Female Speakers of Japanese in Transition

Katsue Akiba Reynolds

1. The Confucian doctrine of “men superior, women inferior” (Dan-Son Jo-Hi), an indispensable element in the hierarchical structure of Japanese society, began to give way when women were guaranteed equal status in the new Constitution soon after the end of World War II. At that time, women began to assert their existence in various public fields. However, the average person’s image of women has not changed significantly, and the notion that women should behave onna-rasiku ‘as expected of women’ is still predominant. Thus, Japanese women talk submissively and politely, just as always. Max Adler (1978), for example, states that in spite of rapid industrialization Japan “has changed astoundingly little and has remained very conservative” and that this “is shown in the ways in which women are supposed to use language” (56). Such resistance to social change seems puzzling. It contradicts one of the assumptions—implicit or explicit—in many studies of social change and language change, namely that “fundamental changes in any basic social institution should be reflected within a generation or two by correspondingly fundamental changes in the semantic system” (Friedrich 1965: 32).

When one inspects the ways in which Japanese women talk at a variety of social levels, a complex interaction between social change and language change emerges, and changes in women’s speech become visible. There is no doubt that social changes during the post-war era have had an incalculable impact on women’s perceptions of reality, giving rise to “status conflict” (Pharr 1984) in various areas of social life. Language use is one such area: the female/male speech dichotomy stands in obvious contradiction to the new
social order based on egalitarian ideology. As shown in Reynolds (1985), language use reflects Japanese society of the past, in which women were viewed as the inferior, weaker sex and were expected to talk accordingly. Women may perceive themselves as equals of men but women’s language calls up the older image of women. Here exists an “objective condition for conflict” (Pharr 1984).

The conflict may not necessarily be in the forefront of a speaker’s consciousness and it may elude methodologically rigorous studies of social science. Nevertheless, recognizing such conflict is essential for a better understanding of the relation between the changing status of Japanese women and the changing pattern of Japanese female speech. The conflict concerns, in an important way, social change as well as linguistic change. The task of this paper is to identify recurring patterns of conflict resulting from the discrepancy between the formal constitutional ideology that women and men are equal in status and the cultural belief that women should talk onna-rasiku. In Section 1, I will outline the social structure of Japan from an historical perspective and give some characteristics of traditional female speech. Then, in Section 2, I will present some “deviant” cases of women’s language, which may be viewed as conflict behaviors. I will argue in the conclusion (Section 3) that research on female speech in light of conflict theories not only reveals a new dimension in the issue of language and gender but also suggests feasible strategies for change toward linguistic equality.

2. During the feudal era, which lasted up to 1868, Japan maintained its internal integrity under one of the most extreme forms of hierarchical society. The samurai ‘warrior’ class held control and people were required to adhere strictly to behavioral norms. The slightest deviation from the norms could provoke the most severe punishment — decapitation. The introduction of the ideology of democracy into the Japanese political system at the time of the Meiji Restoration in 1868 led to the outlawing of such extreme feudal practices, but interactional expectations based on social ranking, an outgrowth of two-hundred years of feudalistic practices, have persisted as a cultural characteristic. Even after the radical changes in social institutions after the War, the expectations remain at almost all levels of interaction among the Japanese. Thus, Nakane (1970) analyzes contemporary Japanese society as a hierarchical society governed by the “vertical” principle of human interaction. Because of intransigent adherence to this principle, many social
scientists, including Nakane, maintain that the changes in political/social institutions have not reached down to the foundation of the culture. To many researchers Japan still appears to be a hierarchically organized, harmonious society with a high degree of internal integrity.

Recently, this view has been explicitly challenged by Krauss, Rohlen and Steinhoff (1984). They present examples of intergroup conflicts in Japan during the postwar period, and convincingly argue that the hierarchy/harmony model of Japanese society, which does not take such conflicts into consideration, is not adequate, being unable to account for the source, development, and outcome of various social phenomena.

