Overt Anaphoric Expressions, Empathy, and the Uchi-Soto Distinction in Japanese

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1. Introduction

Recent studies on Anaphora (Huang 2000) have revealed the extent to which languages differ in terms of morphosyntactic means (e.g. gaps, pronouns, names) employed, as well as the discourse-pragmatic functions assigned to anaphoric expressions.

What emerges from cross-linguistic comparison of anaphora is the contrast between languages like English and French where the use of overt anaphoric pronouns is unmarked, and those where it is stylistically marked to varying degrees. Japanese belongs to the latter group of languages.

By analyzing the discourse context of Japanese script data (movie and TV drama), this paper discusses functional-cognitive factors determining the choice of overt anaphoric expressions in Japanese, e.g. personal pronouns (e.g. kare ‘he/him’) and proper names (e.g. Yamada-san ‘Mr. Yamada’).

2. A Brief Look at Previous Studies on Discourse-Pragmatics of Anaphoric Expressions

“Anaphora” refers to “a relation between two linguistic elements, wherein the interpretation of one (called an anaphor) is in some way determined by the interpretation of the other (called an antecedent)” (Huang 2000, p. 1). The following examples illustrate NP-anaphora (examples (1a) and (1b) are from Huang 2000, p.2-3):

(1) (a) “gaps”

Xiaoming shuo (0) zui xihuan Tian’ehu.

Xiaoming say most like swan lake
“Xiaoming says that (he) likes *Swan Lake* most.”

(b) “pronoun”

John said that *he* was a music lover.

c) “names”

*Taroo* ni wa *Taroo*-no koto-o omotte kureru to TOP GEN thing-ACC think:GER give (me) koibito-ga ita.

*lover-NOM existed*

“*Taroo* had a girlfriend who loved him.”

When a language has several anaphoric expressions available, it is a challenging yet intriguing question to identify factors that determine the choice of one or the other expression in specific context.

Previous studies exploring the choice of anaphoric expressions in English and other languages have recognized functional factors such as “topic continuity” (Givón 1983) and “accessibility” (Ariel 1990). Givón proposed the following hierarchy of topic continuity whereby more continuous topics tend to require less overt linguistic coding:

(2)

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more continuous / accessible topics

Zero anaphora
Unstressed/bound pronouns (⊥ agreement ⊥)
Stressed/independent pronouns
Full NP’s
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more discontinuous / inaccessible topics

Ariel (1990) extended Givón’s topic coding hierarchy by employing the psychologically oriented notion of “accessibility”, i.e. “degree of activation” within memory (p. 16). Ariel’s contention, similar to that of Givón, is that “emptier forms (less Informative, less Rigid, more Attenuated) retrieve more accessible entities” (p. 99). Ariel’s accessibility hierarchy is shown in (3):

(3) Full Pronouns > Cliticized Pronouns > Rich/First- and Second-Person Agreement > Poor/Third-Person Agreement > Zero Agreement (ibid)

These “accessibility” accounts are directly applicable to languages like English and French, which employ a variety of overt anaphoric pronouns regularly. In these languages, correspondence can be readily identified...
between the morphosyntactic coding of pronouns and their discourse functions, as presented in (2) and (3).

It is debatable whether such accounts are directly applicable to East Asian languages like Japanese, Korean, and Chinese. In these languages, pronouns do not necessarily show such formal variation as suggested in hierarchies (2) and (3), nor are they employed as regularly. In fact, overt anaphoric expressions other than personal pronouns are frequently employed in these languages where personal pronouns are expected in languages like English and French. Non-pronominal anaphoric expressions include proper names, as in (4) (Makino 1980, p.71, partially modified):

(4) A: Yamada-san wa ima nani-o yonde i-masu-ka?
   TW TOP now what-ACC read:GER exist-POL-Q
   “What is Mr. Yamada reading?”
   B: \{Yamada-san-wa/Kare-wa\} amerika-no syoosetu-o yonde i-masu.
   he America novel
   “{Mr. Yamada/He} is reading an American novel.”

This fact suggests that personal pronouns in these languages may be stylistically more marked than their counterparts in languages like English and French. This is indeed the case in Japanese, where personal pronouns tend to be omitted when contextually recoverable as in first and second person pronouns (example 5), or to be avoided as in third person pronouns (example 6):

(5) Watasi-wa (*?watasi-no) heya-de (*?watasi-no) tomodati-to hanasite ita.
   I-TOP I-GEN room-LOC I-GEN friend-with was talking
   “I was talking with my friend in my room.” (Makino and Tsutsui 1986, p. 29, partially modified)

(6) Taroo-wa {??kare/zibun}-ga tensai-da to omotte iru.
   TOP he/self NOM genius-COP QUOT think:GER exist
   “Taro, thinks that he, is a genius.”

