

Ambiguous boundary between women's and men's speech in the Japanese language in the use of polite expressions

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In my former paper dealing with women's language research in the English language,¹ I critically argued that the androcentric ideology had greatly influenced the findings of sociolinguistic research on sex differences in language use. I also pointed out that even feminist researchers had been affected by the androcentric ideology, and as a result they had conspired to reinforce stereotypes of women's language. In this paper, first of all, I would like to critically examine some sex difference research and stereotypes of women's speech drawn from these studies in Japanese sociolinguistics. Then by discussing my research results which seem to be showing sex similarity between women's and men's speech, I would like to try to foreground the actual boundary ambiguity between men and women in order to undermine the man/woman binary division.

1. Sex differences in the Japanese language

The relationship between language and sex is probably one of the most extensively reported fields in Japanese sociolinguistics. Ide (1986) argues that unlike sociolinguistics in English, the basic assumption of sociolinguistic research into the Japanese language is that language is different from individual to individual, rather than from group to group.

This means that researchers do not begin their research by looking into the varieties of language used by people, grouped by some pre-established categories such as social class, sex, etc. (Ide, 1986, 283)

What Ide, a leading feminist sociolinguist in Japan, suggests is that sociolinguistic research

¹ Mizokami (2001).

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in Japanese has not been based on the androcentric man/woman dichotomy which has been dominating the sociolinguistic research in English. However, as I shall discuss in detail later, many sociolinguistic studies of the Japanese language including Ide's own study (1990) are based on the assumption that men's language and women's language are distinctly different. In other words, Japanese sociolinguistics is also influenced by the man/woman dichotomy: the method of Japanese sociolinguistics has usually been to compare the language use of men as the norm group with that of women as a deviation group.

Various aspects of sex differences in Japanese have been investigated. Interestingly, findings through sociolinguistic research on women's speech in the Japanese language have been extensively similar to those of English. Typical findings are, for instance, that women tend to employ 'honorifics' to a greater extent than men (Hori, 1986, Endo, 1999). Women tend to be at one level more polite than men (Ide, 1990). Moreover, certain sentence-final particles are said to be associated with speaker's sex. The semantic function of female related sentence particles such as '*wa*', '*no*' and '*kashira*' make a statement soft and polite, whereas male ones such as '*zo*', '*ze*', '*sa*' and '*na*' suggest self-confidence, assertiveness and confirmation (Ide, 1982, McGloin, 1993, Honda, 2001). Women use the sentence-final particle '*wa*' with a rising intonation, which is a device of giving options to the addressee, like English tag questions. This device is said to be the speaker's attempt to reduce the strong sense of insistence because women are not supposed to talk in a strongly assertive manner (McGloin, 1990; 1993). As for a lexical level, the use of certain first person pronouns such as '*watashi*', '*watakushi*', '*atashi*', '*atakushi*' are reserved for females, while '*boku*', '*jibun*', '*washi*' and the more aggressive '*ore*' are used only by males. Also, the use of particular second person pronouns such as '*omae*', '*temee*' and '*kisama*' are restricted to men, whereas women are not allowed to use them (Loveday, 1986, Kanemaru, 1993, Ide, 1990, Ozaki, 2001).

Not only have their research findings been similar to findings in English sociolinguistics, but so have the explanations attributed to them. The linguistic behaviour of women in Japan has been similarly interpreted as the symbolisation of femininity as well as of inferiority. The greater use of politeness expressions, for instance, is often explained as follows: women speak more politely than men because they want to present themselves as in higher social position, or because they want to be regarded as more refined (Hori, 1986).

Interestingly, this 'status consciousness' explanation is almost the same as that of Trudgill's.² Regarding women's inferiority, Ide (1993, 8-9) claims that the idea of considering women's language as inferior does not actually apply to the Japanese sociolinguistics unlike English sociolinguistics. Rather Ide (1993, 10) argues that Japanese sociolinguistics considers women's language as different. As can be seen, this argument is just the same as the arguments between the dominance approach and difference approach.³ Whether women's language is seen inferior or different, the result would be the reinforcement of the man/woman dichotomy.

'Not assertive, but overly polite and tentative' women's language has been found in various pieces of research as I have discussed above, and certainly this has become rooted as 'common sense' or 'truth', or what I would like to call 'the Dominant Discourse' in this paper, within the language and sex difference research in Japanese sociolinguistics. However, similar to the case of English-speaking women, many Japanese women deviate from these stereotypes in many situations. Uchida (1993, 156) argues that a look at any transcribed text could tell us whether an utterance is made by a male or female without listening to the voice. Then the Dominant Discourse in Japanese sociolinguistics would assert that the utterances such as the following are typically men's language.