2.1 In studies of Japanese society focusing on hierarchical structure, women are represented only as wives, mothers and mothers-in-law. In Nakane (1970), for instance, "woman" is mentioned only twice in footnotes while "wife/wives" appears in the text at least 30 times. Befu (1980) criticizes Nakane's model and says that it applies only to the male members of the population and fails to account for women's lives in any significant way. The fact that women have been underrepresented in studies of Japanese society, however, may mean that women actually have not counted as full members of society. It was only two or three generations ago that women were all but prevented from entering the public arena: they occupied their respective positions within family structures as wives, mothers or mothers-in-law and had contact with the world outside the family only through male relations, or as substitutes.

2.2 In the above-mentioned study (Reynolds 1985), I attempted to show that most linguistic rules applying only if the speaker is female have the effect of reducing assertion, or expressing formality or politeness (hearer orientation), which indicates that the social foundation of female speech is a sex-segregated hierarchical society in which women are viewed as inferior. Some examples of such rules may be in order. (See Reynolds (1985) for more detailed illustration of each rule.)

A. Rules of assertion reduction

Copula deletion (NP - COPULA → NP - φ)

(1) — (a)  
  tegami-o kai-ta no da. (Male)  
  letter-ACC wrote NOM COP  
  'It is that I wrote a letter.'
(b) *tegami-o kai-ta no.* (Female*)

Imperative deletion \((V - te - [V] \rightarrow V - te - \phi)\)

(2)—(a) *tegami-o kai-te-kure.* (Male)
letter-ACC write-&-give
‘Write a letter for me.’

(b) *tegami-o kai-te (∴).* (Female*)

Interrogative deletion \((S - ka \rightarrow S - \phi)\)

(3)—(a) *tegami-o kaku ka (∴).* (Male)
letter-ACC write Q
‘Will you write a letter?’

(b) *tegami-o kaku (∴).* (Female)

B. Rules of formality

(4) *tegami-o kaki-masi-ta no.* (Female)
letter-ACC write-FORM-PAST NOM
‘I wrote a letter.’

C. Rules of politeness/hearer-orientation

(5)—(a) *tegami-o kai-ta wa(∴).* (Male*)
letter-ACC wrote FP
‘I wrote a letter.’

(b) *tegami-o kai-ta wa (∴).* (Female)

ACC : Accusative Case Marker, NOM : Nominalizer, COP : Copula, IMP : Verb in Imperative Form, Q : Interrogative Particle, FP : Sentence Final Particle, FORM : Formal Verb Suffix, PAST : Past Tense. ‘* ’ placed after Female or Male marks that the pattern is typically, but not exclusively, used by females or males.

Notice that the sentence (1b) is exactly the same as the male sentence (1a) except that it lacks the informal copula, which has a strong assertive force, and
notice further that this is a nominal sentence with no overt matrix verb. Sentence (2b), ending with a conjunctive particle te, which is supposed to be followed by another verb — in this case a verb in the imperative form, has an “incomplete” tone. As a matter of fact, this sentence is quite ambiguous: it could mean “Have you written a letter?” as well. Sentences in (3) show that female speakers cannot use the question particle ka, unless they express formality in the verb. To ask a question is to give a command: the addressee is required to give a response. Female sentence (4) is a formal version of (1b), and is never used by males except those who choose, or pretend to choose, to identify themselves with women. The last two sentences differ from each other only in the intonation:1 male speakers pronounce the particle wa with a declarative falling intonation and females with an interrogative rising intonation. (For more on this difference in pronunciation between male and female speakers, see Kitagawa (1977).) I also argued in Reynolds (1984) that female speakers tend to use ano / anoo, a filler that connotes a speaker’s humble/polite attitude towards the addressee, while men tend to choose vowel fillers which have no such friendly connotation.

