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"Tasteless" Japanese

Less "Feminine" Speech Among Young Japanese Women

Shigeko Okamoto

It's Tasteless—Women's Use of Men's Language

In addition to the use of childish words and final rising intonations, young women have even started using men's language. Speaking in men's language is one thing, but there are girls who even use dirty words such as "*Aitsu, nani nebokete yagandai. Bakkeyaroo. Fuzakenjanee yo*" ['That guy, is he sleeping or something? You fool. Cut the crap'], which makes me wonder how in the world their parents and teachers are raising them. But then, their mothers are also actively using men's language. On TV, I even saw a female professor using men's language proudly; I felt it was deplorable and questioned her educational level. It is difficult to judge whether they are trying to be like men even in language because men and women have equal rights or whether it is a fad influenced by the mass media. In either case, for men it seems as tasteless as eating sand or grafting bamboo on a tree. It sets my teeth on edge like eating a sour apple. In Japan there is an attractive and adorable women's language. If we teach men's language to female foreigners, we will inevitably end up teaching the wrong Japanese culture.

—Letter from a fifty-nine-year-old man
to the readers' columns,
Asahi Shinbun, November 2, 1992;
translated from the Japanese original.

Japanese norms of behavior have traditionally been highly gendered. The Japanese language has also been characterized as having distinct female and male speech registers or "languages," and the gender differences are usually deemed more extensive and more rigid than those in English and other European languages. Descriptions of Japanese female and male speech differences are abundant in the literature (e.g., Ide 1979, 1982, 1990; Jugaku 1979; Kindaichi 1957; Mizutani & Mizutani 1987; Ohara 1992; Reynolds 1985; Shibamoto 1985, 1990; Smith 1992a, b); the most frequently cited differences include women's and men's divergent uses of self-reference and address terminology, sentence-final particles, honorifics, pitch ranges, and intonation.[1] Compared to "Japanese men's language" (otoko-kotoba or dansei-go), "Japanese women's language" (onna-kotoba or josei-go) has been described as polite, gentle, soft-spoken, nonassertive, and empathetic (e.g., Ide 1979, 1982, 1990; Jugaku 1979; Mizutani & Mizutani 1987; Reynolds 1990; Shibamoto 1985; Smith 1992a, b). These characteristics are often interpreted as reflecting women's lower social status or powerlessness (e.g., Ide 1982; Reynolds 1985; Smith 1992a, b).

Recently, however, newspapers and other publications within and outside Japan have been reporting anecdotally that some Japanese women, particularly younger women, are abandoning "traditional women's language" or stereotypical feminine speech patterns:

Women's Language

There are other signs of change, particularly among younger Japanese [women]. Suzuko Nishihara [an administrator at the National Language Institute in Tokyo] said that her two college-age daughters use more neutral, less polite and even mildly masculine forms of speech. Instead of ending their sentences with the feminine wa yo, they use da yo (the masculine form) when they are speaking with their classmates, male or female. Toward their elders, they end their verbs with -masu instead of the more polite gozaimasu. (Ellen Rudolph, New York Times, September 1, 1991)

Women's Language is Disappearing

"Omee nani yatte n da yo!" ('What the hell are you doing!'), "Urusee naa. Monku yuu n ja nai yo." ('Shut up. Don't grumble'.), "Oi, ore kono mondai tokeda zo." ('Hey, I solved this problem'.), "Maji ka yo. Iya na yatsu." ('Are you serious? Disgusting guy'.). In classrooms of junior and senior high schools now, conversations like these are flying around among female students. Expressions like

these make even male students feel embarrassed and are causing adults to lament, "Recently, girls' speech has become *ranboo* 'rough'." (*NHK Jissen Hanashi Kotoba*, October 1991–March 1992; translated from the Japanese original)[2]

These casual observations suggest that there may exist wide synchronic and diachronic variations in Japanese women's speech styles. If so, such practices would undermine essentialist assumptions about Japanese women's speech as constituting a discrete, homogeneous category. At the same time, these observations suggest the need for careful empirical studies of variations in Japanese women's speech, together with analyses that consider social diversity among Japanese women. In her critical overview of the literature on Japanese women's language, Eleanor Jorden (1990:2) pointedly asks, "How much actual correlation is there between *onna-rashii* ['womanly'] language and the broad spectrum of language used by the Japanese woman of today?" Katsue Reynolds (1990), discussing "deviant" cases of Japanese women's language, emphasizes the need to analyze such phenomena because such cases may eventually lead toward female-male linguistic equality. To date, however, only a few studies have examined variation in female speech patterns (Kobayashi 1993; Takasaki 1993).

Against this background Shie Sato and I (Okamoto & Sato 1992) carried out a preliminary study, examining tape-recorded conversations of fourteen Japanese women in three age groups. (All but two of the subjects were living in the United States.) Results of the study revealed great variation in speech styles across the three age groups, as well as among individuals within each age group. The present chapter, an extension of this earlier study, examines the speech styles of female college students living in Tokyo, focusing specifically on their employment of sentence-final forms. Three interrelated issues are of principal concern: (1) How and to what extent do the speech styles of young Japanese women differ from the stereotype known as *Japanese women's language*? (2) Does "Japanese women's language" reflect real language practices or the linguistic ideal for Japanese women? (3) Why and under what circumstances do Japanese women use or not use stereotypical "women's language"?

Consideration of these issues requires a reexamination of our thinking about the relation between language and gender. Previous studies of language and gender—in particular, the two opposing theories often referred to as the *dominance approach* (e.g., Fishman 1983; Lakoff 1975; O'Barr & Atkins 1980; Trudgill 1975; West & Zimmerman 1983) and the *difference* or *cultural approach* (e.g., Maltz & Borker 1982; Tannen 1990a, b)—have

made important contributions, raising our awareness of how language reflects the social inequalities or cultural differences between women and men.[3] Many of these studies, however, are based on static binary opposi- tions and abstractions, such as *women* versus *men, powerless* versus *power- ful*, and *women's speech* versus *men's speech* (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992). Recently, a number of researchers have emphasized the importance of investigating local linguistic practices and recognizing the multiplicity, contextuality, ideologies, and historicity involved in the relation between language and gender (Cameron & Coates 1988; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992; Gal, this volume; Ochs 1993). Such an approach pays close attention to the diversity and heterogeneity of women and stresses women's agency in their linguistic practices. It enables us to identify the meanings of women's linguistic choices in specific sociocultural and historical contexts (e.g., Brown 1990; Cameron, McAlinden, & O'Leary 1988; Eckert 1989; Gonzales Velásquez, this volume; Goodwin 1988, 1992; Nichols 1983; Ochs 1987; Thomas 1988).