- (1) A: *Gohan tabeta?* (= Have you eaten (lunch)?)
B: *Un, ie de kuttakita.* (= Yeah, I had at home.)
- (2) *Ah, ketsu ni ase kaita.* (= Oh, my bottom is sweaty.)
- (3) *Omae, damattore!* (= You, shut up!)

However, all of these expressions above were uttered by actual female college students

² Trudgill states that women speak in a more standard way than men. He explains this as women being more status conscious than men (Trudgill, 1975).

³ The 'dominance' approach sees women as an oppressed and marginalised group, and interprets linguistic differences in women's and men's speech as a reflection of men's dominance and women's subordination. On the other hand, the 'difference' approach emphasises the idea that women and men belong to separate subcultures to which no pejorative value should be attached. The sex differences in language use are interpreted as reflecting these distinct subcultures. If one takes the 'dominance' approach, there is a risk of degrading women as passive victims whose cultural forms have no positive attributes. By contrast, if one opts for the 'difference' approach, one seems to ignore the political questions of actual male dominance in society whilst posturing objectivity. In the end, neither approach can be politically advantageous for women (See Mizokami, 2002).

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whom I happened to witness in the college where I am working. In (1), the person B uses the verb '*kuu*' which is usually considered a vulgar form of the verb '*taberu* (= to eat)'. In (2), the Dominant 'women speak politely' Discourse in sex difference research would claim that women do not use the expression like '*ketsu*', a vulgar form of the noun '*shiri*' (= bottom); instead women should say '*oshiri*', which is a polite form of '*shiri*'. In (3), the Dominant 'women's language' Discourse often says that the use of '*omae*', a Japanese second person pronoun, is restricted to males. In fact, I can ubiquitously see that female students in my college use the above expressions both to males and females. Thus it can be said that similar to the case of English sociolinguistics, 'polite' female speakers should be seen as merely a stereotype and do not always represent reality. It is important to note that the androcentric ideology has influenced both English and Japanese sociolinguistic research almost in the same way: the Dominant 'women do not speak in assertive, but polite and tentative ways' Discourse has been rooted in both English-speaking and Japanese-speaking countries.

2. A critical assessment of the Dominant 'women's language' Discourse in Japanese

Now I would like to show how the androcentric ideology has affected the Japanese sociolinguistic findings on sex differences. As has been pointed out earlier, one of the most common research findings about women's language is the politeness of women's speech. Let me consider the validity of the Dominant Discourse within Japanese sex difference research, which is, 'women speak more politely' Discourse. Amongst many studies which found sex differences in the use of polite forms, or 'honorifics', I shall take up the works conducted by Ide (1990) and Hori (1986), as influential representatives of these studies. Ide's work (1990) is based on the survey conducted by Ide et al. in 1986. According to Ide (1990, 66), the survey they conducted involved asking 256 men and 271 women in Tokyo about their use of polite linguistic forms. The men were mostly businessmen and the women were mostly housewives. The survey asked the subjects which linguistic forms they would use for the different types of addressees. The politeness levels of linguistic

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forms which the informants reported that they would use for various types of addressee are shown according to sex in Table 1. Numbers indicate average scores of politeness, 1 being least polite and 5 being most polite. Ide (1990, 67) reports that for 9 types of addressee out of 12, women would use more polite linguistic forms than men. Ide concludes that this numerical evidence shows the women's use of more polite linguistic forms.

Types of addressee	Men	Women
a. Child	1.39	1.15
b. Spouse	1.41	1.85
c. Delivery person	2.19	2.39
d. Friend	2.15	2.55
e. Workplace inferior	1.91	2.39
f. Same-status colleague	2.41	2.45
g. Neighbour	3.72	3.25
h. Spouse's friend	3.53	3.99
i. Parent at P.T.A. meeting	3.83	3.5
j. Instructor of hobby group	3.99	4.31
k. Daughter's or son's professor	4.19	4.4
l. Workplace superior	4.31	4.39

Table 1: Degree of politeness level of linguistic forms used for types of addressee (cited from Ide, 1990, 66)

Ide's finding actually supports the general public's common sense about women's politer speech. However, I found that the subjects of the survey by Ide et al. in 1986 were rather partial. Although Ide (1990) did not give us information about her subjects in detail, I found out that the ages of informants were from 42 to 60 for the men, and from 40 to 62 for the women. Thus the informants are all middle-aged or older. As I pointed out earlier, my casual observation of college students suggests that young female speakers do not seem to be using much of the alleged women's language. Likewise Endo (1999, 109-110) reveals that women in their 40s use more honorifics than women in their 20s and 30s. This being the case, it can be assumed that older women such as Ide's informants use more polite forms than young women. Therefore it should be important to investigate the language use of younger women before reproducing the Dominant Discourse of 'women speak more politely than men' which would result in reinforcing the man/woman binary division.

