What's my name in absolute solitude?: The essence of monologic selves in Japanese

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The essence of monologic selves in Japanese[*]

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Abstract

This study explores Japanese solitude speech as it refers to the speaker himself or herself. The chief aim is to shed new light on the nature of the speaker's self-referential expressions in two types of solitude speech: self-encouragement and self-blame. The solitude speaker would be expected to be predominantly realized by the reflexive pronoun *zibun*, which is by nature independent of an addressee. However, our questionnaire survey found that the pronoun *zibun* is far outnumbered by other first-person pronouns, which are assumed to presuppose an addressee. We argue that Japanese speakers assume 'plain' or 'bare' selves as what they perceive themselves to truly be, with no regard to any context or interaction with an addressee.

1.   Introduction

The self-reference to the monologic speaker in Japanese fundamentally differs from that in languages like English and Korean in that it tolerates neither the second-person pronouns, nor the name of the speaker (i.e., vocative) (Koguma et. al. 2020). The essence

of Japanese monologic self-reference resides in **absolute solitude**: the conceptualization of a speech event with no presence of addressees.

This study examines what pronouns are most likely employed for the speaker's self-reference in two types of solitude speech: (i) self-encouragement, where the speaker cheers himself or herself up by uttering that he or she can do something tough, and (ii) self-blame, where the speaker reproaches himself or herself by asking rhetorical questions.[1]

2. Genuine monologic speech event conception

Koguma et al. (2020) demonstrate that English, Korean, and Japanese exhibit notable discrepancies in terms of the self-referential expressions usable for the monologic speaker in the relevant types of solitude speech. Japanese differs from the two other languages in that its second-person pronouns are not readily available for a speaker's self-reference in solitude speech.

Examples (1) and (2) instantiate self-encouragement and self-blame in English respectively. Both the first- and second-person pronouns are readily available for the speaker's self-reference in both types of utterances.

SELF-ENCOURAGEMENT   SELF-BLAME

(1) a. I can do it!   (2) a. What the heck am I doing?

    b. You can do it!   b. What the heck are you doing?

                                        (Koguma et al. 2020: 169)

In Korean, both the first- and second-persons can be employed for the speaker's self-

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[1] Nishimitsu (2017: 10) insightfully observes a marked discrepancy between Japanese and English monologic utterances. He reports that his informants find it strange to verbalize meaningful internal monologues aloud like *?Oh, no! I spilled the coffee!*. However, English does allow meaningful monologic utterances in self-encouragement and self-blame.

reference in self-encouragement, as shown in (3).[2] In self-blame, however, unlike the first person, the second person pronoun can be only marginally used for such a self-reference, as illustrated in (4).

KOREAN

SELF-ENCOURAGEMENT

(3) a. ***na***-*n(eun)*   *ha-lsuisseo!*
      I- TOP   do-can
      'I can do it!'

   b. ***neo***-*n(eun)*   *ha-lsuisseo!*
      You- TOP   do-can
      'You can do it!

SELF-BLAME

(4) a. ***na*** *mweo*   *ha-neun*   *geo-ni?*
      I   what   do:ADN   thing-Q
      'What the heck am I doing?'

   b.^(?)***neo***   *mweo*   *ha-neun*   *geo-ni?*
      You   what   do:AND   thing-Q
      'What the heck are you doing?'

                                              (*ibid*.)

In Japanese, the first person is natural, but the second person is unnatural for self-reference in both self-encouragement and self-blame, as observed in (5) and (6).

JAPANESE

(5) a. ***atasi***[***ore***]-*nara*   *dekiru!*
      I_FEM[I_MASC]-be.if   can (do it)
      'I can do it!'

   b. ^{??}***omae***[***anta***]-*nara dekiru!*
      You[You]-be.if   can (do it)
      'You can do it!'

(6) a. ***atasi***[***ore***] *nani* *yatten-daroo?*
      I_FEM [I_MASC] what do:PROG-Q
      'What the heck am I doing?'

   b.^{??}***omae***[***anta***] *nani yatten-dayo?*
      You[You]   what do:PROG-Q
      'What the heck are you doing?'

                                       (Adapted from *ibid*.)