The former tendency toward omission of “contextually or situationally recoverable” personal pronouns is observed in Korean too (Sohn 1994, P. 282). Regarding the latter tendency toward avoidance of personal pronouns, Iwasaki (2002) made the following observation: “Pure personal pronouns used for reference tracking, such as “he, she, it, they” in the English language, do not exist in Japanese. (...) Though the younger generation uses
kaer/kano-jo (‘he, him/she, her’: KH) more often than the previous generations, the use of these words as pure third pronouns is still extremely limited.” (p. 267)

The discussion presented in this section leads us to suspect that the choice of overt anaphoric expressions in Japanese, including personal pronouns and proper names, may be influenced by factors other than topicality and accessibility. The next section addresses this issue from a cognitive-functional perspective.

3. Factors Influencing the Choice of Overt Anaphoric Expressions in Japanese: Empathy and Subjectivity

“Other” cognitive-functional factors influencing the choice of overt anaphoric expressions in Japanese have been recognized by previous researchers. Two factors identified in the previous literature are “empathy” and “subjectivity”.

“Empathy”, “the speaker’s identification, with varying degrees (…), with a person who participates in the event that he describes in a sentence” (Kuno and Kaburaki 1977, p. 628), has been applied to a variety of grammatical phenomena in Japanese including passive constructions and verbs of giving and receiving. Clancy (1980) argues that the notion of empathy can be extended to the choice of overt anaphoric expressions in Japanese, as follows: “(…) it generally seems true that the character being empathized with tends to be pronominalized or ellipted, whereas nominal reference is used for characters receiving less of the speaker’s empathy (…) the narrator tends to take the viewpoint of the character he most frequently pronominalizes or ellipts and to take a more objective or neutral stance toward those referred to with noun phrases.” (p. 179)

Regarding the choice of overt anaphoric expressions, Clancy’s suggestion amounts to the following observation: the more a referent is empathized with, the more likely it is to be coded by pronoun than noun phrase. A similar observation has been presented by Makino (1980), who proposed the following “empathy hierarchy” (p. 31, English translation by KH):

(7) Ellipsis > Incomplete Repetition > Complete Repetition
    more empathized←------------------>less empathized

Makino’s empathy hierarchy is illustrated by examples (8a)-(8c) (p. 30, partially modified; English translation by KH):
(8) Yamada-wa iki-taku nakatta. Daitai {(a) 0/(b) kare-wa/}
TOP go-want NEG:PAST generally he-TOP
(c) Yamada-wa} party-no tagui wa kirai datta.
GEN kind dislike:PAST

“Yamada didn’t want to go (there). Generally speaking, 
{*0/he/Yamada} didn’t like party-thing.”

Makino notes that the writer’s differential degrees of empathy toward a referent is indicated by the differing degrees of “repeating” the referent linguistically. The highest empathy toward ‘Mr. Yamada’ is encoded by ellipsis (8a), the lowest degree by “full” repetition (8c), e.g. proper name, with the intermediate degree of empathy indicated by incomplete repetition (8b), i.e. pronoun.

Another notion that has been identified as a factor governing the choice of overt anaphoric expressions is “subjectivity”, “the expression of self and the representation of a speaker’s (…) perspective or point of view in discourse” (Finnegan 1995, P. 1, quoted in Traugott and Dasher 2002, P. 20). Uehara (2001) argues that Japanese is a “speaker’s perspective-oriented language” and that “(t)he subjective perspective (or speaker’s view) is prominent and active in the language” (p. 49). Uehara’s argument is based on his contextual analysis of overt anaphoric expressions (third person pronouns and nominal expressions) in Japanese that were used to translate English pronouns in O. Henry’s novel *The Last Leaf*. Uehara found the following distributional peculiarity of Japanese third person pronouns occurring in the translation: “(T)he third person pronouns *(kare, kanozo, karera)* are found only in the narrator’s reference to the people in the story (…). In other words, third person pronouns are never used by the characters in reference to others in the story.” (p. 40) In contrast, nominal expressions including proper names were used in reference to the characters in the story as they were mentioned by other participants in the story.

