

【研究例会 IN ハンガリー発表】

Gender in Japanese Language Textbooks: Modern Society and Teachers' Awareness***Terumi Mizumoto**

*日本語訳あり

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1. Introduction

For students of Japanese, textbooks are not only a means to learn the language, they also play an important role in learning about Japanese society and culture. Among students outside Japan who have no actual experience of living there, there is especially a strong likelihood that they will accept the images of Japanese people and society portrayed within their textbook as real depictions of modern Japan. However, descriptions influenced by concepts of traditional gender ideology can be found in many of the textbooks now widely used in Japanese language education. For example, many of the young female characters appearing in Japanese language textbooks continue to use what are known as “female sentence-final particles” in spite of the fact that such particles have disappeared from conversational, plain-form Japanese speech in actual everyday use. This unnatural language usage has remained uncorrected for some time now in textbooks.

In order to grasp what sort of awareness Japanese language instructors who are using these textbooks in an pedagogical environment have regarding gender, and to see how they are teaching it, I conducted a survey via questionnaire of 200 Japanese language educators. Where the survey revealed an outstanding difference between the answers given by instructors in Japan and Korea and those in Europe was in the section covering the use of female sentence-final particles. In this paper, I aim to find out how Japanese language instructors have grasped the results of research into female sentence-final particles in textbooks done by Mizumoto et al. (2009), and well as investigating how they are teaching these particles in the pedagogical environment. Furthermore, I will consider why textbooks have been so sluggish in reacting to changes in the language, and put forward a proposal for textbooks in the future.

2. Previous Studies: Comparative Analyses of Japanese Language Textbooks and Natural Speech

The main research into female final-sentence particles began in the Nineties. Prior research has reported that use of final-sentence particles such as “~wa” and “~kashira” is in decline (Kobayashi, 1993; Ozaki, 1997; Nakajima, 1997; Ogawa, 2004). The data on natural speech used for these researches were collected from the early to mid Nineties, so as a period of ten years sees a generational change, Mizumoto (2006) decided to collect her own original data between 2004 and 2006 (for details of the survey methods, see previous research).

The female sentence-final particles covered in the previous research (Mizumoto, 2006) were mainly narrowed down to four varieties that are regarded as now having all but disappeared from the casual, plain-form speech of young women in their twenties and thirties, namely “~wa (yo/ne)”, “~kashira”, “N¹ + ne/yo”, and “~no yo”. Then, as a result of data gathered from 36 female speakers of standard Japanese in their twenties, thirties, and forties, Mizumoto et al. (2009) were able to confirm that the average usage rate of female sentence-final particles across the three generations was just 5.26%, and among women in their twenties it was a mere 2.36%. Seven of the survey subjects did not use the particles at all. The survey also revealed that even in cases where they were used, it was deliberately as a joke, sarcasm, or when quoting the speech of older female speakers.

On the other hand, there is little research on female sentence-final particles used in the majority of

textbooks, with Kawasaki and McDougall (2003) the only research published before this author's own research to use precise, original data. Other than that, Suzuki (2007) and Thomson and Iida (2002) have pointed out that the decline in usage of female sentence-final particles is not being properly reflected in textbooks, but both papers lack adequate subjects for analysis and data numbers.

Mizumoto (2009) then examined a total of 39 different teaching materials published from 1994 to 2006 — 12 beginner and intermediate level Japanese language textbooks, 8 covering listening comprehension, and 19 for the Japanese Language Proficiency Test or Examination for Japanese University Admission for International Students—and confirmed that the average usage rate for female sentence-final particles in them was between 54.42% and 79.42%, which is between 10 and 15 times higher than actual natural speech. Furthermore, data was obtained from previous experiments (Mizumoto et al. 2007b) that showed that, unless specifically taught otherwise by their instructor, 70% of young students who did the speaking and listening practices in those teaching materials would then try to use the female sentence-final particles just like the conversation examples in their textbooks.