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On the other hand, Hori's study (1986) is also based on the survey conducted by Ide et al. in 1986. In fact, Hori is one of the members who conducted that research. Based on Hori (1986, 375-377), Japanese predicates can be divided into two states, 'plain' and 'polite', each conveying the same information but differing in stylistic and social connotations. She divides Japanese verbs into two portions: 'base' and 'ending'. To sum up, a Japanese verb can be separated into two portions, 'base' and 'ending', each having two states, 'polite' and 'plain'.

Hori (1986) focuses on the use of the verb '*iku*', which usually means 'to go'. She categorises the verb variants into four groups according to the degree of politeness. In combination with the suffix '-u', the stem '*ik-*' can form a plain base, '*iku*'. If the stem '*ik-*' is followed by an honorific suffix '-are-', the result is a polite base, '*ikare-*'. There are other stems, such as '*irassha-*', '*oidenina-*' etc. which are 'honorific' by themselves. They form 'honorific' (polite) bases as well. These are designated as <+H>, which means the base is 'honorific'. When the stem '*ik-*' is used without an honorific suffix, it forms plain bases. They will be described as <-H>, meaning the base is not 'honorific'. The same designations can be given to the ending. If the ending contains an honorific auxiliary '-mas-' or an honorific copula '-des-', it will be regarded as <+h>, meaning the ending is honorific. If the ending has neither of them, it will be considered as <-h>, meaning the ending is not honorific. Thus the verb '*iku*', in its dictionary form may be designated as <-H, -h>, the least polite form, meaning both the base and the ending are non-honorific. On the other hand, when both the base and the ending are honorifics, it will be categorised as <+H, +h>, the most polite form. If a verb has honorifics either in the base or in the ending, it will be categorised as either <+H, -h> or <-H, +h>. In this way, the variants of the verb '*iku*' are divided into four categories.

Hori (1986) investigates which of the four categories is used by male and female speakers in her data in speaking to different kinds of addressees. Table 2 shows the case of speaking to a person with whom both female/male informants are commonly associated.

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category of people	spouse		son/daughter		sibling		friend		neighbour		son's/daughter's teacher/professor	
	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<-H, -h>	98.16	61.11	99.56	99.65	72.09	75.90	65.57	26.92	3.39	7.81	0	0.57
<+H, -h>	1.23	10.49	0.44	0	0	7.23	5.74	46.15	0	27.34	0	1.14
<-H, +h>	0.61	22.22	0	0.35	25.58	14.46	21.31	10.44	25.42	15.63	4.76	0.57
<+H, +h>	0	6.17	0	0	2.33	2.41	7.38	16.48	71.19	49.22	95.24	97.71
N =	163	162	229	289	43	83	122	182	59	128	63	175

Table 2: Informants' choice of variants of *iku*, classified according to the existence/non-existence of honorific morphemes in the base and ending (Categories of people common to male/female informants) (cited from Hori, 1986, 381)

Hori (1986, 380) concludes that there is virtually no sex difference in the choice of verb variants made by males and females when speaking to their son/daughter and to their son's/daughter's teacher/professor. When talking to neighbours and siblings, men actually tend to be more polite. In contrast, when talking to friends, men tend to favour the least polite form, whereas women tend to use slightly more polite forms. She then argues that the biggest difference occurs in relation to 'spouse'.

While almost all men (98.16%) use <-H, -h> towards their wives, wives use more polite forms, in addition to the least polite forms in <-H, -h>, towards their husbands. It is worth noting in this table that the added sum of <+H, -h> and <-H, +h> of wives (32.71%) far exceeds that of husbands (1.84%). This figure suggests that wives treat their husbands much more politely than vice versa. (Hori, 1986, 380)

Hori's data above shows that women speak more politely than men in regard to spouse and friend in everyday interactions in which both men and women commonly participate.

