English and Japanese Vocative Use in a Multiethnic Community in Japan

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Vocatives, or forms of address, are crucial to the study of linguistics and social structures; however, research on their use is lacking, especially in terms of comparative and empirical studies. In this exploratory study, I attempt to address this issue by analyzing the use of English and Japanese vocatives in a multiethnic university in Japan. Results indicate that although English address forms predominate, limited usage of Japanese vocatives among non-Japanese provides evidence of language crossing, pragmatic transfer, translanguaging, and language socialization in the university community.

呼格、呼びかけの形式は、言語学や社会構造の研究において重要である。しかし、その使用に関する研究は、特に比較と実証研究の観点から不足している。本予備的研究では、多様な民族が学ぶ日本の大学における英語と日本語の呼びかけの使用を分析することによって、この問題を明らかにすることを試みた。その結果、英語の呼びかけ形式が優勢ではあるものの、外国人の中で日本語の呼びかけ形式が限定的に使用されており、大学コミュニティにおけるlanguage　crossing、語用論的転移、translanguaging（言語交差使用）、言語社会化の現れであることを示した。

Vocatives, or forms of address, reflect the relationships between interlocutors in terms of factors such as age, gender, intimacy, politeness, and solidarity, and also embody the values of a particular culture. In addition, their appropriate use is necessary in order to navigate interactions in that culture (Leech, 1999). For these reasons, vocatives play a role not only in the study of linguistics, but also in that of social structures and changes (Clyne, Norrby, & Warren, 2009; Joseph, 1989; Mogi, 2002). However, comparative and empirical research on vocative use is notably lacking (Clyne et al., 2009; Leech, 1999). This exploratory study aims to address this gap by examining vocative use by graduate students in the researcher's teaching context, an international university in rural Niigata.

The university is known for its culturally diverse student population, an image that it actively fosters and promotes. Because the vast majority of the students at this university come from many different countries from around the world, English as a Lingua Franca is the standard medium of communication between different ethnicities within the university community. Despite this, the large number of Japanese staff and faculty and the location of the university itself ensure that the participants are exposed to and engage in interactions in the Japanese language.

The following research questions will be explored:

1. How often do non-Japanese use English versus Japanese forms of address in nonscripted interactions?
2. Why do participants elect to use English forms of address in certain situations, and Japanese forms of address in others?

In particular, in this study I sought to determine whether participants use of English and Japanese address forms constitutes evidence for certain sociolinguistic phenomena, particularly language crossing (Rampton, 1995; 2001), pragmatic transfer (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Yamagashira, 2001), translanguaging (Baker, 2011; Garcia, 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012) and language socialization (Duff, 2008; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Zuengler & Cole, 2005).

I first became interested in this topic when I noticed that, in my particular teaching context, graduate students from certain nationalities would insist on addressing me by my formal title instead of using my first name, which I have requested students to do. As Clyne et al. (2009) have pointed out, the exchanging of first names between university faculty and students is common in native English-speaking contexts. Another incongruity that I have noticed in teacher–student interactions is that some non-Japanese students would address non-Japanese faculty using Japanese terms like *sensei* or *san*. Curiosity to understand some of the sociocultural motivations behind these students' marked language use inspired this research. As universities in Japan move towards internationalization through the Global 30 Project and other measures (Agawa, 2011; Shimomura, 2013; Yonezawa, 2011; Yonezawa, Akiba, & Hirouchi, 2009), more university professors and lecturers will come into contact with students from various nationalities. It is hoped that this research will provide these instructors with insights on how to interact with these international students and navigate the sociocultural differences that will arise in such interactions.

Forms of Address in English and Japanese

According to Leech (1999), vocatives in English are used in interactions to (a) summon attention (e.g., A: "Dad!" B: "Yes?"), (b) identify the addressee (e.g., "Hey Ben, could you come over here for a minute?"), (c) "establish or maintain a social relationship between the speaker (or writer) and the addressee" (p. 108) (e.g., "Yeah man, that's right"), and (d) to express an emotion (e.g., "James! Look at this mess!"). Leech (1999) divides vocatives into several semantic categories; drawing on Leech, the following categories will be used in this research:

1. Casual: These include familiarizers and first names. Familiarizers are used to indicate familiarity with the addressee, and include shortened address forms (e.g., "bro"), shortened first names (e.g., "Beth"), and pronouns used as vocatives such as "you."
2. Formal: These include titles (e.g., "Professor Mason") and honorifics (e.g., "sir"). These are used to signal "polite distance" (p. 112) and indicate a level of respect to the addressee.

