* and *watasi* etc., for the first person, and *name+tyan*, *anata*, etc. for the second person. Thus, Japanese children cannot be quite as sure as their American counterparts of the choice of a proper variant, since the choices are so much wider for them.

I have hypothesized earlier on the basis of previous speculations by scholars in various disciplines that one rather interesting way of identifying self is reflected in the use of person-designating terms. Here the supporting evidence to further the hypothesis is the lack of one stable linguistic form for identification purposes in either the first or the second person, a point that may be correlated with the fact that the Japanese lack a strong, stable self-image. This correlation can be seen at work from an early stage of language acquisition.

Now, let us examine the content of the selectors, especially, the intra-personal selectors such as *swaggering*, *dependency*, *angry*, etc.. These are the attributes that lead children to use one variant over the others, and they may be taken as culturally meaningful. Awareness of these attributes leads children in each language to be conscious of what is important in their use of it. It is interesting, therefore, to compare these concepts cross-culturally as well as between the two sexes.

The selector that can be found in all Japanese but not in the English charts is *dependency*. It is popularly known in Japanese culture as AMAE, a key

concept expounded by Takeo Doi (1971). This cultural trait manifests itself even among small children. It is, therefore, only natural that it is listed in the charts. Of course, American children do depend on parents, too, even though this fact is not made so much of in America as in Japan. I have listed *wanting attention* (Fig. 6 and 8) and *being babyish* (Fig. 2) as selectors for the second person referents of American children and these selectors may well be interpreted as an American-style manifestation of AMAE.

Consciousness of seniority is found in both groups of children taken either cross-culturally (Japanese vs. Americans) or cross-sexually (boys vs. girls). For children growing up, the consciousness of being senior or junior to a dyadic partner seems to be one contributing factor that causes the switch from one basic variant to another.

The sex factor also plays an important role in the choice of language elements. In this vein, then, if the uses of personal referential forms are compared, there seems to be some similarity between the English selectors *angry* and *being boyish* and the Japanese selectors *swaggering* and *boyish conversation*. All these factors assert masculinity in the mind of the speaker. They seem to correlate reasonably well with the use of such forms as *ore* or *omae* in Japanese or *turkey*, *dummy*, *stupid* in English.

Similarly, American girls' *mothering* (Fig. 8) and *baby talk*, (Figs. 4 and 8) and Japanese girls' *affected maturity* (Fig. 3) are sex-linked cultural traits. They all appear when a little girl pretends to be a mature person—a mother, a big sister, or a lady. They can be considered as her tentative adoption of a traditional feminine role. These selectors are considered correlated with the use of such variant forms as *name* in English and *watasi* in Japanese, both of which are deviations from their respective normative forms: *I* and *name+tyan*.

The selector *formal attitude*, which gives rise to a path in the routine for Japanese girls in their choice of a variant of the first or the second person designation, seems illuminating to the extent that we can suppose that since Japanese women were exposed so young to this formal attitude characterized in their language to take on whatever degree of formality that is expected of them as adults in Japanese society, it may have something to do with their exceptional ability.

6. Summary

The present study has been concerned with differences between the uses of

Japanese and English person-designating terms by children. Our goal was to describe and compare such uses both cross-culturally and cross-sexually. The method employed here, in the form of flow charts, seems to have enabled us to visualize the processes reflecting on the thinking that may be construed as taking place in the minds of Japanese and American children with respect to their choice of a first or second person referential form. The flow charts themselves may also have served to clarify certain differences between the two social organizations of language behavior the children represent in developmental terms (Fishman 1971: 1).

It should be evident how complicated the choice of personal referential forms is in Japanese society. Be that as it may, some similarities have been observed between those two seemingly divergent social organizations of children's language behavior. One point of interest is that American children have some flexibility in their language behavior towards first and second person referents, albeit overshadowed by the predominance of *I* and *you*. It is also true that in both Japanese and American children the sex of speaker seems to be an important condition in the choice of variants.

NOTE

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1. The terms "I-word" and "you-word" which are employed in Fred C. C. Peng (1973) are not used here; instead, the phrase "person-designating terms" is employed interchangeably with "personal referential forms", because this study encompasses words and phrases other than personal pronouns. In the first or second person, for instance, are included such words as first name, nicknames, and phrases which indicate the position in a family, status or occupational

names besides personal pronouns "I" and "you" and their variants. In Suzuki (1973) "terms of self" and "terms of address" are employed. However, "terms of self" implies "first person references", while "terms of address" is different from the second person reference in that it includes address forms. Therefore, Suzuki's terminology is not adopted.

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