The image of a Japanese woman that can be derived from the linguistic characteristics manifested through these rules is a familiar one: she is not assertive, but overly polite and tentative in her speech. This is not surprising at all given the picture of the hierarchical society that we have seen in the previous section. It is almost impossible to trace the process through which these rules for female speech formation developed, but it is beyond dispute that they are a consequence of Japan’s long-lived male-centered feudalism.

2.3 It may be argued that the image I claim female speakers of Japanese present is a stereotype and does not represent reality. I do not mean to imply by my analysis of Japanese female speech that the normative rules for female speakers are always strictly adhered to. On the contrary, this study takes note of the fact that many women deviate from the norm in many situations. But the features of female speech discussed in the preceding section can still be extensively observed among the majority of Japanese women, and some rules are even obligatory if the speaker is female. For example, as a woman I am not allowed to say to anybody, even to my younger sibling, Tot-te-kure ‘Get (it) for me’ using Informal-Benefactive-Imperative. I have to say instead Tot-te, applying the imperative deletion rule. I am not allowed to say It-ta ka? ‘Did you go?’. I must suppress the interrogative marker ka and say It-ta ( ), shifting the rising intonation to the tense marker. Some rules for gender-
marking in Japanese are categorical, while in English rules are variable. However, this does not mean that the distinction between female speech and male speech is always clear-cut. Furthermore, there are several stylistic variants of female and male speech signifying different degrees of femininity or masculinity. Roughly speaking, the division between female and male speech is schematized as in the diagram below, \( V_1 \) being the most masculine—assertive/forceful variants—and \( V_n \) its opposite extreme.

That is, women are supposed to choose a style closer to the least assertive end, which men are supposed to avoid. Also, it seems that the risk of stepping into the overlapping area (\( V_k-m \)) is greater for females than for males. A woman using a style in this area may be considered impolite in more situations than a man talking in the same way. If we limit ourselves to informal speech (i.e., excluding from our consideration formal and written styles, which exhibit different patterns of distribution), the option for a style is much narrower in the case of a female speaker.

This asymmetric linguistic division may not have created serious problems in a sex-segregated society, where the wife, a woman in the only legitimate female category, occupied “the lowest rung on the entire social ladder, subordinated within the feudal hierarchy and within the family hierarchy as well” (Pharr 1984: 224). There was no need for women to talk assertively/forcefully/authoritatively since they were defined as subordinate to others.
With the legal and economic changes after the war, however, the barriers between women and men were removed in most social and educational institutions: women are no longer confined to the home but are taking up various social/public roles which used to belong to men. Inevitably, mixed sex interactions have significantly increased, causing remarkable changes in the way people relate. Mixed sex interaction in which women and men can talk almost as equals is no longer taken as exceptional. There are many situations in which a woman talks as a superior to her male subordinates. It is mostly in such emerging patterns of interaction that speakers (especially, female speakers) face the conflict between traditional patterns and the need to meet the communicative requirements arising from their new roles. In order to be accepted as a “good” woman, a female speaker of Japanese must choose to talk nonassertively, indirectly, politely, deferentially: but in order to function as a supervisor, administrator, teacher, lawyer, doctor, etc. or as a colleague or associate, she must be able to talk with assurance. Given the constraint that a woman should talk onna-rasiku ‘as expected of women’ regardless of her role, which is far more mandatory in Japanese than in English, the presence of an “objective condition for conflict” (Pharr, 1984) is common.

3. In analyzing the “tea-pourers” rebellion (a rebellion in Kyoto, Japan, in the early 1960’s by a group of female clerical workers in a city government office who were protesting against having to make and pour tea several times a day for the male members of their respective sections) as a sample case of status conflict, Pharr (1984) argues that conflict develops in five stages: (1) the objective basis for the conflict, (2) the subjective awareness of the conflict, (3) the initiation of conflict behavior, (4) the escalation/deescalation of conflict behavior and (5) the termination of conflict. Examination of female/male speech conflicts according to this model reveals a number of important facts.  