Next, Hori (1986) analyses the case of speaking to a person with whom each sex of the informants is separately associated.

informant's sex	male				female			
	work-place subordinate	same status colleague	business client	work-place superior	delivery person	parent at PTA meeting	instructor of hobby group	spouse's superior
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<-H, -h>	80.60	46.97	7.27	1.65	31.25	2.86	0	0.64
<+H, -h>	0.50	3.03	0.91	0.83	21.25	27.62	0.88	0
<-H, +h>	16.42	40.15	16.36	7.02	36.25	6.67	0.88	0
<+H, +h>	2.49	9.85	75.45	90.50	11.25	62.86	98.23	99.36
N =	201	132	110	242	80	105	113	156

Table 3: Informants' choice of variants of *iku*, classified according to the existence/non-existence of honorific morphemes in the base and ending (Categories of people different in each sex of the informants) (cited from Hori, 1986, 382)

By examining Table 3, Hori (1986, 383) argues that for females there is no category spoken to using the least polite category <-H, -h> most frequently. Even a 'delivery person' is most frequently spoken to in the more polite <-H, +h> forms. She then claims that these findings support the common impression that women use more honorifics than men.

[T]here is no one, except children, to whom women can safely use forms which apparently lack politeness, for the reason that none of these people, even 'delivery person', are not clearly ranked below the housewife in social status. (Hori, 1986, 383)

Hori (1986, 384-385) speculates that since men need to be regarded as capable, powerful, energetic and trustworthy especially in the workplace situation, they use fewer honorific verb forms, whereas housewives have no such place. The different choice of linguistic forms made between males and females comes not from their *sex per se* but from different role-relations in society. This explanation parallels the 'difference' approach which claims that women speak differently from men because each sex belongs to different subcultures. This argument may result in strengthening the androcentric man/woman dichotomy which works to maintain male hegemony. Indeed, if Hori (1986) had compared the language use

of men with that of working women, she might have concluded that men's language and women's language are similar and that there is no clear-cut boundary between them.

Ide's work (1990) and Hori's work (1986) both support the 'women speak more politely' stereotype and the 'women speak differently from men' stereotype. Nevertheless, I would argue that because of the age range of their informants and the disparity between sexes in terms of occupation, they reached such a finding to support the Dominant Discourse of female speech. In this sense, feminist linguists in Japan, even unconsciously, have been accomplices in reinforcing the man/woman dichotomy as well as feminist linguists studying the English language. To undermine the man/woman binary opposition, I shall now try to show the actual boundary ambiguity between the women's speech and men's speech based on my own survey result.

3. Boundary ambiguity between men's language and women's language

My experience as a college teacher has suggested to me that young female speakers frequently use so-called men's language. In order to support my impression that the boundary between women's language and men's language is actually becoming ambiguous and thereby to weaken the man/woman dichotomy, I conducted a survey on the use of honorifics by my college students. To facilitate comparison with previous studies, my survey was deliberately based on the method used by Hori (1986) and Ide (1990). The subjects in my survey were 82 female students and 62 male students attending K College in Aichi Prefecture. Their ages ranged from 18 to 26.

I asked questions to all these students individually or in groups, the questions being based on a questionnaire, during the months of May and June, 2002. The questions were (1) what variant of '*iku*' do you usually use when asking '*itsu-iku-ka*' (= When do you go?)' to each category of person? Write one variant for each category; (2) Do you use honorifics in your daily life? If yes, to whom do you use them? Question 1 was the same as that asked by Hori (1986) and Ide (1990), although the categories of person were modified from theirs in accordance with the students' contemporary life styles.

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3.1. Discussion

Taking Question 2 first, 87.1% of males and 91.5% of females answered that they use honorifics in daily life, whereas 12.9% of males and 8.5% of females answered that they never use honorifics in daily life. Most of them said that they use honorifics when talking to customers of their part-time workplaces, part-time workplace superiors, college seniors, college teachers and other people who are older than themselves. Thus it would appear that there is no marked sex difference in answers to this particular question in the sense that the majority of both males and females reported that they do speak politely to certain people in certain contexts.

Now let me analyse their answers to Question 1. As I have noted, Ide's and Hori's informants were mostly businessmen and housewives. In my case, provided that the students, both males and females, do not have such different social roles in terms of sex as Ide's and Hori's informants, I gave all of them the same ten categories of people in answering the question beforehand. These categories are: parents, older siblings, younger siblings, friends, seniors at the college and part-time workplaces, juniors at the college and part-time workplaces, bosses at part-time workplaces, college teachers, college administrators and neighbours. All the variants of '*iku*' used for these categories of people have been sorted into four groups according to Hori's (1986) classification. The result is displayed in Table 4. As I told them if they did not have or they did not usually communicate with a given category of people, they could leave the category blank, the numbers of people who answered to a given category differ, as is shown in the table (see the N row in Table 4). For ease of comparison, the form of the table is the same form as Hori's.

