

Gender Roles and Politeness in Language: Evidence from Japanese Society

Ruth Vanbaelen

0. Stating the problem

Politeness in relation to gender differences has been a much-studied issue in research on the Japanese language. Taking into account only the research of the National Institute for Japanese Language (国立国語研究所Kokuritsukokugokenkyuujo¹) it already becomes clear that a lot of attention has been paid to this subject throughout the years with thorough questionnaires and interviews in both cities and companies (Kokuritsu kokugokenkyuujo² (国立国語研究所編)1957, 1982, 1983, 2001). Also individual researchers such as Ide, Jugaku etc. have addressed the same subject at length (e.g.井出 1982, 1983, 井出他 1985, 寿岳 1979). Early studies indicated that women tended to use more polite² language than men. The general tendency to be found nowadays is that the language use of females has been reported as gradually becoming less polite than in the past. Research focused on how males' language is changing is rare. Also, the media has noted that the language of females is changing and capitalizes on this with e.g. reports³ on the language use of teenage girls. The fact that similar to academic research TV or newspapers are focusing on young women's language reflects a tendency in society to view women's language as more marked than men's.

Newspapers have featured articles on the present situation of polite language use (e.g. Asahi Newspaper(朝日新聞Asahi Shimbun)2001a, b). The articles suggest that youngsters, without making a difference between the sexes, have a problem using the correct forms of polite language. Yoshioka (吉岡1986) reported a similar tendency after an attitude survey among senior high school students. However, when readers send opinionated letters to the editor of a newspaper it usually contains a judgement that is not in favor of women (e.g. Asahi Newspaper 1999, 2000, 2001c). In addition, the present research⁴ did not find any opinion that mentions the language of males in a negative sense.

Therefore, this paper addresses two hypotheses concerning language behavior, namely that females speak more polite than males do, firstly because women's position in society is inferior and secondly because society expects women to speak that way independent from their actual status. The first hypothesis is not a new one.

Originally introduced by Trudgill (1975) the argumentation has also been followed in Japanese sociolinguistics (Ide 1982). However, claiming that females had/have a lower status without pointing out why this is the case is one of the deficiencies to be found in the research mentioned above⁵. Therefore, this paper broadly outlines Japanese society in the twentieth century with a focus on the influence of the state in order to indicate the hypothesis is valid. Articles from *Fujō Shimbun* (婦女新聞 'The Woman's Journal') are employed to illustrate language use in the first half of the century.

The paper argues, however, that status alone cannot account for the difference in language use between males and females. The first hypothesis contains the generalization that all women speak more polite than men do because all women are of a lower status. Reality indicates this is not true but still there seems to exist a dynamic that women in general should use polite language. This leads to the second hypothesis, one that at the same time will justify the generalization of the language use of women in a lower social position as being the language use of all women, without any connection to their actual status. The knife namely cuts at two edges; because of the frequent use of polite language by a large number of women of a subordinate status politeness has come to be considered a characteristic of the female variety independent from the actual position in society of the individual female. In other words, polite speech as a characteristic of women with a lower status was reproduced over and over by females and this repeated use has made it part of the ideal, or even of the standard of how women should speak. This in turn created a social pressure and resulted in polite speech expanding to the speech of women in general. In other words, this study argues that, in general, Japanese women use more polite language compared to their male counterparts both because of their status which often is lower and because of the expectation and pressure from society to do so.

Based on a questionnaire conducted in 1996 (Vanbaelen 1997) the study indicates that such an expectation from society does exist. More precisely, the generalization present in the first hypothesis creates part of the social expectation and this expectation in turn recreates the polite speech as a characteristic of women's speech.

1. Hypothesis One: Women speak more polite than men do because of their position in society

1.1. Trudgill

The first hypothesis states that (Japanese) women speak politer than men do because of their status. In society a difference in position or status asks for a difference in behavior. Subordination involves respect from the subordinated towards the subordinator. Language use is one aspect of behavior. Therefore, one can expect a respectful, i.e. a politer language from the subordinated side towards the subordinator. This reasoning is not new, neither in Japanese linguistics nor in linguistics concerning other languages. Trudgill (1975) reached a similar conclusion with his research on British English. In his study on phonological variables in the language use of Norwich inhabitants he found that women of the different social classes use a variant closer to the standard language, which is considered to be more polite than other varieties. Moreover, women over-report such use in self-evaluation tests whereas men tend to under-report. Trudgill explains this as follows:

"The social position of women in our society is less secure than that of men, and, usually, subordinate to that of men. It may be, therefore, that it is more necessary for women to secure and signal their social status linguistically and in other ways, and they may for this reason be more aware of the importance of this type of signal. (Trudgill 1975:91)"

The author continues:

"Men in our society can be rated socially by their occupation, their earning power, and perhaps by their own abilities— in other words by what they do. For the most part, however, this is not possible for women. It may be, therefore, that they have instead to be rated on how they appear. Since they are not rated by their occupation or by their occupational success, other signals of status, including speech, are correspondingly more important. (Trudgill 1975:91-92, italics from the original text)"

Trudgill's theory has been applied to the Japanese language situation (Ide 1983) but without satisfying grounding about the societal background. In England the social class system is still strongly present. This facilitated the categorizing of the participants according to social status in order to make comparisons between the different classes. In Japan, during the twentieth century the class division is said to be not so apparent. A stance like this makes it sound as if Japan is a society with equal possibilities for its members. Ueno (上野1990) claims for example that the middle class full-time housewife is a myth. However, the overview of Japanese society in the twentieth

century in the following section will make it clear that Trudgill's argumentation (with certain amendments) can be applied to Japanese society; women's status was usually lower than men's; they were/are in a subservient position both at home and in public.