Clyne et al. (2009) have found that use of first names is becoming more and more widespread in countries where English is a first language, even in work and service encounters, and is indicative of shifts towards egalitarianism in social relations. Address forms such as title + surname remain the norm in certain domains such as interviews, hospital visitations, and more formal work situations (Bargiela et al., 2002); however, this practice is disappearing in other traditionally formal interactions, such as between academic staff and students at the university level (Clyne et al., 2009).

Japanese address forms have similar functions and semantic categories to their English counterparts (Fischer, 1964; Yui, 2012). However, Yui (2012) states that Japanese offers a larger variety of vocative pronouns (e.g. *anata*, *omae*, and *kimi* for the

English pronoun equivalent "you," each distinct from the others in terms of use); in addition, the frequency of use of the different categories varies between the two languages.

The Japanese honorifics *san* and *sensei* will be focused upon in this study, because these address forms were the only Japanese ones that were used by the study participants. *San*, which appears at the end of names and certain family terms and familiarizers, "is used between equals regardless of gender" (p. 45). Use of *san* among study participants is thus allocated to the first category established for this research, casual, with a couple of caveats. First of all, Yui (2012) states that *san* can also be used in situations where the social relations between interlocutors are unclear or still being negotiated. According to Befu and Norbeck (1958), *san* can be used to show deference. Thus, *san* may also be used in more formal interactions. On the other hand, *sensei* is traditionally associated with educators, but is also used to refer to "people who engage in diverse occupations such as actors, dentists, lawyers, medical doctors, politicians, and writers" (Mogi, 2002, p. 19). Because of its utilization in titles and as an honorific, use of *sensei* will be allocated to the second research category, formal. Mogi (2002) also notes that, like *san*, the somewhat ambiguous nature of *sensei* allows it to be used when an addresser is unsure of how to address the addressee, or when the addressee does not like to be addressed by their occupation. This particular usage of *sensei* is also relevant to the results of this research.

Sociolinguistic Phenomena: Language Crossing, Pragmatic Transfer, Translanguaging, and Language Socialization

As mentioned previously, four related but distinct sociolinguistic phenomena are the foci of this study: language crossing, pragmatic transfer, translanguaging, and language socialization. Language crossing refers to the utilization of a language that is not usually associated with the user's linguistic background (Rampton, 2001), and "involves a distinct sense of movement across social and ethnic boundaries, [raising] issues of legitimacy which, in one way or another, participants need to negotiate in the course of their encounter" (Rampton, 1995, p. 485). In the context of this study, non-Japanese participants' marked use of Japanese vocatives when addressing non-Japanese faculty would be an example of language crossing.

These participants' use of Japanese address forms may be due to pragmatic transfer, or the influence of their culture and first language on the pragmatic use of their L2 (Beebe et al., 1990, Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Yamagashira, 2001). As a person tries to achieve a particular function of language in their L2, they may use their L1 communication strategies; this can result in marked L2 language use.

Pragmatic transfer is distinct from translanguaging, or the act of utilizing certain linguistic features from different languages in order for multilinguals to maximize communication and understanding with each other (Baker, 2011; Garcia, 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Lewis et al., 2012). In other words, interlocutors mix languages when they communicate in order to make their interactions as dynamic, effective, and meaningful as possible. Although pragmatic transfer can indicate a lack of pragmatic competence dictating a certain function in the L2, translanguaging (between two pragmatically-competent individuals) demonstrates preference of one linguistic code over another for communicative purposes (between two pragmatically-competent individuals). Translanguaging is thus "a powerful mechanism to construct understandings, to include others, and to mediate understanding across language groups" (Garcia, 2009, pp. 307-8).