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category of people	parents		older siblings		younger siblings		friends		seniors at college & work	
	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<-H, -h>	100	100	100	100	100	100	98.4	100	8.2	11.4
<+H, -h>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<-H, +h>	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.6	0	82.0	86.1
<+H, +h>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9.8	2.5
N =	62	82	49	58	51	64	62	81	61	79

category of people	juniors at college & work		bosses at work		college teacher		college administrators		neighbours	
	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<-H, -h>	96.7	94.6	6.9	1.4	11.7	7.3	13.1	0	11.5	2.5
<+H, -h>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<-H, +h>	1.7	5.4	58.6	76.4	56.7	70.7	68.9	70.4	65.6	82.7
<+H, +h>	1.7	0	34.5	22.2	31.7	22.0	18.0	29.6	23.0	14.8
N =	60	74	58	72	60	82	61	81	61	81

Table 4: Students' choice of variants of *iku*, classified according to the existence/non-existence of honorific morphemes in the base and ending

Let me first mention that when talking to parents or older and younger siblings, 100% of men and women chose <-H, -h> category. Obviously there is no sex difference here. When

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talking to friends, 98.4% of men and 100% of women chose <-H, -h> category: the difference between the sexes is negligible here unlike the case of the Hori's informants. When interacting with their juniors at the college and workplaces, 96.7% of men and 94.6% of women chose the <-H, -h> category. Here again, the difference between the sexes is insignificant.

However, if we focus on the use of <+H, +h> category by either sex, some interesting features can be found. When talking to their seniors at the college and their workplaces, their juniors at the college and their workplaces, their bosses at their workplaces, college teachers and neighbours, men claimed that they use the <+H, +h> category, the most polite form, much more than women. Especially when interacting with bosses and college teachers, men's use of <+H, +h> category far exceeds women: 34.5% of men and 22.2% of women claimed to use <+H, +h> to their bosses at part-time workplaces, and 31.7% of men and 22.0% of women said they use <+H, +h> category with college teachers. This tendency indicates that male college students may use more honorifics than female college students contrary to the Dominant 'women use more honorifics than men' Discourse. This finding could also undermine the women's 'status consciousness' stereotype — that women speak more politely than men because they want to be regarded as more refined. The result of my survey does not support the common idea that women are more status conscious than men: if women were more status conscious and they were bound up with the idea of feminine speech, my female informants would have written expressions categorised as <+H, +h> more. It can then be argued that the women in my survey do not appear to be as status conscious as the Dominant Discourse claims, or that younger women may not be so tied to the idea of women's language than older women.

In terms of the added sum of the use of <+H, +h>, <-H, +h> and <+H, -h> categories, which refers to the overall use of politer forms, women slightly exceed men in interacting with the five categories of people: 'juniors at the college and workplaces', 'bosses at part-time workplaces', 'college teachers', 'college administrators' and 'neighbours', whereas men slightly exceed women only when talking to 'friends' and 'seniors at the college and workplaces'. One might be led to argue that overall women use more honorifics than men. However, in fact it is difficult to definitely conclude that women use more honorifics than men by only looking at this tendency since the differences in rates are very small except

for the 'college administrators' category.

I would speculate that the reason why 13.1% of the male students yet 0% of female students claimed that they would use the least polite form <-H, -h> in talking to college administrators is that the number of male students in K College is so small⁴ that college administrators easily remember them and frequently talk to them to foster a friendly relationship. If so, then this suggests that the degree of familiarity may also affect the speaker's choice of linguistic form. This will be one of the topics of my future research.

Comparing the result of my survey with those of Ide's and Hori's, it is rather plausible to conclude that male students and female students do not notably differ in the overall use of honorifics towards a certain type of addressee. That I cannot find any definite signs of women's politer language use amongst my informants may suggest that the boundary between the men's and women's language use is actually ambiguous at least in terms of the use of honorifics and at least among the younger generation.