1.2. Japanese society in the twentieth century

How has Japanese society evolved and how did this influence language? Endou (遠藤1994) touches upon the possible influence of the war and Horiuchi & Oomori (堀内&大森 1994) mention the speeches read during the students' revolution in the 1960's. The National Institute for Japanese Language (1986) describes democratization, industrialization and urbanization as the major influences for changes after World War II. Also the influence of the media, especially the popularization of television cannot be ignored. Therefore, one could say that considering Japanese society after World War II is sufficient to grasp the present-day situation of Japanese language. However, since a change in language is never abrupt and since one needs to acknowledge the previous situation to grasp the changes in full, starting at the turning of the nineteenth to the twentieth century might give a clearer idea. Terada (寺田2000) points out that present-day differences in language use between males and females came into being in the late Meiji period. Similarly, starting with the late Meiji period is useful because prior to 1900 the modern government lacked the administrative apparatus necessary to exert pressure on its subjects (Garon 1997). Following Trudgill's argumentation status is partly decided by one's occupation, i.e. one's participation level in the public. Therefore, the focus here will be on the state's influence on gender relations in the family and at the workplace since state policies are influential in positioning men and women in different gender roles.

1.2.1. Late Meiji era till WWII

Whereas till the beginning of the Meiji era the feudal system controlled Japanese society, from 1868 society started changing. Traditionally family duties and social values had kept females out of the public arena (Nolte & Hastings 1991). In the Meiji era these values became reinforced by the Confucian concept of Ryou sai Ken bo (良妻賢母 Good Wife and Wise Mother) ⁶ and by the Family-State ideology (家族国家観 *Kazoku-Kokka Kan*) centering on the family as a means to overcome social turmoil commonly accompanying industrialization (Nagy 1991).

In 1898 the Civil Code stated the male as the head of the household and

proclaimed women as legal incompetents. Kondo views the Civil Code as enshrining a conservative, patriarchal form of samurai life as the law of the land, a tradition alien to the more fluid and egalitarian family lives of most Japanese. The Code raised to the level of national law the subordinate status of women, and it legitimized a male-centered household (1990:264-8).

Social management in the beginning of the twentieth century positioned females in the family; the concept of *Ryousai Kenbo* in combination with Western ideas of domestic science and pronatalism, made the authorities and the middle-class (MC)⁷ urge wives to manage the household. Similarly mothers were to take a central role in child rearing, contrary to the belief prevailing in the Tokugawa era that mothers hinder the development of the child (Garon 1997:120).

Note the double standard state policy displayed towards females of different classes. Middle-class girls should receive an education because households, considered the foundation of the state, required good wives and wise mothers. In contrast with the middle-class, the official rhetoric did not demand of lower class females to stay home and take care of husband and children. For them the state promoted an ideal of working (outside of the home) and sacrifice as symbols of feminine virtues. The state proclaimed this situation for the lower classes as not being contradictory to the concept of *Ryousai Kenbo*.

To put it differently, the state applied different policies to different classes while still aiming at the same result: a prosperous country with high economic growth. As is stated in Rosenberger (1991), high economic growth requires a group of men who devote themselves to large, private businesses with close governmental ties. It presupposes a group of wives to stay home at least part-time to support these men, their children and their parents. It depends on another group of men and women who do menial and service-oriented jobs at a much lower level of compensation.

Eventually more and more women start receiving primary and secondary education, which leads to a rise in the number of female teachers, nurses and physicians. Acceptable roles for females in the public remain limited, however, to certain fields. In the 1920's economic necessity (e.g. increase in food and housing prices) caused MC women to start working outside the home. This can be seen as a transition period of gender roles for women from "good wife and wise mother" to something more diverse (Nagy 1991). Also Koyama (1994) mentions a shift in the concept of *Ryousai Kenbo*; the new ideology expects women to have occupations of their own (basically home-based side jobs or subsidiary businesses, and at the same time make this

compatible with being a wife and mother. Advancing towards WWII, women entered the public as men became drafted. Mainly single young females from the countryside became temporary workers while married women were mobilized in government-sponsored patriotic associations (e.g. food rationing and fire drills). This was only to be a temporary situation, as after the war males would take up their positions again.

