

# Metadiscursive Construction of Japanese Women's Language: Images and Ideologies

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## Abstract

Previous literature discussing Japanese women's language (JWL) has shown that it is a cultural knowledge about "how women speak" rather than a genderlect, which has been dynamically constructed in the given spatio-temporal context (Inoue 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2006; Washi 2004). The purpose of this study was to reveal how modern female speakers of Japanese negotiate media discourses about JWL and contribute to recontextualization of JWL through metapragmatic narratives. Three participants were asked to analyze the speech styles of female characters from a TV drama to discuss linguistic femininity. The participants' metapragmatic narratives were examined based on the principles of the discourse centered approach (Sherzer 1987), shedding light on their dynamic articulations of JWL discourses. The participants' generalizations of linguistic femininity showed both interpersonal and intrapersonal similarities and differences, as well as some contradictory discourses around JWL.

Keywords: *discourse, Japanese Women's Language, linguistic femininity*

## 1 Introduction

Traditionally, relationships between language and gender have been discursively framed based on a dichotomy of women's and men's speech (Haas 1944; Lakoff 1973), presupposing biological differences of two sexes (Trechter 1999). The traditional view that essentializes the nature of the dichotomized sexes of men and women not only obscures multiplicity in actual gendered and gendering speech but also exclude 'deviant' forms from the norms. It was not until in the 1990s that language and gender research went beyond a persistent essentialism that attributes a certain speech style to innate nature of a particular sex, supporting such claims as women are dominated by men (see Spender 1980) or are culturally different from men (see Tannen 1990). In recent years, however, the focus of research has shifted from linguistic forms and speech styles of men and women to cultural ideologies (re)producing metapragmatic gender meanings through a speaker's (non-)use of such forms and styles (see Bucholtz 1999, 2000; Land and Kitzinger 2005; Mendoza-Denton 2008).

Preceded by many prominent studies on language and gender in the West, Japanese women's ways of speaking have also been scrutinized, especially after Jugaku's (1979) observations that were not only on linguistic forms and speech styles but also on cultural ideologies associated with what is now called *joseigo* [Japanese women's language] or JWL. JWL had been, and still is in terms of public discourses about it, considered to be the language spoken by Japanese women. Earlier studies (see Ide 1990; McGloin 1990; Shibamoto 1990; Reynolds 1990; Wetzel 1990) focused on observable

gender differences in forms and styles, addressing pervasive gender-specific traits as well as the perceived “decrease” of gender differences or convergence of women’s speech to the normative men’s speech. Focusing on linguistic practices of Japanese women in real life situations, these studies attempted to demonstrate the “essential” nature of JWL. However, many of these studies revealed that linguistic practices of Japanese men and women are not gender-specifically homogeneous, but are heterogeneous at different levels of socially meaningful categories and local contexts where multiple spatio-temporal factors intersect with each other (Nakamura2007).

Recent studies have argued that JWL is a cultural construct which has been dynamically negotiated in many historical intersections of certain temporalities and spatialities, involving multiplicity on many different levels (see Inoue 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2006; Nakamura 2007; Washi 2004). To put it differently, JWL is a cultural knowledge about “how women speak,” how they “usually speak” or “should speak” in the given spatio-temporal context. The complex spatio-temporal configurations of JWL have yielded linguistic and discursive heterogeneity in terms of meaningful social categories—such as class, age, region, etc. Iconicity and indexicality of JWL have been undergoing a recursive process in which attached pragmatic values and discursive values are recursively negotiated; the perceived decrease in the pragmatic values of JWL (see Matsumura 2001; Mizumoto 2005; Shibamoto 1992) does not necessarily undermine its discursive values, as the relationship between them has always been mutually contingent to reproduce forms and discourses. In other words, production and reproduction of forms of the imaginary JWL are discursive activities themselves, both individually and institutionally, which contribute to reformation of gender as an ideology realized through language (use).

## **2 Discourses around JWL**

Public discourses around modern women’s speech styles have been articulated in various forms of mass media, such as TV programs, Internet, magazines, etc., lamenting the perceived decrease of the use of JWL. According to the census report made in 2009 by a prestigious media company, Jiji Press, 87.7% of the participants perceive that the modern use of the Japanese language is corrupted, and 46.1% of them think that one of the main reasons for the “corruption” is women’s inclination to use what they perceive as “men’s speech style” (Jiji Press 2009).

Many of the previous studies on JWL, in an attempt to elicit gendered speech deriving from the imaginary “pure” forms, ironically resulted in proving heterogeneity in Japanese women’s speech. One traditional account for the heterogeneity is an assumption having to do with linguistic purism and lament: there used to be a holistic, pure body of JWL in the past which most—if not all—women actually spoke while the use of aesthetic JWL has decreased along with recent socioeconomic transformations of women’s status (Nakamura 2007). If JWL is really the language spoken by women, why is the public perception of this “decrease” apparent regardless of the stable existence of Japanese women who speak language? Why would people “lament” the speech style of modern Japanese women? The target of lament here is not the gap between diverse linguistic practices of women in the past and those of modern women, but is a divergence of linguistic practices of modern women from the purified image of JWL.