3. Surveying Japanese Language Instructors' Awareness and Analyzing the Data

Between June and July, 2010, I conducted a questionnaire survey of 200 people involved in Japanese language education (118 in Japan and South Korea, 82 in Europe), and then analyzed the results. For details of the survey method, please refer to Mizumoto (2011, 2013a). In the survey, I first checked whether or not the instructor was up to date on the current state of Japanese society, and then tried to discover what sort of awareness and opinions he or she had regarding the problems surrounding gender in textbooks. In the survey, I divided up the statistical data into two groups for analysis, A) Japan and South Korea, and B) Europe². Few differences were observed between the two groups in the majority of categories covering such areas as the image of Japanese women and their work, and the image of Japanese housewives and families³. However, where a startling difference was seen was in the awareness and opinions on female sentence-final particles. In this research, I will perform a comparative analysis of the survey results concerning female sentence-final particles where the differences were conspicuous, and examine the latent gender bias that the results indicate.

In response to a question in the survey regarding whether or not the instructor was aware that female sentence-final particles are no longer being used in natural speech by young women as mentioned above, 91% of instructors in Group A answered that they were aware, whereas in Group B the number was 76%, and of those who answered “not aware”, 85% were women over 50. Judging by their ages and the fact that they had at least 10 years prior experience of living in the Tokyo Metropolitan district, where standard Japanese is spoken (and where female sentence-final particles were mainly used in the past), it is thus fair to assume that since moving overseas they have spent time in an environment where they are unable to notice changes in the speech of younger age groups of women in Japan.

When I then asked the instructors whether or not the textbooks should contrast male and female sentence-final particles, 84% replied that it was necessary. As reasons for this, around one third of the total respondents gave answers such as “The particles are a characteristic of Japanese,” “They are necessary for politeness and in business,” and “I want the differences between male and female speech to be preserved”, and of the remaining two thirds, the majority of opinions given went along the lines of “The particles are used in novels, manga, TV dramas, and movies,” “There are still older people who use them,” “I teach them as an aspect of Japanese knowledge, and it's important to be able to understand them when you hear them.” From this, it can be seen that most instructors understand the current situation regarding their usage (that older women still use the female sentence-final particles), and that knowledge of them is necessary for understanding literary and film creations. However, with regard to the opinion in the first one third that “they are necessary for politeness, and in business,” one has to question whether a speaker would actually be using female sentence-final particles (which are more commonly used in casual conversations) in a business situation. Moreover, if the instructor “wants the differences between male and female speech to be preserved,” is there not a strong possibility that latent gender-biased thinking is influencing their ideas about the

linguistic roles of men and women?

A difference between Groups A and B was also observed in how instructors felt about the use of female sentence-final particles in speech by young female characters in textbooks, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Use of female sentence-final particles in speech by young female characters in textbooks

Residence	Approve	Should not be used depending on age and situation,	Should not be used by young people
a. Japan/S.Korea	29%	63%	8%
b. Europe	61%	37%	2%

Around two thirds of the instructors in Group B approved, compared to less than one third of Group A. In contrast, around two thirds of instructors in Group A replied that depending on the speaker's age and/or the situation the particles should not be used, whereas only a little over a third of Group B gave the same response. From these results, it can be seen that Group A instructors, in Japan and South Korea, clearly recognise that the younger age groups of women do not actually use these particles. Among the reasons they gave were, when young women use them, it is "unrealistic and unnatural," "students want to study how Japanese people in the same age group speak," "usage in textbooks should be natural and match real life," "stereotyped women's language in textbooks is a problem that could lead to gender problems," and "there is a concern that this incorrect awareness arising from overuse in textbooks will cause gender problems." It can therefore be surmised that instructors in Japan and Korea are well aware that teaching textbook usage of sentence-final particle that runs contrary to actual use among younger age groups is in itself a gender problem.

On the other hand, even though 76% of Group B instructors in Europe were aware that younger age groups do not use female sentence-final particles, two thirds of them contradictively replied that they approved of their usage in textbooks. Reasons for this were variously given as, "I feel it's odd when women talk the same way as men," "Female students who do not use female sentence-final particles will create a bad impression," "I want these beautiful, soft, feminine words to remain as part of Japanese culture," and "I feel that using these particles is orthodox Japanese." A latent conceptual bias influenced by gender ideology can clearly be identified in these opinions.

4. Thoughts and Conclusions

Based on the results from the survey described above, I was able to confirm the following points.