Uehara attributed this distributional difference between overt anaphoric expressions to the presence vs. absence of subjectivity: “The characters in the story tend to take subjective perspectives toward the participants in events they describe, while the narrator’s perspective is rather objective.” (p.43)

Uehara’s observation is shared by Kanzaki (1994), who stated that a personal pronoun is chosen when its intended referent is described with maximal objectivity and emotional detachment by the writer, as illustrated
by the following quotation from the famous Japanese novel *Sansyoouo* (‘salamander’) by Masuzi Ibuse:

(9) Sansyoouo-wa kanasinda. Kare-wa kare-no sumika salamander-TOP become sad: PAST he-TOP he-GEN residence
dearu iwaya-kara deyoo to sita (…)
COP cave-from get out:INT QUOT do: PAST
“A salamander became sad. He aspired to get out of the cave, which was his residence…”

The cognitive-functional characterizations of Japanese overt anaphoric expressions presented so far in this section are summarized as follows:

(10)

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<th></th>
<th>Personal pronouns</th>
<th>Nominal expressions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Clancy (1980), Makino (1980)</td>
<td>more empathized</td>
<td>less empathized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uehara (2001)</td>
<td>objective</td>
<td>subjective</td>
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The notions of empathy and subjectivity are independently defined from each other. Still, characterizing third personal pronouns as “more empathized” and “objective” at the same time appears to be contradictory. The same would result when nominal expressions are labeled as both “less empathized” and “subjective”. These apparently opposing observations arguably require “deconstructing” these notions, as it were, when they are applied to overt anaphoric expressions in Japanese. We will discuss this issue in the next section.

4. Deconstructing Empathy: Relevance of the *Uchi* (‘in-group’) - *Soto* (‘out-group’) Distinction

The previous section has revealed that it is not sufficient to invoke cognitive-functional notions like empathy and subjectivity in characterizing the distributional differences between third personal pronouns and nominal expressions.

The current study argues that an in-depth analysis of contextually variable interactions between a speaker, an addressee, and a human referent mentioned by the speaker, is essential to understanding the
cognitive-functional factor determining the choice of overt anaphoric expressions in Japanese. Specifically, it proposes that the following two factors are crucially relevant:

(A) The empathy relationship between a speaker, an addressee, and a human referent mentioned by the speaker;

(B) The notions of *uchi* (‘in-group’) and *soto* (‘out-group’) as the determinant of (A).

Factor (B) needs some explanation. The notions of *uchi* (‘in-group’) and *soto* (‘out-group’) are indispensable to understanding a variety of grammatical phenomena in Japanese including its honorification system, which “is relativized with regard to an insider-outsider distinction” (Shibatani 1990, P. 379). Shibatani elaborates on his observation as follows: “One of the characteristics of the Japanese honorific system is that the notion of distance is relativized in such a way that the same person can be distant or close depending on the distance between the speaker and the addressee. When the speaker and the addressee are close, and the referent is distant, then referent honorifics (subject or object honorifics) will be used. (…) Likewise, in reference to the company president, colleagues would use honorifics when speaking among themselves. But when they are speaking to an outsider, e.g. a customer, the president is placed on the speaker’s side, and no honorifics would be used in reference to the president.” (p. 379, emphasis added)

The “relative” nature of the Japanese honorification system, which is often contrasted with its arguably more “absolute” Korean counterpart (Sohn 1999), is illustrated by the following examples (quoted from Shibatani 1990, P. 379, glosses and translations partially modified):

(11) a. Syatyoo-san wa ima o-dekake ni natte i-masu.
   president-HON TOP now HON-go out HON be-POL
   “The president is gone out now.” (to an insider)

b. Syatoo wa ima dekake-te ori-masu.
   president TOP now go out be-PO
   “same as (11a)” (to an outsider)

Previous researchers, including Quinn (1994) and Makino (1996), have clearly recognized that such *uchi/soto* distinctions are observable in a variety of Japanese grammatical phenomena. For instance, Quinn (1994)
made the following observation on the ubiquity of *uchi/soto* indexation in the grammatical structure of Japanese: “The main contention of this chapter is that an *uchi/soto* distinction, far from being limited to social or spatial deixis, indexes differences of an epistemological kind, too, as a function of the meanings of certain pairs of grammatical devices, which contrast along just these lines. (...) Grammatical devices that index such *uchi/soto* distinctions include (but are not limited to) (in) transitivity, aspect, and modality, two clause nominalizers (*no* and *koto*), a pair of particles (*ni* and *to*).” (p. 250)

The notions of *uchi* and *soto*, combined with the notion of empathy, arguably play a crucial role in determining the distribution of overt anaphoric expressions in Japanese. The next section presents an in-depth analysis of contextually variable interactions between a speaker, an addressee, and a human referent mentioned by the speaker from the perspectives of empathy and the *uchi/soto* distinction.