The present study examines Japanese women's speech from this new perspective. Although previous research has concluded that the linguistic differences between Japanese women and men are extensive, most resorts to overgeneralizations based on the static dichotomous categories of *women's language* and *men's language*—an approach that tends to represent and rein- force stereotypes or linguistic norms. Many of these studies also suffer from methodological weaknesses in that they rely on either the researchers' introspection or self-report surveys that do not accurately capture actual speech practices. In contrast, the present study analyzes tape-recorded actual conversations in order to explore the meanings of the linguistic choices that young Japanese women make in specific sociocultural and historical contexts.

Method

The data for the present study, collected in September and October 1992, consist of five tape-recorded informal conversations, each between two close friends. A total of ten female college students, ages eighteen to twenty, participated as subjects. All were born in Tokyo and still reside there, are from middle- or upper-middle-class backgrounds, and speak standard Japanese. The subjects were asked to tape-record their *oshaberi* 'chat' with their close friends.[4] Each conversation, with the exception of the first five minutes, was transcribed to obtain 150 consecutive sentence tokens for each speaker.[5]

The analysis focused on sentence-final forms, each of which was identified

as *feminine*, *neutral*, or *masculine*. Feminine forms are those traditionally considered to be used primarily by women; masculine forms, by men; and neutral forms, by both women and men. This identification was based mainly on the classification given in the literature (e.g., McGloin 1990; Mizutani & Mizutani 1987; Shibamoto 1985).[6] Feminine and masculine forms were further subdivided into *strongly feminine* or *strongly masculine* forms and *moderately feminine* or *moderately masculine* forms; forms traditionally considered to be used exclusively by women or by men are classified respectively as strongly feminine or strongly masculine. The following list exemplifies the gender classification of sentence-final forms used in the present study (the list is not exhaustive; see Okamoto & Sato 1992 for a more detailed list). It is to be underscored that this classification is used only as a reference point and is by no means absolute.

Gender Classification of Sentence-Final Forms

Feminine forms
- The particle *wa* (with rising intonation) for mild emphasis or its variants (*wa ne*, *wa yo*, *wa yo ne*)
  > Example: *Iku wa.* ['I am going.']
  > Classification: strongly feminine
- The particle *no* after a noun or *na*-adjective in a statement
  > Example: *Ashita na no.* ['It is that it is tomorrow.']
  > Classification: strongly feminine
- The particle *no* after a plain form of a verb or *i*-adjective for emphasis or explanation in a statement
  > Example: *Iku no.* ['It's that I'm going'.]
  > Classification: moderately feminine
- The particle *no* followed by *ne* or *yo ne* for seeking confirmation or agreement; the particle *no* followed by *yo* for assertion
  > Example: *Ashita na no ne?* ['It's that it's tomorrow, isn't it?']
  > Classification: strongly feminine
- The auxiliary *desho(o)* for expressing probability or for seeking agreement or confirmation
  > Example: *Iku deshoo?* ['You are going, aren't you?']
  > Classification: moderately feminine
- The particle *kashira* ['I wonder']
  > Example: *Kuru kashira.* ['I wonder if he is coming.']
  > Classification: strongly feminine

Masculine forms

- The particles *ze* and *zo* for assertion
  - Example: *Iku ze*. ['I'm going, I tell you.']
  - Classification: strongly masculine

- The particle *yo* after a plain form of a verb or *i*-adjective for assertion
  - Example: *Iku yo*. ['I'm going, I tell you.']
  - Classification: moderately masculine

- The auxiliary verb *da* alone for declaration (or its variants *da ne*, *da yo*, or *da yo ne*)
  - Example: *Ashita da*. ['It's tomorrow.']
  - Classification: moderately masculine

- The plain imperative form of a verb alone or followed by *yo*
  - Example: *Ike*. ['Go.']
  - Classification: strongly masculine

- The phonological form *ee* instead of *ai* and *oi*
  - Example: *Shiranee*. (*Shiranai*.) ['I don't know.']
  - Classification: strongly masculine

- The verb *-oo ka* for an invitation or offer
  - Example: *Ikoo ka?* ['Shall we go?']
  - Classification: moderately masculine

Neutral forms

- The plain form of a verb or *i*-adjective for assertion
  - Example: *Iku*. ['I'm going.']

- The particle *yo* followed by *ne* for seeking agreement or confirmation
  - Example: *Iku yo ne?* ['You are going, right?']

- The negative auxiliary *ja nai* for mild assertion or to seek agreement
  - Example: *Ashita ja nai?* ['It's tomorrow, isn't it?']

- The negative auxiliary *jan* (a contracted form of *ja nai*) for mild assertion or to seek agreement
  - Example: *Ashita jan?* ['It's tomorrow, isn't it?']

- The particles *ka na* 'I wonder'
  - Example: *Iku ka na*. ['I wonder if he is going.']

- The gerundive form of a verbal alone or followed by the particle *ne* or *sa* (when accompanied by a sentence-final intonation and/or semantic completeness)
  - Example: *Ikoo to omotte (ne/sa)*. ['I thought I would go.']

- The exclamatory particle *naa*
  - Example: *Ii naa*. ['How nice.']

After the gender style of each sentence token was identified, the total number of sentence tokens in each style for each speaker and for the entire group were tallied, and the percentages of each style for each speaker and the whole group were calculated.

Less "Feminine" Speech Styles Among Female College Students

Table 12.1 shows the distribution of gendered sentence-final forms for all ten subjects combined. Although this distribution varies from individual to individual,[7] the speech styles of the participants in this study are hardly feminine in the traditional sense.