- 1) Regardless of where they currently reside, most instructors are aware that Japanese women in younger age groups are using female sentence-final particles less and less now.
- 2) Many instructors in Europe approve of the use of female sentence-final particles by young women, and the influence of gender ideology can be recognized in many of those cases.
- 3) The majority of instructors living in Japan and South Korea teach female sentence-final particles as an aspect of Japanese knowledge, and feel that it is necessary to teach them to students so that they can understand them if heard.
- 4) Whatever the case may be, instructors who think that the younger generations should not be actively using female sentence-final particles are demanding natural language usage in textbooks that reflects reality.

New editions of some of the textbooks featured in this survey were published in the middle of the 2000s. However, while topics presented in the later versions were brought up to date, the use of female sentence-final particles by young women characters was still high, ranging from 64% to 74%. Why is it that, in spite of being language textbooks, they were not updated according to current language usage with attention paid to changes in speech? Do the producers of these textbooks maintain a strongly-rooted

perception that female sentence-final particles equal a unique characteristic of Japanese which in turn equals an aspect of Japanese culture that they must preserve? Or does it come from a belief that the middle-aged and older generations are more influential linguistically than younger people? Even if, hypothetically, that were the case in society, is there any reason in textbooks to make young students learn expressions that are already disappearing from actual use?

Included in the replies to the questionnaire was the opinion that the use of female sentence-final particles by young women in textbooks should be tolerated because the books “must present archetypal examples.” It is certainly true that archetypal examples are easy for students to understand and assist comprehension. However, surely gender ideology does not have to be included in that? Should we as teachers continue to pass down traditional stereotypes, and should we also, based on the rather misguided assumption that the age groups which use female sentence-final particles are still the mainstream, ignore linguistic expressions that are changing and continue to change?

If a textbook has to show female sentence-final particles, then it is sufficient for students to recognize them in speech or text and understand their meaning. Showing examples in textbooks in which young characters deliberately use these particles is meaningless, and practice drills that force young students to use them will conversely only end up causing confusion in the learner. It would be appropriate if the use of female sentence-final particles in textbooks is limited to characters in age groups that actually use them, and make students aware that in the fictional world of novels and movies the particles are used to fulfill a particular function.

At the end of the questionnaire I asked the Japanese language instructors whether a Japanese language textbook that paid attention to gender and gender problems was necessary, to which only one person answered that they deemed it unnecessary. Around 65% replied that they thought it was necessary, from which fact we can conclude that now is perhaps a good time for a textbook to be produced in which young female characters do not use female sentence-final particles. As my next research topic, I would like to investigate what sort of expressions young women are actually using in the place of traditional female sentence-final particles, and then put forward a model for a textbook that takes gender problems into consideration.

Footnotes

1. “N” refers to substantives, such as nouns and pronouns. ([Back to text](#))
2. For results of the survey of instructors in Group A (Japan and South Korea) regarding female sentence-final particles, please refer to Mizumoto (2011). ([Back to text](#))
3. In the results of the survey covering both Japan/South Korea and Europe, for details of women’s jobs see Mizumoto (2013a), and for the portrayal of Japanese families see Mizumoto (2013b). ([Back to text](#))

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Note: As for the list of the investigated textbooks, please refer to the chart that is indicated on the last page of the Japanese paper.

(日本語訳)

日本語教科書におけるジェンダー：現代社会の実情と教える側の認識

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キーワード：日本語教科書、女性文末詞、日本語教師、ジェンダー・イデオロギー

1. はじめに

日本語学習者にとって、教科書は言語を習得するためだけではなく、日本社会や日本文化を知る上でも重要な役割を果たす。特に、日本社会での実体験がない海外における学習者にとっては、教科書に描かれる日本人像や日本社会像がそのまま現在の日本の姿であると受け取られる可能性が高い。現在、日本語教育において広範に使用されている教科書の多くには、従来のジェンダー・イデオロギー的な観念に影響を受けた描写が認められる。例えば、現在は実社会で普通体によるくだけた会話において、従来の“女性文末詞”が既に消滅しているにも拘わらず、多くの日本語教科書の中の若い女性登場人物に今もなお使用され続けているという「不自然な言語使用」が長年改善されずに引き継がれている。

[目次に戻る](#)