   It is also pointed out that unlike Japanese, English and Korean both allow vocative

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[2] The following abbreviations are used in glossing: ADN (adnominal); FEM (feminine); FP (final particle); MASC (masculine); PROG (progressive); Q (question); TOP (topic).

reference to the monologic speaker. The speakers of these languages can address their own name at the beginning of the utterance, as shown in (7) and (8) respectively. Table 1[3] summarizes the observation above.

(7) **Walter**, what the heck are you doing?

(8) ***Gim Jihyeon***,   *mweo*   *ha-neun*   *geo-ni?*
             What   do- AND   thing-Q

    'Kim Jihyun, what the heck are you doing?'

(*ibid*.: 170)

	1st-person pronoun	2nd-person pronoun	name for monologic speaker (vocative)
English	common	common	possible
Korean	possible	possible	possible
Japanese	possible	difficult	difficult

Table 1: Potential self-reference to monologic speaker

(Adapted from *ibid*.: 172)

      Based on the observation above, Koguma et al. (2020) argue that we need to assume two distinct speech event conceptions in order to accommodate the linguistic behaviors across the three languages. Japanese speakers, who allow neither second-person pronouns nor their own names for their self-reference, are assumed to solely employ **genuine monologic-speech event conception**, as sketched in Figure 1(a). In this conceptualization, the conceptualizing and conceptualized selves are virtually inseparable. The inverted-U-shaped dotted arrow represents the speaker's monologic utterance or the mental path from the cognizer to the cognizee. In other words, the speaker himself or herself plays dual roles.

      On the other hand, the use of second-person pronouns and/or vocatives for speakers'

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[3] In this table, we adopt "possible" rather than "common" for Korean and Japanese uses of pronouns, because unlike in English, the subject is often left unexpressed in the two languages.

self-reference, as observable in English and Korean, invariably presupposes **conversational event conception** and **split-selves**. In this type of solitude speech, the cognizee is mentally detached from the cognizer so that it could be superimposed onto the intangible addressee facing to the speaker (i.e., cognizer), as schematically diagramed in Figure 1(b). The dotted line connecting the cognizer and the cognizee indicates that they are identified with the same solitude speaker. The dotted arrow directed toward the cognizee stands for the speaker's monologic utterance. English and Korean speakers can exploit this pseudo-dialogic setting with the disguised addressee.[4]
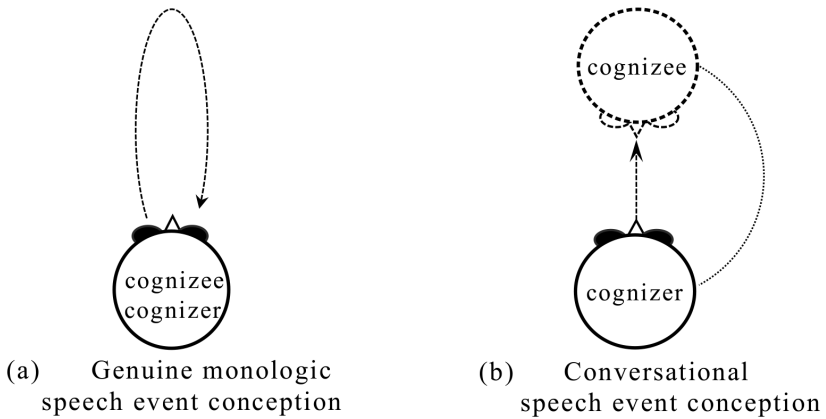

(a)	Genuine monologic speech event conception	(b)	Conversational speech event conception

Figure 1:   Two distinct monologic speech event conceptions

(Adapted from *ibid.*: 173)

3. Speaker's self-reference in conversation

Japanese has a large repertoire of expressions that a speaker can use for his or her self-reference in conversation, as illustrated in Table 2. The choice of a speaker's self-reference is commonly interactional and context-dependent.

In speech to an addressee who is under the speaker's protection (cf. Takubo 1997:

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[4] The pseudo-dialogic setting here largely corresponds to "pseudo conversations" in Hasegawa's (2006: 152) pioneering work on Japanese soliloquy.