Next, in the table above one can easily notice that no one claimed that they would ever use the <+H, -h> variants of *'iku'* such as *'ikareru'*, *'ikareruno'*, *'irassharu'* and *'irassharuno'*. Accordingly I counted their overall frequency of the use of the variants of *'iku'*. I found that there are only 13 variants of the verb that more than 1% of either males or females claim that they would use. They are *'iku'*, *'ikuno'*, *'ikun'*, *'ikunda'*, *'ikuyo'*, *'ikuga'*, *'ikimasu'*, *'ikimasuka'*, *'ikunsuka'*, *'ikun(o)desuka'*, *'ikaremasu'*, *'ikaremasuka'*, *'ikarerun(o)desuka'*. Of these 13 expressions, *'iku'*, *'ikuno'*, *'ikun'*, *'ikunda'*, *'ikuyo'*, *'ikuga'* are <-H, -h> expressions, whereas *'ikimasu'*, *'ikimasuka'*, *'ikunsuka'*, *'ikun(o)desuka'* are <-H, +h>, and *'ikaremasu'*, *'ikaremasuka'*, *'ikarerun(o)desuka'* are <+H, +h> categories respectively. No stems which are honorific by themselves such as *'irassha-'* and *'oidenina-'* could be found in my informants' reported use of the verb *'iku'*. That the variation in young people's polite forms is limited may indicate that young people use honorific expressions less than old people. In short, it could suggest that young people overall, including young women, do not speak politely compared with the older generation, including older women.

Tables 5, 6 and 7 show the results of counting the students' overall use of the variants. Variants used by both males and females less than 1% are categorised altogether as

⁴ At the moment, there are only about 70 male students in K College, whereas there are more than 600 female students.

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'others'. Let me first show their use of <+H, +h> category, the most polite expression, to see if women really speak more politely than men.

variant	men	women
itsu-ikaremasuka	9.0%	5.3%
itsu-ikarerun(o)desuka	2.6%	3.8%
itsu-ikaremasu	1.2%	0.5%
others	0%	0%
total	12.8%	9.6%

Table 5: The students' use of <+H, +h> category

There are no expressions exclusively used by males or females here. The sum of the use of <+H, +h> category is: men 12.8% and women 9.6%. If we only looked at this result, we might be led to conclude that men's speech is more polite than women's speech. However, as the difference is very small, it is more plausible to claim that there is no explicit difference among male and female use of the most polite expressions.

Next I shall display the result of their use of <-H, +h> category, or less polite form.

variant	men	women
itsu-ikimasu	6.7%	1.2%
itsu-ikimasuka	8.6%	6.7%
itsu-ikun(o)desuka	13.0%	31.8%
itsu-ikunsuka	4.9%	0.1%
others	0.4%	1.1%
total	33.6%	40.9%

Table 6: The students' use of <-H, +h> category

The sum of the use of <-H, +h> category is: men 33.6% and women 40.9%. Here women's use of the category exceeds men's. In particular, the women's use of '*itsu-ikun(o)desuka*' far surpasses men's use of it. This may suggest that women prefer less polite expressions such as '*itsu-ikun(o)desuka*' rather than the most polite expressions. The overall sums of <+H, +h> and <-H, +h> categories, or honorific expressions are: men 46.4% and women

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50.5%. Again this result may not strongly suggest the Dominant 'women's language' Discourse which claims that women speak more politely. Furthermore one may note that there are no 'men only' expressions here.

Regarding the informants' use of <-H, -h> category, which is the plain form, the following results were obtained.

variant	men	women
itsu-iku	23.6%	9.7%
itsu-ikuno	19.5%	37.2%
itsu-ikun	4.9%	2.4%
itsu-ikunda	1.2%	0%
itsu-ikuyo	1.2%	0%
itsu-ikuga	1.1%	0%
others	1.9%	0.3%
total	53.4%	49.6%

Table 7: The students' use of <-H, -h> category

As can be seen, males' use of 'iku' exceeds females', whereas the females' use of 'ikuno' exceeds males'. The sentence-final particle 'no' in the expression 'ikuno' has been attributed to only females in the Dominant 'women's language' Discourse. However, as can be seen in the above, males use the expression quite frequently. I could then say that the sentence-final particle 'no' is not sex categorical as it has been claimed. Rather it is used by both men and women regularly, making the boundary between men's language and women's language ambiguous.

By contrast, the sentence-final particle 'da' included in the expression 'ikunda' is often attributed to men within the Dominant Discourse of sex difference research in sociolinguistics. The result above certainly shows that this expression only appeared in male's use of the verb 'iku'. However it is not persuasive to deduce through my survey that the sentence-final particle 'da' is exclusive to men as only 1.2% of males claimed that they would say 'ikunda'.⁵ The expression 'ikun' is a dialect-based informal expression used by people

⁵ In fact Kobayashi (1993) reveals that high school girls often use such expressions as 'ikunda' and 'ikumokane' which have been attributed as males (Kobayashi, 1993, 188).