Table 12.1 Use of Gendered Sentence-final Forms for All Ten Subjects (ages 18–20)

Sentence-final Forms	Total Tokens Used (%)
Feminine forms	12.3
• Moderately feminine forms	7.8
• Strongly feminine forms	4.5
Masculine forms	18.9
• Moderately masculine forms	17.5
• Strongly masculine forms	1.4
Neutral forms	68.8
Total	100.0

Note: Total number of tokens = 1,500 (150 tokens for each subject)

All of the speakers used neutral forms most frequently,[8] and all except two used masculine forms more often than feminine forms. Moreover, the majority of the feminine forms used by the subjects were moderately feminine forms, the most common being the verb or *i*-adjective *no*, appearing in 55 tokens, and the auxiliary *desho(o)*, appearing in 40 tokens, as illustrated in the sentences reproduced in (1) and (2):

(1)   (Speaker 4, referring to her trip to Europe)
       Uun, ichi-gatsu ni wa moo kaette kuru no.
       'No, I will already be back in January'.

(2)   (Speaker 3)
       Shoogaku-juken desho.
       'That's an entrance exam for elementary school, right?'

The use of strongly feminine forms was infrequent, appearing in only 34 percent of all feminine tokens. The forms used most frequently were *no ne*, appearing in 42 tokens, and *na no*, appearing in 15 tokens. It is worth noting that the particle *wa* (with rising intonation) and its variants, often cited in the literature as the most typical feminine forms, were used only twice in the entire data set. The particle *kashira*, another ending perceived as strongly feminine, was used only once; in its place subjects employed the neutral form *ka na*. There was not a single instance of the (noun/*na*-adjective) *yo* with rising intonation (e.g., *Ashita yo* 'It's tomorrow'), which is also considered a typical feminine ending. Note, however, that in addition to the two instances of the feminine particle *wa* just mentioned, there were six other instances of the feminine particle *wa* in the data set. Interestingly, these were all part of speakers' quotations of older women (for instance, their mothers or female teachers), as in examples (3) and (4).

(3) (Speaker 4, quoting her female teacher)
Sono roku-nin ni wa moo kekkoo gooka-na mono agechau <u>wa</u> yo to ka ittee.
'She said, "I will then give quite luxurious things to those six people."'

(4) (Speaker 8, quoting her mother)
Sore okaasan ni hanashitara, ja watashi ga morau <u>wa</u> yo to ka itte.
'When I told that to my mother, she said, "Then I will get it."'

Most of the masculine forms used by the subjects were moderately masculine forms, appearing in 93 percent of all masculine tokens. The two forms used most commonly were the auxiliary verb *da* and its variants (e.g., *da yo, da yo ne*), used in 263 tokens, and the particle *yo* (preceded by a plain form of a verb or *i*-adjective), used in 69 tokens. These uses are exemplified in sentences (5) and (6), respectively.

(5) (Speaker 6, talking about reading books)
Jaa kore wa pittari <u>da yo</u>.
'Then this (book) is perfect (for you)'.

(6) (Speaker 7, discussing skiwear)
Demo ryuukoo wa [oe] owanai hoo ga ii <u>yo</u>.
'But it's better not to follow the fashion'.

The subjects did use strongly masculine forms, though on a very limited basis; such forms appeared in only 21 tokens of the entire data set. Three of these uses are reproduced in examples (7) through (9).

(7)   (Speaker 1, discussing the location of an office)
      Iya datte tooi zo.
      'But it's far away'.

(8)   (Speaker 4, correcting the interlocutor's mispronunciation)
      Gondoro ja nee, gondora (laughter).
      'It's not *gondoro*, it's *gondora* (gondola)'.

(9)   (Speaker 10, responding to the interlocutor's teasing remark)
      Katte ni itte ro tte.
      'Say whatever you want to say'.

In addition to the instances of strongly masculine sentence endings, subjects also used other expressions commonly perceived as strongly masculine or vulgar: e.g., *aitsu* 'that guy', *bakayaroo* 'stupid', *dekai* 'humongous', *kuu* 'eat/chow down', *nukasu* 'say', *yabai* 'troublesome', *yatsu* 'that guy/thing', and *yatsu-ra* 'those guys'.

In sum, the speech styles of the speakers observed in this study are hardly feminine but, rather, neutral to moderately masculine. The following excerpt from the data set, a conversation between two participants about a part-time job, illustrates the speakers' unfeminine conversational styles:

(10) Speakers 3 and 4, discussing a part-time job that involves collecting questionnaires (neutral and masculine forms are underlined)
      SP 4:   *Baito.*
              'It's a part-time job'.
      SP 5:   *Baito ka. Ii jan, sore.*
              'Oh, it's a part-time job. That's good, isn't it?'
      SP 4:   [laughter]
      SP 5:   *Nani, yareba ii jan.*
              'What? You should do it, don't you think?'
      SP 4:   *Iya, hyaku-nin da yo.*
              'But I have to ask 100 people'.
      SP 5:   *Un, karui mon jan.*
              'Yeah, it's easy, isn't it?'

SP 4:   *Iya, hyaku-nin de ichi-man-en da yo.*
        'But it's (only) 10,000 yen for (asking) 100 people'.

SP 5:   *Ichi-man-en? Ichi-man-en kaa.*
        '10,000 yen. Oh, it's 10,000 yen'.

SP 4:   *Hyaku-nin yaru no wa muzukashii tte yuu uwasa da yo.*
        'I heard that it's difficult to get 100 people'.

All the sentences in the exchange reproduced in (10) end with either a masculine or a neutral form, not with a feminine form; such a conversation is typical of those appearing in the data set.

It is interesting to compare these results with those obtained by Okamoto and Sato (1992). The earlier study examined the speech styles of three age groups: 18–23 (seven subjects, all college students), 27–34 (three subjects, all homemakers), and 45–57 (four subjects, all professional women). Except for two subjects in the oldest age group, all were Japanese women living in the United States; the subjects in the two youngest age groups came to the United States no more than 18 months before the time of data collection. Table 12.2 summarizes the results of the study.

Table 12.2 Use of Gendered Sentence-final Forms (Percentages)

Sentence-final Forms	7 subjects ages 18–23	3 subjects ages 27–34	4 subjects ages 45–57
Feminine forms	14	24	50
• Moderately feminine forms	10	13	23
• Strongly feminine forms	4	12	28
Masculine forms	29	14	6
• Moderately masculine forms	24	14	6
• Strongly masculine forms	5	0	0
Neutral forms	57	62	44
Total	100	100	100

Note: Total number of tokens = 1,820 (130 tokens for each subject)

Source: Shigeko Okamoto and Shie Sato, "Less Feminine" speech among Young Japanese Females," in Kira Hall, Mary Bucholtz, and Birch Moonwomon (eds.), *Locating Power: Proceedings of the Second Berkeley Women and Language Conference* (Berkeley: Berkeley Women and Language Group, 1992).

