Questioning the Extent to Which Adult Female Learners of Japanese as a Second Language Should Adhere to Japanese "Female Language" Conventions

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The present article means to briefly explore the ways in which certain sociolinguistic factors can be applied to considerations of second language learning contexts, particularly in contexts involving adult female learners of Japanese as a second language. As such factors have not been the subject of concerted research, the present article distinguishes and then expounds upon four factors that have been (a) identified in the literature and (b) discussed during the JALT 2004 conference presentation. As fodder for potential future research, cursory conclusions are drawn, and readers are encouraged to make informed choices regarding language choice in communicative acts.

　本論文では、第二言語修得において特定の社会言語学的要因の応用方法を簡潔に考察する。特に社会人女性が日本語を第二言語として学習する状況を見ていく。これらの要因はあまり研究されなかったため、本論文では先行研究から導いた要因と、2004年度のJALTの発表の中で討議された要因、計四つの要因の解義を試みる。結論の概要の中で、著者は、結論の概要から読者がコミュニケーションの際の言語使用の選択を認識し、的確な選択を推奨している。

One may say that a language originates from the community it facilitates, and as such, the language cannot be divorced from all that affects its composition and use. At some level, all languages require a basic manipulation of the features of grammar and vocabulary, but as the term "manipulation" implies, speakers have choices concerning which features they wish to use to express themselves. Communicative competence as discussed by Canale and Swain (1980) involves not only an adequate ability to deal with the grammatical, discourse, and strategic aspects of communication, but it also requires an adequate understanding of the social context in which language is used (Savignon, 1983). A number of sociolinguistic factors including a person's age, gender, and social status have even been identified as having a significant influence on the way a person chooses to communicate.

One explanation for why these factors seem to have such an effect on people's language choices is implied by the "socio-" prefix. We are ultimately social beings. The success or failure of our interactions with others is an important dynamic when forming or maintaining our self-concept. Guiora, Brannon, and Dull (1972) proposed the idea of *language ego* to account for the identity a person develops in reference to the language they speak. They explained that a person's self-identity is strongly influenced by language because it is through the communication process of sending out messages and having them responded to that such identities are continually

shaped, confirmed, and reshaped. However, discussions regarding the influence of these sociolinguistic factors have generally been confined to first language use.

The present article means to briefly explore the ways in which these sociolinguistic factors can be applied to considerations of second language learning contexts, particularly in contexts that involve adult female learners of Japanese as a second language (AFLJSL). As this topic has yet to be addressed in a systematic way in the literature and has not been an area of concerted research, this article aims only to identify and illuminate what has been found in the literature as well as necessarily include essential information and insights garnered from the presentation given at the JALT 2004 conference held in Nara, Japan, all as a means to providing researchers with potential starting points for future research. This presentation, which focused on the specific circumstances surrounding an AFLJSL (which includes both native and non-native English speakers), questioned the presentation audience members as to what extent such a learner should adhere to the conventions of "female language" in Japanese. Four key factors germane to this question were identified in the presentation and were then discussed. These factors were (a) age, (b) gender, (c) second language learners as opposed to native speakers, and (d) the distinctive features of the Japanese language.

The Four Factors

Age

A discussion of the first factor identified above regarding the stipulation of an adult versus a child second language learner is important to consider for two reasons. First, it involves the expectations of society on the linguistic performances of an adult. There is arguably less pressure on a child to perform accurately in a second language (for instance, in situations where the language learner does not feel that his/her language production is being overtly evaluated) in comparison to the expectations placed on an adult. This is because it is generally acceptable for a child to make both linguistic and sociolinguistic mistakes as a natural part of their learning process. In contrast, society tends to be less forgiving of an adult language learner's mistakes. Also, an adult second language learner often participates in a broader range of social settings where the influencing factors determining appropriate language usage demand consideration, and what is apposite may be more difficult to ascertain. The second reason for defining the distinction between adult and child stems from the fact that such a definition is indicative of a person who is assumed to no longer have the ability to acquire the second language as a native speaker would.

