

# Re-examining Gender Differences in Contemporary Japanese Speech Patterns

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This dissertation aims to examine the differences in Japanese communication styles that are alleged to exist between genders. Differences in communication are often said to lead to misunderstanding between men and women. In other words, the main question posed in this study is whether the differences are related to gender. More specifically, this study examines the gender differences of communication, focusing on how applicable gender styles commonly observed in English are to Japanese communication.

Chapter One addresses the structure of the dissertation with an outline of the contents for each chapter, which discusses the framework of the dissertation. The goal of this study was to identify gender difference in language use empirically and to engage in empirical discussions about the language-gender relationship: e.g., whether women's language use has been changing or whether there is actually gender difference in language use.

Chapter Two consists of two parts. Part One provides a historical overview of relevant literature with regard to gender in language. It describes how research on gender in language has evolved in the western culture. Part Two describes how the literature on gender differences in the Japanese language characterizes male and female language use. This chapter provided a synopsis of related research, both in the Western culture and in Japan. Scholars have produced knowledge of how women speak differently from men, using both empirical and case study evidence. They have examined male-female differentiation at all levels of language, as well as extralinguistic features. In addition, pronouns and final particles were said to function as exclusive gender markers indexing femininity and masculinity. Women's language was thus considered as a set of linguistic forms and functions of language used by women and often registered with polite, empathetic, and nonassertive.

Chapter Three investigates how Japanese native speakers conceive male and female differences in the Japanese language. A questionnaire was conducted with this purpose. The questionnaire seeks to verify whether the participants share a common knowledge about these differences and whether they actually use the characteristics mentioned. A group of males and females in the age 21 to 60 years were chosen as the sample. This chapter verified the awareness of native speakers of Japanese about differences in the Japanese language between men and women by means of a questionnaire. The participants generally shared a common knowledge about these differences, but they did not actually use in the real world the characteristics mentioned. Women's language was

also a self-conscious parameter of social change. An opinion poll was conducted on whether women's language is disappearing and if it is true, how it accounts for. This linguistic consciousness of how women speak was related to notions of culture in the assumption that women's language is uniquely Japanese. An image of the loss of women's language is shared in this chapter.

Chapter Four focuses on the will of an individual in language use. This language use of each group of men and women is discussed. This chapter reconsiders the questionnaire described in Chapter Three with the interviews of intimate friends in the 20's in order to verify if the results of the questionnaire are applied to the actual language use of the youths. It might also be a challenge to the theories that because women and men learn to have conversations in same-sex peer interaction, they develop different norms for establishing conversational involvement. Furthermore, it is my intent to show that these theories are not reflected in practice, especially by the younger generations of Japanese. They were likely to be freed from an obsession about women's language.

Chapter Five focuses on the influence of society. This chapter analyzes the interviews conducted with four male and four female workers of the 40's and 50's at a university in order to compare with the previous youths, both on the level of actual language use as the reasons for their language choice. This chapter focuses on the influence of social factors to understand differences between the language choice of males and females. It indicates the relation between social position and language choice. Present-day differences in language use are related to different social positions, rather than male and female. This chapter compared male and female workers in different social positions with the youths in Chapter Four, on the level of actual language use. In general, different social positions were assumed to influence to differences between the language choice of males and females, because society expects them to speak differently (e.g., more politely) dependent on social factors such as status or age. Rather, there was variation in language use among them beyond such social factors. The language choice of males and females was more likely related to the relationship of solidarity as well as individual preference. In other words, the participants seemed to change their speech forms in informal conversations, according to solidarity, yet within the range of society's expectation. If speakers deviate from a permissible range of solidarity, for example, they will be in trouble with "*tameguchi*" or "*tamego*" referring to casual talk with possibly too casual. This phenomenon has been one of Japan's social issues reported repeatedly through media.

Chapter Six investigates Japanese translations of the popular English movies that function as genderlects (two distinct languages). Furthermore, it discusses the way the

Japanese translations are affected by the social norm. This chapter starts by describing the differences in Japanese translations of two English movies; *Legally Blonde* (2001) and *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* (2008). It considers the Japanese translations of these movies to verify if male and female characters can result in different language use according to the translators. This chapter analyzed American and British movies where “men and women speak differently” in Japanese. Men and women encounter women’s language through the media, such as foreign movies subtitled into Japanese or dubbed with Japanese voices. In movies, male and female actors “spoke” masculine and feminine languages in Japanese. However, this study showed that the statement that “men and women speak differently” do not apply to their discursive practice. Why then does it make sense that “men and women speak differently” in the movies? As a possible explanation, distinctively masculine and feminine languages are likely to help the description of characters. That is to say, these actors “speaking” with a subtitle in Japanese or with Japanese voices are not authentic Japanese. As a questionnaire shown in Chapter Three, men and women believed that women’s language exists in Japan. Another explanation could be that translators are fettered by the convention. Furthermore, the audience is also getting used to the different languages used in the movies. As long as the consciousness of women’s language widely spreads in Japan, women’s language is likely to be surviving most in movies.

Chapter Seven summarizes the study outlined in this dissertation and examines the relevance of the study.

In conclusion, researching on women’s language makes sense in a way that the perceived disappearance of women’s language attests to its imaginary existence. Women’s language is now lost as a result of women becoming linguistically equated with men in the present, but many Japanese people believed that women’s language exists. Indeed, conversation analysis enabled us to visualize the existence of women’s language in Japanese translations of movies. However, the description of discursive practice questions the distinctions imposed by a deceptive statement such as “Japanese women speak women’s language.”

Therefore, this dissertation speaks for the voice of Japanese women that women’s language is not theirs. Gender differences in language use reified in women’s language derive from the cultural role in western societies. Japanese women’s language may be inseparably connected with the social changes into modernity. The interaction of women’s language is a complicated system that governs social awareness about language and gender.