The speech styles of the youngest subjects in the 1992 study, whose sentence-final forms are itemized in the first column, closely resemble those of the participants in the present study. The styles of younger women, then, appear to be much less feminine than the styles of older women, although there are of course individual differences among the speakers within each age group.

"Japanese Women's Language" and Gender Ideologies

The results of the present study and the 1992 study illustrate the great variations in the speech styles of Japanese women, an observation also recently noted in studies by Mieko Kobayashi (1993) and Midori Takasaki (1993). Kobayashi reports that the self-report surveys and analyses of conversations she and her colleagues conducted show generational differences among women: older speakers (grandmothers and mothers) used more "feminine" expressions (i.e., sentence-final forms, indirect expressions, honorifics) than younger speakers (students) did. Takasaki's analysis of conversations of women in different occupations shows that homemakers used more "feminine" linguistic features (such as sentence-final particles, interjections, and honorifics) than students did, and that female office workers used features such as honorifics and the polite prefix o- much more than professional or self-employed women did.[9] These findings suggest that the common sex-based category *women's language*, as opposed to the category *men's language*, is too static and monolithic to capture variation in the speech styles of Japanese women.

Because the attributes associated with "Japanese women's language" include politeness, formality, empathy, soft-spokenness, indirectness, and nonassertiveness, it could be said to function to create an image of powerlessness, social sensitivity, and femininity. A textbook example of this style surfaced in the speech of one of the older speakers in the 1992 study, designated as Speaker 2 in Table 12.3.

The majority of the forms used by Speaker 2 were feminine forms (70 percent), many of them strongly feminine forms; only rarely did she employ masculine forms (1 percent). In addition, the pitch level of her speech was very high; when she was a small girl, she told me, her mother used to chide her whenever she spoke with a low voice because it was *gehin* 'vulgar, unrefined'. She was raised in an upper-middle-class family in Tokyo and graduated from a prestigious university for women; she has been living in the United States for more than twelve years, having very little contact with other Japanese.

Table 12.3 Use of Gendered Sentence-final Forms for Individual
Speakers in the Oldest Age Group, 45–57 (Percentages)

Sentence-final Forms	SP 1	SP 2	SP 3	SP 4	All
Feminine forms	50	70	55	24	50
• Moderately feminine forms	22	33	21	12	22
• Strongly feminine forms	28	37	34	12	18
Masculine forms	6	1	3	15	6
• Moderately masculine forms	6	1	3	15	6
• Strongly masculine forms	0	0	0	0	0
Neutral forms	44	29	42	61	44
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Speakers 1 and 2 = U.S. residents; Speakers 3 and 4 = Tokyo residents

Source: Shigeko Okamoto and Shie Sato, "Less Femine" Speech among Young Japanese Females," in Kira Hall, Mary Bucholtz, and Birch Moonwomon (eds.), Locating Power: Proceedings of the Second Berkeley Women and Language Conference (Berkeley: Berkeley Women and Language Group, 1992).

One would rarely encounter such a stereotypical feminine speech style among contemporary young women. Even many of the older women in the middle classes do not use such feminine speech styles, as exemplified by the less feminine style of Speaker 4 in the same study. For this speaker, only 24 percent of the forms were feminine; 15 percent were masculine. Nor do women living in farming and fishing communities seem to use hyperfeminine speech styles. Chisato Kitagawa (1977:292) points out, "The sexual distinction in speech style in Japan has been more of an urban phenomenon than a rural one." (See also Kindaichi 1957.) In this connection, the gender differences in regional dialects also seem to be less distinct than those in the standard dialect, which may be due to the historical fact that the use of "women's language" was particularly encouraged in the Meiji era (the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century), along with the standardization of Japanese. In Tokyo itself there are two regions, Yamanote 'the hillside' and Shitamachi 'the downtown', but the boundaries are not as clearcut today as they once were. In the words of Dorinne Kondo (1990:57), Yamanote is "the mainstream, modern ideal," the domain of white-collar workers, whereas Shitamachi "conjures up images of the merchant, the artisan, the small family business." The two groups are said to speak different "languages": Shitamachi kotoba and Yamanote kotoba. In contrast to the former style, which is thought to be "rough," "direct," and "vulgar"

(Kondo 1990), *Yamanote kotoba* is thought to be "soft-spoken," "indirect," and "refined"—or, rather, the language that encompasses the feminine ideal.

In light of these observations, it is uncertain to what extent the label *Japanese women's language* reflects the actual language practices of Japanese women. Speech styles of Japanese women are not, as frequently implied, consistent across different age groups, classes, occupations, regions, and situations. Where, then, does the stereotype of Japanese women's language come from? As pointed out in Okamoto and Sato (1992), "Japanese women's language" is a construct based largely on the speech style of traditional women in the middle and upper-middle classes in Tokyo, corresponding to the "ideal feminine" variety in *Yamanote kotoba*. Sachiko Ide (1979) notes that her characterization of Japanese women's language is based on the variety spoken by people in the middle class or above in Tokyo, in particular the variety *Yamanote kotoba*. Miyako Inoue (forthcoming) explains that modern perceptions of Japanese women's language were shaped and promoted during state formation and industrialization in the Meiji era, when government officials and intellectuals sought to standardize the language and to discipline women according to the ideal of *ryoosai kenbo* 'good wife and wise mother'. Women's language, thus identified, was viewed as the "natural" speech of the Tokyo elite. Today's notion of Japanese women's language can be seen as a lasting legacy of this historical enterprise.[10] Along with other symbolic systems (e.g., clothes, bearing), it constitutes an ideal for the traditional, proper, or *onna-rashii* 'feminine' Japanese woman. It is thus culturally and ideologically constructed, both class-related and normative.