Gender

The second factor of gender can be seen as a distinguishing feature in almost all known languages. Each language has its own unique characteristics. However, the type of language deemed to be universally appropriate for females is, in comparison, typically more polite than its parallel version for males. A number of theories and explanations have been put forward to explain this phenomenon of a universal code for linguistic politeness. These have included arguments concerning social issues such as status, conservatism, and

solidarity (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Lakoff, 1975; Leech, 1983; Trudgill, 1983). Even so, it has been remarked that none of the theories presented so far have proven conclusive for all situations (see Cameron, 1988). Ide (1990) goes so far as to admonish that none adequately explain the characteristics regarding the use of linguistic politeness in Japanese.

Researchers such as Ide and McGloin (1990) and Wetzel (1990) propose that Japan is unique in many respects among the highly developed industrial countries. They assert that studies of women's language in the United States and Europe since the 1970s have predominantly been argued along feminist lines and have reduced differences to degrees of social power. However, Ide and McGloin argue that although feminism has not been without influence in Japan, neither has it revolutionized people's ways of thinking and living, including their ideas regarding appropriate language usage (Alder, 1978; Reynolds, 1990). Ide and McGloin also argue that assumptions about what it is to be a man or woman are viewed differently in Japan as compared to western societies where interaction is conducted on the basis of individualism and egalitarianism. They propose that instead of claiming the same status and role as men, Japanese women prefer a complementary version of status and role differences giving them equal dignity despite differences in form. They also maintain that social and psychological factors dependent on the gender variable in Japanese are complex and should not be reduced purely to questions of power and status. This explanation is not without its adversaries who still pursue more feministic-type arguments to explain the obvious gender differences (Jugaku, 1979).

Different authors depict a variety of concepts involved with the term "female language." For the present discussion this term is used to denote the kind of language women have been instructed prescriptively to use by society, or in other words, what has been considered "acceptable" language practices for women. Gender-exclusive features in Japanese date back as far as the eighth century to collections of poems known as the *Manyôshû*. Various other historical documents have also been testimony to the existence of and changes in female versions of the Japanese language. Included in such versions are the well-known novel by Lady Murasaki entitled *The Tale of Genji* and records that contain evidence of court ladies' language called *nyôbô kotoba* used around the fourteenth century (Ide & McGloin, 1990).

The Nature of the Language Learner

As the appearance of AFLJSLs "en mass" in Japan is a relatively new phenomenon, research has yet to begin providing perspective on female language choice and use by non-native Japanese females. However, from our experiences and observations, we would like to propose that the situation of such non-native learners, although in many respects similar to their native counterparts, presents a slightly new dimension to the sociolinguistic dynamics already at work in Japan. Being a second language learner of Japanese does not totally divorce foreign women from the need to be sensitive to what is considered socially acceptable for a female in various situational contexts. Regardless, two conditions that have a strong influence over the perceived success or failure of AFLJSL interactions with native speakers of Japanese may be advocated. These conditions are, namely,

(a) Japanese people as a whole are as of yet not used to non-native speakers being able to speak their language, which is compounded by (b) the outward appearance of the speaker (should they happen to look dissimilar from native Japanese in some way). Stated differently, the extent to which the non-native speaker appears physically similar to or different from native speakers could potentially influence interlocutor perceptions of interactions.

Due to these two conditions, we propose that the language used by a non-native female is subject to what may be termed an "emphatic effect." That is, although she is still offered the same spectrum of choices as a native speaker in terms of language use, whichever end of the polite/impolite language scale the speaker leans towards, that language is received as more of an extreme in comparison to the language as used by their native speaker counterparts. It was interesting and enlightening to hear the comments of the presentation audience members regarding this proposed phenomenon. Many agreed that the suggested two factors seem to have a significant influence on the way a foreign female's communicative acts in Japanese are received.