Given that language itself includes variation and is transformable over time, it is unnatural to assume that, despite the heterogeneity of women’s speech in recent years, women in the past were engaged in the same—or at least similar—linguistic practices

without much diversity (Nakamura 2007). Moreover, the rich diversity in regional dialects brings up another issue of spatiality; where did JWL come from? It is reported that speakers of “standard” Japanese are exposed to JWL more often than those who speak a regional dialect (Nakamura 2007). How does this spatiality come into play when intersected with temporal transformation? Even if we could possibly locate the spatio-temporal origin of JWL, how do we label each of the regional and contextual varieties and their transformed versions over time? How do we see other variation based on sociocultural factors such as class, age, etc.? Where is the spatio-temporal boundary of the “pure” JWL?

Mass media are dynamic sites of struggle over representation, and complex spaces in which subjectivities are constructed and identities are contested, through interactions with interpretive practices of media audiences, diversity of media audiences and media uses, and multivocality and indeterminacy of media texts (Spitulnik 1993). Mass-mediated texts are a mirror of cultural norms as well as a site where reproduction of such norms take place (Inoue 2003), and media depiction of a certain characterological image can be as powerful as (de-)legitimizing the particular group (see Peterson 2011 for the example of depicting Navajo). The mass-mediated texts such as TV shows, films, radio, books, magazines, etc. themselves and individual negotiation of them may be a form of what Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) metaphorized as “where the rubber meets the road” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992:96)—a site of producing, reproducing, and resisting the organization of power in society and in societal discourses of meaningful social categories. The explicit use of JWL in the media is a projection of spatio-temporally negotiated discourses of JWL, and at the same time, serves as a powerful force to objectify Japanese women and materialize their language through the romanticized use of such language. The recursive process of production and reproduction of discourses of JWL through the media and individuals’—especially female audience’s—iterative exposure to such discursive activities blurs the boundary between “what is real” and “what people think is real”. In other words, JWL becomes a vicarious language (Inoue 2006) through which Japanese women are to negotiate their femininity. Mass-mediated texts are themselves a form of metapragmatic discourses that naturalizes the indexical orders of JWL of the given temporality. The purpose of this study is to examine how audiences, especially modern female speakers of Japanese as cultural actors, negotiate the presented media discourses and contribute to recontextualization of JWL discourses through metapragmatic narratives.

### **3 The Study**

#### **3.1 Purpose of the Study**

The view of JWL as language ideology blurs the boundary of speakers and non-speakers of JWL, suggesting that there is, and has been, few speakers of the imagined, purified, and romanticized JWL across time and place. In this study, a focus was given to a site where discursive narratives are effectively articulated: metapragmatic discourses of JWL among Japanese female speakers. Mass-mediated texts are both a site where public discourses of JWL are reflected and as a reinforcing source of the discourses itself, while audience of the media discourses are also cultural agents who engage themselves in discursive activities through decontextualization and recontextualization of JWL discourses.

In order to examine JWL discourses among audience intersected with media's discursive representations of JWL and Japanese women, a careful analysis was given to metapragmatic commentaries on JWL represented in the media made by Japanese female speakers. Three research participants were asked to view a drama episode and individual interviews were conducted, followed by a focus-group meeting, for discussion. The research questions are as follows: 1) what are the criteria for each participant to perceive (non-)femininity?; 2) how is one's criteria for and perception of femininity depicted in the media similar to and different from each other?; 3) how do the participants generalize linguistic (non-)femininity?; 4) What kind of emerging metapragmatic discourses can be observed among the speakers?

### 3.2 Methodology

The data for this study comes from two types of metapragmatic narratives the participants engaged in: individual interviews and a focus group discussion. In order to elicit the data, the participants were asked to: 1) preview the 50-minute drama episode at home to familiarize themselves to the specific episode; 2) participate in the scene-analysis activity in which each of them were shown ten selected scenes from the episode and were asked to make oral and written comments on observable (non-)femininity; 3) explain their analysis to the researcher; and 4) participate in a focus group discussion where all three participants shared their perspectives and opinions regarding feminine speech with the others.

The target of analysis for the participants was one episode of a popular Japanese TV drama serial called *Shomuni* [General Affairs Department 2]. The drama is staged in a big company in Tokyo where two female characters, Chinatsu Tsuboi, the “boss” of the General Affairs Department, and Misono Sugita, the “boss” of the elite secretaries, always antagonize each other and are depicted as opposites in various respects, such as social status, personality, and most importantly in this study, the ways they speak. In this study, the participants were asked to analyze women's language use in one 50-minute episode, titled *Tsui ni Misono ga Kotobuki Taisha?* [Is Misono finally quitting the job for marriage?]. The metadiscursive data was collected by showing the participants ten selected scenes that can be categorized into two types: 1) the ones in which Tsuboi and Sugita are talking to each other; 2) the ones in which each of them is talking to the psychiatrist, Higuchi, and trying to attract him.

