

★ = Level of Formality

Japanese First Person Pronouns

Tofugu, LLC

わたし

私

[watashi]

★★☆

Usage by women: The most common pronoun for women, used in both casual and formal situations.

Usage by men: Men use わたし mainly in formal situations. In casual conversation, they may sound stiff or feminine.

わたくし

私

[watakushi]

★★★

More formal than わたし, though they share the same kanji. It's considered a more suitable pronoun in conservative business scenarios or serious situations such as apologizing to clients.

あたし

[atashi]

★☆☆

Feminine

The shortened, slang form of 私 used only in casual settings. The difference between this and わたし is subtle when spoken. The written form can be seen in pop-culture and social media.

ぼく

僕

[boku]

★★☆

Masculine

A common pronoun with earnest, polite, and cultured connotations often used by men. Overall, it has a softer, less-aggressive feel than 俺 (おれ). Stereotypically it's also considered pronoun for little boys, though boys are beginning to use 俺 at an early age.

うち

[uchi]

★☆☆

Feminine

Young Women

A popular first-person pronoun among young women over the last thirty years. It comes from the Kansai dialect.

おれ

俺

[ore]

★☆☆

Masculine

A common pronoun for men with a “manly” feel. 俺 sounds more aggressive and less gentle than 僕. For Japanese learners, it's best to avoid because it's hard to master sounding natural while using it.

Your First Name / Nickname

★☆☆

Feminine

Children

Used by children and many young people as a first-person pronoun, mainly inside the family. Some young adult women do this outside of family interactions also, but it's controversial.

じぶん

自分

[jibun]

★★★

Masculine

Often used in hierarchical systems, such as sports and the military toward someone with higher status. It carries some masculine connotations because of these associations.