1.2.2. The postwar period and the present-day situation

To avoid unemployment among males just after the end of the war youngsters, women and older people were given less access to the workforce (Kumido(工水戸)1990). Nonetheless the war had caused long-term changes in gender relations. The entrance of women in the workforce during the war undermined the formerly sex-segregated labour market and this caused women's movements after the war to rally for equal employment opportunities. In the family daughters gained a certain degree of autonomy thanks to their salary and to the broadening of social life.

In the 1950's when the Japanese economy started to pick up, women, also married ones, reentered the workforce. A new concept arose in society, namely the one of *paato* (パート part-time labor). Originated as a temporary measure for the labor shortage in department stores it developed into a general and widespread phenomenon. During the economic boom of the 1960's the number of women entering the workforce increased but their positions as *paato* or as piece worker made it possible to treat them as a buffer against business fluctuations in times of recession (e.g. the oil shock of the early to mid-1970's).

Also in the 1970's and 1980's the official rhetoric was one of women in the home. Ito mentions a few examples: Minister of Justice Setoyama claimed in a Cabinet council in 1978 that women were to be in the home, and in 1987 Minister of Education Shiokawa stated that mothers should be in the home during the period that the children are receiving compulsory education (伊藤1998:229). Therefore, women are expected to retire upon marriage, only to have part-time occupation after children are old enough to be put in day care or ideally have finished high school. Also nowadays the belief that the females' place is in the family exists. This is promoted by the state who tries to discourage females' full-time employment in order to preserve the nuclear family. The implication for the state is that if females work full time, the state has to provide more social welfare, such as day-care facilities. In addition, Japan is facing the problem of an aging society. The state tries to persuade the populace of the 'naturalness' to care for parents (Garon 1997:225). The bulk

of caring is not provided by institutions for the elderly but is performed by married women. Once more the government uses 'nature' as an argument for its policy.

In 1986 the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (男女雇用機会均等法 *Danjo Koyou Kikai Kintou Hou*) was implemented, theoretically giving equal opportunities to both sexes in the workplace. The law however neglects to question sexual division of labor, placing the entire responsibility for the household on females and does not benefit part-time workers. It does not contain penal regulations for violations or a system to correct the existing discrimination (Kumido 1990). Moreover, women looking for a career find themselves in competition with males considered to be free from household responsibilities and facing the preconception that they will leave the workforce at a whim. Whether they want to quit or not, women are often forced to leave the company upon marriage or after giving birth.

Women's participation in public has become much more pronounced throughout the years, whether it is through part-time jobs, whether it is through cultural or social activities. Matsumura (松村1990) gives a clear overview of the activities Japanese (mainly MC) women are involved in. Nevertheless, the ways in which men and women participate in public life are still strikingly different.

1.2.3. Language data: reasons of selection

The increasing diversity of roles for both men and women makes it difficult to choose clear-cut language data. Both males and females have gained a lot of mobility during the twentieth century as well as access to media. Mobility means increasing contact with different persons in different positions, each demanding a different use of language. Access to media means more contact with standard language, as well as contact with thinking patterns that might differ from one's own thinking.

For linguists the access to language data has also significantly changed over time. In the beginning of the century the number of journals was limited and there were other media to a much lesser extent. However, of what existed not everything has been preserved or access might now be limited. Nowadays radio, TV, newspapers and journals cater for different groups of gender and age, which accordingly results in different language use aimed at the different groups. The abundance of spoken and written language data of the present day makes it difficult to choose a target group. Moreover, in the scope of this article it is nearly impossible to cover a whole century of change in language use. Therefore, the study illustrates the difference in status between men and women, and how this leads to differences in language use during

the first four decades of the twentieth century. In addition, data was limited to one journal, i.e. written language, targeted at females.

1.2.4. 'The Woman's Journal'

In 1900 the first number of *Fujo Shimbun* (婦女新聞), translated into English as 'The Woman's Journal' was published. This weekly journal was issued 2175 times until its discontinuance in 1942. Its aim was the enlightenment of women and the advancement in their status (*Fujo Shimbun wo Yomu Kai* (婦女新聞を読む会) 1997). The authors were mainly male intellectuals, although women also wrote articles and female readers sent letters to be published. Using written language as data has two disadvantages. Firstly, part of the naturalness of the spoken language is lost. Secondly, certain subjects ask for a style where gender differences might not be necessary. However, this point might act in favor of this study. In one and the same column one might expect a similar style, regardless of the sex of the writer. If however differences between the sexes are found one of the main reasons to consider is social position. Another reason can be individual preference or style but it cannot merely be a coincidence that, as will become clear from the analysis, most of the female contributors had a preference to use a more polite style than their male counterparts.

1.2.4.1. Data

The study focused on the style of the verbs, which are divided into "plain" and "polite style". Plain style categorizes verbs ending on "da", "-ru", "-tta", "-nai" and "nakatta". Polite style verb endings are "desu", "-masu", "-masen", "-mashita" and "-masendeshita". The use of both styles in one article is labeled as "mixed style".