3.1 There are at least two types of mixed-sex interactional situations where the objective conditions for conflict are inherent: a situation in which a female speaker is superior in social status to a male speaker and a situation in which both sexes are supposed to have equal status.

A woman in a superior position—a position defined as such by the male-established hierarchy—is expected to signify her authoritative power in her language, but female speech does not provide a means to this end. Formal speech may be interpreted as the speaker’s means of keeping a distance from the addressee, or it may be taken as a manifestation of the speaker’s genuine
Katsue Akiba Reynolds

humility—a virtue—only if it comes from someone who has an option of a more overtly assertive/intimidating style, i.e., a male speaker. But formal speech is a sign of deference, an expected quality of the powerless, when it is used by a speaker who is constrained to using a nonassertive style, i.e. by a female speaker.

In mixed-sex conversations where there is no vertical relationship among the participants, linguistic equality will be maintained only if both female and male members talk in formal speech, keeping a distance from each other. The odds are in favor of male speakers in any competition in informal speech.

Actions such as tea-pouring are intentional and the actors are well aware of what they are doing, so the fact that the duty is a burden imposed only on female workers is apparent to everybody. The question of what can be done to make the situation more fair can be discussed openly. But decisions as to what linguistic style to use must often, on the other hand, be made subconsciously by individuals. It is characteristic of linguistic conflict that subjects are seldom aware of it. Initially, interviews with women who are in social positions that require assertive talk—women who administer predominantly male groups or mixed sex groups with large percentages of male members, women critics, women in the media, women teachers and women politicians—suggest that they have never experienced any difficulties due to their language use. Yet later in the same interviews these women admit that their language does not have the same authoritative force as that of their male counterparts, that they must be aware of their language so they will not offend others, or be considered improper as women. However, there is evidence that women are attempting, subconsciously, to resolve the conflict, mostly by defeminizing their speech within limits, using variants in the Vk-m area in the diagram shown earlier. They even use some variants closer to $V_1$ than $V_k$ when sentences are not explicitly directed towards the addressee: e.g., $Sooda naa$ ($'$) instead of $Soo$ ($desu$) $nee$ ($'$), both of which are reflexive questions—questions directed towards the speaker him/herself; or the use of $sikasi$, the conjunction 'however/but' commonly used in male speech/public discourse, instead of $desukere$-$do$, $kere$-$do$, $kedo$, $demo$, conjunctions with the same semantic function as $sikasi$ but more commonly used in female speech/conversational discourse. I hear these expressions when women talk to me, a female stranger: this suggests that they are used more extensively in communication in work situations, especially when conflict is intense. One incident might be seen as an escalation of conflict behavior. A woman principal’s thundering
Female Speakers of Japanese in Transition

Bakayaroo! ‘Stupid!’ silenced a group of faculty members. (Yaroo is a vulgarism referring to men: the word does not belong to the female vocabulary.) She said, “We must sometimes show who is the boss,” when the incident, which must have been spread among the teachers and other principals in the community, was brought up by another woman principal. Variants at the V₁ level were employed by several angry women among about 200 observers of a Diet session discussing a bill to legislate equal employment opportunities for men and women (Notes, July 24, ’84, no tape recording permitted).

3.2 A social conflict like the one concerning teapouring duties is externally observable and the existence of conflict is apparent. The conflict of male/female linguistic style under discussion, however, takes place mostly within individuals: subjects may not have full awareness of the existence of the objective conditions for conflict and may not consciously initiate conflict behavior. An individual who initiates conflict behavior under such conditions might easily yield to the pressure of society and be persuaded that it is she who is wrong, that it is her behavior that must be corrected. The role of society in this process is crucial, especially in Japan, where the desire for harmony is so deep-rooted in the culture that deviating from the cultural norm—destroying the harmony—is almost suicidal. The government proposal to put into law the principle of equal employment opportunity for men and women in response to the egalitarian ideology of the International Decade for Women was met with strong opposition by proponents of a “cultural ecology” theory. Michiko Hasegawa, a female philosophy teacher, states, “The pattern of men’s and women’s roles is an important element of the system of each culture. It is analogous to religion or language, and if one attempts to change it recklessly, one might destroy the whole system of the culture” (Hasegawa 1984: 83). She argues that the Law, if it is ratified, would undermine the well-balanced system of Japanese traditions. To think of removing the male/female speech dichotomy is absurd to her, and to many others. It is understandable that individual female speakers’ attempts to rebel against traditional female speech patterns do not escalate beyond a very limited domain. Conflicts either remain unresolved or end in failure.

