

LANGUAGE OF INFERIOR STATUS

— A Universal Feature of Woman's Language —

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“Linguistic differences are a sensitive index of social differentiation and their presence sharpens group difference.”¹ Based on this assumption Paul H. Furfey surveyed the facts of sex difference found in the languages which, he calls, belong to primitive people, such as the American Indian languages, Chiquito of Bolivia, Thai, etc. Having reviewed these languages he concluded that “There is linguistic evidence that, at least in some scattered instances, the existence of these distinctions is associated with an assertion of masculine superiority.” He further suggested that “language sometimes serves as a tool of sex dominance.”²

A similar conclusion was independently drawn by Robin Lakoff³ who concentrated completely on the English language. Earlier it was assumed that the sex difference is barely discernible in English. However, Lakoff pinpointed various hidden facts of women's features in language in relation to the women's place in society.

By insightfully looking at English in a two-sided approach she claimed that women's language tends to be powerless and trivial and that women's language has been used as a tool to keep women in their place. Her first approach was to examine how women talk and the second one was to examine how the words about women are interpreted. She hoped that her claims based on English may, *mutatis mutandis*, be universal.

¹ Paul H. Furfey, “Men's and Women's Language,” *The American Catholic Sociological Review*, 5: 218-23 (1944) p. 218.

² *Ibid.*, p. 233.

³ Robin Lakoff, “Language and Women's Place,” *Language in Society*, 2: 45-80 (1973).

It is common knowledge that the Japanese language has sex difference in the first and second person pronouns and sentence-final particles. There are sex distinctions in other aspects of the language as well. They are elaborately differentiated and used according to the status of the interlocutors, formality of setting, and sex of the speaker.

It is the purpose of this paper to analyze the Japanese women's language in the light of Lakoff's first approach; that is to find the features of the language women use. I would like to demonstrate how a major part of Japanese women's language can be explained in relation to women's status in the real world just the same way as English. The implication is to claim a universal feature; that is, women's language is the index of the inferior status, and it has been used to keep women in their place.

Let me limit the scope of data for this paper. The data are based on my introspection of my knowledge of Japanese. My geographical dialect is the Yamanote dialect of Tokyo which is considered to be the standard Japanese. The social dialect, which is an important factor to be considered in the sex distinction in language, includes from middle class to upper class. (It seems that we find few sex distinctions in the lower class dialect.) Factors of speech sound—such as intonation, voice quality, the manner of articulation which are relevant to women's feature in language—are not to be discussed in this paper.

What Lakoff claimed as the main feature of women's language is the reflection of their powerless status. In appropriate women's speech strong expression of feeling is avoided, expression of uncertainty is favored and by virtue of these expressions, women's speech generally sounds, more polite than men's. It seems that a large part of women's speech in Japanese share this same feature.

The most formal form of the first person pronoun singular in Japanese is *watakushi*. It is used by both sexes. In less formal speech men use *watashi* and in informal speech *boku* is most commonly used. *Ore* is most informal form. On the other hand women use *watashi* most commonly in informal speech. (*Atakushi* is often used by women of higher social class in place of *watashi*.) *Atashi*, which is used by most little girls, is used by some women but it is a less formal form than *watashi*. The choice of these forms depends on the situational context: the degree

of formality of setting and the relative status of a speaker against an addressee. The different forms of pronouns are shown in the diagram below along the formal and informal scale according to the range of their use.

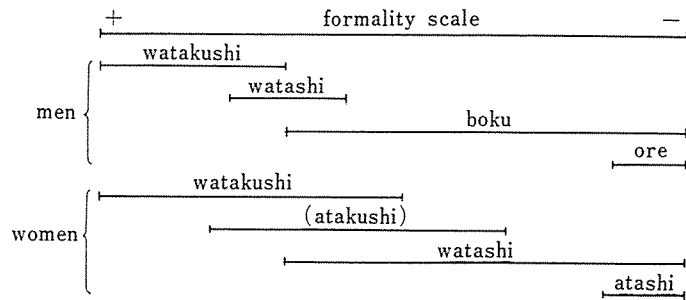


Diagram 1. First Person Pronouns

To choose a first person pronoun for a Japanese is to identify oneself appropriately to the situation. Thus in a formal situation like in a public speech men and women both use the most formal *watakushi* to refer to themselves.