This study involved three participants, all of whom were female native speakers of Japanese: Aya, Sawa, and Miku (pseudonyms). Aya was a 46-year-old woman who was originally from Shizuoka, Japan, one of the areas adjacent to Tokyo. Sawa was a 31-year-old woman who was also from Shizuoka, Japan. She spent most of her life in her hometown speaking the Enshu dialect. Miku was a 30-year-old woman who was born and raised in Saitama, Japan, another area adjacent to Tokyo. She identified herself as a speaker of “standard” Japanese, who spent most of her life in her hometown where it was spoken. Although all three participants were not from Tokyo, Miku claimed she spoke the “standard” and Aya and Sawa identified themselves as dialect speakers who were also “capable of speaking the standard when expected” (Individual Interview).

The participants' written scene analysis data, individual interviews, and the focus group discussion were triangulated in order to effectively uncover and denaturalize the intertwined discourses of feminine speech and JWL that the participants have internalized in their lives as well as the ways in which such discourses are negotiated in metapragmatic narratives about them. The analysis of the metapragmatic narratives made

by the participants was examined based on the principles of discourse centered approach (Sherzer 1987), by which I looked at the dynamic articulations of discourses by participants not only about the ones that came from the scene analyses, but also their generalizing remarks of feminine speech.

## 4 Data

### 4.1 Perceived Linguistic Femininity

In the individual analysis of linguistic femininity depicted in the selected scenes, the traditional features of JWL played a major role in drawing the attention of the participants, especially Aya and Miku, to perceived femininity. Following the instruction to mark (non-)feminine features on the scripts, Aya and Miku shared the criteria for perceived femininity: presence of feminine sentence-ending particles such as *wa*, *kashira*, *no yo*, etc., the use or non-use of honorifics, the use of gendered pronouns such as *atashi* [I], among other things.

The presence of feminine sentence-ending particles in the characters' utterances often evoked linguistic femininity for the participants. For example, in Scene 2 where Sugita, the "feminine" secretary, is talking with "the golden guy" (Higuchi) in the counseling room, Sugita's utterances are highly marked by feminine sentence-ending particles, and Aya and Miku marked such particles as signs of feminine speech. Aya articulated that the criterion for femininity was mainly by the use of feminine sentence-ending particles. Interestingly, it was the presence of prototypical feminine particles that evokes femininity for the participants, but the lack of feminine particles remained unmarked.

Another major JWL form that draws participants' attention was the use of honorifics. In a particular scene where Tsuboi is talking to a male psychiatrist, all three participants, when asked about non-feminine features, articulated the lack of honorifics in Tsuboi's utterances. Considering the fact that the use of honorifics in other scenes did not draw attention from the participants in terms of linguistic femininity, the lack of honorifics, especially where it was expected based on the shared cultural knowledge about pragmatics of honorifics, accentuated the perception of impoliteness hence the judgment of non-femininity.

Other major JWL forms articulated during the participants' analyses of linguistic (non-)femininity include the use of gender pronouns, intonations, and exclamations including laughs. While the use of gender pronouns was too naturalized to be noticed, most of the time, the deviant use of pronouns (e.g. women's "impolite" use of pronouns) got marked as non-feminine. For example, Miku generally marked the use of casual pronouns as non-feminine, while she marked the use of feminized pronouns as a sign of femininity only when it appeared with the deviant use of pronouns in the same scene. In Scenes 3 and 4, Tsuboi's use of the casual form of second person pronoun *anta* [you] was marked non-feminine by Aya and Miku. *Anta*, the only gendered pronoun used in both scenes, was also marked by the participants in other scenes as a sign of non-feminine or masculine speech. On the other hand, traditional feminine particles such as *atashi* [I] did not always mark an utterance as feminine; it only got marked when there was a contrastive, deviant use of personal pronouns in the same scene.

Furthermore, there were some other major suprasegmental features which contributed to the participants' perception of femininity. All three participants pointed out *toon* [tone] is one of the feminizing and defeminizing features, by which they seemingly

mean intonation, lengthening, and overall tone of voice through their clarifications. Aya also articulated the influence of lengthening to projection of femininity, and to Sawa, the above mentioned phonological features and facial expressions were the only major feminizing factors in this scene. Although articulated in different ways, all three participants acknowledged the phonological factors of rising intonation and lengthening to realize feminine speech.

The “feminine” use of tones and exclamations, especially when they were present together, delineated a feminine mood in which such features were so foregrounded that no one listed anything non-feminine for the particular scene. It is important to note here that their articulation of such features did not necessarily reflect all the working (de-)feminizing factors in a strict sense; it is convincing enough to say that there were some explicit factors remaining unsaid and other implicit factors that the participants were not even aware of. Moreover, their explanations not only showed interpersonal differences but also contextual judgment about (non-)femininity; not everyone shared the exactly the same measurement for femininity, and individual explanatory remarks about their scene analysis were sometimes contradictory, suggesting that perception of femininity was context dependent.