One group of women who are particularly vulnerable to the linguistic dilemma are female teachers in junior high schools, as well as teachers teaching older age groups in elementary schools. They must handle boys and girls (the average class of a Japanese school has more than 40 students) who
demand that the teacher be attentive and friendly to them while at the same time displaying a defensive and resistant attitude themselves. Displays of both solidarity and authority are necessary for a teacher to be successful in a Japanese junior high school: it is informal male speech that can satisfy these two requirements simultaneously. Let us look at an example of a male teacher’s discourse in class.\textsuperscript{4}

\begin{quote}
\textbf{T:} ... Please present a lot of your opinions or impressions. First, the boy. About the boy... You probably remember what you have written down yesterday. Well, what have you thought about the boy? \textit{I want you to present it, OK? (Kore o dasi-te-morai-tai na.)}

\textbf{P (Male):} ...

\textbf{T:} Yes, that’s right. That’s correct... What I wanted you to write about... among the subjects that you had strong feelings about, there are probably a lot besides it, aren’t there? Well, ... to confirm those points with each other. \textit{Well how about you A, first? (Ee, mazu saisyo ni A doo da.)}

\textbf{P (Male):} ...

\textbf{T:} Yes. \textit{You felt thrilled at what the boy was doing, is it? (Syoonen ga yat-te-iru koto ni suriru o kanzi-ta, da na.)}
\end{quote}

The italic parts are in an informal male speech style and those which are not marked are either formal or are in a written language style, which is very common in lecturing. Note that this male teacher teaching Tolstoy in Japanese translation to seventh graders regularly switches the code from formal to informal at the point where he attempts to elicit responses from students. 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 the public environment. 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.

However, a teacher is evaluated not only by students but also by parents and the principal, who are critical if female teachers’ behavior deviates from traditional standards. All the female principals that I interviewed criticized female teachers’ language one way or another, although most of them admit that female teachers cannot be like “normal” women. One of the principals
Female Speakers of Japanese in Transition

revealed that she had called in a young female teacher to admonish her about her language. The principal said that since that time the teacher in question seemed to be improving her language.

In the discussion on female speech held during a three-day seminar on women's studies at the National Women's Education Center (Kokuritu Huzin Kyooiku Kaikan) a participant expressed concern about her daughter's language, which she thought was too rough for a girl, "perhaps, because of her (female) teacher's influence." Several younger participants who could still identify themselves with students rather than mothers responded that when they were students they always favored female teachers who talked a little bit like male teachers over those who talked too formally. It is the conflict inherent in being a female teacher that has been brought into focus by these two opposing views, the view of the mothers and the view of students as recalled by younger participants at the seminar.

The social expectation that women, regardless of their roles, should talk onna-rasiku is so strong that women teachers themselves often view defeminization negatively. A 26 year-old female teacher responds to a newspaper reporter, "I tend to speak rough language with an imperative tone in spite of my efforts not to, perhaps, because I am a teacher. I always think regretfully that this is not good for me" (the Asahi, July 18, 1984), and she adds that she, ambivalent about language use, won't be able to meet the demands of the career. It is interesting that the reporter (female or male?) admiringly describes the teacher as sitting onna-rasiku on the floor with her hands arranged in front of her folded knees in a poised manner. It seems to be only a matter of time before this teacher will terminate the conflict by returning to the traditional woman's place—home. Sensing society's disapproval of her language, this female teacher is punishing herself while the same society (represented by the reporter) lauds her for her femininity.