31), the speaker is expected to make a self-reference using some kinship/status terms like (*o*)*toosan*/*papa* 'dad,' (*o*)*kaasan*/*mama* 'mom,' (*o*)*niityan* 'elder brother,' (*o*)*neetyan* 'elder sister;' *sensee* 'teacher,' but not other kinship/status terms like*titi/*oyazi 'father,' *haha/*ohukuro 'mother;'*syatyoo 'president.' Only the kinship/status terms that have vocative uses can be used for this purpose (cf. Koga 2018: 86-87; Suzuki 1973, 1982). For instance, a father, in conversation with his son, can refer to himself by (*o*)*toosan* or *papa* but not by *titi* or *oyazi* because the son can address to him with (*o*)*toosan* or *papa* but not *titi* or *oyazi*.

first-person pronouns	Kinship terms	Status terms	Reflexive pronoun
(*w*)*atasi* *ore* *boku* …	(*o*)*toosan*/*papa* 'dad' (*o*)*kaasan*/*mama* 'mam' (*o*)*niityan* 'elder brother' (*o*)*neetyan* 'elder sister' ...	*sensee* 'teacher' *omawarisan* 'police officer' …	*zibun* 'self'

Table 2: Expressions of speaker's self-reference

In dialogic utterances like (9), one needs to choose from various options (*atasi/watasi/ore/boku*…) according to his or her relationship to the addressee (Takubo 1997: 15).

(9) (   )-*wa*   *soo-wa*   *omowanai-naa.*

    (   )-TOP   so- TOP   think.not-FP

    'I don't think so.'

Kinship/status terms cannot refer to a solitude speaker because their semantic imports inevitably reside in a particular relationship between a speaker and the addressee. Likewise, the choice of first-person pronouns is essentially determined by elements like seniority, formality and/or gender, which are assessed in relation to the addressee. Given that, one would expect these pronouns to be ruled out.

Besides the first-person pronouns, Japanese has another type of pronoun *zibun*, which has been considered as a reflexive and/or logophoric one (cf. Hirose 2000: 1645). This reflexive pronoun *zibun* could be viewed as the most likely candidate for the speaker's self-reference because it does not presuppose any presence of an addressee (cf. Hasegawa and Hirose 2005; Hirose 2000). One would expect solitude speakers to adopt *zibun* exclusively, or at least predominantly, for their self-reference. However, it turns out that Japanese speakers prefer a small set of first-person pronouns over the pronoun *zibun*.

4. Speaker's self-reference in solitude speech

4.1. Questionnaire survey

In order to find what expressions Japanese speakers are likely to recruit in the relevant solitude speech, we conducted a questionnaire survey using Google forms. Respondents were asked to check all the given choices that they feel like using in a given situation.

We prepared two probable scenarios in order to examine the acceptability of the pronouns discussed above, namely, some first-person and second-person pronouns (*ore*'I$_{masc}$,' *boku*'I$_{masc}$,' *atasi*'I$_{fem}$,', *watasi* 'I,'; *omae*'you(vulgar),' *anta* 'you') and the reflexive pronoun *zibun*.

With respect to solitude speech of self-encouragement, respondents were given the situation where they are suddenly getting nervous and unconfident before an upcoming important interview. With respect to solitude speech of self-blame, they were given a scene where they inadvertently made a terrible mistake in filling in their application form for admission. To make all seven options sound natural on their own, the sentence ending of each choice is slightly adjusted. For instance, *ore nani yatten-daroo, omae nani yatten-dayo*, *zibun nani yatten dayo/daroo*?

Our questionnaire survey had 60 valid responses consisting of 36 females and 24 males. Regarding age, 46 respondents were in their 20s and 9 were in their 50s, and those two age groups made up 83% of the total. With respect to their hometown, Kansai and

Hokuriku regions accounted for 57% and 20% respectively.

Since the respondents were expected to tell us all the options that they felt like uttering, some chose more than one item even in each expression type, like *atasi* and *watasi* from first-person pronouns. This study examined the number of respondents rather than the number of chosen instances *per se,* so that we could see the overall preference among three expression types in a fair manner.