Finally, non-Japanese participants' use of Japanese address forms may be the result of language socialization, or the

adoption of the linguistic features of a particular community upon integration into that community (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Zuengler & Cole, 2005) According to Duff (2008),

> Newcomers to a group learn, explicitly or implicitly, how that culture and language encode thoughts and feelings, and how they are expected to speak (or read, write) in various settings. The end result, it is assumed, is communicatively competent members who have appropriated the culture's core values, beliefs, and dispositions plus other kinds of knowledge. (p. 2)

The extent to which these four sociolinguistic phenomena dictate participants' use of Japanese address forms will be explored in this study.

Method

Data was collected in two ways—through naturally occurring conversations and email exchanges—in order to ensure that the data were as spontaneous and authentic as possible (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). To collect oral data, I recorded (by marking a chart) how study participants ($N = 96$), all of whom were students in the target community, greeted me when I encountered them around campus during a 7-day collection period. Other than Japan, participants came from a total of 33 countries, mostly from nations in Central, South, and Southeast Asia; however, there were participants from other countries including Australia, France, Jordan, and the U.S.

Oral greeting tokens were then coded into five distinct categories: English formal (i.e., if a particular participant greeted me with a more formal English address term such as a title or honorific); English casual (if the participant greeted me with a casual English vocative such as my first name or a familiarizer); Japanese formal (if the participant greeted me with a formal Japanese address term, *sensei*); Japanese casual (if the participant greeted me with a more casual Japanese vocative, *san*); and None (if the participant did not utilize a form of address in their greeting, e.g., just "good morning" or "hello"). A total of 138 tokens were collected from the participants, some of whom greeted me more than once during the collection period.

To collect written data, I looked at email exchanges I had with a smaller set of participants, 53 in all. A total of 446 emails were examined for vocative use in the salutation and body of each email. From the emails, 504 written greeting tokens were collected; these tokens were coded in the same categories as the oral greeting tokens above.

After the oral and written greeting data was analyzed, follow-up interviews were conducted with 10 of the participants in order to further explore possible explanations of the choice of vocatives in greetings by speakers of different cultural backgrounds. Some interviewees were selected randomly from certain nationalities that exhibited marked linguistic trends. For example, a randomly selected Mongolian participant was interviewed and asked to comment on the general tendency of Mongolians to forego the use of address forms. In other cases, non-Japanese interviewees were selected because of their choice to use Japanese vocatives with me.

Results and Discussion

General Distribution of Vocatives

In order to answer the first research question (How often do participants use English and Japanese vocatives in naturally occurring interactions?), the distribution of the forms of address in both oral and written communication was analyzed to determine the frequency. Table 1 shows the five categories of vocatives described above. The first column, *English Formal,* represents the formal English form of address (e.g., *professor*); *English*

Casual represents the casual English vocative (e.g., first name); *Japanese Formal* is the formal Japanese form of address (e.g., *sensei*); *Japanese Casual* is the more casual Japanese vocative (e.g., *san*); *None* indicates that no vocative was used in the interaction.

Table 1. General Distribution of Vocatives in Oral and Written Data

Category	Oral				Written			
	Tokens		Participants ($N = 96$)		Tokens		Participants ($N = 53$)	
	#	% of total	#	% of total	#	% of total	#	% of total
English formal	33	24%	23	24%	252	50%	37	70%
English casual	33	24%	25	26%	140	28%	26	49%
Japanese formal	12	9%	10	10%	72	14%	9	17%
Japanese casual	10	7%	7	7%	8	2%	2	4%
None	50	36%	44	46%	32	6%	21	40%

As the data in the table indicate, in more than a third of oral interactions (36%) and by almost half of the participants (46%), no form of address was used when orally greeting me. A little more than a quarter of participants (26%) used my first name, and slightly fewer used an English title or honorific.

In contrast, in the written interactions, use of English titles and honorifics was more prevalent. In 50% of total interactions by a majority of participants (70%), formal English forms of address were used. About half of the participants (49%) used casual English forms, and 40% used no form of address at all. Thus, although participants were more formal when addressing me in writing, a significant proportion of them still used less casual forms of address at some point in the written interactions. These results suggest several possibilities. First of all, as stated previously, speakers often use vocatives to get the addressee's attention or for identification (Leech, 1999). In oral interactions, these functions can be performed by nonverbal actions such as eye contact and gestures (e.g., waving one's hand); however, in written communication address forms must perform these functions. Another possible cause of the significant use of first name or no forms of address among both oral and written participants may be the perceived growing equality of English interactions, as observed by Clyne et al. (2009). Finally, a high level of familiarity between interlocutors may have lead participants to use more casual or no forms of address when greeting me, despite possible perceived status differences. According to an interviewed participant from Mongolia:

> Because [our university has] few people, [we] already know [each other]. Because of this, [we] do not need to greet [everyone].