Within the same degree of formality two people may choose different pronouns to refer to themselves depending upon their relative status. Suppose at a panel discussion two men use *watakushi* and one man uses *boku*. The man who uses *boku* is obviously superior to the other two, because he can identify himself less formally and still be appropriate in the formal panel discussion. His informality is tolerated whereas if inferiors were to use *boku* they would be considered to be impolite, therefore they would put themselves in an inappropriate situation. This is how the choice of the forms of the first person pronoun, the self identification, is relevant to the relative status of the speakers involved and how it is important in the matter of politeness.

If we observe the use of pronouns by men and women in real speech, there are cases when *watashi* or *boku* is used by men whereas *watakushi* is used by women. Women are expected to use formal form *watakushi* in a wider range to be more formal. Even if there is no difference in the social status among the people involved in a conversation, it is considered to be appropriate for women to lower their psychological

status and try to be slightly more formal. This is a reflection of women's status in the real world.

It may be worth noticing that the informal forms used by women are simply variants of *watakushi*. *Atakushi* is formed by deleting *w-* from *watakushi*. *Watashi* is formed by deleting *-ku-* from *watakushi* and in turn *atashi* is formed by deleting *w-* from *watashi*.

Let us now turn to the second person pronouns. When we use the second person pronouns we have the choice of using them in several ways depending on the formality of the situation, the relative status and the familiarity of the interlocutors. Pronouns are not the only way to refer to the second person. *Sensee* 'teacher' is used to refer to teachers, doctors, congressmen, etc., as the second person. Titles alone like *shacho* 'the president of a company' are often used. The first and last names followed by *-sama*, *-san*, or *-chan* are also widely used.

The second person pronouns are used only when one is talking to a person of the same status or his inferior.

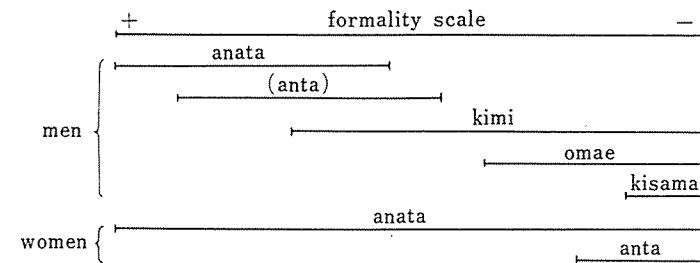


Diagram 2. Second Person Pronouns

Anata is the most formal second person pronoun men use in a formal situation or to refer to an unfamiliar person. (Men of lower or lower middle class use *anta* in place of *anata*. In some dialects in the country *anta* is often used by men.) The most frequently used one is *kimi*. When a man refers to the second person as *kimi*, the speaker must be in rapport with the addressee or he is superior than the addressee. *Omae* and *kisama* are rather derogatory and are used when one is fighting with or looking down upon the addressee. Women use *anata*, the most formal form, in all levels of formality. There isn't a counterpart of *kimi* for women. The only alternative form *anta*, which sounds

slightly derogatory if someone uses it to refer to me, is derived from *anata* by deleting *a* from the second syllable. Thus, the diagram shows how women use a more formal form because they are expected to be more polite, while for men the derogatory forms *omae* and *kisama* are tolerated when they choose to be boastful or to show anger at the addressee.

Given these facts, one can see how the use of personal pronouns are the index of sexual distinction in the real world. Women are pushed in the inferior status and are expected to be polite using more formal forms and restricting themselves not to have derogatory words within their available vocabulary.

Sentence-final particles express feeling or emotion of a speaker. They are found only in informal speech. When one is talking to his superior, one does not use these particles because their use create an informal situation which is interpreted as impolite by the superior. Some particles are exclusively used by men, some by women and others by both sexes.

Zo and *ze* are exclusively used by men. They are used to get the attention of the hearer. In Japanese the fricative [z] is considered unpleasant to the ear if put at the last syllable of an utterance, and therefore they are derogatory particles. *Ze* is more derogatory than *zo*. Here are some examples of sentences with these particles. (+M, -F) is used exclusively by men, (-M, +F) is used exclusively by women, (+M, +F) are used by both sexes; and (+For) is used for formal situation only, (-For) for informal only and (\pm For) is for both situations.