Elinor Ochs (1993:149) asserts that "language is a source and moving force of gender ideologies" and that "we should expect language to be influenced by local organizations of gender roles, rights, and expectations." Similarly, Susan Gal (this volume) argues that categories such as *women's speech* and *men's speech* are "culturally constructed within social groups; they change through history and are systematically related to other areas of cultural discourse such as the nature of persons, of power, and of a desirable moral order." Thus "Japanese women's language" is not simply a result of overgeneralization in linguistic description; rather, it is a reflection of the dominant gender ideologies embedded, even today, in Japanese culture and society. Inoue (forthcoming) argues that the modern "Japanese women's language" is a result of "a political project to construct a norm or ideology of women's language." To regard a particular feminine variety as belonging to Japanese women's language is, then, to advance certain gender ideologies.

To disregard all unfeminine or less feminine language practices as devia-
tions serves to marginalize the meanings women express through these
practices. Such ideological conflict is well illustrated by this chapter's
epigraph.

As emphasized by Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet (1992),
ways of being women and men are diverse and continually changing, and so
are ways of talking. In contrast to the images projected by stereotypes,
particularly those advanced by cultural essentialism,[11] Japanese women are
socially and ideologically diverse and constantly changing (Brinton 1993;
English Discussion Society 1992; Inoue & Ehara 1991; Iwao 1993; Kondo
1990; Lebra, Paulson, & Powers 1976; Roberts 1994; Tamanoi 1990; Uno
1993). In 1990, for example, more than half of all Japanese women were in
the labor force (Lam 1992); working mothers now outnumber full-time
homemakers (Inoue & Ehara 1991). Expectations in connection with gender
roles and the images of ideal Japanese women (and men) are also changing,
as the following excerpts demonstrate:

> In a society where it is difficult for women to gain economic inde-
> pendence, it has been thought that marriage is the place of life secu-
> rity for women, and that child rearing after marriage is the woman's
> way of living. But recently, along with women's advancement in the
> society, more people think that [a woman] need not necessarily get
> married if she can be independent. [According to government polls,
> in 1972, 13 percent of women and 7 percent of men agreed with this
> view; in 1987, 24 percent of women and 16 percent of men
> supported the same view.] (Inoue & Ehara 1991: 14–15)

> According to the opinion survey on women released by the Prime
> Minister's Office on January 13, 1991, 34 percent of men and 43
> percent of women disagreed with biological division of labor. In the
> previous survey, 20 percent of men and 32 percent of women were
> opposed. (English Discussion Society 1992:79)

> Mom is jogging and Dad is cleaning. That is an illustration used in a
> new elementary school home economics textbook. ... Some [illus-
> trations] which imply reversed sex roles or images have appeared in
> the textbooks which are to be used from '92. (English Discussion
> Society 1992:80; original from *Asahi Shinbun*, February 3, 1992)

> New models of manhood are constantly being proffered. *Nikkei
> Woman* magazine, the bible for working women in Japan, exhorted
> its readers this year to seize the advantage and settle for nothing less

than a "Goat Man." Like the animal regarded in Japan as gentle but
strong, the Goat Man is a mate of intelligence and wide interests
who doesn't look to his wife as substitute mother and who likes
household chores and child care. (Teresa Watanabe, *Los Angeles
Times*, January 6, 1992)

Women's linguistic practices, particularly their use or disuse of stereotypical
Japanese women's language, may reflect or "index" (Silverstein 1976, 1985)
differences in gender ideologies like those alluded to in these passages. This
observation has prompted analysts like Eleanor Jorden (1990:3) to call for
more study of variation in Japanese speech styles: "Assuming that Japanese
women are expected to use a gentle, empathetic style more commonly than
men, it becomes important to identify the image and the message they
communicate when they do *not* speak in this register." But such images and
messages can be identified only if variation and change are examined vis-à-
vis dominant norms and expectations at a given time, with reference to their
sociocultural and historical significance. Such a study entails the investiga-
tion of actual language practices in diverse communities and contexts.

Identities, Interpersonal Relations, and Speech-Style Strategies

Why and under what circumstances, then, do Japanese women choose to
use or not use stereotypical women's language, or, more appropriately,
certain speech styles? As the traditional classification of sentence-final
particles illustrates, certain Japanese linguistic forms have often been
regarded as gendered. Such a treatment views the relation between language
and gender as a simple straightforward mapping of linguistic forms to the
speaker's sex (Ochs 1993). Clearly, however, this view cannot account for
the speech styles of the subjects in this study. Rather, as argued by Ochs
(1993:146), it is more helpful to view the relation between language and
gender not as directly indexical, but as "constituted and mediated by the
relation of language to stances, social acts, social activities, and other social
constructs." For example, it is often said that compared to masculine forms
such as *zo* and *da*, particles such as *wa* (with a rising intonation) and *no* are
gentle, nonassertive, or empathetic, and hence convey a sense of femininity
or politeness (Ide 1979, 1982, 1990; McGloin 1990; Reynolds 1985; Smith
1992b; Uyeno 1971). In other words, these linguistic indexes are best
regarded as expressions of pragmatic meanings, such as gentleness and
empathy, which in turn may relate to gender images or "the preferred
images of men and women" and hence may "motivate their differential
uses by men and women" (Ochs 1993:151).

To go a step further, the choice of speech styles or certain linguistic forms can be considered a matter of the speaker's "strategic choice" (Brown 1980), based on the kind of pragmatic meanings she (or he) wishes to convey. Not all Japanese women may wish to project the image of "traditional" femininity. Japanese women (and men) choose particular speech styles to communicate certain pragmatic meanings that are appropriate for expressing and constructing their identities in specific relational contexts. These choices, then, require the context-specific consideration of multiple social attributes associated with the speaker's identity and interpersonal relationships (such as gender, age, occupation, intimacy), as well as the speaker's knowledge and evaluation of the relevant linguistic norms. It is to be emphasized that one's identity is dependent on specific relationships and sociocultural contexts (Bachnik 1994; Kondo 1990; Rosenberger 1992); Japanese women's speech styles reflect their understanding of themselves as certain kinds of Japanese women (e.g., young unmarried women, homemakers, managers) interacting in specific contexts. Thus, gender cannot be viewed in the abstract, as independent of identity and relationships. Rather, gender and other social attributes jointly and interactively construct women's identities and their relationships, thereby affecting their choice of speech styles.