2 issues (every second and every 27th issue) of each year were checked. The style of the editorials (*Shasetsu* 社説) and of the articles in the critic column (*Hyouron* 評論) were verified. This resulted in 82 editorials (three issues did not feature an editorial) and 153 articles. 73 of the editorials do not list a name of the author but it is safe to suppose the nameless editorials were written by the male chief editor Fukushima Shirou (福島四郎) (*Fujo Shimbun wo Yomu Kai* 1997:3). One editorial is explicitly written under his name, one under one of his pen names, "Shunpo 春浦". Two other articles are written by Shimonaka Hougaku (下中芳岳), two by Kuroda Naomichi (黒田直道) and one by Sawayanagi Masatarou (沢柳政太郎), all males. Finally, one editorial is written by Eda (枝), a pen name that does not indicate the gender of the author. The verbs are in the plain style. Two exceptions are found: one nameless

editorial as well as one editorial by Kuroda Naomichi are written in the polite style.

The styles used in the critic column are compiled in Table 1, separately for males and females. For the actual analysis eight articles were not taken into account because of different reasons; one article was written both by males and females, one article was written nameless, and of six articles it was impossible to judge if the writer was male or female. This is due to the fact that some of the writers or journalist wrote under pen names which could be used by either sex. The identity of the writers was verified as much as possible through the index edited by Fuji Publishing (Fujishuppanhenshuubuhēn 不二出版編集部編1985). This was necessary because some of the male journalists used female pen names (e.g. Fukushima Shirou also wrote under the name of Kareha Joshi (枯葉女史 Miss Dead Leaf) or Toita Seizou (戸井田盛藏) used Kyoufuushi (矯風子) as a pen name) and this could influence the results of the research.

Of the remaining 145 articles, 97 articles (67%) were written by men, 48 (33%) by women. 83 articles were written in the plain style, of which 69 by males and 14 by females. Of the 50 articles written in the polite style 17 came from the hand of males, 33 from females. Men mixed both styles in 11 articles, women only once.

Table 1 Styles in the Critic Column (number of articles followed by percentage)

	Plain Style	Polite style	Mixed style	Total
Male writers	69(71)	17(18)	11(11)	97(100)
Female writers	14(29)	33(69)	1(2)	48(100)
Total	83(57) males(83) females(17)	50(34) males(34) females(66)	12(8) males(92) females(8)	145(100) males(67) females(33)

1.2.4.2. Discussion of the data

Although this is only a limited study, two things can be deduced from the result. Firstly, in the critic column men wrote more articles than females did and secondly women used more polite verb endings than men did.

More male than female contributions

Despite the fact that the journal chosen targeted women and the main goal stated was the improvement in the social status of women, during the 42 years of its existence the main editor was a man and a major part of the articles were written by men. This can be considered as a reflection of the social situation of those days where men occupied more public positions than women did. Considering the fact that the

critic column was usually featured on the first few pages indicates these articles are of more importance than others. Combining this with the fact there were more male contributions, leads to the conclusion that women had less input and thus less respect in the journal although the journal itself was aimed at a female public. Similar to the increasing participation of women in the public over time there is a slight increase in female contributions in the third and fourth decade. In the first twenty years of the journal's existence, men wrote 54 articles (71%) and women 22 (29%). In the remaining years, men wrote 43 articles (61%) and women 27 (39%).

Polite style

Since the articles checked were written in the same column one could expect a similar style for all the articles, independent of the writer's gender. Men, however, wrote not only more articles in the critic column than women did, on average they used a plain style of writing. Again this is an indication of the difference in status between men and women. Even though women were contributing to the journal there was a need to be more polite than the male contributors were.

Women used the plain style in only 29 percent of the articles. The plain style started appearing in articles written by women after 1924, with one exception in 1905. In the first twenty years (1900-1919) of the *Fujo Shimbun* women wrote one article in plain style, and 21 articles in polite style. The next 23 years, they wrote 13 articles in plain style and 12 articles in polite style. Thus, there is a gradual shift from polite style towards plain style or at least a simultaneous use of the two whereas before the main style to be used by women was the polite style. This occurred more or less in conjunction with the increasing input of female writers to the critic column as mentioned before.

Furthermore, when comparing the articles in terms of style and in terms of verbs used, it became apparent that over the whole period women used more verbs expressing modesty with polite verb endings (*gozaimasu*, *itashimasu*, *zonjimasu*, *moushimasu* etc.) while men mainly used neutral verbs with polite verb endings. In the 33 female articles in polite style, 18 (56%) used modest verbs. As for men, only three (18%) out of 17 articles used such verbs.

Nevertheless, a shift away from modest verbs can be indicated. In the first twenty years 14 (67%) of the 21 articles used such verbs. In the remaining period only four (33%) out of twelve articles used them.

In conclusion, it may be said that the use of polite style and verbs expressing

modesty was more widely apparent in the first twenty years of the journal. This coincides with the initial appearance of women in the public arena. The gradual shift from polite style to plain style and the lesser use of modest verbs follows the changing social climate where women gain a greater role in society.