1. Omoshiroi *zo*. Hey, it's interesting. / (+M, -F), (-For)

2. Omoshiroi *ze*. Shit, it's interesting. / (+M, -F), (-For)

Yo is another particle used to draw attention. This *yo* is only used by men. (*Yo* is used to ensure the statement, too. In that case *yo* is used by both sexes.) It does not carry a derogatory connotation, therefore it is widely used.

3. Omoshiroi *yo*. Look, it's interesting. / (+M, -F), (-For)

When women call attention, they use *yo* together with *wa*. *Wa* is a particle to soften the statement. It is exclusively used by women. By putting *wa* before *yo* women can gently call attention.

4. Omoshiroi *wa-yo*. See, it's interesting. / (-M, +F), (-For)

Thus, when a woman calls attention she has to use the non-derogatory particle *yo* with softening particle *wa*, while a man can choose from *yo*, *zo* and *ze*. This explains why men are allowed to express themselves more strongly and less politely.

Another sentence-final particle used exclusively by women is *no*. This is used to ensure that the statement has a soft and charming manner.⁴

5. Omoshiroi *no*. Well . . . it's interesting, isn't it? / (-M, +F), (-For)

no is very difficult to express in English, as it has the effect of giving a charming, sweet and uncertain tone to the statement. It is often used with *yo* which is used to ensure the speaker's statement.

6. Omoshiroi *no-yo*. It's interesting, isn't it? / (-M, +F), (-For)

1, 2 and 3 are used by men and 4, 5 and 6 are used by women. *Wa* and *no* are the signal for women's speech. They are put at the end of the sentences to make the statements sound soft. The use of particles, in this study, have been investigated in terms of the meaning the particles convey. Women's particles are for softening and men's are for plain, strong or derogatory utterances.

Lakoff defined a tag-question in English as a feature of women's language. She says "such features are probably part of the general fact that women's speech sounds much more 'polite' than men's. One aspect of politeness is leaving a decision open, not imposing your mind, or views, or claims, on anyone else."⁵ The use of *wa* or *no* by women seems to give essentially a similar effect in the Japanese speech. Since *wa* and *no* soften the statement, an utterance with either *wa* or *no* sounds less imposing, and thus more polite.

Desu and *da* are copulas which function like "be". By putting them at the end of sentences, a speaker can be more definite in his decision. *Desu* is formal and *da* is informal. The former can be used by both sexes, but the latter is only used by men.

7. Kore wa hon *desu*. This is a book. / (+M, +F), (+For)

⁴ This is frequently used by children of both sexes. As a boy grows older he uses it less and less frequently.

⁵ Lakoff, *Ibid.*, p. 56.

8. Kore was hon *da*. This is a book. / (+M, -F), (-For)

In an informal situation, a woman can either use the softening particle *wa* after *da* or delete *da* altogether and use some other particle.

9. a) Kore was hon *da-wa*.
 b) Kore was hon *yo*.
 c) Kore was hon *na-no*. } This is a book. / (-M, +F), (+For)

Thus, the informal form *da* is consistently avoided by women. This is an example for Japanese for what Lakoff says "women's speech is devised to prevent the expression of strong statement."⁶

Other disparities found in the usage of men's and women's speech is found in imperative forms. *Nasai* is a formal form and *ro* is an informal form of the auxiliary for imperative.

10. Tabe *nasai*. Eat. / (+M, +F), (+For)

11. Tabe *ro*. Eat. / (+M, -F), (-For)

Again, the informal form is not to be used by women. There is no counterpart of *ro* for women's speech. This is because the use of an imperative form itself is not very polite. The imperative forms are only possible when talking to people of equal or inferior status.

What women would ordinarily do in informal situation is to use *te*, the particle for a mild request.

12. Tabe *te*. Please eat. / (+M, +F), (-For)

The formal form of request is *te-kudasai*. It consists of *te* as request particle and *kudasai* as a humble honorific verb.

13. Tabe *te-kudasai*. Would you please eat? / (+M, +F), (+For)

The imperative and request forms are described below in continuum as choice depends on the degree of the speaker and hearer's relative status and content of message.