5. Contextual Analysis of Overt Anaphoric Expressions in Japanese: Based on Drama/Movie Script Data

Recent discourse-functional studies (e.g. Ochs, Schegloff, and Thompson 1996) have made it obvious that spontaneous conversation is the most ideal laboratory in which to observe and analyze the functions of grammatical devices. While the current study concedes that this is true, it suggests that alternative data sources can be sought, especially when the grammatical devices in question are not necessarily employed on a regular basis, as in the case of third personal pronouns in Japanese.

The methodology of analyzing instances of overt anaphoric expressions that correspond to third personal pronouns in an English text, which was proved useful in Uehara's study (2001), was adopted for the purpose of data collection. Additionally, we collected instances of overt anaphoric expressions occurring in a Japanese movie script with English subtitles.

The two conversational data used in this study are as follows:


b. Japanese conversational data occurring in a Japanese movie script

*Reisei to zyoonetu no aida* (‘Reisei’)
These two data were selected (i) because they include conversations between participants (a speaker and an addressee) in which the third party (e.g., the speaker’s boyfriend) was mentioned by means of a variety of overt anaphoric expressions, and (ii) because they provide sufficient audio-visual information and contextual cues for the better understanding of the degree of the speaker’s empathy toward a referent relative to the addressee.

A word is in order here regarding the minimum essential details of the stories of the two data. *Ally McBeal* is a popular American TV comedy regularly broadcast by NHK (a broadcasting organization) in Japan. It features the public and private life of a female lawyer living in Boston, *Ally McBeal*. In that drama, Ally interacts with her law firm colleagues, customers, and friends in a variety of settings including courtroom, office, and apartment. *Reisei to zyoonetu no aida* (*Between Cool and Enthusiasm*) is a Japanese movie that won popularity particularly among young Japanese women. It centers around two main characters, i.e., a young male art restorer named *Junsei* and a young female student from Hong Kong named *Aoi* studying in Japan. Junsei and Aoi are romantically involved with each other despite having their respective lovers.

Our analysis uncovered the following four patterns of empathy relationship between Speaker (S), Addressee (A), and Referent (R) based on the notions of *uchi* and *soto*.

(I) S and the A are in *uchi* (‘in-group’), while R is in *soto* (‘out-group’). S’s empathy toward R is higher than that toward A. This case can be schematized as follows: {S, A} R

(II) S and R are in *uchi*, while A is in *soto*. S’s empathy toward R is higher than that toward A. This case can be schematized as follows: {S, R} A

(III) Both A and R are in *soto*, while S alone is in *uchi*. S’s empathy toward A is equal to that toward R. This case can be schematized as follows: {S} A, R

(IV) Both S, A, and R are in *uchi*. S’s empathy toward A is equal to that toward R. This case can be schematized as follows: {S, A, R}

In what follows, we will examine overt anaphoric expressions employed in each case.
5.1.1  (Speaker, Addressee) Referent

When a speaker and an addressee are in uchi, while a referent is in soto, third person pronouns, e.g. kare, kanozyo, tend to be employed, as in (13) - (14):

(13) Watasi-no ruumumeeto sitteru desyoo. Kanozyo ni ne, koibito-ga
dekita no. “You know my roommate? She found a new boyfriend.” (Ally)

(14) (A friend of Aoi): Tokorode anatatati-no kekkon-wa?
(Aoi’s boyfriend): Kanozyo-ga nozonde nai
“I don’t think she wants it.” (Reisei)

In (13) and (14), third person pronoun kanozyo refers to the person whose empathy relationship to the speaker is more distant relative to the empathy relationship between the speaker and the addressee.

5.1.2  (Speaker, Referent) Addressee

When a speaker and a referent are in uchi, while an addressee is in soto, non-pronouns, e.g. proper names tend to be employed, as in (15) - (16):

(15) (Richard): Gei? Zyon-ga?
(Ling): Seitekini hannoo sinai nda mono.
(Richard): (…) Zyon-wa gei zya nai.
“Gay? Uh, John?”
“He won’t respond sexually.”
“He’s not gay.” (Ally)

(16) (Junsei): Aoi-ni nante itta?
“to what say” (PAST)
“What did you say to Aoi?”

Aoi-wa sonnna onna zya nee zo.
TOP such woman COP NEG SFP
“She’s not that kind of girl.”