## 4.2 Contextuality and Metapragmatic Discourses

All three of the participants were familiar with the drama series and had knowledge about background information and the characters that appear in it. They all named the main character, Tsuboi, as the most impressive for her non-feminine way of speaking. Also, Sawa referred to Tsuboi as a “rare woman” for her direct speech style, which she found “a little masculine but not too harsh because the speaker is female” (Individual Interview, Sawa). One of the common impressions among the participants was unrealistic language use in the drama series, especially that of women. The participants took the unrealistic use for granted because of the nature of the drama series as a comedy which “requires exaggeration to entertain audience” (Individual Interview, Miku). For example, according to Miku, the secretaries, including Sugita, were depicted as “too feminine, going over the average of female characters” hence “too dramatic to exist in reality” (Individual Interview). As the participants more or less shared the unrealistic nature of comedy, they took the language use in the drama as “exaggerated” and representative of imaginary characteristics of people whom they “have never seen in reality” (Individual Interview, Miku).

It is impossible to define linguistic femininity without context. First, it is not uncommon that a feminizing factor for a character could be used in non-feminine way by another character. For example, while Sugita’s use of the first person pronoun *atashi* [I] tends to be perceived feminine (Scene 8), while Tsuboi’s use of the same pronoun (Scene 5) remains unmarked. In Scene 8 where Tsuboi and Sugita are talking about the psychiatrist, Sugita’s use of *atashi* evoked femininity to Aya and Miku. For the language use of Tsuboi and Sugita in Scene 8, overall written analysis made by Aya and Miku suggested Tsuboi is depicted non-feminine while Sugita is feminine for the use of particles and pronouns. Even though the overall tone of voice employed by Sugita in this scene is low, as Sawa pointed out, the presence of explicit feminizing particles seemingly encouraged some participants to perceive another feature of the similar feminizing function also as feminine. In this case, Tsuboi’s overall defeminizing language use (i.e., offensive language and low tone of voice) demoted the supposedly-feminizing pronoun of *atashi*, resulting in the participants’ articulation of “no feminine features at all”

(Individual Interview, Aya and Miku) in the scene. Not to mention the interpersonal differences, this perceived gap over the same pronoun probably came from various contextual factors—regardless of awareness level of the participants—such as other co-occurring (de)feminizing features, content of the utterances, and visual cues salient in the scene. Moreover, one factor that caused gender-neutrality in one scene could produce femininity in another, or *vice versa*. For example, all the participants were concerned with the lack of honorifics in Tsuboi's speech in Scene 3, while the lack of honorifics in both Tsuboi's and Sugita's utterances sometimes remained unmarked in other scenes.

One's perception of femininity in a specific situation consisted of dynamic interaction of multiple factors. Despite Aya and Miku's relatively high dependency on linguistic, more specifically, morphological forms in terms of femininity, these forms were not the only working feminizing factors in each scene to them on both the perceptual level and metapragmatic level; all three participants usually provided more than one factor to measure femininity and non-femininity and masculinity. Contextuality also involved interpersonal differences in perception. For example, although Aya acknowledged several feminizing and de-feminizing factors in Scene 4, Miku and Sawa took a different approach to femininity respectively: in contrast to Aya's focus on morphological forms and lexical choice, Miku looked more at pragmatic effects of the content of an utterance and the manner of delivery. She articulated that the combination of the use of feminine linguistic features and the use of feminine, nagging intonation in Tsuboi and Sugita's interaction produced a sarcastic mood, and that engagement in such a sarcastic interaction itself was a feminine demeanor. To Miku, representation of femininity in the particular scene comprised not only the feminine linguistic forms and its delivery, but also the topic of the interaction. Sawa, on the other hand, did not find anything that stood out in the same scene in terms of femininity: she was more concerned with the manner of interaction between Tsuboi and Sugita, even though some prototypical feminizing forms were present in their utterances. Despite some overlaps between participants' criteria for (non-)femininity, there were considerable interpersonal differences on the perceptual level.

There was both a gap and a lapse between perceived femininity and expected femininity that was contingent on the dynamic interaction of the language use one was actually faced and his or her socioculturally constructed expectations for the given context. The pre-existing expectations for a person like Sugita—a woman who has a desired position and high social status (hence assumed well-educated)—to speak feminine using prototypical feminizing features is not always realized in her actual language use. Interpersonal and intrapersonal varieties in perception of femininity negotiated in each context are not solely spontaneous but are dynamically negotiated with pre-existing, socioculturally-driven expectations for a character.

In eliciting (non-)femininity from the ten selected scenes, definitions of (non-) femininity and scales by which each participant employed to mark specific features were not always fixed but showed a great extent of fluidity and contextuality. Sometimes participants noticed their own contradictory remarks, other times they were completely unconscious about the contradiction. Moreover, their perception of femininity was not necessarily based on the binary of feminine and masculine. Non-femininity may sometimes equal masculinity in their perception, but it could also point to gender-neutrality. Most importantly, definitions of femininity and non-femininity were relative, and were based on a dynamic comparison to the unmarked of each situation. The basis for comparison was not limited to the description of interpersonal differences (e.g., Tsuboi-Sugita comparison) or intrapersonal differences (e.g., Sugita's language use in front of

Tsuboi and that in front of the psychiatrist), but can be expanded to the perceptual gap between what was expected for the characterological image and the actual language use depicted in the scenes. In other words, their generalizing remarks about (non-)femininity were negotiated with contextual dynamism of each scene intersecting with the participants' socioculturally-driven expectations for the situation.