Female principals are in positions where they can control the female speech conflict to a certain extent. Unlike teachers, principals do not come into direct contact with students, and they can handle most interactions in formal language. Furthermore, even if they use rough language like [Bakayaroo!] they are relatively free from others' criticism since they are at the top rank within a school system. Difficulties that women principals experience are more subtle. First, a woman principal must demonstrate that she does not display linguistic traits which are believed to be typical of women: especially, she must avoid giving an impression in her talk that she is indecisive, indirect or
picky. At the same time she cannot be as authoritative as a male counterpart would be. One of the women principals interviewed who seemed to be quite successful in establishing a good rapport with the teachers confided that she was careful not to be too informal with the teachers so that the male headmaster, 6 who is in between herself and the teachers, would not be crowded out (Recorded, July 18, 1983). A male headmaster talks to the principal deferentially according to the traditional principle of vertical relationships and at the same time he attempts to maintain his face as the superior vis-a-vis the teachers. Thus, the principal must allow enough distance between the teachers and herself to make room for the headmaster. She said, “I am formal and short with teachers in my office, but I try to make up for it by saying one or two words in a personal/casual manner to convey to them that I remember their cooperation and support when I see them around.” Second, a woman principal has to deal with difficulties in her communication with male principals. A woman principal who talks to male principals too informally does not have a good reputation among male principals—the majority. Male principals’ informal talk of course creates no difficulty. “We should not be carried away and address male principals with -san—a suffix very roughly corresponding to Mr. in English—just because male principals do so among themselves. We should address them with the title Sensei ‘Master/Teacher’ or Kootyoo Sensei ‘Mr. Principal’ or with family name and title (e.g., Yamada Sensei and Yamada Kootyoo) as we are expected.”

It has been noted that the use of boku ‘I’ (Male) by junior high school girls has recently become quite common in Tokyo. Girls who were interviewed in a TV program explain that they cannot compete with boys in classes, in games or in fights with watasi ‘I’ (Female), reports Jugaku (1979). What we see here is a case of conflict behavior consciously initiated by a large group of female speakers who are fully 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. The use of boku and other expressions in the male speech domain by young female speakers has escalated to a larger area and to older groups of speakers. 7 However, since they know that boku-language is not acceptable in the society outside schools, they use watasi-language in talking to “members of the society”. 8 In other words, as school girls they are bilinguals who have two distinct codes, boku-language and watasi-language. They select a code according to the situation.

In spite of the surface defiance of the trend, however, boku-language may
not have as much subversive force as it appears. The avowedly rebellious
behavior on the part of teenage girls rouses curiosity but never the anger that
would be invoked if females with full membership in society stepped over the
gender boundary in a less self-conscious and less forthright manner. This is
because *boku*-language can be dismissed as a passing phase — it does in fact
taper off by the time the students leave school — while defeminization/
masculinization by adult female members is a serious threat to the established
norms of society.

4. The female/male language dichotomy in Japanese is not a mere
differentiation of the two sexes but it reflects the structure of a society where
women were defined as the inferior sex. Jugaku (1979) points out that the
structure of the Japanese language has a far greater effect on the way Japanese
women live than one may expect. The examples of conflict processes that we
have seen show that female speech plays a crucial role in keeping Japanese
women in traditional roles. Attempts to remove the boundary between the
male/female speech division inevitably end in failure, as a result of self-
restraint on the part of female speakers who foresee social punishment. It
appears that the way women are supposed to talk has changed little; the norm
functions as a conservative force.