Nonetheless, some audience members suggested that stating only these two factors was oversimplifying a much more complex issue. A female Australian university lecturer of Japanese who attended the presentation said that from her thirty-year experience as a JSL learner, speaker, and educator, she has realized that she will never be accepted or viewed the same as a Japanese woman and therefore she no longer thinks it is appropriate to attempt to communicate in exactly the same way as a native Japanese woman. She commented on her preference to speak in a manner that

sets her apart as a foreign female speaker of Japanese. The general consensus of opinion among the foreign females who attended the presentation was that foreign women will never be considered equally with Japanese women, though it must be commented that the Japanese females in attendance were not in complete agreement with such a blanket assertion.

Linguistic Factors of the Japanese Language

Concerning the fourth factor, in modern Japanese, what is thought to be distinctive about appropriate female language can be broadly divided into two main categories, which are (a) the use of distinctive sentence endings in familiar speech and (b) vocabulary usage. Using these two broad categories, the following presents a short summary of the major distinguishing features between male and female language in modern Japanese as outlined by Ide and McGloin (1990), McGloin (1990), Niyekawa (1991), and Mizutani and Mizutani (1997).

Regarding sentence endings in female language, there are a number of choices depending on the word form at the end of the sentence. For instance, when using verbs and *i*-adjectives, both men and women use the plain form, but women may add *wa* for mild emphasis. The particles *ne* and *yo* are used by both men and women, though women also add them to *wa*. When using nouns and *na*-adjectives, women use the formal form of the copula *desu* or add *wa* to the plain form *da* as in *da-wa* as a means to be more emphatic. Likewise, the formal past form *deshita* is used, or *datta-wa*. The particles *ne* and *yo* are added to the above, but women also use *datta-wa* before *ne* or *yo*. The use of the emphatic *n-desu* becomes *na-n-desu* after nouns and

na-adjectives in polite speech. However, in familiar speech for women it becomes *na-no*. The particles *ne* and *yo* can also be added in such instances. In polite speech, requests are expressed by such sentence endings as *te-kudasai*, *te-kudasaimasen-ka*, and *te-itadakimasen-ka*. In familiar speech, the pattern *te-kurenai* is also used, although women tend to add *ne* at the end to soften the tone. When using the expressions of probability, *deshô* and *kashira* are used more often by women.

With regard to differences in vocabulary usage, women tend to use the more polite versions or choices as well as add the honorific prefixes *o-* or *go-* more frequently. Mizutani and Mizutani (1997) also argue that Japanese women are allowed to use more emotional expressions than their male counterparts and that there are other distinguishing features typical of traditional Japanese female speech such as high pitch and a greater range of undulation in intonation.

There are other issues involved with female Japanese speech to consider. As Adachi (2002) explains, speech form and style among Japanese women is not solely a matter of selecting sociolinguistic variables from a prescriptive hierarchy. It involves an interaction of perspectives, intuitions, established social positions, prescribed linguistic rules, and negotiated meaning. Japanese society is said to be in the midst of tremendous surface changes in behavioral culture, and changes in language usage can be seen as a part of this process. However, even in the Japanese society of today, there is still an obvious cultural tradition that can be seen which dictates the femininity or *onna-rashisa* expected of Japanese female behavior. Part of this expectation includes Japanese women's communicative choices.

Some authors like Dunn and Cowen (1993) state that in the framework of Japanese society Japanese women are "shy, demure, and doll-like" (p. 41), which, it may be argued, reflects their language use as well as their actions. However, it is important to point out that while possibly true, such a statement has been regarded as a blanket stereotype that no longer accurately depicts females in modern Japanese society. Furthermore, situations certainly arise where more unisex linguistic choices are appropriate and evident (Mizutani & Mizutani, 1997). Japanese women are increasingly adopting patterns formerly associated with men, thereby utilizing what was formerly peripheral or even taboo to the spectrum of what has been traditionally accepted as appropriate female language. To illustrate this point, they explain that a female candidate for the Japanese Diet is expected to speak in the same way as a male, that there is no expectation for a distinction to be made between males and females regarding language usage in business discussions, and that a female professor is expected to give her lectures in the same way as her male counterpart (i.e., use language that is not dissimilar to language used by men).