Japanese Vocative Use in English Communication: Evidence of Language Crossing, Pragmatic Transfer, Translanguaging, and Language Socialization

Language Crossing

An interesting finding was the periodic use of Japanese address forms (*sensei* and *san*) in predominantly English interactions between the participants and me in both data sets. Such linguistic choices probably would not be surprising from Japanese participants. However, none of the oral participants, and only two of the writing participants, who used Japanese forms of address were of Japanese ethnicity. In addition, these users of Japanese vocatives came from a variety of cultural backgrounds. The unexpected use of Japanese vocatives between non-Japanese interlocutors could thus be construed as evidence of language crossing (Rampton, 1995, 2001).

Pragmatic Transfer

A female participant from Vietnam indicated that her use of Japanese vocatives was the result of pragmatic transfer (Beebe et al., 1990; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Yamagashira, 2001). In other words, she used Japanese vocatives because showing respect to people of older age is integral to Vietnamese culture.

> We just think that [*san* is] polite . . . if we are not close friends. For example, if the person is higher age . . . in Vietnamese culture we have to show respect to the people who are older.

A female participant from Myanmar stated that she used Japanese address forms because linguistic equivalents exist in the Burmese language, and it is common for people in Myanmar to address people of older age with certain vocatives.

> *San*…sometimes we use [with] the one who is elder than me…because in our culture we have to accept this. We never call [them by name directly] . . . we just put *oo* or *tou*, and we give a respect [sic] to him or her.

English address forms rely solely on familiarizers, first names, titles, and honorifics (Leech, 1999), as well as the pronoun *you,* and lack the multiple verb forms and pronouns that are present in other languages such as Japanese (Clyne et al., 2009). These aspects of English address forms may cause L2 users of English to utilize features of other languages due to pragmatic transfer.

Interestingly, pragmatic transfer was suggested by a participant from Mauritania, who said that he refrained from using formal English titles because the use of titles in his culture is frowned upon.

> Actually, back home we don't use these titles at all. One of the reasons is people don't really like being called by titles . . . and sometimes, actually, would consider [it] offensive if you call someone "doctor" or "professor." They consider it you're flattering someone, or maybe trying to give the opposite meaning . . . so people don't really use [titles] at all.

Translanguaging

Participants also seemed to engage in translanguaging (Baker, 2011; Garcia, 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Lewis et al., 2012) when they used Japanese address forms in English communication. According to another participant from Myanmar, she preferred to use Japanese address forms when she wanted to indicate familiarity or closeness with interlocutors:

> It's kind of showing we are friendly [with each other]. We are just kidding each other, even when we are saluting someone, "ohayo gozaimasu" (good morning) or something. [It's] showing friendships.

A female Japanese participant stated that the Japanese honorific *sensei* indicates a closer relationship with a person, rather than the more-distant English title of *professor*. Therefore, she elects to use *sensei* with university instructors with whom she has greater familiarity, rather than *professor*.

> Because, I feel you are very familiar with [sic], so I don't say *sensei* or *professor*. *Sensei* or *professor*, for me, I feel a little bit distant.

This concept isn't just limited to the Japanese members of the community, as indicated by this male participant from Cambodia:

> I feel that it's clos[er] than *professor*, when we call *sensei*. When we call [people] *professor*, sometime we feel that we're not close to them.

In the target community, Japanese titles may thus occupy a mid-way point between English titles and first names in terms of familiarity between interlocutors.

Another reason why participants seem to consciously elect to use Japanese vocatives instead of their English counterparts is to avoid potentially offending interlocutors, especially when they do not know the correct term or title to use in a particular situation. According to a participant from Jordan:

> [*Sensei*] is widely used, not just for professors and teachers but also for the physicians in the hospital . . . it's like you couldn't be much more puzzled—oh, what shall I call him, what shall I call this person, what shall I . . . so *sensei* is more comprehensive to be [used], for all these categories of professionals.