To predict from this, however, that female speech has not changed and will
not change may be wrong. Even though individual processes of conflict may
terminate in failure, “the effects of the conflict feed back into the objective
conditions that potentially will give rise to further conflicts” (Pharr 1984:
219). One individual’s conflict behavior can have an impact on a wide range
of female speakers who come into contact with it, who may initiate conflict
behaviors and influence in turn other women. As long as there are objective
conditions for female language conflict, conflict behaviors will recur in
various social segments and will spread with increasingly greater speed. Even
if all conflict behaviors are suppressed, the ripple effect of conflict may
eventually generate the energy necessary to undermine the traditional division
of the language, into assertive styles for men and nonassertive/polite styles for
women. It is certain, to say the least, that the female/male speech dichotomy
will not remain as it is at present, just as the traditional role division based
on sex has been fluctuating widely in various aspects of social life.

Aside from conflicts related to the features of female speech that have been
discussed in the first section of this paper, there are conflicts that have been
resolved with some success. There are many women who refuse to use *syuzin* (lit: ‘my master’) referring to their husbands, although they have not found feasible replacements yet. There was a woman (and there may be many others like her) who stipulated prior to her marriage the condition that the prospective husband would never call her *omae* (‘you’ used in a superior-inferior dyad), a condition which has been observed by her husband for more than 20 years (Reported, at a meeting on August 7, 1984). A woman who had worked for a gubernatorial office for 20 years successfully convinced the governor that *naizyo no koo* ‘virtue of one’s wife’s assistance’ should be reinterpreted more literally (the literal meaning of this word is ‘virtue of internal assistance’) so that husbands of female workers would be honored as well as wives of male workers after twenty years of service. As a result, she was presented with a diamond ring for her service to the government and her husband with a watch for his internal assistance to her, in honor of the wife’s twenty-year service to the government. The new meaning of *naizyo no koo* will from now on apply to the cases of all workers who have worked for this government office for twenty years regardless of sex; it may spread to other gubernatorial offices. *The Asahi*, a major newspaper (July 17, 1985), reports a group of women who are attempting to change through litigation the meaning of *syotainusi* ‘household head’ by removing the semantic feature of maleness that the word took on during the patriarchal era. The literal meaning of *syotainusi* is ‘household head’, but the referent is conventionally assumed to be male. So a male employee who supports his family is paid some extra in some companies according to the number of his dependents while a female worker, who is never a household head under the present definition, does not benefit from the system even if she is in reality a household head—her husband may be dead or unemployed, or he may be working for a small company where there are no such benefits. The new interpretation of *syotainusi*, if these women win the case, will apply to all workers, men and women, of all the companies with the same pay systems.  

If equality between men and women enhances linguistic equality, and if linguistic equality entails equal access for all the speakers of a language to all the resources of the language, it is a logical conclusion that the female/male speech dichotomy must be removed. Although the observations that I have presented here may very well be proof that the change towards linguistic equality is already under way, there is no guarantee that the change will proceed without interruption or digression. It is in fact quite likely that the
present form of dichotomy will simply shift to another—perhaps less obvious—form of dichotomy. Inoue (1984) concludes her essay on the image of women presented through the mass media saying that, in place of the traditional role division of domestic work for women and career work for men, a new system of dividing men's and women's roles may be developing: for example, a system in which administrative positions are assigned to men and secretarial positions to women, cooking to entertain the guests is men's work and cleaning up afterward women's. If Inoue's analysis is correct, language may follow the same pattern of change: even if the obvious dichotomy between female and male speech disappears, the overall dominance of male speakers over female speakers may survive in a different form. I would like to suggest therefore that it is an important task for researchers of gender in relation to language to observe and analyze various phenomena related to the sex dichotomy, especially conflict phenomena, and to work against changes that create a new male/female language dichotomy rather than leading to linguistic equality.

NOTES

* This paper was first presented at the first Berkeley Women and Language Conference (March, 1985) and has appeared in Proceedings of the First Women and Language Conference. I am grateful to the Berkeley Women and Language Group for their generous permission in allowing this paper to be included in this volume. I am particularly thankful to Noelle Caskey and Birch Moonwomon of the Group for their excellent editing work.