Age, for example, may be an important aspect of a Japanese woman's identity, affecting her way of relating to others and hence her choice of speech style or linguistic form. It is often said that Japanese women, in particular young women, are becoming more assertive (English Discussion Society 1992; Iwao 1993)—a perception supported by an *NHK* survey conducted in 1979:

> Among teens and those in their early '20s, more women than men regarded themselves as "the main speaker" in casual conversations, but the opposite was the case in older generations. Further, in the case of younger generations, the portion of those who regarded themselves as "likely to insist on their opinions against others" was about the same among men and among women, but in middle-age or older generations the portion of men who held this view was two or three times that among women. (Hiroshi Ishino, *Kotoba* 4, no. 4, (1980):34–37; translated from the Japanese original)[12]

A 1992 article in *Asahi Shinbun*, in reference to the speech of young female employees newly entering a company, similarly reported: "[Their speech] has a positive aspect: they are able to speak without hesitation" (October 8, 1992). In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* during the same year, a board member of the International Community Association in Tokyo

attributed the success of his matchmaking firm to this same assertiveness, declaring that "Japanese women today are not like women":

> When you look at it from a Japanese male perspective, Japanese women today are not like women," Omura sighed. "They're too self-assertive. They won't listen to men. They used to be more submissive and weaker. Women have changed. But men haven't. So these men who haven't changed can't find women. (Teresa Watanabe, *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 1992)

College-age women frequently use sentence-final forms traditionally deemed masculine, that is, more direct or assertive styles, but they use the feminine particle *wa* when quoting their mothers and female teachers.

Other linguistic features that characterize the informal speech styles of young women include the contracted sentence-final form *jan* (see example (10)) instead of the more formal form *ja nai*, a prolonged sentence-final (and medial) rising intonation (e.g., the final *ittee* in example (4)), faddish slang and coinages (e.g., the prefix *choo-* 'super-', *suggee* 'awesome', *tame* 'agemate', *kakyoo* from *kateikyooshi* 'tutor'), and quick conversational tempos (*Asahi Shinbun*, October 8 and 14, 1992, October 20, 1993; Kashiwagi 1991). These features seem to create an image of playfulness and youthfulness. A number of young women I talked with emphasized the importance of these features as a marker of youth; regarding tempo, for example, they characterized their mothers' speech as slow. The differences in speech among age groups seem rather important in Japanese, as the term *sedai-hoogen* 'generation dialect' suggests. A newspaper reporter writes, "It's gotten so that I could be told by young people 'You (the chief) have a strong *yonjyuu-namari* ('a forty-something accent')'" (*Asahi Shinbun*, October 14, 1992). When I showed the reader's letter in *Asahi Shinbun*—this chapter's epigraph—to two young Japanese women, one of them immediately responded that she was not using men's language but "*waka-mono no kotoba*" 'the language of young people'. It seems that the use of such speech styles by young women, particularly in conversation among peers, serves to convey an image of youthfulness, to differentiate younger from older women, and thus to establish solidarity.

A woman's occupation and position, as they relate to her relative power, may also affect her choice of speech styles in certain situations. In Okamoto and Sato (1992), the speech of the youngest group, all of whom were students, was less feminine than the second youngest group, all of whom were homemakers (see also Takasaki 1993). Here, the fact that communities of students are not as clearly differentiated in gender roles as communities of

homemakers may account for some of the difference. In this connection, we may note that the use of the first-person masculine pronoun *boku* is not uncommon among high school girls in Japan. Akiko Jugaku (1979:80) reports that high school girls explained that they use *boku* because if they use the first-person feminine pronoun *atashi* they cannot compete with boys. According to Reynolds (1990:140), girls are "aware of the disadvantage of female speech in school situations where they are expected to compete with boys for good grades and choose to ignore traditions openly."

Reynolds (1990:138) also discusses the conflict between traditional female speech expectations and the need for professional women to communicate more assertively: "Female informal speech, which has long been limited to private discourse among women, does not work in the same way as male informal speech in public environments. For a woman teacher to be successful under the present circumstances, she has no choice but to use defeminized patterns to strengthen solidarity with her students without losing authority." Prominent female politicians are frequently reported as defying traditional speech conventions, as in the following reference to Takako Doi, the current Speaker of the House of Representatives in the National Diet:

> Takako Doi, who recently resigned as head of the Socialist Party and is one of the most visible women in Japan, succeeds in breaking many of these rules [for Japanese women's speech]. Her voice is always low, even when she is passionately pressing a point. She uses honorifics much less often than most women, and she employs the masculine form, *de arimasu*, instead of the more polite, and thus feminine, *de gozaimasu*, meaning "to be." Most noticeable is a bit of unusual body language: she always looks the listener straight in the face when speaking. (Ellen Rudolph, *New York Times*, September 1, 1991)

Gender differences in speech also seem less distinct in rural areas, perhaps in part because "in farming communities, women constitute an important labor force, and thus are not as dependent on men as their urban counterparts" (Kitagawa 1977:292); they need not behave as powerlessly as urban homemakers.

All these examples show that Japanese women at times employ unfeminine speech styles—that is, speech styles that are less formal and more direct—in order to express power or to empower themselves. Such linguistic behaviors may be considered "marked" (Ochs 1993:154) against the normative behaviors, insofar as they are viewed as unfeminine or incongruous

with expectations of gender practices. Although such a culturally marked strategy may be found appropriate by some women in certain domains, others may prefer to exert more gender-appropriate strategies to express and gain power. Janet Smith (1992a) discusses two such strategies that women in positions of authority sometimes employ in giving directives: *motherese*, based on forms that mothers commonly use in speaking to their children, and *passive power*, based on relatively passive or indirect forms. The former recalls the authority of the Japanese mother while simultaneously invoking family-like solidarity; the latter exploits the normative expectations for Japanese women's interactional behaviors. Yukako Sunaoshi (1995, forthcoming) supplies empirical data for the effective use of these two strategies as well as several others used to create rapport in the context of power relations. Thus, gender, relative power, norms, and expectations interact in complex ways, and Japanese women select the strategies—whether marked or unmarked—that they find most appropriate for expressing and constructing their identities and relationships.