4.2. Distribution of speaker's self-referential expressions

Contrary to the expectation mentioned in section 2, the survey revealed that the first-person pronouns are considerably preferred over the reflexive pronoun *zibun.*

Table 3 shows the distribution of each expression type in self-encouragement. Figure 2(a) represents the total number of respondents who chose each expression type. 57 out of 60 respondents, which is 95%, used first-person pronouns. The number of speakers who chose first-person pronouns is three times as many as that of those who chose the pronoun *zibun*. Figure 2(b) shows that the respondents who exclusively chose first-person pronouns outnumber those who exclusively chose the other pronouns.[5]

Self-encouragement								
first-person pronouns			second-person pronouns			*zibun* 'self'		
female(36)	male(24)	total(60)	female(36)	male(24)	total(60)	female(36)	male(24)	total(60)
34 (87%)	23 (96%)	57 (95%)	3 (8%)	5 (21%)	8 (13%)	12 (33%)	6 (25%)	18 (31%)
first-person pronouns (Exclusive)			second-person pronouns (Exclusive)			*zibun* 'self' (Exclusive)		
24 (67%)	14 (58%)	38 (63%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	1 (2%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)	2 (3%)

Table 3: Self-reference in self-encouragement

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[5] Surprisingly, only 2 respondents made an exclusive choice of the reflexive pronoun *zibun*.

(a) number of persons
using each expression type

■ male ■ female

60

40

34

20

23

3
5

6

12

0

1st 2nd zibun

(b) number of persons
using each expression type exclusively

■ male ■ female

60

40

24

20
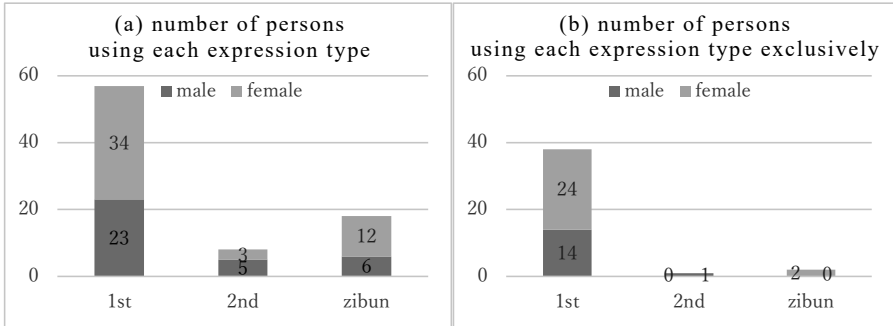
14

0 1 2 0

0

1st 2nd zibun

Figure 2: Pronominal distribution in self-encouragement

Table 4 summarizes the results of self-blame. Those who chose first-person pronouns outnumber those who chose the other pronouns. Figure 3 represents the number of people who chose each expression type. The speakers who chose first-person pronouns are almost twice as many as those who chose the pronoun *zibun,* as shown in Figure 4. The number of speakers who exclusively chose first-person pronouns is three times larger than that of those who exclusively chose the pronoun *zibun*, as seen in Figure (3b). In fact, almost half of the speakers exclusively chose first-person pronouns.

Self-blame								
first-person pronouns			second-person pronouns			*zibun* 'self'		
female(36)	male(24)	total(60)	female(36)	male(24)	total(60)	female(36)	male(24)	total(60)
28 (78%)	18 (75%)	46 (77%)	6 (17%)	4 (17%)	10 (17%)	17 (47%)	8 (33%)	25 (42%)
first-person pronouns (Exclusive)			second-person pronouns (Exclusive)			*zibun* 'self' (Exclusive)		
15 (42%)	14 (58%)	29 (48%)	2 (6%)	2 (8%)	4 (7%)	6 (17%)	2 (8%)	9 (15%)

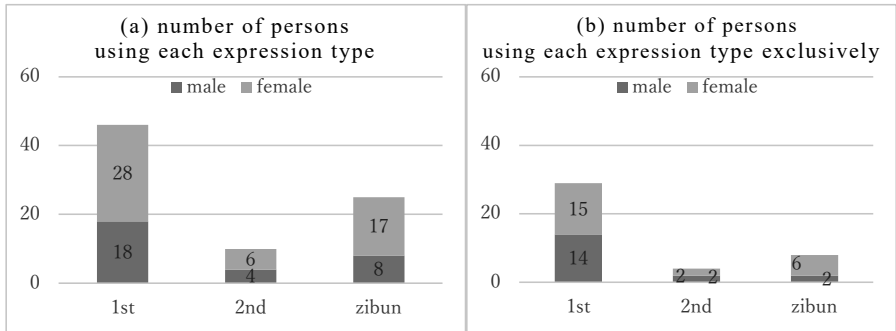Table 4: Self-reference in self-blame

Figure 3: Pronominal distribution in self-blame

The first-person pronouns outnumber the reflexive pronoun *zibun* in both types of solitude speech. This strongly suggests that the self-reference of Japanese solitude speakers is much more associated with the self-images that they have when they talk using specific pronouns like *atasi/ watasi/ore/boku*. Japanese speakers choose their name of 'plain' or 'bare' self from those particular first-person pronouns. In other words, 'the self that one perceives oneself to truly be,' is most likely to be verbalized by one of those specific first-person pronouns far more dominantly than the reflexive pronoun *zibun*.

