

The syntax of formality: universals and variation

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Introduction. Across many languages, pronouns express distinctions in formality. This suggests that Universal Grammar makes available a system that configures them. We show that formality distinctions come in different guises, which suggests that formal pronouns do not constitute a natural class. This raises two questions: **i)** What underlies the universal aspects of formality distinctions? And **ii)** What regulates the range and limits of variation in formality distinctions? For the purpose of this talk we compare the well-known binary *T/V* instantiated in German and French, with the non-binary formality distinctions found in Japanese.

Different ways to be formal. The pronoun paradigms of many Indo-European languages include a contrast between informal and formal 2nd person pronouns. The latter is identical in form and agreement properties to another member of the paradigm – the 3rd person plural pronoun (*Sie*) in German, and the 2nd person plural (*vous*) in French. In their formal uses these pronouns do not distinguish between singular and plural referents. Formality in Japanese pronouns is strikingly different: First, Japanese encodes formality in both 1st and 2nd person. Second, though sources differ in the inventory of the forms they provide, and in the characterization of the precise conditions of use for each one, there appear to be at least five different 1st and 2nd pronouns that encode at least two degrees of formality and two degrees of informality, and in some cases, they are restricted to either males or females. Third, all 1st and 2nd person pronouns are unique in form, that is, they are not homophonous with a plural or 3rd person pronoun (e.g. Martin 2004, Kaiser et al. 2013). Kaiser et al. provide the following ordered list of 1st and 2nd person pronouns: (where > indicates more formal): 1st person male: watakushi > kochira > watashi > boku > ore > washi; 1st person female: watakushi > kochira > watashi > atashi > uchi; 2nd person male: (anata) > sochira > kimi > omae/anta > kisama, and 2nd person female: (F) anata > sochira (Kaiser et al. 2013)

Background. Following Ritter and Wiltschko (2018), we assume that nominals, like clauses, contain a speech act (SA) layer of structure above the DP, and that the SA layer is the locus of *pragmatic person*, whereas DP-structure is the locus of *grammatical person*. The former encodes SA participant roles, whereas the latter is the realization of binary person features [$\pm 1, \pm 2$]. Ritter and Wiltschko reason that since formality distinctions are based on the social status of the speaker relative to the addressee, they are properties of SA roles, and must be expressed as features of pragmatic person.

Analysis. We propose that formality features can either be merged in the SA layer, or they can move into this layer. Non-binary formality distinctions of the Japanese type are merged together with other information about the SA participants in the SA layer. Such pronouns encode all kinds of pragmatic information, including relative social status, and subjective stance (McCraw 2011). In contrast, formality distinctions of the *T/V* type arise in languages in which pronouns realize information that is normally associated with the grammatical structure. Formality is expressed by means of *recycling* (in the sense of Mezhevich 2008): Grammatical content is moved into the SA layer, and is re-interpreted in this domain. In the case of *T/V*, plural (= greater) number is re-interpreted as formal (=greater) status (Brown and Gilman 1968). Since grammatical pronouns are characterized by binary phi-features, the result is a binary formality distinction as well.

Consequences: Assuming that Japanese pronouns realize only pragmatic person and related non-binary content predicts that they are different from grammatical pronouns of the familiar type. This prediction is borne out: Japanese pronouns do not encode phi-features, and hence do not trigger agreement (Kuroda 1986); they are rarely used as arguments, but mostly serve discourse functions (Ono & Thompson 2003); they behave more like an open class, as evidenced by lack of consensus on how many pronouns there are (Barke & Uehara 2005); and, finally, we know on independent grounds that Japanese case markers have primarily pragmatic content and hence may be part of the SA layer as well.

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