

Preface

Japanese is a rich source for inquiries into gender and language. It has sex-exclusive features in personal pronouns, sentence final particles, interjections and other lexicons, super-segmental elements, and deletions of some sentence final elements. These are salient features whose proper use defines a woman's speech as appropriate.

The origin of sex-exclusive features in Japanese can be traced as far back as the 8th century, when *Manyoosyuu*, a collection of poems composed by people of all classes, was compiled; it contains gender indicative second person pronouns. In the 11th century, *hiragana* was employed as the writing system exclusively for ladies, while Chinese was being used among learned men. It is a well-known fact that *The Tale of Genji*, a novel by Lady Murasaki, was written in women's language. Around the 15th century, when feudalistic society pushed women's social spheres farther away from men's, we find the beginning of women's language called *nyooboo-kotoba*, which is the language of court ladies. Japanese women's language of today may be viewed as the contemporary manifestation of language used in women's quarters since nearly a thousand years ago.

Studies of women's language in the United States and Europe over the last two decades initially emerged in the wake of the feminist movement, and have produced hundreds of examples of gender differences in language usage. Most of these studies reduce such differences to questions of social power. In other words, the bulk of such studies were argued along feminist lines.

Gender differences in Japanese language usage might also be approached from a feminist perspectives as examples of sexism. However, it must be remembered that among highly developed industrial countries Japan is unique in that feminism has not revolutionized people's ways of thinking and living. Though it has had a certain influence, most people stick to old ways. The reasons might lie in assumptions about what it is to be a man or a woman in Japanese society. In Western societies interaction is carried out on the basis of individualism and egalitarianism. Instead of claiming the same status and role as men, Japanese women prefer a complementary vision of status and role

differences, giving them equal dignity, despite differences in form. Besides, the sexuality of Japanese men and women take different pattern from those of Westerners (cf. Beatty 1979). For these reasons sexism in a Japanese context cannot be the same as that in the United States and Europe. Thus, social and psychological factors dependent on the variable of gender in Japanese are complex and cannot be reduced to questions of power and status only.

Given its distinctive features, Japanese could serve as a treasure-trove for research on gender, language and society. In fact, Japanese women's language has attracted attention from both the general public and specialists on Japanese language. However, most of the literature on the topic tends to be merely descriptive or anecdotal, and there are surprisingly few books on this subject in languages other than Japanese. Therefore, we felt it imperative to create a book on Japanese women's language which covers a variety of aspects of the topic, including some which are more in line with linguistic analyses. Hence, a compiling of *Aspects of Japanese Women's Language* was planned.

This volume contains nine articles with widely varying orientations and perspectives. Some of the works are based on sociolinguistic data of varying scale while others present semantic/pragmatic analyses. Some works take a feminist standpoint while others are more straightforward linguistic accounts. Our aim here is not to present a coherent whole, but rather to give a sense of what has been done so far, in order to further understanding of the multifaceted issue of gender differences in Japanese.

Many articles in this volume analyze gender differences seen in the language used by men and women. Haig examines male/female differences in their use of dialect vs. standard forms, using data collected from teenagers in Nagoya, Japan. The result of his analysis supports the claim that the use of dialect (nonstandard) forms has become a covert marker of masculine speech.

McGloin investigates the uses of sentence-final particles and tries to give a rigorous linguistic account of why the use of particles such as *zo* and *ze* are masculine and *no* and *wa* feminine. The femininity associated with *no* and *wa*, in particular, is found in their function of "engendering common ground" or "creating conversational rapport."

Forms one uses to refer to oneself as well as those used to refer to the addressee differ greatly in Japanese depending on the gender of both the speaker and the addressee. Ide, in her "Person References of Japanese and American Children," examines these differences as seen in children's speech as

part of a larger contrastive study between American English and Japanese.