The nature of the relationship between conversational partners (e.g., degree of intimacy) and the formality level of the conversational situation also affect a woman's choice of speech style. For example, both in the present study and in Okamoto and Sato (1992), the subjects' use of strongly masculine or vulgar speech styles was limited in frequency and reserved for certain interlocutors. Some of the subjects explained that they use strongly masculine or vulgar expressions only with close peers or "*kokoro no tsuu-jiru aite*" ('those who can understand each other well') as "*aijoo no hyoogen*" ('expressions of affection'). When compared to the use of moderately masculine forms, the use of strongly masculine forms seems to be a highly conscious decision. In both studies subjects often qualified strongly masculine expressions by giggling (as in example (8)) or using hedges, such as a quotative *tte* 'that' (as in example (9)) or the expression *mitai na* 'like': e.g., *shiranai no ka yo mitai na* 'It's like, "don't you know?"' (Okamoto & Sato 1992:486). Such devices indicate that the speakers are aware of the markedness of these vulgar forms and do not see them as part of their normal speech style. Yet, they elect to use them, to break the norms, in an attempt to reinforce solidarity. The participants used strongly masculine forms particularly for emphasis (example (7)), when telling a joke (example (8)), or when criticizing or protesting (example (9)). Their employment therefore functions to increase the expressiveness of an utterance, making the conversation between peers "more interesting and spirited," as several participants remarked in the Okamoto and Sato study (1992:487).

Note also that the youngest group in the 1992 study used many more

masculine forms, including strongly masculine forms, than the subjects in the present study. One of the reasons for this difference may be related to the fact that the present study was carried out in a more formal context than the earlier one: the subjects were asked to cooperate by their professors at Japanese colleges; the subjects in the 1992 study, conducted at an American college, were asked to participate by a student or professor who did not know them. The style differences observed in the two studies, particularly regarding the use of strongly masculine styles, may reflect not only the participants' awareness of speech norms for women but also their desire to employ speech styles most appropriate to the situation. Their discursive choices are perhaps influenced by notions such as *uchi* 'inside/private' versus *soto* 'outside/public', and *tatemae* 'social surface' versus *honne* 'real feelings'—distinctions essential to understanding Japanese behaviors (Bachnik 1992, 1994; Kondo 1990; Tobin 1992). Dorinne Kondo (1990:141) explains that *uchi* "instantly implies the drawing of boundaries between us and them, self and other," and that "*soto* means the public world, while *uchi* is the world of informality, casual behavior, and relaxation. *Soto* is where one must be attentive to social relationships, cultivating one's *tatemae*, whereas in the *uchi* one is free to express one's *honne*." In a setting of *soto*, then, young women may be inclined to use more feminine or polite speech styles, and in a setting of *uchi*, where solidarity and casualness are important, they may find such styles inappropriate. As several young women in the study explained, feminine speech styles in the latter situation sound "*aratamatta*" ('formal') and "*kidotta*" ('prudish').

Nobuko Uchida (1993) offers further evidence for the influence of social relationships on the choice of speech styles. She and her colleagues examined dyadic conversations of forty female and male college students (in which each pair of speakers was meeting for the first time) as well as conversations on television interviews. Her analysis revealed that in mixed-sex conversations between college students, both women and men used facilitative questions and interjections frequently—a finding that suggests speakers are more relaxed with same-sex interlocutors. In the television conversations, the relative status between speakers affected the occurrence of features such as interruptions, indirect expressions, and honorifics. Moreover, the male college students in her study used the first-person masculine pronoun *ore*—a form regarded as more masculine/informal than another masculine first-person pronoun, *boku*—more frequently in mixed-sex conversations than in same-sex conversations. Uchida concludes that the choice of speech style is regulated by the psychological distance that the

speaker feels toward the interlocutor; speakers monitor their linguistic behaviors according to how they view themselves and how others view them.

In sum, the discussion in this section demonstrates that the use of Japanese women's speech is not directly derived from the gender of the speaker; rather, its employment is dependent on multiple social factors relating to the speaker's identity and relationships.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented empirical evidence for variations in Japanese women's speech and argued that the category commonly delineated as *Japanese women's language*—a culturally and ideologically constructed, class-based norm—is too static and monolithic to account for the varied speech styles of Japanese women. Rather than correlating speech styles directly with the speaker's sex, I have tried to demonstrate that Japanese women select their speech styles by considering multiple social attributes associated with identity and relationships and by evaluating the linguistic norms in the relevant communities. Based on a context-specific assessment of these interrelated factors, Japanese women strategically choose particular speech styles to communicate desired pragmatic meanings and images of self. In other words, the choice of speech styles is a means by which women express and construct their identities and relationships. Young women's use of unfeminine or direct speech styles in informal conversation is not simply an exception to "Japanese women's language" but a meaningful choice based on their understanding of themselves as young unmarried female students situated in specific interpersonal relationships and sociocultural contexts.

Although the preceding discussion has focused on synchronic divergence, the variation in Japanese women's speech styles is also diachronic and its careful investigation is imperative. The perception that the speech styles of Japanese women are becoming less feminine often leads to a second generalization about Japanese women's speech that is equally essentialist: the idea that the speech styles of all Japanese women are changing from feminine to masculine. The speech styles of Japanese women are diverse, and the use of ideal feminine styles or "Japanese women's language" has been far from universal among Japanese women. Thus, when we discuss diachronic change, it is important to examine which kinds of women are adopting which kinds of change.

For example, with regard to the "defeminization" phenomenon, it may be helpful, as a start, to narrow our attention to the speech styles of middle-

and upper-middle-class women in Tokyo and ask to what extent defeminization, if in fact it is occurring, is advancing: is it mostly limited to young women or is it affecting older women as well? The differences among age groups summarized in Table 12.2, for example, may reflect a broad defeminization process—related to changing gender roles and ideologies—that most strongly affects the younger generation; on the other hand, the same differences may point to a feminization process that individual women may experience as they grow older (due to societal pressures deriving from employment, marriage, and so on); alternatively, and perhaps most likely, both processes may coexist. Jennifer Coates's (forthcoming) study of the talk of teenage girls in London shows significant changes in discourse styles during adolescence (from ages twelve to fifteen); in particular, innovations and agency in discourse declined as the girls in her study grew older. A similar kind of developmental change may explain, at least in part, the age-group differences shown in Table 12.2. Several working women in their late twenties also told me that since they started working, their ways of talking have changed, and that they have come to use less rough ("*ranboo na*") expressions and have become more careful about the use of honorifics. Furthermore, although the data set is limited, the results of this study and of Okamoto and Sato (1992) suggest that there are wider variations in speech styles among older women as compared with younger women. Perhaps defeminization and feminization are highly individualized, affecting different women to different degrees. It is interesting to note here that Speakers 1 and 2 in Table 12.3 have been living in the United States for nineteen years and twelve years respectively, and have therefore not experienced the change in women's speech styles in Japan. In fact, Speaker 2, who used the most feminine style of all participants, said that when her older sister and mother visited her from Japan, she felt that their language had become *kitanai* 'dirty'.