The differences in written language as used in 'The Woman's Journal' illustrate there was a difference between men and women even when they occupied similar positions. Female writers occupied a place similar to men in their function as journalists but they wrote in a more polite style and were more modest. Is it only the less public position of women allocating polite language as the proper style for women that accounts for this discrepancy? The expectation of society is closely entwined with the choice of appropriate language. The social expectation factor will be addressed hereafter.

2. Hypothesis Two: Women speak more politely because of a social expectation to do so independent of status.

2.1. Background: Expectation from society as shown in the media

An article in the Asahi Newspaper (2001b) discusses how youngsters do not know how to use polite language properly. Although a questionnaire conducted by the Agency for Cultural Affairs in 1999 reveals that also young people⁸ are concerned with the way polite language is used, they do not seem to know the correct usage. Articles like these do not take an apparent stand. Certain letters to the editor, however, indicate how an expectation in society concerning language, mainly directed towards women, still exists. It is interesting to note that most of those opinions are written by women themselves.

In the Asahi Newspaper (2001c) a female announcer of a TV channel located in Hokkaido writes that in her job one is particular about language use. She mentions that she understands that language changes through time but she refuses to use rising intonation at the end of a word or *Kogyaru-go* (コギャル語 the language of teenage girls) as she sees this as *Midare* (乱れ disorder) rather than change. In two other articles (Asahi Newspaper 1999, 2000) women comment on the language they heard being used by other women. In one case the writer mentions how the rude language of a young mother towards her child surprised her. In the other case a young woman is described as beautifully looking but using bad language. The writer suggests among others the mother's influence.

For the announcer, change is acceptable but disorder is not. As examples of disorder

she gives the rising intonation which is said to be characteristic for young women and the use of *Kogyaru-go*. The other two writers clearly mention the influence of the mother on language. Those three opinions clearly show that language use of (young) females is a target for critic, as they do not adhere to the norm any longer. Moreover, mothers are expected to nurture the language used by their daughters. Males are never mentioned in the discussion, neither as the target nor as the ones to teach the norm. Why does society expect women to use the appropriate language while leaving men out of the equation? The expectation of society concerning language use is explained through the results of a questionnaire conducted in 1996.

2.2. Questionnaire

In the summer of 1996 a questionnaire was conducted in Tokyo with the purpose of conducting research on the differences in language use of male homosexuals, heterosexual males and females. In addition, the questionnaire was worded to provide an indication of social expectation with regard to language use.

2.2.1. Sample

98 Japanese nationals responded to the questionnaire, of whom 31 females were and 67 were males. Males outnumber females because the research targeted three groups: homosexual males, heterosexual males and females. However, the following discussion does not focus on the differences that might occur because of sexual inclination⁹. The focus is on the self-assessment concerning language use of the individuals. Around 90% of the participants were in their twenties, the rest in their early thirties. 52% were students, 28% company employees and the rest were either self-employed, unemployed or did not state their profession.

2.2.2. Results

The participants were asked to assess their own way of speaking, more precisely, if females thought they were or were not speaking a female variety of Japanese and males a male variety. Additionally, they were asked to write down the characteristics of their own language use. The self-judgment of speaking a male or female variety is analyzed in comparison with the characteristics of these varieties outlined by the participants.

Characteristics obtained for the female variety were the use of certain sentence-final particles (*kashira*, *wa*, *nanoyone*, *nano?*, *noyo*), the use of the honorific prefixes

o and *go*, the use of first-person pronouns *watashi* and *atashi*, a preference for polite language and the avoidance of rough language. Characteristics obtained for the male variety were the use of sentence-final particles *ze* and *zo*, the first-person pronouns *ore* and *boku*, the use of imperatives, and a preference for rough and non-polite language. Male and female participants who judged themselves not to be speaking respectively the male or female variety justified this by reasoning they did not use the respective characteristics mentioned above. The results of this part of the questionnaire did not always fit personal observations or the results of other researches. Accordingly, it can be said that the participants did not write down the characteristics of their own language use but rather how they thought they were speaking, or even more, how they would like to be speaking. This is a risk one always has to incorporate when conducting an awareness survey. The participants are not always able (or willing) to give an objective answer. Rather, they form a judgement based on the way they think things are, or would like them to be because of their own wish to be of a certain status, or to adhere to social pressures, and social expectation about how things should be.

The results indicate two indisputable conclusions. Firstly, judging from the characteristics given by the participants, the contrast between the male and female variety is the clearest on the level of politeness. Men use imperatives and rough language while women avoid this. Additionally, women use sentence-final particles that soften the impact of the utterance, a characteristic that adds to higher politeness. This result was to be expected based on the first hypothesis.

Secondly, compared with analyses of actual language data (Okamoto & Sato 1992, Okamoto 1994, Yoshioka 1994), the participants seem not to have given the actual characteristics of their language use but rather the common sense or consensus that seems to exist concerning male and female varieties of the Japanese language. Rather than assessing their own language use one can say that they gave the characteristics of how society expects a male or a female to speak. That a consensus exists can be concluded from the fact that both the participants who judged themselves to be speaking respectively the male/female variety and those who judged themselves not to be speaking the male/female variety gave the same characteristics for those varieties.