Past sociolinguistic inquiries into gender differences and politeness (Trudgill 1972; Lakoff 1975; Brown 1980) have yielded results which mostly support the universal hypothesis that women are more polite than men in their use of language. However, these works all treat politeness features of language use as associated with the speaker's sex and consequently of women's inferior social position. In contrast, Ide investigates women's linguistic politeness as expressed primarily in the use of honorifics in Japanese. She shows that gender difference in the use of polite linguistic forms is a more complex phenomenon determined by multiple factors, among which are gender differences in how politeness levels of linguistic forms are assessed, the speaker's status differences, and differences in the speaker's concern for his/her own good demeanor.

Shibamoto investigates the deletion of the particles *wa* and *ga*. While deletion of particles is not generally considered to be sex dependent, Shibamoto finds in her data of natural conversation that the rates of deletion are significantly higher among women. She attempts to account for this as a difference in perceptions of what information is required by the listener(s) in a discourse.

Makino examines gender differences in written Japanese discourse. He discusses some Japanese linguistic features that are crucially related to the sex of the writer (*no da*, parentheticals, discourse-initial sentences, personalized statements and realistic descriptions) and finds that women tend to be more empathetic in writing than men.

The topic of Nakamura's article is the terms used to talk about women. She argues that *onna*, in contrast to *otoko*, carries a sexually derogatory connotation. Nakamura analyses other female terms such as *zyosi*, *huzin*, and *zyosei* as euphemisms for *onna*, and argues that they too have acquired negative implications by denying the connotation of positive female sexuality.

Both Wetzel and Reynolds tackle the sociological question of "power" as the major variable controlling male/female linguistic behavior. Observing that there are many similarities between Western female and Japanese communication styles, Wetzel argues that such similarities do not indicate that Japanese linguistic behavior is feminine (or powerless) but rather that the notion of "power" needs to be redefined in particular cultural contexts.

Reynolds' concern is with conflict processes resulting from the discrepancy between the formal ideology that women and men are equal and the cultural

belief that women should talk *onnarasiku* (in a feminine manner). Reynolds examines cases where conflict naturally arises, i.e., where a female speaker has "power" (e.g. as an executive, a highschool teacher, etc.) and she argues the prospects for change in the direction of linguistic equality.

Needless to say, not all aspects of Japanese women's speech are represented in this volume. For example, we would have liked to see analyses of Japanese women's characteristically high-pitched intonation patterns and of the person references (personal pronouns and address forms) used by adult speakers of Japanese. A more thorough study of lexical choices by men and women would have been desirable. Our varieties of approaches involve various levels of sophistication of data and analyses. In spite of these shortcomings in scope and maturity, we hope this volume serves as groundwork and stimulus for future research in the field.

We would like to thank Eleanor Jordan for agreeing to write an overview, which gives a critical perspective on issues involved in approaches to women's language in Japanese. We are also deeply indebted to Yumiko Okano and Toshihiro Fukunishi at Kuroshio Publishers for their encouragement in publishing this volume. Thanks also go to Beverly Hill for her competent editorial assistance, Risako Ide for putting the bibliography and romanization in order, and last but not least, to the contributors for their patience through the long delays in bringing this work to publication.

REFERENCES

- Beatty, J. 1979. "Sex, role, and sex role." *Language, Sex and Gender: Does "La Difference" Make A Difference?* eds. J. Orasanu, M. K. Slater and L. Adler. 43-49. New York: The New York Academy of Sciences.
- Brown, P. 1980. "How and why are women more polite: some evidence from a Mayan community." *Women and Language in Literature and Society*. eds. S. McConnel-Ginet, R. Boker and N. Furman. 111-39. New York: Praeger.
- Lakoff, R. 1975. *Language and Woman's Place*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Trudgill, P. 1972. "Sex, covert prestige and linguistic change in the urban British English of Norwich." *Language in Society* 1, 179-95.

May, 1990

Sachiko Ide
Naomi Hanaoka McGloin