1. It has been pointed out by Sachiko Ide, Japan Women's University (in personal correspondence) that the pattern in (5)—(a) is mainly used by male speakers of the Kansai dialects. According to some native speakers of the Osaka dialect, one of the major Kansai dialects, there is very little difference between female and male speech in their dialect: both female and male speakers frequently use wa (\). Female and male speech in dialects other than so-called standard Japanese certainly need to be studied in detail. In this study, however, I have limited myself to the version of Japanese mainly spoken in the Tokyo area.

2. Georganne Weller, Director of Center for Interpretation and Translation, University of Hawaii, has brought to my attention that the sociolinguistic studies using aspects/variants of conflict theory have increased during the past decade. E.g., Chapter IV, "The Conflict Paradigm," of Christina Bratt Paulson's
According to Nihon Kyooiku Nenkan (The Almanac of Japanese Education) 1985, the percentages of female teachers in Japanese schools are as follows (as of May 1, 1984): elementary schools, 56.0%; junior high schools, 33%; senior high schools, 18.1%. Female teachers in junior high schools are still a minority. Furthermore, the subjects that female teachers teach are often, though not always, limited: most of them teach home economics, gymnastics for girls, Japanese, or perhaps music.

The sample was taken from the transcribed material published in “Rokuonki” in Gengo Seikatu 172, 1966.

This seminar of women’s studies is held for three days every summer with over 200 participants who include teachers at various levels, women working in government offices and in other professions, students and housewives, and is subsidized by the Ministry of Education. The discussion in question was held in the evening of the second day of the 1984 seminar.

There seems to be an unwritten rule that a female headmaster is never assigned to a school with a female principal.

Jugaku (1979) made a study of boku used by school girls in Osaka and discovered that boku is used quite often by high school girls in Osaka, too, although the use is accompanied by a joking playful tone. Several people have pointed out to me that boku is easier to use in woman-to-woman communication than in mixed-sex communication. It seems that in the process of expansion of boku from high school girls to college girls the sociolinguistic significance of boku-language used by girls has undergone a slight change.

At the commencement ceremony, Japanese students are congratulated by guest speakers for “becoming members of society,” that is, students are not regarded as members of society in Japan.

I have examined dialogues in the plays written at the end of the feudal era (from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the following century) and confirmed that omae was not always used in superior-inferior dyads: wives used omae towards their husbands and daughters, and sons towards their fathers. However, it gradually became a superior-to-inferior form, as anata which was originally a third person pronoun (or a demonstrative meaning ‘over there’) developed as a deferential ‘you.’ It seems that for some reason a second person pronoun always undergoes a radical semantic derogation, from a deferential (inferior-superior) term to a derogatory (superior-inferior) term. In contemporary Japanese anata can be quite offensive: it is well known that politically radical students in the early seventies often chose anata for addressing university professors in their efforts to indict them for what the students
considered cooperation with the establishment. What is relevant here is the fact that the statuses of the wife and husband reflected in the address terms have always been asymmetric, the wife using an inferior-superior term and the husband a superior-inferior term. The woman in question said to her fiancé that since even her own father had never used *omae* towards her, he should not put her down by addressing her with *omae*.

10. In the case of teachers of most private universities of contemporary Japan, whichever spouse makes the larger sum receives the family allowance. I owe this information to Sachiko Ide.

11. *The Asahi* (July 25, 1985) reports a tendency for male employees to be placed in the main office while female employees of the same company are placed in branch offices.

**REFERENCES**


Hasegawa, M. 1984. “Danzyo koyoo byoodoo hoo wa bunka no seitaikei o hakai suru. [The law of equal employment opportunity will destroy the ecological system of the culture].” *Tyuuoo Kooron* 5. 78-87.


Katsue Akiba Reynolds