5. Curious findings from an additional survey on teenagers

We conducted an additional survey on teenagers consisting of 22 girls and 8 boys, using the same questionnaire. Interestingly, its results notably differ from those of the other age-groups examined in section 4.2. Female teenagers exhibit quite an opposite trend in both types of solitude speech. The reflexive pronoun *zibun* consistently surpassed the first-person pronouns in exclusive as well as multiple choices, as shown in Figures 4 and 5.

This distribution unique to female teenagers might have something to do with the well-known unique type of self-reference found among young females: quite a few girls use their own given names instead of first-person pronouns for their self-reference before

coming of the age. Such a self-reference sounds childish or unreliable, so they come to stop using it as they grow up. The young female respondents might have chosen the pronoun *zibun* because the questionnaire gave them no option of their own name. This line of account could capture the idiosyncratic but intriguing findings on female teenagers.
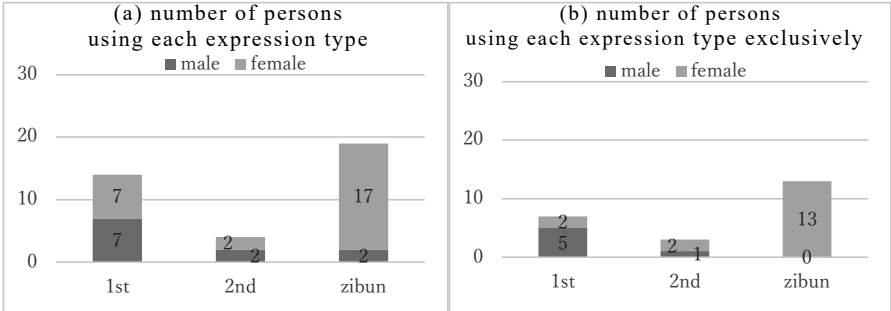

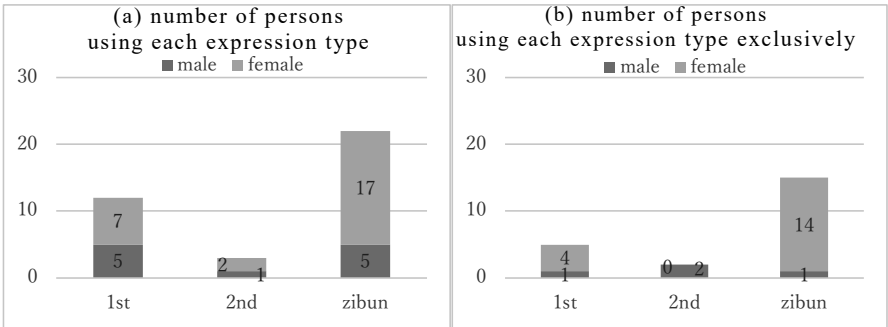Figure 4: Teenagers' pronominal distribution in self-encouragement

Figure 5: Teenagers' pronominal distribution in self-blame

6.   Conclusion

This study examined a speaker's self-referential expressions in two types of Japanese

solitude speech. The reflexive pronoun *zibun* would be expected to be exclusively or at least predominantly recruited for the solitude speaker's self-reference because all the other self-referential expressions are more or less interactional and addressee-dependent.

However, it turned out that Japanese solitude speakers are most likely to choose one of the particular first-person pronouns, *atasi/watasi/ore/boku*. In fact, the pronoun *zibun* is far outnumbered by those first-person pronouns. We thus argued that any Japanese speaker selects one of those particular pronouns as the name of their 'self' that they perceive themselves to be, with no regard to any context or interaction with an addressee. We can refer to this particular self-image (cf. identity) as 'plain' or 'bare' self.

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