

Article Review

Constructing Women's Language and Shifting Gender Identity through Intralingual
Translanguaging by Eriko Sato

Dr. Eriko Sato is currently a professor at Stony Brook University in New York in the Asian and Asian-American Studies department. She has a Ph.d in Linguistics and teaches translation studies, language acquisition and Japanese language and linguistics. This article was published in "Theory and Practice in Language Studies," Vol. 8, No. 10, pp. 1261-1269, October 2018. This paper covers the use of "women's language (onna kotoba) and the use of gender-sensitive first-person pronouns such as: *watashi*, *atashi*, *boke*, *ore*, *jibun*, etc. I believe this can be partially related to a book by Kittredge Cherry, *Womansword: What Japanese Words Say about Women*. Both of these are related to how the Japanese language shapes individual identities of Japanese women. Just like many other languages, Japanese has many words that are considered to be feminine. While not innately bad, they can deliver a sense of being less than, in this case being lower on the social ladder than men.

In Dr. Eriko Sato's article, she first covers the many variations of Japanese language based on the user's personal attributes. Attributes such as: age, gender and occupation to list a few. These different language variations are closely tied with one's own group identity. It's difficult however to understand these identities. Dr. Sato uses Tracy's multifaceted model of identity to analyze the group identity of those that use Japanese women's language. Tracy proposes four identities: master, interactional, personal and relational. Master is a social category relating to a person's gender, age, race, ethnicity, national and regional origins. Interactional is related to a person's specific role, such as teacher, mother, wife, customer, etc. Personal identity is based on a person's unique traits, such as honesty, hotheaded, gossipy, etc. While relational identities is based on the relations a person has another person in specific situations.

Next Dr. Sato goes into the specific Japanese words that are women's language (onna kotoba, josei-go, fujin-go). The various words that are only really used by women and are expected of women to use such as pronouns, honorifics, interjections, etc., as well as avoidance of more masculine words and expressions. Based on some of the oldest texts from Japanese history, this phenomenon of gendered Japanese language is relatively new. The Kojiki, a text written in the early 8th century, contains a depiction of a dialogue between a male and female deity that has both using the same grammatical structure and wording outside of the use of male and female identifying pronouns. Dr. Sato lists two major theories for when the linguistic features of women's language first arose. According to Inoue (2002) women's language took form in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Through Teyo-dawa (schoolgirl's language). Schoolgirls in this context refers to the daughters of elite families during the Meiji period (1868-1912) that were able to afford secondary schooling, the highest education available to women at the time. This accounted for less than half a percent of the female population in Japan around 1900. Even though only a very small percent of the female population received education on this style of speech, it spread throughout Japan by means of various forms of media: novels. Newspapers, magazines, etc. These medias created a new image of the ideal modern woman in Japan. Another argument for the origin of women's language is from Endo (1997, 2008) crediting court ladies' language. Court ladies' language began in 14th century Japan within the imperial courts. The characteristics of court ladies' language make it sound much more polite, elegant, and pleasing to the ear because of the avoidance of Sino-Japanese words which have a much stronger sound associated with them.

During the Meiji Period, Japan's society went through a major shift. Transitioning from both premodern into modern and feudalism into capitalism. This modernization of the country

quickly brought with it changes to the old traditional roles of women within Japanese society.

Japanese society was still very male dominated however. Education afforded to women was mostly to instill their subservient role to men and to create ryosai-kenbo (good wives and good mothers). Japan during this time was highly militaristic and expected men to go off to serve the country in war while women served at home.

The last topic that Dr. Sato touches on is the use of gender-sensitive personal pronouns. The typical male pronouns are ore, boku and washi, while typical female pronouns are atashi and atai. Another typical female pronoun is watashi and watakushi but both are also used by males in formal situations. Within popular media such as manga and anime there are female characters that use ore and boku but are typically portrayed as more vulgar. Outside of media there are some schoolgirls that use the more male pronouns within their own groups. Also, within the LGBT communities there is a lot of variation with the use of the pronouns.

Dr. Sato concludes that women's language in Japanese is a construct of society instead of being the result of physiological or psychological nature. It created the large gap that is currently in the male-dominated society of Japan during critical points in its history. That schoolgirl language and court ladies' language were used collectively to construct women's language. Further research will be required however to the creative and critical mindset that starts translanguaging practices.

The evolution of the Japanese language from what it was, into the highly gendered language that it currently is has been quite a journey. It would be nice to have more examples of speech of males and females from before the court ladies. Speech that wasn't a depiction of conversation between gods as well, but I understand that not many books have survived from

that far back. Overall though I really enjoyed the piece. The history of how gendered language for females spread through the use of popular media is really insightful of how popular culture can make change on a large scale. A few of the main resources that Dr. Sato used are:

- 1) Tracy, K. (2002). *Everyday talk: Building and reflecting identities*. New York: Guilford
- 2) Inoue, M. (2002). Gender, language, and modernity: Toward an effective history of Japanese women's language. *American Ethnologist* 29.2, 39 -422.
- 3) Inoue, M. (2006). *Vicarious language: Gender and linguistic modernity in Japan*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press.
- 4) Okamoto, S. & J. S. Shibamoto-Smith. (2016). *The social life of the Japanese language: Cultural discourses and situated practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 5) Endo, O. (2008). The role of court lady's language in the historical norm construction of Japanese women's language. *Gender and Language* 2.1, 9-24. doi:10.1558/genl.v2i1.9.
- 6) Endo, O. (1997). *Onna no kotoba no bunka-shi [Cultural history of the women's language]*. Tokyo: Gakuyō shobō.