### 4.3 Generalizing Linguistic Femininity

Despite the observable interpersonal differences in the articulation of perceived (non-)femininity, the nature of their generalizing remarks was characterized by elicitation of forms. In contrast to the participants' articulations of perceived (non-)femininity in the target scenes, more attention was given to forms in making generalizing comments after the analysis. Although the participants were somewhat aware of context-dependent nature of femininity, their metapragmatic generalizations valued gendering forms—not in the feminine vs. non-feminine framework, but in the essentialized binary of feminine vs. masculine scale—over contextual dynamisms.

Fluid, dynamic negotiations of femininity were observed in all the participants who wandered around multiple yet fuzzy definitions of femininity as evident in contradictions in their generalizing remarks. Although the criteria for judgments were always dynamically negotiated and articulated in various ways by each participant, one of the critical factors contributing their judgment was the notion of markedness, a continuum of linguistic choices of varying degrees of markedness in terms of discourse type (Myers-Scotton 1993). The binary of marked and unmarked was not necessarily fixed but context-dependent. The use of this binary was observed in scene analyses, too, but it got further highlighted when the participants were engaged in metadiscursive analysis. For example, Aya compared two patterns, one in which a man was the speaker and the other in which a woman was the speaker, to measure naturalness before reaching their decision on the level of (non-)femininity of a particular utterance. In other words, the major criteria they employed in categorizing feminine and non-feminine were based on markedness of their subjective perception for the utterance, which only became salient when compared to unmarkedness.

In addition to markedness in terms of intergender comparison, interpersonal differences also served, or at least were believed to serve, as a criterion for markedness. All three participants projected a binary of feminine and non-feminine onto Sugita and Tsuboi on metadiscursive level. In this binary, neither Sugita nor Tsuboi was unmarked, but they both were marked in the two extremes, in comparison to what they called *hutsuu no hito* [ordinary people] like themselves. In other words, the default was not masculine speech to which the participants compare feminine speech, but the comparison was made on an intragender basis supposing what women use in reality was “neutral” or unmarked, and the Tsuboi and Sugita's respective speech styles were “exaggerated” or marked in terms of (non-)femininity.

Another criterion for markedness observed in the data was based on intrapersonal variations. For example, Aya explained how Sugita's feminine speech was neutralized in the eyes of the audience so that her utterances that contained fewer feminizing features got marked as non-feminine. None of the participants saw their own language use as feminine based on their definition of “real” feminine speech (i.e., not what is used in the media) mostly centering on “politeness” and “soft tones.” However, the extent of their perceived deviance from this type of femininity varied. Aya and Miku claimed that they usually do not speak feminine, while Sawa “wants to think” that she speaks feminine. For



Aya, feminine speech consists mainly of polite tender tones, and she does not see herself as such a speaker. It can be observed that she thinks she should be speaking in that way much more than she usually does, as reflected in her apologetic comment, *hontoo ni mooshi wake nai* [I am truly sorry] (Individual Interview).

On the other hand, Miku does not consider herself to be a feminine speaker who uses prototypical JWL features such as particles and tones: she sees herself as a “neutral” speaker who does not use either masculine or feminine speech style. Although her definitions of feminine speech were dynamically negotiated, especially in the data analysis, Miku tended to be concerned with the prototypical forms as much as Aya was, and much more than Sawa was, by applying her knowledge of feminine forms and masculine forms into the target utterances. Here, her definition of feminine speech was further narrowed down to JWL forms by dichotomizing the two styles in the metapragmatic discussion.

Sawa was the one who values soft, tender tones and interactive speech style over morphological forms among the three participants. Based on her definition of femininity she developed over the course of the research, her reaction to my question of “do you speak feminine?” differed from the other two to some extent: *omoitaidesu* [I want to think so]. Her positive answer derived from the overlap between polite speech and feminine speech; she thinks she speaks, or wants to speak, politely hence feminine. All three participants shared a positive attitude toward feminine speech that they defined respectively in a realistic term aside from the media discourse, mostly centering on “politeness” and “soft tones.” Interestingly, as the group discussion went on, the participants’ definitions of feminine speech developed a dichotomy within feminine speech: ideal, purified feminine speech and realistic, modern women’s speech. All three participants renegotiated their definitions of feminine speech respectively through the metadiscursive discussion, and placed the feminine speech styles observed in the drama in somewhere in between the two. The following conversation shows a discourse of linear history of JWL:

Sawa: *Kono, koo iu josee kotoba tte mukashi kara aru n desu ka ne.*

“Do you think this kind of JWL has existed in Japan for a long time?”