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around the Nagoya area of Japan (Aichi, Gifu and Mie Prefectures). It seems that the expressions '*iku*' and '*ikuga*' are also dialect-based expressions used by people in the Okumikawa area in Aichi Prefecture and Toyama Prefecture respectively, according to the students who used the expressions.

The sum of the overall use of <-H, -h> category, the least polite category, in terms of sex are: men 53.4% and women 49.6%. Here again it can be said that women and men do not extensively differ in their frequency of the use of the various expressions of '*iku*'. In addition, it can be said that there are no obviously sex-exclusive expressions of the verb among the young students.

In conclusion, the boundary between men's language and women's language appears to be quite ambiguous, at least among the younger generation as represented by the subjects of this survey and as concerning the use of this set of honorifics. Thus my survey result suggests that young men and women do not notably differ in their use of polite expressions. Having obtained this result, I conducted a small group interview with the students on what they think of men's and women's languages to find out about their perception about so-called men's and women's languages. The interview was conducted in September 2002. The informants were students in my discussion seminar class: they consisted of 3 males and 11 females, all freshmen. I asked various questions about sex differences in language, and let them articulate their opinions freely during the 90 minute period. The discussion was held in Japanese. Let me cite some of their opinions as expressed during the discussion in my English translation.

Myself: First of all, does anyone think that men's language and women's language are different? I mean, about the people of your generation or otherwise.

Mr. I: I've never thought of such a thing . . . The difference between men and women?
I don't think there is much linguistic sex difference for our generation. Men do not always talk roughly.

Mr. H: There are men who talk very tenderly.

Ms. Y: I agree with you. I think some TV dramas and novels sometimes exaggerate the linguistic differences between the sexes too much.

Myself: Can you give us any example?

Ambiguous boundary between women's and men's speech

Ms. Y: Ah, for example, sometimes in novels, women use the sentence-final particle '*kashira*'. But I've rarely seen a woman who talks like that in reality.

Myself: I also have another example. In the TV family drama 'Wataru seken wa oni bakari', the mother in the Okakura family used to talk in honorifics to her husband. The mother was perhaps in her 60s. What about your parents? Does your mother use honorifics when talking to your father?

Many: Never!

Mr. I: I can't imagine my family members talking in honorifics to each other.

Ms. A: My grandmother in her 70s doesn't talk in honorifics to my grandfather.

In this excerpt, we can see that one of the subjects (Mr. I) first mentions that he has not been so aware of the clear-cut distinction between men's language or women's language in their daily lives. However, Mr. I's and Mr. H's words suggest that they unconsciously link men's language with roughness and women's language with tenderness. In other words, though they seem to think that there is not much difference between the sexes in reality on the one hand, on the other hand their comments imply that they know what men's and women's languages should be like. One student (Ms. Y) points out that some TV dramas and novels tend to rely on stereotypes, not real men and women talking, which may be affecting the perception of the students such as Mr. I and Mr. H.

Myself: Suppose there is 'men's language'. What kind of linguistic expressions can you think of?

Ms. Y: The sentence-final particles '*ze*' and '*zo*' sound masculine.

Ms. A: Yes, something like '*ze*', '*zo*' and '*da*' seem to be men's language.

Myself: So are they only used by men? Women never use expressions such as '*itsu-ikunda*' and '*iku-zo*', for example?

Mr. I: My mother does.

Ms. K: Yes, some women do use such expressions. But when women use them, they may sound rough.

Ms. A: Yes. When I was a junior high school student, I used some masculine expressions. And then my mother and my older sister told me not to use such

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expressions.

Mr. I: There were some girls who referred to themselves '*boku*' or '*ore*', the same as boys in junior and senior high schools.

Myself: What kind of girls were they?

Mr. I: Like boyish girls, and athletic girls who were as muscular as boys.

Mr. H: Like girls who want to compete with boys!

Ms. A: But some normal pretty girls also called themselves '*boku*' or '*ore*'.

Ms. Y: Yes. And some girls referred to themselves as '*ora*' or '*oira*' like a boy!

Ms. K: And also I know some girls who referred to themselves as '*washi*'!

Mr. I: I often call myself '*washi*'.

Mr. H: I usually call myself '*washi*' or '*ore*' to my friends. I use '*boku*' to older people. And I use '*watashi*' when writing a formal report.

Ms. A: Yes, it depends on the situation.