Finally, it has been noted by some that neutralization of Japanese women's and men's speech may be taking place, with masculinization occurring in women's speech and feminization occurring in male speech (Kobayashi 1993; Reynolds 1985).[13] Jorden (1990:2–3) also observes, "Some patterns continually described as *onna-rashii* now turn up frequently in examples of men's speech." What may be occurring, then, is a shift in cultural stereotypes of women's speech and men's speech, so that the linguistic forms previously identified as feminine, masculine, or neutral no longer convey the same meanings among modern-day speakers. A growing number of young women do not perceive certain moderately masculine forms to be masculine at all; their changing attitudes may in turn affect the

dominant linguistic norms of speech for Japanese women and men. Surely, not only women's speech patterns but men's as well will continue to adapt to the ongoing changes in Japanese gender roles and gender ideologies. However, we must also recognize that systematic research on change in Japanese women's and men's speech is virtually nonexistent. Before drawing conclusions about the process of neutralization as a universal linguistic phenomenon among Japanese, we must closely examine the linguistic practices of women and men in diverse communities across time. In particular, speakers who have remained "invisible" behind "representative" Japanese (e.g., farmers, blue-collar workers) must be included in our studies. We need to identify the nature of linguistic change, the types of speakers most likely to adopt it, and the social conditions that encourage it. Only then can we begin to understand fully the meanings of specific changes in Japanese women's and men's speech.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. In addition to these differences, Shibamoto (1985, 1990), based on her analysis of naturalistic speech data, demonstrates that female and male speech also differs syntactically with regard to the ellipsis of subject nominals, word order, and the ellipsis of case particles, among other features. Smith (1992b) analyzes gender differences in the use of "secondary modality."

2. I thank Miyako Inoue for providing me with this material. The acronym *NHK* stands for *Nippon Hoosookyookai* 'Japan Broadcasting Association'.

3. See Coates (1988) and Uchida (1992) for an overview and critical discussion of these approaches.

4. This study employs basically the same method of data collection and analysis that was used in Okamoto and Sato (1992), so as to enable comparisons of the results obtained in the two studies. All ten subjects were attending private

colleges: Speakers 1–8 were attending a two-year women's college, and Speakers 9 and 10 a four-year coed college (see Table 12.4 in note 7). Topics for conversation were not specified, although sample topics were suggested, among them school matters, friends, shopping, and travel. I chose to record informal conversations rather than administer interviews for two reasons: first, female–male differences in sentence-final forms appear most clearly in familiar conversation, not in formal conversation; second, it seems that young women gravitate toward an unfeminine speech style particularly with their close peers in informal situations.

5. Such tokens do not include the following types of sentences or fragments: (1) interrupted or incomplete sentences, (2) neutral interrogative sentences (e.g., *Iku!* 'Are (you) going?'), (3) neutral fillers (e.g., *A soo* 'Is that right?'), (4) direct and indirect quotations, except for the direct quotations of the speaker's own speech, and (5) expressions repeated for emphatic purposes (e.g., *Takai, takai* 'Expensive, expensive'). The final forms of interrogative sentences and fillers are normally neutral, and these neutral forms were excluded because their inclusion would have skewed the data for those participants who tended to be listeners and asked questions or used fillers constantly. Further, dependent clauses were ignored unless they were used sentence-finally with semantic completion. In the case of so-called right dislocation (of a phrase or clause), the final form of the sentence in the "original" word order was considered because it is the part that is gendered.

6. For the forms for which classification was not available in the literature, we made our own judgments, making reference to women's and men's conversational data.

7. The distribution of gendered sentence-final forms for each speaker is shown in Table 12.4.

Table 12.4 Use of Gendered Sentence-final Forms for Individual Speakers (Percentages)

Form	SP1	SP2	SP3	SP4	SP5	SP6	SP7	SP8	SP9	SP10	All	Range
F	13	15	12	13	13	16	8	19	5	10	12	5–19
•MF	8	9	10	10	9	10	5	7	3	8	8	3–10
•SF	5	7	2	3	4	6	3	12	2	2	5	2–12
M	11	17	25	17	19	25	17	13	23	23	19	11–25
•MM	8	15	25	16	19	22	15	13	21	21	18	8–25
•SM	3	1	0	1	1	3	2	1	2	1	1	0–3
N	77	68	63	71	68	59	75	68	73	67	69	59–77
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	

8. Among the neutral forms, the most commonly used (appearing in more than one hundred tokens) were plain forms of verbs and *i*-adjectives (e.g., *soo omotta* 'I thought so'), the gerundive forms (... *itte* ' ... said'), and the base of *na*-adjectives and nouns by themselves (e.g., ... *juuyoo* ' ... is important').

9. Takasaki (1993) analyzes transcribed conversations published in a journal

between 1951 and 1988. She compares the speech of working and nonworking women, but it seems that the comparison cannot be made straightforwardly because the conversational situations for the two groups differ in formality, which strongly affects the use of features such as honorifics and sentence-final particles.

10. The concept of *women's language* existed in premodern Japan (Ide forthcoming; Kindaichi 1957; Kitagawa 1977). However, Inoue (forthcoming) asserts that what is now thought of as modern "Japanese women's language" is a recent historical product and discontinuous with the premodern women's "voices."

11. See Minear (1980) and Tamanoi (1990) for criticisms of cultural essentialism in Japanese studies.

12. I thank Miyako Inoue for providing me with this material.

13. See Ogawa and Smith (forthcoming) for a discussion of the feminization of men's speech in gay Japanese couples in Tokyo and Osaka.

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