Aya: *Mukashi kara mochiron mukashi wa [...] hutsuu ni [...] ippan no ano jogakusee mo tsukatteta n ja nai ka na to watashi wa...Datte, iroiro ano, sooseki no hon toka yonde mo, koo iu kotoba zukai shiteru gakusee no onna no hito toka iru yo?*

“Of course, it’s been a long time. I think schoolgirls used to use it often in the past...You know, there are many female characters speaking that way in Soseki’s books, right?”

[Group Discussion]

Aya provided “evidence” of the imagined fact that JWL was actually spoken by women in the past by citing Soseki Natsume (1867-1916)’s books. This interaction suggested a discourse of purity of JWL that women in the past actually spoke feminine in terms of their purified image of JWL. Also, the participants articulated their real-life encounter with someone who speaks the purified JWL. Acknowledging that there are women who actually use JWL in modern Japan is based on the assumption that the pure JWL has been passed down to the present generation: they are “still” using it even though it has mostly “disappeared” by now. Following the above conversation, the participants also revealed

another dimension of JWL discourse: JWL is associated with Tokyo upper-middle class women who are “proper” or “neat” and “of a good upbringing.” Although they all reported that there are few women who actually speak JWL in their daily lives, the use of JWL by a Tokyo upper-middle class woman is “natural” hence unmarked. The discourse of JWL associated with Tokyo upper-middle class woman background women of other regional and class origins by naturalizing the use of JWL by such “selected” people.

Despite the perceived neutrality of presence of JWL speakers in the modern-day Japan, the image of feminine speech was generally discussed in two terms by the participants: the pure image of JWL in the imagined past and more modern, practical style of women’s speech. On one hand, the participants believed that there used to be the ideal form of JWL and that there used to be women who spoke JWL, while they acknowledged the perceived decrease of JWL use among modern women. The perceived decrease of feminine speech is generally targeted at the purified image of JWL rather than what they think is feminine speech in the intersection of contemporary trends and tradition. They regarded the decrease of JWL use as women’s convergence to men due to the changing social status of women in modern Japan. Moreover, the target of lament was not limited to the recent decrease of JWL but they shared a sorrow for its predictable future loss. Miku articulated:

Miku: *Nakunattara nakunatta de [.]. nan daroo [.]. sore wa sore de [.]. komacchau tte iu ka, nai hoo ga ii ka atta hoo ga ii ka tte ittara, atta hoo ga ii tte omou.*

“If JWL ceased to exist, it’s puzzling for me. If there is a choice between continuation and loss, I think it should continue to exist.”

TN: *Nichijoo seekatsu de?*

“You mean in your daily life?”

Miku: *U:n, komaranai kedo,*

“Um, I wouldn’t need it though,”

[Individual Interview]

Miku showed a contradictory, nostalgic feeling: even if she wouldn’t use JWL, she thinks JWL is still needed in her life. Also, Aya articulated:

Aya: *Bunka da mon ne, onna rashisa, nihon jin no onna rashisa, nihon josee no onna rashisa tte, bunka ja nai?*

“Isn’t it culture? Femininity, Japanese femininity, Japanese women’s femininity, I mean. Don’t you think it’s culture?”

[Group Discussion]

Initiated by Aya, all the participants agreed that feminine speech is a culture that has been passed down from the past: they cannot lose the precious culture (Hill, 2002).

Lamenting the possible future loss of JWL, the participants shared an essentialist discourse of feminine speech:

Sawa: *Watashi ga saisho kono dorama o mita toki ni mattaku josee rashii kotoba ni ki ga tsukanakatta yooni, koo jibun mo umare nagara ni shite, jibun wa tsukawanai kedo dokoka de shitteta kotoba datta kara iwakan ga nakatta n ja nai ka na to omotta node,*

“I didn’t notice JWL at all when I first watched the drama, I didn’t find anything unnatural, because I knew JWL somewhere inside me innately, I think.”

[Group Discussion]

Sawa believes in innateness of JWL as if: she knows JWL as she was born with the innate capability just because of her female sex; she did not notice JWL in the drama because it was too natural for her to mark.

Despite the lament and hope for continuity, they saw JWL as a vicarious language in the sense that they know they still wouldn’t speak it in their life:

Aya: *Watashi tachi ni nani ga dekiru kana.*

“What can we do?”

TN: *Dakara tte jibun ga hanasu yoo ni shiyoo to wa omowanai?*

“But you won’t try to speak it?”

All: *Omowanai.*

“No.”

TN: *Jaa joseego tte dare no mono nan deshoo.*

“Then, whose language is it?”

All: *(silence)*

[Group Discussion]

Despite their lament for the perceived decrease of JWL and hope for its continuity in the future, they saw themselves as inactive speakers of JWL, and were unable to answer the question: whose language is JWL? However, throughout the interview and group discussion, all of the participants showed a considerable affection to feminine speech and JWL and used the term “we” as a sign of solidarity among the people who share the language. Yet contradictorily, their articulations of lament, hope, solidarity and dilemma suggested that JWL is a vicarious language for the participants, which they still want to see, at least in the media if not in the reality.