That those characteristics mainly refer to an ideal of how one should speak according to societal norms became clear from the answers on how the participants' language use is judged by others. 35% of the female sample was told at a certain point of time to be using male language whereas only 10% of the heterosexual male sample

was ever told to be using female language. If there was no concern on which variety to use no remarks would have been made and this shows that a norm is at work and this that seems to be stronger for women. Also, men might be more conscious to avoid the female variety to keep face with peers while women might be bolder¹⁰ to try something different since the expectation from society makes them the target of critic no matter what. Nowadays the position of youngsters is quite equal and girls refuse to speak with the same level of politeness as for example elder generations do because they do not feel they are of a lower status. The critic however remains because the standard that politeness is a characteristic of female language still exists. A change in behavior due to a change in social position will eventually be followed by a change in the norm¹¹.

3. Conclusion

The description of Japanese society in the twentieth century makes the difference in status between males and females clear. It also shows that this difference was at large a creation of the modern Japanese state. It would however be hard to prove and most probably wrong to say that the state intended to directly influence its subjects' language. Nevertheless, it affected people's behavior in a more roundabout way. Throughout the twentieth century the distinction home-public has been a constant strongly promulgated by the state with the clear intention to maintain a gender division in labor in order to sustain a high economic growth. It should be noted that this distinction is a matter of power relations. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century ideas were mainly imposed by males: females had no say for example in politics and therefore not in the decision-making process. Later on women gained a larger place in the public but this increase as well is initiated by state policies. Above all, their participation was only tolerated when and where it was beneficial for the state.

It is not only this lack of power that accounted for the subordinate status attributed to women. Another reason was offered by Takamura Itsue (高群逸枝), general editor of *Fujin Sensen* (婦人戦線 The Women's Front), a feminist magazine in the early 1930's. She argued that the private sphere, which includes feelings, love, family and women, was placed below the public sphere. Since women were associated with the family, they were automatically placed below men (Germer 2000). Also in the workplace a large group of females is attributed a lower status (e.g. paato).

This study presented two hypotheses concerning language, namely that (Japanese)

women speak politer than men do firstly because of their status and secondly because of the expectation from society to do so independently from their actual status. These two hypotheses cannot be viewed separate from one another.

The data from 'The Woman's Journal' indicate that the female contributors used a more polite style compared to males. This is seen as a result of the fact that, in general, women have a lesser status in society than males, as if it would not have been proper to write in a plain and therefore more direct-sounding style. Even with their status as professional journalists the female writers wrote more politely. This leads to the second hypothesis that even without any connection to their actual status females use a more polite style¹² because of social expectation. However, it is important to note in the articles of 'The Woman's Journal' that there is a gradual shift towards a more plain style simultaneously with the widening of acceptable roles in public for females. Again this can be connected to expectation from society. Gradually society starts accepting women in public roles with a higher status and therefore also gradually a more direct, i.e. a less subordinate language can be accepted from these women. This is similar to what is happening in society nowadays; namely that young women are turning away from the polite style that is still expected from them by society as is shown by the results of the attitude questionnaire. It is therefore that especially women in the sample were told not to be using the appropriate language. Society still expects them to use a language variety of subordinated people but youngsters feel less pressure than earlier generations. Nevertheless, young females carry the legacy of the formerly lower status of women. Accordingly, women entering the workforce will experience pressure to use polite language as is expected of them. Their changing behavior and more apparent participation in society can, however, be expected to eventually cause a change in such social expectation and with that a change in the standard norm.

Notes

¹ Japanese names and concepts will be given both in Japanese and their Romanized form the first time they appear in the text.

² More polite language use indicates the use of politeness forms and their frequency without considering the level of politeness intended by the speaker because as Ide (井出1982) and Ide, Hori, Kawasaki, Ikuta, Haga (井出、堀、川崎、生田、芳賀編1985) point out, women tend to use politer forms than men but with a lower level of politeness attached to it.

³ The direct academic value of e.g. TV reports can be questioned but such reports do show

the current dynamics in society.

⁴ The search engine of Asahi Newspaper was used to search over a period starting from January 1, 1999 till March 31, 2002.

⁵ One of the few researches that do describe the social background is a survey conducted in 1986 by the National Institute for the Japanese Language. This was a survey on the standard of politeness in relation to social changes but rather than focusing on differences between males and females, it focused on changing family ties and changing relations with the neighborhood.

⁶ Ryousai Kenbo is in general considered to be a Confucian concept but the term is said to originate from Nakamura Masanao, a Christian Meiji intellectual who was influenced by the Western cult of domesticity (Kondo 1990: 267).

⁷ Defining social classes at a certain point of time in history is not easy. The present paper follows Duus (1976) in his description of Japanese social classes.

Upper class (also called business class) at the beginning of the 20th century consisted mainly of bankers, merchants, financiers, manufacturers and company officials, many of whom descended from the samurai class. This class had the social prestige and political importance of the old aristocracy.

