The Use of The Second Person Pronoun *Anata* ‘You’ in Japanese Parliamentary Discourse

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the use of the second person pronoun *anata* 'you' in Japanese parliamentary discourse. It is well known that in Japanese, the use of personal pronouns inherently indexes the relative social status between the speaker and the listener, as well as the gender and the level of formality in a situation (Sakuma, 1959; Suzuki, 1978; Kindaichi, 1988; Shibtani, 1990; Kanzaki, 1994; Hirose, 2000; Miwa, 2010). In the previous literature of Japanese linguistics, the function of *anata* ‘you’ has been treated in a contradictory manner: namely, it is viewed as ‘neutral’ or ‘polite’ in some studies (*Kojien* Japanese dictionary; Ide, 1990), while it is seen as ‘insulting’ the hearer in other studies (Suzuki, 1978; Maynard, 2001; Nariyama, 2003). Further, many researches point out that in daily conversation *anata* is often avoided since its use is a matter of great delicacy (Suzuki, 1978; Okamoto, 1985; Kindaichi, 1988; Shibtani, 1990; Kanzaki, 1994; Miwa, 2010).

In Japanese Parliamentary discourse, interestingly, the use of *anata* is observed in different contexts. The proposed study discusses three different usages of *anata* in committee meetings and plenary sessions. First, *anata* is selected in reported speech when politicians implement story-telling strategy. This usage is non-deictic in the sense that *anata* ‘you’ does not refer to the
listener in the discourse situation but “the role of one of the characters in the described situation” (Biq 1992: 311). Second is the use of anata to enact stance which tries to equalise the status between the speaker and the listener. Third is the case where anata is used with a strong emotion, typically when the speaker aggressively attacks the listener regardless of their actual social/political status. Both the second and the third usages are deictic and refer to the listener in the immediate discourse situation. It will be shown that although both usages can be a face-threatening act, it is an attempt to reach the listener’s personal self by using anata rather than interacting with the listener’s social self by referring to their conventionalised address terms.

The corpus of this study is collected from the database ‘Diet Conference Minutes Retrieval System’. Although there are questions regarding the treatment of the minutes of the Japanese Diet as genuine spoken data because mispronunciation, filler, utterances regarded as fukisokuhatsugen ‘irregular remarks’ or so called yaji ‘jeering’ and so forth are generally deleted (Matsuda 2008: 23; Kim 2012: 21), it is nevertheless suggested that the minutes of the Japanese Diet contains a vast amount of “spoken Japanese record in a formal setting” (Matsuda 2008: 23) and are an exceptionally valuable data source for various linguistic research such as lexicon, syntax, dialectology and discourse analysis.

*The list of references can be provided upon request