Thus, metapragmatic narratives on JWL made by the participants showed several key discourses that emerged through their contextual negotiation of their own speech styles, modern sociocultural knowledge of JWL, and prevailing ideologies of JWL. Citing women in the media of the modern-day Japan takes advantage of the indexicality of the JWL, iconizing linguistic femininity of the speaker(s). Despite the semiotic value negotiated over time and the participants’ positive attitude toward JWL, their metadiscursive narratives reflecting discourses of purism and essentialism suggest that JWL does not necessarily have the same semiotic value in reality.

## 5 Discussion

On the participants’ perceptions that were directly reflected in their articulation, the (non-)use of JWL contributed to construction of (non-)femininity of the characters in the drama. One of the major factors constructing the characterological images of Tsuboi and Sugita was, among other visual and demeanor-based cues, the participants’ explicit language use. Specifically, Sugita’s social persona as an educated, elite woman of the modern temporality was attributed to her “polite” and (hence) “feminine” speech reified in her regular use of prototypical JWL forms. On the other hand, Tsuboi’s non-use of such

forms and style typically made more a non-feminine—or manly—impression on the audience. Especially for Aya and Miku, the relationship between the constructed social personas and language use was mutually contingent: the (non-)use of JWL indexed (non-)femininity while the (non-)femininity indexed the (non-)use of JWL at the same time. This mutually contingent relationship created the presumption for each character to speak in the way expected by the constructed social persona, and to behave in the (non-)feminine way the depicted persona would do for her speech style. In both directions, the characters' (non-)use of JWL appealed to the participants' perception of (non-) femininity.

One of the possible reasons for the use of JWL in general is economically-driven: the mere presence of the feminizing nature of JWL in someone's utterance would easily construct the character's persona to be projected in the context because of the sociocultural values attached to the JWL. Drawing from the shared sociohistorical expectation for JWL being spoken by upper-middle class, educated Tokyo women, the use of JWL by Sugita effectively constructed the image of modern elite woman in the participants' perceptions. On the other hand, the non-use of JWL by Tsuboi, contrast to the participants' expectation for Sugita using JWL, was also taken for granted by the participants for her depicted characterological image of woman of lower socioeconomic status. Despite the depicted variations in the speech style of each Tsuboi and Sugita, their characterological images were effectively constructed by the participants in terms of the (non-)use of JWL, as evident in their focus on the prototypical JWL forms in the analysis and generalizing remarks.

Each of the participants had varieties of criteria for judgment of (non-)femininity—either articulated or not—each of which gets foregrounded at times while backgrounded at other times, depending on the context. For example, Aya and Miku placed importance on sentence-ending particles and backgrounded the other potential factors for judging femininity in one scene, while they relegated the presence of feminine sentence-ending particles to the background in another. While this was seemingly caused by several factors (e.g., co-occurring JWL features, content of the utterance, situation, people, etc.) intersecting with each other, there was a certain number of common criteria articulated, especially between Aya and Miku. In spite of the presence of intrapersonal varieties of criteria to be highlighted in the given context, the interpersonally collective application of the same—or at least similar—criteria for femininity was attributed to the shared knowledge about JWL the participants have internalized socioculturally. The participants mentioned that generalizing femininity was difficult, suggesting they struggled somehow with dealing with the varieties that they consciously and unconsciously applied. Explicit generalization of femininity excluded unconscious application of their own criteria for femininity across different contexts (i.e., scenes), all resulting in contradictory explanations and generalizations.

Along with the variations of criteria and spontaneity of judgment, the notion of markedness was dynamically negotiated. The basis of markedness was always fluid and context-dependent, attributed to intergender binary (i.e., masculine vs. feminine), intragender binary (i.e., more-feminine vs. less-feminine), or inter-“world” binary (i.e., “ordinary people” in reality vs. media characters in the imagined world). The participants' choice of comparison basis for markedness was arbitrary and spontaneous, which was to be negotiated with the contextual information depicted in the scenes. Moreover, one's generalizing remarks were sometimes influenced by the other participants' articulation of their generalizations, resulting in convergence to the “mainstream” opinions (e.g., Sawa converted her criteria for femininity she articulated in the individual interview to the other two's in the focus group interview. Sawa's focus was

originally on interactiveness and pace for projection of femininity, but after being exposed to the other two's criteria in the group discussion she showed a converging stance agreeing with their criteria and put less focus on her original). Thus, the importance of contextuality was evident in these gaps and contradictions on various levels intersecting with each other.

Despite the importance of contextuality and their articulation that they do not use JWL in reality, it still plays an important role for projection of femininity on the perceptions of the participants in this study. In particular, the observable interpersonal and intrapersonal differences were yet explicable in terms of JWL of which each participant foregrounded different aspects in a given situation. The participants' perception of (non-)femininity and articulation of it were hence subject to the dynamism within the shared cultural knowledge, especially in their metapragmatic narratives and metadiscursive generalizations where the participants were cultural agents.