Myself: What about '*omae*'? '*Omae*' is usually considered men's language. Does anyone use '*omae*' when talking to somebody?

Ms. A: I sometimes use it.

Mr. I: My mother regularly uses it!

Ms. A: My mother doesn't. She uses '*anta*' instead.

Ms. O: I use '*anta*', too. But I never use '*omae*'.

Mr. I: After all, all people speak differently depending on personal circumstances. My mother often uses masculine expressions perhaps because my family consists of all men except herself.

Ms. Y's and Ms. A's comments suggest that they have internalised some image of men's language. During the discussion, the informants realised that the use of same words and expressions is often taken differently depending on the speaker's sex in society. Then the informants tentatively reached the conclusion that people may speak differently depending on context irrespective of sex. Their discussion points towards the conclusion that there is in fact no absolute difference between men's and women's language, rather that the boundary between men's and women's language is re-marked according to the contexts at all times.

The following comments suggest that the Dominant 'women talk more politely' Discourse

has not been so deeply internalised by the younger generation.

Myself: Are there any boys around you who use women's language?

Ms. S: Mr. H!

Mr. I: Mr. H!

Myself: So you talk the most politely of all boys around you, Mr. H?

Mr. H: I don't know.

Mr. I: I didn't mean that Mr. H talks politely. He never uses honorifics. Speaking of politeness, Mr. T uses honorifics with everyone, even with people of his own age. I don't know why. I don't like to be talked to like that. I feel like he is making a fool of me by using honorifics.

Myself: So what did you mean when you say Mr. H uses women's language.

Mr. I: Well, I mean his way of speaking is just gentle.

Ms. S: Mr. H's way of speaking sounds friendly. He seems to be listening well.

Ms. K: He often chimes in during conversation saying '*sou-dayone*' etc.

Ms. Y: And his voice is soft.

Mr. H: But I never use honorifics with anyone, even with older people.

Mr. I: He can't use honorifics! He talks in a plain form even with college seniors and others whom he meets for the first time.

From this extract it seems that the informants do not particularly link women's language with politeness or the use of honorifics. Rather some of them link women's language with other aspects such as a soft voice or a gentle way of speaking and with listening. These aspects have not hitherto been investigated to any great extent but ought to be investigated in further research. The result of the interview suggests that whereas young men and women may think that men and women do not differ so much in their actual use of the language, they do have some notion of men's language and women's language.

In this study I only focused the use of polite expressions by a small group of college students, and I could not find any clear-cut difference between men's and women's speech. However, the possibility remains that female students may start using so-called women's language after they graduate from college and become adult members of society. It would then be very helpful to conduct a similar sort of survey with people aged somewhere

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between the young informants in my survey and Hori's and Ide's considerably older informants, namely people aged 25-40, in order to more strongly support the claim that modern women and men are not so different in terms of their language use.

4. Conclusion

I have argued that the androcentric man/woman dichotomy has influenced the findings of sociolinguistic research on sex differences in language use. The Dominant Discourse of 'women's language' within sociolinguistics, assertions of which include: 'women speak more politely than men' and 'women speak differently from men', is in fact a product of the androcentric ideology. As the basic assumption in sociolinguistic research is based on the 'men as the norm, women as deviation' criteria, most of the linguistic studies on sex differences have centred on one specific aspect, that is, to determine differences in male/female speech. In so doing, both traditional linguists and feminist linguists have cooperated in producing and reproducing the Dominant Discourse of women's language, which is generated out of the androcentric ideology. In other words, they have, hand in hand, maintained the male/female division which justifies women's further oppression by proving men's alleged superiority and women's inferiority through their research.

It is necessary to realise that finding male/female categories of division in sociolinguistic research may reinforce the androcentric ideology which functions to maintain the hegemony of men in society. Thus one of the ways to weaken the man/woman dichotomy, is to prove 'sex similarity' or 'boundary ambiguity' between men and women, and to prove the characteristics of it.

The results of my questionnaire survey of my students' use of polite expressions and of my interview with students suggest that the language of female students and that of male students do not remarkably differ and that the boundary between them is ambiguous. Although the Discourse of 'common sense' or 'truth', or the Dominant Discourse in society asserts that women speak differently from men and that women speak more politely than men, I could not find any apparent evidence to support the claims of the Dominant Discourse of 'women's language'. In other words, I would suggest that the boundary between

women's language and men's language is always being re-marked. In this way, if future researchers can demonstrate boundary ambiguity between men and women in many fields other than language use, it then may be possible to weaken the man/woman dichotomy which has been deeply rooted in society.

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