

【日本語ジェンダー学会ウエスタン・ミシガン大学研究例会発表要旨】

**Stylistic Differences dealt in Teaching Japanese**

立松喜久子

I used to teach at the Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies administered by Stanford University. It is a one year intensive course for American and Canadian graduate students who are majoring in Japanese history, literature, religion, art, business, politics and various fields concerning Japanology.

I taught grammar of classical literature of Japanese and history as well as Japanese in general, including listening and reading comprehension. I also taught formal expressions including honorific and polite expressions so that the students wouldn't be thought to be "inappropriate", "impolite" or "rude" in the future when they mingle with the educated, sophisticated (if there are any) Japanese people.

They must behave and talk like Japanese, they must be accepted by the Japanese so that they are valued positively. Of course, many dialects and different vocabularies and pronunciations exist in Japanese, though I value highly the varieties of the Japanese language, there are received pronunciations and vocabularies for formal situations which are acceptable by most Japanese people.

As for informal conversations it rarely matters if they make mistakes or if they speak too politely, I presume. Think about the case of English. When you meet the dean at the university for the first time you may say "How do you do, sir" instead of saying "Nice to meet you". So we haven't taught informal expressions except when they appeared in the dramas and literature. We taught them how to comprehend slang and vulgar words only at comprehension classes.

Of course there were some students who said that they had been criticized by their Japanese friends saying the students were too polite and gave the impression of being cold. However, I thought that they must be encouraged to use the socially relevant variety of Japanese. The norms are not static and the politeness in Japanese has been decreasing drastically in these 40 years, though.

There are many well-informed people who deplore saying that the Japanese Language is being debased in these days. The evidence is :the omission of "ra" of the potential form .e.g. instead of "taberareru" they say "tabereru". These phenomena appeared for the first time about 40 years ago, but it is now considered a correct inflection. I think it owes to the Osaka dialect which prevails now and is very popular among young people of Kanto area.

In Japan the big change in the usage of Japanese has occurred since the 1970s, the time when the student movements were rampant. They were:

- 1) the difference between men's speech and that of women's was drastically reduced and
- 2) the politeness in the language also decreased.

On the other hand, excessively polite expressions are heard at department stores and so on because the manuals for salesclerks to speak to the customers are thought to be polite, but the person who wrote the manual didn't know the correct usage of honorific expressions. I was surprised to have been asked my name, saying "onamaesama wa?" ("May I have your revered name, please?")

As far as politeness is concerned, Japanese Language is going to two extremes. Very casual expressions and overly polite expressions. Prof. Shimemura talked about the ending particle in which the difference between men and women appears to decrease in casual speech. It is called "blurring " or "androgynous" phenomenon.

I too, recognized the disappearance of ending particle "dai, kai" from men's speech. "Dai "is used with "wh " questions like daredai, dokodai, itudai, doredai, nandai, and "kai" is used in the questions which anticipate yes or no answer, but these ending particles are seldom heard among the young people nowadays in Tokyo area. However, they are heard among the dialects especially spoken by elderly people. Instead, young men use "no" at the end of sentences like "ikuno""aruno". So if a young man say "ikukai" instead of "ikuno", it sounds as if he is old before his time or, he seems to be speaking a dialect.

It's also important to pay attention to the intonation. Another ending particle "wa "varies according to the speakers like "ikuwa" by women, (with rising intonation) or "ikuwa" by men (with falling intonation).

Depending on the situation, a word can have quite a different meaning. For example, "sensei" which means a teacher, instructor, or professor, may be used pejoratively. I once heard a man say about one of his workers "Ano sensei, nani yattenda!" ("What is he doing, that fellow!") Thus, an utterance reflects speaker's birth place, the place where he or she was brought up, his or her social stratum, or feelings, to whom the utterance was spoken, the place where the utterance was performed, etc.

Illiteracy is confined to a very few in Japan, (by the way, the rate of the students who go to the senior high school exceeds 97% of the students who graduated from the junior high) and I could say that Japanese people are almost unanimous in comprehending and speaking a common Japanese, (kyotsugo) not standard Japanese (hyojungo) though their pronunciation are quite bit different. Dialects are diminishing rapidly and are excluded from business society, academic society , and politeness society. Dialect is thought to be non-standard and can connote various degrees of inferiority. On the other hand, the dialects are occasionally highly estimated and are used effectively in the drama or etc.

Of course, the diminishing of the difference between men and women' speech owes to the thought that both men and women are equal, however, Prof. Takeshi Shibata dislikes the idea that it was affected by the feminist movement. And Prof. Sachiko Ide (sociolinguist on women's language) said the difference between men and women's speech is not the gender difference but it's ROLE DIFFERENCE. So, if one speaks in the commentary

program in the TV, he or she speaks almost the same, there isn't any gender divide. Because the degree of politeness is almost the same, women don't speak too politely, and men don't speak too harshly.

However, there remains the fact that women are treated unfairly, and the language, as Professor Mizue Sasaki pointed out, is spoken behind in the society, or thought in the people's bosom without saying it aloud. Subconsciously these discriminations underlie both men and women.

Actually, the tardiness of the improvements on the women's promotion, raise of salary, participation in the society are obvious. These de facto gender discriminations must be reformed ASAP. As Robin Lakoff said, "Language uses us as much as we use language." Inequality exists in the language as well as in the reality.

(立松喜久子 前米加大学連合副所長、日本語ジェンダー学会評議員)