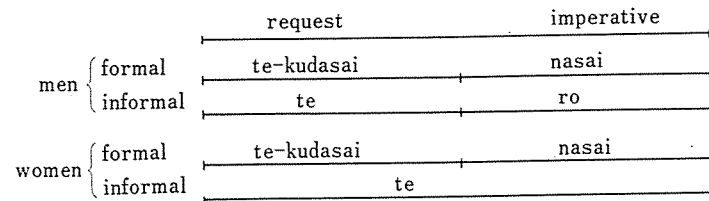


Diagram 3. Request and Imperative Forms

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

As it is obvious from the diagram above, women do not have informal imperative form.

Honorifics are the forms to be used when one wants to be polite. The more formal the situation, the more polite expression is used. And the higher the addressee's status, the more polite the form is expected to be.

The honorific prefix *o* or *go* is put before nouns and verbs. Both men and women use them but in natural speech women use them far more frequently than men.

14. sensee no *go-hon* teacher's book /
 (?M, +F), (+For), (+Honorific)

15. sensee no hon teacher's book /
 (+M, -F), (+For) } (-Honorific)
 (+M, +F), (-For)

It seems appropriate to use 14 for a woman because *sensee* 'teacher' is supposed to hold a superior status in Japan and to use the honorific prefix before teacher's book is to indicate that the speaker is paying respect to the owner of the referent, the book. However, when men use 14 in the same situation, it is assumed to be either too polite or too effeminate.

16. O-shokuji o ishoni *shima-sho*. Shall we have lunch together? /
 (?M, +F), (+For), (+Honorific)

17. Shokuji o ishoni *shi-yoo*. Let's eat together. / (+M, -F),
 (-For), (-Honorific)

The verbs under consideration here are *shi-masho* for the polite form and *shi-yoo* for the informal form. The reverse combinations with / without the honorific prefix *o-* are unacceptable.

18. *O-shokuji o ishoni *shi-yoo*.

19. *Shokuji o ishoni *shi-masho*.

These are unacceptable sentences on the basis of the sequence of formality.

16 is typical of the speech among women as well as by women talking to men. In a similar situation men would use 17 among men. However, men would use 16 when they are asking women very politely so that their offer will be accepted. (When a person *asks*, rather than suggests, somebody to do something, a polite way to do it is to lower

his psychological status, which can be performed by using more formal linguistic forms than he normally does.)

Honorifics are found not only in prefixes but also in auxiliary and verbs. Though there is no honorific exclusively used by either sex, there is a great deal of difference in the frequency of their use. Women are generally expected to use more honorifics for their speech to be appropriate to the situation. That is, the norm for the acceptability of women's speech is that it must be more polite than that of men's.

This discussion has taken into account the disparities for sex differences in the use of the decisive copulas, imperative forms and honorifics in Japanese. All this is evidence contributing to the universal feature that women's language reflects their inferior status in the real world.

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深層レベルにおける文法の説得力

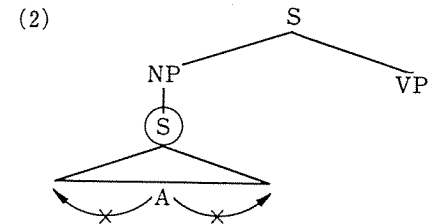
[Cleft Sentences を中心に]

加藤 雅子

I

- (1) a. The teacher who the reporters expected that the principal would fire is a crusty old battleax.
 b. *The teacher who that the principal would fire was expected by the reporters is a crusty old battleax.
 c. The teacher who it was expected by the reporters that the principal would fire is a crusty old battleax.

何故、文(1b)のみが非文法的で、(1a)および(1c)は許されるのか？ これに対する解答は、Sentential Subject Constraint (SSC)¹ という名の制約の元に、Ross (1967) により与えられている。この制約 SSC とは(2)のような構造を有する S (丸印つき)の中からは、如何なる要素(A)も取り出せ得ないということである。



◎ とは、文の主語として機能している埋め込み文のことである。この

¹ John R. Ross (1967), "Constraints on Variables in Syntax", Ch. iv, sec. 4: The Sentential Subject Constraint を参照。例文(1)は Ross の例文(4.251)に当たる。