Middle class consisted of company executives, middle-level bureaucrats, journalists and professors emerging from the ranks of the ex-samurai class. Also university graduates, including those from well-to-do peasants and affluent urban shopkeepers made their way up into this class. By the end of the Meiji period due to rise in salary and prestige the 'salary man' entered the middle class.

Working class consisted mainly of peasants and industrial workers who can be divided in three groups, namely unskilled workers (e.g. women in textile industry), skilled workers (e.g. heavy industry) and semi-skilled workers in small-scale enterprises.

Nowadays most of the Japanese would consider themselves as belonging to the MC. Koyama (1994) quotes Terade (寺出1982:34) "...this new middle class emerged as a unitary social class and proceeded to form and establish its own life-style." He identifies its particular characteristics as follows: employment characterized as "brain work"; the salary system of income; a position in the social class structure between the capitalists and the wageworkers; and an average living standard.

⁸ In an opinion survey of the Agency of Cultural Affairs 73% of young women (age 16-19) and 59% of young men in the same age group expressed concern about the "disorder" of polite language.

⁹ Rather than explaining the observed differences as a result of sexual inclination this paper

considers them as originating from differences in roles.

¹⁰ Ohara, Saft & Crookes (2001) quote Matsumoto (1996) saying that "young women's use of unconventional and innovative speech styles (i.e., those that include use of male forms) indicates young women's resistance to the dominant ideology that frames the normative concept of femininity."

¹¹ In most societies division of labor makes the two sexes occupy different roles with different degrees of public participation. This results in different statuses for both sexes in general. As Spence & Helmreich state, "Once established, sex-role differentiations tend to persist long after evolutions in societal conditions have diluted or changed their original functional significance. If the arrangements between the sexes become maladaptive or come to conflict with the contemporaneous value system of the society, realignment may be expected to occur, sometimes slowly and sometimes rapidly, in response to an accumulation of social pressures or to shifts in political ideology (1978: 5-6)." In Japan a similar sex-role differentiation was established at the beginning of the twentieth century and became solidly embedded in society in the 1960's when Japan's economic growth rate was at it highest (Ueno (上野)1990:197). It is still the influence of this sex-role differentiation that keeps the expectation from society alive that women should speak more politely. However, following Spence and Helmreich, the change in societal conditions causes a conflict with the value system of society and will result in a change of the norm.

¹² Sunaoshi (1994) calls this kind of polite language used by women in a position with power "motherese strategy".

Material

不二出版編集部編 (1985) 『『婦女新聞』 第1巻～第68巻』 東京：不二出版 (福島四郎編 1900～1942 『婦女新聞』 の再版、東京：婦女新聞社)

References

- Duus, P. (1976) *The rise of modern Japan*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Garon, S. (1997) *Molding Japanese minds: The state in everyday life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Germer, A. (2000) Continuity and change in Japanese feminist magazines: Fujin Sensen (1930-31) and Onna Erosu (1973-82). U. & Sato, B.H. & Suzuki, S. (eds.) *Gender and modernity: Rereading Japanese women's magazines*. Kyoto: International Research Center for Japanese Studies, pp.101-130.
- Kondo, D. (1990) *Crafting selves: Power, gender and discourses of identity in a Japanese*

- workplace*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Koyama, S. (1994) The "Good Wife and Wise Mother" ideology in post-World War I Japan. *U.S.-Japan women's journal, English supplement* No.7, pp.31-52.
- Matsumoto, Y. (1996) Does less feminine speech in Japanese mean less femininity? Warner, N., Ahlers, J., Bilmes, L., Oliver, M., Wertheim, S. & Chen, M. (eds.) *Gender and belief systems: Proceedings of the fourth Berkeley women and language conference*. Berkeley, Berkeley Women and Language Group, pp.455-476.
- Miyake, Y. (1991) Doubling expectations: motherhood and women's factory work under state management in Japan in the 1930s and 1940s. Bernstein, G. L. (ed.) *Recreating Japanese women, 1600-1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp.267-295.
- Nagy, M. (1991) Middle-class working women during the interwar years. Bernstein, G. L. (ed.) *Recreating Japanese women, 1600-1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp.199-216.
- Nolte, S.H. & Hastings, S.A. (1991) The Meiji state's policy toward women, 1890-1910. Bernstein, G. L. (ed.) *Recreating Japanese women, 1600-1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp.151-174.
- Ohara, Y., Saft, S. & Crookes, G. (2001) Toward a feminist critical pedagogy in a beginning Japanese-as-a-foreign-language class. *Japanese language and literature*. No.35, pp.105-133.
- Okamoto, S. (1994) "Gendered" speech styles and social identity among young Japanese women. Bucholtz, M. & Liang, A.C. & Sutton, L.A. & Hines, C. (eds.) *Cultural performances: Proceedings of the third Berkeley women and language conference, April 8, 9 and 10, 1994*. Berkeley: Berkeley Women and Language Group, pp.569-581.
- Okamoto, S. & Sato, S. (1992) Less feminine speech among young Japanese females. Hall, K. & Bucholtz, M. & Moonwomon, B. (eds.) *Locating power: Proceedings of the second Berkeley women and language conference*. Berkeley: Berkeley Women and Language Group, pp.478-488.
- Rosenberger, N. (1991) Gender and the Japanese state: Pension benefits creating differences. *Anthropological quarterly* 64, pp.178-193.
- Skov, L. & Moeran, B. (1995) Hiding in the light: from Oshin to Yoshimoto Banana. Moeran, B. & Skov, L. (eds.) *Women, media and consumption in Japan*. Richmond Surrey: Curzon Press, pp.1-74.
- Spence, J.T. & Helmreich, R.L. (1978) *Femininity and masculinity: Their psychological dimensions, correlates & antecedents*. Austin & London, University of Texas Press.
- Sunaoshi, Y. (1994) Mild directives work effectively: Japanese women in command. Bucholtz, M. & Liang, A.C. & Sutton, L.A. & Hines, C. (eds.) *Cultural performances: Proceedings*