It should be noted that this assertion of Japanese females adopting male speech patterns was supported by two female native-speaking Japanese language instructors who attended the presentation. They also stated that while instructing in the classroom, they tend to use a more unisex type of language that does not distinguish them as women. Also, from casual discussions with female Japanese native-speaker educators regarding this issue of the use of male/female language distinctions in the workplace, we have determined there to be a general consensus of opinion that such

language use is situation dependent and is, to a large extent, determined by personal choice. However, in more casual situations, such as in personal conversations where language usage tends to be less formal, differences between the sexes are noted to become more glaringly apparent (Mizutani & Mizutani, 1997).

Furthermore, although some differences in opinion exist as to the exact situations or the actual degree to which changes have occurred regarding what is acceptable female language in Japanese, one may question that, even assuming changes have occurred and women presently utilize a broader spectrum of language than previously deemed appropriate, if the general expectation still remains for them to use a gentle, empathetic style more commonly than men, what is the image and the message being conveyed when they do not communicate in this register?

This question precisely addresses the point at issue for an AFLJSL and, by extension, the overarching theme of this article. If the aim of a communicative act is to facilitate socially acceptable communication experiences, what is the impression being projected when utilizing the variety of language choices available? Does an AFLJSL have a greater or lesser number of acceptable choices than a native speaker, and are the impressions imposed upon their audience through their language usage the same or different when compared to those projected by Japanese women? In other words, is an AFLJSL also expected to adhere to the changing but still extant sociolinguistic norms placed upon their native Japanese-speaking counterparts or are they in a separate category with a different set of rules and expectations?

Conclusion

Due to the lack of previous research and the admittedly limited scope of this article that simply attempts to tie together information uncovered in the literature and audience comments from a single presentation, it is our opinion that at this point in time, without previous research dedicated to the subject, no single correct answer can be arrived at regarding the main question of "to what extent should an AFLJSL adhere to the conventions of 'female language' in Japanese?" However, based on (a) our analyses of the literature as provided above, (b) the identification of the four factors listed above, particularly the latter two, and (c) the feedback received during the presentation, the "rule" governing linguistic choice is apparently decided by the individual language user. As described in the final two sections above, when compared to males, native Japanese females have a wider range of linguistic features to choose from, and, not unrelatedly, Japanese females must also be aware of the greater number of perspectives and instances to negotiate meaning that come with this greater selection of linguistic forms. Sooner or later, an AFLJSL should be taught (or learn independently) how native Japanese females function linguistically in society and decide for themselves via informed choices whether or not they wish to emulate their Japanese counterparts. Additionally, foreign females must also realize what the consequences of either choice might be. In short, non-native female users of Japanese must be aware of (a) the fact that there *are* choices available for language use, (b) what those choices are, and (c) the consequences of choice selection (i.e., how native speakers may view/react to the choices selected).

This last point about consequences of choice selection brings to light yet another factor that further complicates the situation. Even if linguistic choice becomes a matter of informed selection, an AFLSJL does not have a choice about being subject to specific societal expectations as a direct consequence of all of her specific characteristics: being an adult, female, a non-native speaker, and having Japanese as a second language, nor is she in control of how her choices in linguistic form are interpreted. Guiora et al. (1972) were referring to the first language acquisition process when they said that a person's self-identity is strongly influenced by the communication process of sending out messages and having them responded to. However, we believe this is equally true of a second language learning experience, especially as it is experienced by an adult in the target language country. Therefore, in order to facilitate successful communicative acts, we must be aware of the variety of influences affecting choice selection and choice interpretation so that we may make informed linguistic choices.

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