The interviewed male participant from Cambodia made a similar statement regarding problems with identifying the correct rank of professor to use when addressing different university educators.

> Sometime[s], I'm not too clear about [how to use] the term *professor* . . . let's say that if some professor, they are not in the position of professor yet, so should I call *assistant professor* or *associate professor*. [If] I don't know [if they are] assistant or associate or professor . . . so *sensei* is the best one, I think.

Thus, at least some of the non-Japanese participants are aware of the inclusive nature of *sensei* (Mogi, 2002), as opposed to the more specific English title *professor*, and use the inclusiveness of the Japanese *sensei* as a strategy to navigate ambiguities regarding the status of their interlocutors.

Participants also expressed that they use other features of Japanese (other than address forms) over their English equivalents in order to communicate a particular message more appropriately. A male participant from Pakistan expressed awareness of subtle differences between words and structures that express similar meaning in different languages.

> If I had learned a sentence structure from the classroom, and if I have a situation where to describe, sometime I feel that perhaps Japanese has the right kind of sentence to express those feelings than English.

Thus, for various reasons participants actively engaged in translanguaging when communicating not only with university faculty such as myself, but also with their peers.

Language Socialization

Language socialization may be another reason for mixing English and Japanese when communicating. Given that the English target language community is surrounded by a Japanese-dominant environment, the second female participant from Myanmar above stated that she used Japanese to integrate Japanese culture within her own identity to a limited extent.

> I might use *san*, *sensei* because here is Japan. I just want to accept one [aspect] of the Japanese culture.

According to the participant from Vietnam, another reason why she uses Japanese honorifics when communicating with others in English is because it is a linguistic feature of the community in which she lives. In other words, she utilizes Japanese to emulate her peers and mark herself as a member of that community.

> It's very natural in [this university] . . . in communication with many other student[s] from different countries that [are] not Japanese, many other students add *san* after their name when addressing other people.

The participant from Jordan made a similar statement, indicating that the common use of limited Japanese, including vocatives, binds the heterogeneous members of the community together.

> By using the word *sensei*, it's kind of making all the students feel as one family . . . it's a famous term in the university [and] most of [sic] students who don't know Japanese, they know this word, and they're trying to use any word in Japanese.

As stated by Leech (1999), vocatives can be used to maintain the social relationships between interlocutors. The first female participant from Myanmar stated that she uses vocatives from different languages as a location marker, or to indicate where she met certain people. Mixing of Japanese and English thus serves as an indicator of social groups to which she belongs.

> I [used] *sensei* because it's Japan . . . we met here in Japan, so it's a kind of family, we were here together. If we met in Myanmar, I would not call [you] *sensei*…I would just call [you] *saya*.

Japanese use thus seems to serve as an important aspect of participants' identity, and shows their willingness to integrate certain elements of Japanese culture into their own as well as their membership in the specific target community.

Conclusion

This study examined naturally occurring use of English and Japanese vocatives in oral and written interactions in a multiethnic university community in Japan. More familiar forms of address (e.g., first name or no address form) were common despite the cultural diversity of the community, particularly in oral interactions between the researcher and participants due to their level of familiarity and relative proximity in age. This result is in line with Clyne et al.'s (2009) observations about the shift towards more egalitarian use of address forms among English speakers. Surprisingly, in a small number of interactions language crossing occurred. That is, Japanese vocatives were used between non-Japanese interlocutors. Interviews with these participants suggested that pragmatic transfer, translanguaging, and language socialization all played a role in their mixing of English and Japanese linguistic codes.

In the future, a more in-depth analysis of vocative choice in a larger group of participants could provide valuable insights on use of English address forms in lingua franca situations among different ethnicities, particularly in terms of cross-cultural variation and pragmatic transfer. Another interesting study would be to examine different speech acts (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Yule, 1996) in which participants utilize vocatives, aside from greetings (e.g., requesting clarification, expressing disagreement). Finally, one could further analyze the frequency of vocative use with a discourse completion task (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). To gauge how language choice is the result of physical, psychological, and social factors (such as age, affect, perceptions of status, relationships, and cultural significance and change) is another possible avenue for future research.

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Bio Data

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