- of the third Berkeley women and language conference, April 8, 9 and 10, 1994.* Berkeley: Berkeley Women and Language Group, pp.678-690.
- Trudgill, P. (1975) Sex, covert prestige and linguistic change in the urban British English of Norwich. Thorne, B. & Henley, N. (eds.) *Language and sex: Difference and dominance.* Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House pp.88-104.
- 朝日新聞 (1999) 「女性のことがばが乱れています」 1999年3月11日, p.5
- 朝日新聞 (2000) 「若い女の子が「腹減った」」 2000年8月17日, p.19
- 朝日新聞 (2001a) 「春らしいスカート: 国語審議会物語 3」 2001年2月22日, p.7
- 朝日新聞 (2001b) 「不愉快だよ、過剰な敬語: 若者敬語に「敬意」なし」 2001年6月30日, p.25
- 朝日新聞 (2001c) 「美しい日本語守ります」 2001年8月12日, p.3
- 不二出版編集部編 (1985) 『「婦女新聞」記事執筆者索引』東京: 不二出版
- 婦女新聞を読む会編 (1997) 『「婦女新聞」と女性の近代』東京: 不二出版
- 井出祥子 (1982) 「言語と性差」『言語』Vol11-10, pp.40-48
- 井出祥子 (1983) 「女らしさの言語学—なぜ女は女性語を使うのか—」『講座日本語の表現3 話しことばの表現』水谷修編 筑摩書房
- 井出祥子、堀素子、川崎晶子、生田少子、芳賀日登美 (1985) 『女性の敬語の言語形式と機能』文部省科学研究費研究成果報告書
- 伊藤康子 (1998) 『新日本の女性史』学習の友社
- 上野千鶴子 (1990) 『家父長制と資本制』東京: 岩波書店
- 遠藤織枝 (1994) 「若い女性のことば—論評で綴るその昭和史—」『日本語学』Vol13, 10月号、pp.19-32
- 工水戸富士子 (1990) 「女子労働者の平等要求の発展」『日本女性生活史・第5巻現代』女性史総合研究会編 東京大学出版会、pp.69-100
- 国立国語研究所編 (1957) 『敬語と敬語意識』(国立国語研究所報告 11) 東京: 国立国語研究所
- 国立国語研究所編 (1982) 『企業の中の敬語』(国立国語研究所報告 73) 東京: 国立国語研究所
- 国立国語研究所編 (1983) 『敬語と敬語意識: 岡崎市における20年前との比較』(国立国語研究所報告 77) 東京: 国立国語研究所
- 国立国語研究所編 (1986) 『社会変化と敬語行動の標準』(国立国語研究所報告 86) 東京: 国立国語研究所
- 国立国語研究所編 (2001) 『談話のポライトネス』東京: 国立国語研究所
- 寿岳章子 (1979) 『日本語と女』東京: 岩波新書
- 寺田知美 (2000) 「明治末期の女性語について—夏目漱石の小説にみえる「絶対女性語」の考察—」『早稲田大学日本語研究教育センター紀要』13号
- 寺出浩司 (1982) 「大正期における職員層生活の展開」日本生活学会編『生活学』7ドメス出版、

pp.34-36

堀内克明、大森良子 (1994) 「若い女性のことばの語形・語義の特色」『日本語学』 Vol13、10月号、
pp.72-80

松村尚子 (1990) 「生活の現代的特徴と主婦役割」『日本女性生活史・第5巻現代』女性史総合研
究会編 東京大学出版会、pp.235-268

吉岡泰夫 (1986) 「高校生の敬語知識とその形成要因」『計量国語学』 15-6, pp.221-244

吉岡泰夫 (1994) 「若い女性の言語行動」『日本語学』 Vol13、10月号、pp.33-44

Vanbaelen, R. (1997) 『日本語における男女差 - 男性同性愛者のことばづかいを中心に -』筑波
大学文芸・言語研究科博士課程中間評価論文 (修士論文)