Aoi-o buzyouku suru na.
ACC insult do SFP:NEG
“You insulted her.” (Reisei)

In (15) and (16), proper names Zyon and Aoi are employed to indicate the greater degree of empathy between the speaker and the referent relative to the addressee. Note that third person pronouns are employed in English.

5.1.3 {Speaker} Addressee, Referent

When a speaker alone is in uchi, while an addressee and a referent are both in soto, third person pronouns tend to be employed, as in (17) and (18), similarly to the case of ”{Speaker, Addressee} Referent” in 5.1.1.

(17) (Billy): Zyon Keezi-wa kizu tuki yasui otoko nanda. Sore-wa sitteru yo ne?
John Cage-TOP be hurt likely man EXP that-TOP know SFP
“John Cage is kind a vulnerable guy. I think you know that.”

(Nelle): Kare-ga supea-no rimokon-o kureta no.
he-NOM spare-GEN remote flusher-ACC gave me SFP
“He gave me his remote flusher.” (Ally)

(18) (Referring to Aoi’s boyfriend, with Aoi as the addressee)
(Junsei) Kare-wa?
he-TOP
“How is he?” (Reisei)

In both cases, third person pronouns encode the speaker’s distancing herself/himself from both the addressee and the referent.

5.1.4 {Speaker, Addressee, Referent}

Finally, when a speaker, an addressee, and a referent are all in uchi, non-pronouns like inclusive minna tend to be employed. In (19), minna
indicates the speaker’s sense of solidarity as officemates.

(19) (The law firm secretary Elaine speaking to Ally about other lawyers waiting)
Minna kaigisitu dakara sugu itte.
“Everyone in the conference room because right away go.”

Note that a third person pronoun they was used in the English original, which literally translates into karera (‘they’) in Japanese. Using the latter expression, however, would have conveyed the speaker’s sense of detachment from the addressee.

The distribution of overt anaphoric expressions observed in groups (I)-(IV) can be summarized in:

(20) Distribution of anaphoric expressions based on the uchi/soto typology

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<td>I</td>
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<td>III</td>
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<td>II</td>
<td>S, R</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>S, R, A</td>
<td>Non-Pronouns</td>
</tr>
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5.2 Discussion

The analysis in 5.1 has uncovered a relatively clear pattern of distribution of overt anaphoric expressions based on the uchi-soto typology of Speaker, Referent, and Addressee, as shown in (20). Third person pronouns tend to be employed when the referent is located outside the speaker’s sphere of empathy, as in (I) and (III). Conversely, non-pronouns like proper names tend to be used when the referent is situated inside the speaker’s sphere of empathy. This pattern of distribution sharply contrasts with the distributional pattern of third person pronouns in English, which can be used irrespective of such in-group/out-group distinction (cf. 15, 16, 19).

This suggests that the choice of third person pronouns in Japanese is not governed simply by information-based factors such as topicality and accessibility unlike their counterparts in languages like English and French.

In other words, third person pronouns in Japanese do not simply refer to the antecedent NPs as second mentions. Instead, referring to a person by a
third person pronoun, and failing to refer to him/her by a higher empathy markers like proper name, conveys the speaker’s implication that the referent is not worthy of due recognition and attention. Therefore, use of third person pronouns in Japanese carries specific socio-cultural meaning rooted in the uchi-soto epistemology.

This study has thus opened up a new line of inquiry into overt anaphoric expressions in Asian languages like Japanese, which have tended to be analyzed by means of information-based notions like topicality and accessibility.

6. Conclusion

Based on a contextual analysis of TV drama and movie script data, this study demonstrates that the choice of personal pronouns and other nominal expressions (e.g. proper names) in Japanese is determined by the differential degrees of empathy between a speaker, a listener, and a human referent mentioned by the speaker, the empathy defined in terms of the notions of uchi ('in-group') and soto ('out-group'). Our specific findings included the following:

(I) Personal pronouns tend to be chosen when a referent is situated in soto, thereby showing the speaker’s lesser degree of empathy toward the referent;

(II) Non-personal pronouns (e.g. proper names) tend to be chosen when a referent is in uchi, thereby indicating the speaker’s greater empathy toward the referent.

Abbreviations
ACC (Accusative); CON (Conjecture); COP (Copula); EXP (Explanation); GEN (Genitive); GER (Gerund); HON (Honofiric); INT (Intention); NEG (Negative); NOM (Nominative); POL (Addressee Politeness); Q (Question); QUOT (Quotative); SFP (Sentence Final Particle); TOP (Topic); TW (Title Word).

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