The participants' metadiscursive narratives revealed some contradictory discourses around JWL: discourse of JWL in the contemporary Japanese society and discourse of JWL as cultural heritage. In the articulation of these discourses, the imagined continuity of JWL was romanticized as a cultural heritage so was the semiotic value of JWL: an icon of an ideal woman. However, the participants also acknowledged the structural transformation of the Japanese society and the higher socioeconomic status of modern women, which naturalized the "masculinization" of women's speech to keep up with men. These two contrastive discourses make JWL a vicarious language, through which the participants appreciate the continuity of JWL in the future.

One of the emergent values of JWL in the contemporary Japanese society was a purified, romanticized nature of JWL and its history. In engaging themselves in metadiscursive discussion in the focus group, the participants shared the imagined linear historicity of JWL "developed" from the past and passed down to the present generation (Inoue 2002), and showed a positive attitude toward JWL itself. To the participants, even though the use of JWL has its pragmatic value in the media to the perception of femininity among audience, the use in reality is "almost gone" but can be spotted among a certain group of people, upper-middle class elder women in Tokyo: there are "still" speakers of the pure form of JWL. To them, the speakers are a relic of the good old past where JWL was used by all, or most, women, as if they maintain the historical memory (see Hanks 1999; Webster 2010) of the romanticized JWL. It is not just the use of JWL and JWL itself that are romanticized, but the speakers of JWL in the contemporary Japanese society are also given a positive value.

The modern socioeconomic and sociopolitical transformation around women has naturalized the women's conversion to men's social lifestyle and language use. As Miku articulated, Japanese women in the modern society "have choices" so they "don't have to behave as feminine as they used to be in terms of language and social activities" (Individual Interview). On the other hand, all the participants shared a discourse of JWL as a cultural heritage to pass down to the future generation for its positive cultural value. The intertwined relationship between these two contradictory discourses of JWL articulated in the metadiscursive discussions thus resulted in another discourse of JWL as a vicarious language (Inoue, 2006): the language used by someone else through which they project their own identity, but not through their own use.

The discourse of JWL as a vicarious language was articulated in multiple forms: a belief in the positive cultural value of JWL to be passed down as discussed above, and an essentialist-based hope for the continuity of JWL in the future. Unlike the perceived cultural value of JWL, the essentialist discourse of JWL as an innate ability of woman

“just like motherhood” ignores intentionality and agency of potential speakers while further romanticizing JWL as a unique nature of all Japanese women. Intersecting with the discursive “decrease” of JWL due to the sociocultural transformation of Japan for contemporary trends, the perceived mode of existence of JWL is in a dilemma: a lament for naturalized social phenomena and a shaky essentialist hope for continuity of JWL and its speakers.

JWL is always going through recontextualization by cultural agents engaging in metapragmatics and metadiscourses in the given temporality and spatiality for renegotiated semiotic values. The participants of this study are essentially cultural agents in terms that they themselves negotiate JWL with femininity and other social indexes as they are exposed to it either through mass-mediated texts or in their own speech. However, none of them was optimistic for the continuity of JWL in the future, which made them sad yet did not motivate them to actively maintain it in their daily lives. Despite their articulated appreciation of the “beautiful” JWL, they lack an active agency for maintenance but rely on the small number of “qualified” speakers of the modern temporality or on academic salvation of the “endangered” language.

## **6 Conclusions**

This study attempted to reveal the mode of existence of JWL that is always subject to recontextualization. Specifically, this study examined the construction of perceptual femininity in the mass-mediated texts of the modern temporality, which shows dynamism of contextual negotiations for femininity within the sociocultural information on semiotic values of JWL that the participants have internalized over time. Regardless of the observable interpersonal and intrapersonal differences for the perception of femininity, JWL contributes to the audience’s construction of characterological images in the drama by applying the varying degrees of JWL semiotics for femininity. This study also presented the vicarious nature of JWL to the participants. Although the discourse of purism of JWL associated with the linear history creates a sense of lament for the perceived “decrease” of JWL usage in the modern society, the metadiscursive value of JWL in the contemporary Japanese society naturalizes the “decrease” to masculinize modern women in the socioeconomic and sociopolitical transformation of the modern society. The complex interaction of this lament, the acknowledged cultural value of JWL, and essentialist hope for the future continuity is further negotiated with the naturalized “decrease” and creates vicariousness in the participants’ perception of JWL and its use.

Just like the difficulty the participants experienced in generalizing what consists of femininity to them, it is impossible to generalize the implication of this study to the whole population of modern Japanese women. Negotiation of JWL in relation to femininity and other indexes is never free from contextuality, subject to spaciality and the transformation of temporality. It is my intention that this study will serve as a preliminary study for future research to reveal how the recontextualized discourses of JWL are reflected in pragmatic values of JWL in the given spatio-temporal situation that play an important role for Japanese female speakers to negotiate the dynamism of maintenance and construction of identity.

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