

METAPRAGMATICALLY ENGAGING WITH GENDER NORMS IN JAPANESE LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

PONTUS ANDERSSON

University of Helsinki

Abstract

This paper examines gender biases in a number of textbooks for Japanese as a foreign language, and differs from other forays into the subject by focusing on the presentation of language and on metapragmatic engagement. After an extensive literature review to situate the reader in scholarly linguistic discourses on gender in Japanese, the paper attempts to tentatively answer the question: How are linguistic gender norms managed and presented in textbooks for Japanese as a foreign language? It does this by contrasting Japanese as described in scholarly work with textbook representations of the same, as well as through comparing the textbooks themselves. In this early-stage analysis, I find that the different textbooks have different strategies for presenting gendered forms, characterised by a mix of gender blindness and prioritising male audiences of learners over female ones. This may have consequences for teachers' and students' opportunities for metapragmatic engagement with textbook materials in classroom contexts, as well as for students' lives once they leave the classrooms.

1. Introduction

Speech is often considered a rather personal matter; how one speaks is most times ideally thought of as one's own business, and is considered an expression of identity. Students who study foreign languages, however, realise how much any such statement means venturing out on some very thin ice. To study a language not one's own native tongue is to be fit into a mould, with or without reflexive much thought on that reflexive process. Here, reflexive refers to "reflexive positioning" of oneself in conversation (Davies and Harré 1990: 48). And learning a new language can be a confusing business. In the case of Japanese, one has to contend with seemingly arbitrary norms of gendered speech. And with "one", I mostly mean women learners. One book even starts immediately positing rather concrete prohibitions on how women are to speak by avoiding the first-person pronoun *boku*, and how others are to avoid labelling them with the suffix *-kun*, the latter of which is roughly analogous to the more widely known *-san*, but according to one textbook never used with "women or elders" (Association for Japanese-Language Teaching 1998: 1). At the same time, other textbooks conspicuously ignore the gendered dimensions of some parts of the language, such as Banno et al. (2011a; 2011b), such as the aforementioned suffix *-kun*. Barring recent and radical sociolinguistic change in Japan (which this author has seen no evidence for), it is possible to ask if this risks stranding learners in ambiguous territory.

For the aforementioned reasons, in this paper I undertake a tentative exploration of how a number of Japanese textbooks represent gendered speech and commonly gendered lexical items. This is accomplished through a small case study of a number of textbooks, and a review of the literature on the subject of gender in both Japanese and textbooks, although as we shall see the two are rarely combined, and there is some need to update our knowledge in

the light of more recent literature.

My aim here is to use the content of a selection of Japanese language textbooks to explore how they provide tools for learners to adapt to (or reject) linguistic gender normativity in Japanese. Attention will be paid to the presentation of gendered vocabulary and gender stereotypes in grammar and honorifics, as these constitute the different tools provided to men and women in the form of the varieties of options to use in their language, and how these contrast with other descriptions of Japanese in scholarly writing. These tools are not only different in the sense of being tools across a range, but also different in that men and women as learners are often not offered the same set of tools. I will conclude with remarks on how textbooks can and should be the objects of metapragmatic engagement, and while this is likely the case in many classroom settings, these ideas have not made a significant crossover into academia and how textbooks are considered with regard to how they represent and teach gendered speech.

Gender in daily life is seen as a naturalised position considered immanent in the gendered existence of the speaker. In many cases, such a stance translates with little or no friction. In other cases, where expectations related to gender are widely different across communities of speakers, some degree of conscious, self-reflexive adaptation or rejection may take place, whether the linguistic forms and systems themselves vary or not. In this way, Japanese is not different, except in how it is often perceived and described as a highly gendered system.

This topic is also relevant to the implied opposition between public gender norms and the private sphere of speech as a personal or individual act, with textbooks forming a part of the public discourse on speech, while actual language use is tied to a concrete person. Compare how gendering in policies “are informed by presumptions about gender” as studied by the social sciences (e.g., Hearn and McKie 2008, from the perspective of policy). At the same time this conflict can also be thought of as mirrored at the level of the personal language user, as how an individual speaks can easily be thought of in terms of private and public faces, creating a conflict between public and private ways of speaking, and how teaching must cover both of these for learners to achieve higher levels in the target language. Adding to all of this, the sense of transgression some learners experience when being expressly told to speak in a certain way or another – or to actively avoid some forms for no other reason than their gender – can constitute public discourse dominating their choices on something seen as a private expression of individual identity.

Textbooks are only one small part of a teaching curriculum, but as normative materials they can be assumed to have an effect on classroom environments, even if that effect may be impossible to predict as pointed out by Sunderland et al. (2000). So, if predicting the effect is actually impossible, why look at textbooks at all? While textbooks are only a small part of language teaching, they do form a part of the ground against which students and teachers build their language. In that sense, while whether a teacher engages in subversion or endorsement of a given text may be critical to how the text is received, *what* they are actually subverting or endorsing could matter a lot for how we eventually evaluate learning outcomes.’

2. Literature review

Here I will overview the scholarship on gender in Japan and in the Japanese language, studies

on gender in textbooks and teaching, metapragmatics, and my chosen method of critical discourse analysis (CDA) in the context of educational practices.

2.1 Previous research concerning linguistic gender in Japanese

Textbooks are very much a part of the construction of knowledge, which concerns on one hand feminist linguistics such as Okamoto's (1997; 2011) and Okamoto and Shibamoto Smith's (2008) work on how femininity is constructed, both publicly in everyday life and in scholarly debate. It also concerns more general attempts at describing what linguistic competence really is, such as Coseriu (1985), who points out that many characterisations miss what he calls "knowledge of different discourses" which he connects to the micro-discourses of how to carry oneself in actual interactions, something which to a considerable degree involves the ability of a speaker to manage gender norms. This also ties into the notion of Butler's (1999) gender performativity and Goffman's (1959) presentation of self. However, leaving the more general aside, in this section I review briefly and systematically the salient point of the discussions to date of gender in Japanese. The exception will be gender in Japanese textbooks, which is taken up in section 2.2 on textbooks.

To understand the point(s) of departure for modern depictions of gendered language in Japanese, one must understand the background of the Japanese research and discussions of gender and language from a historical perspective as well as from scholarly debate. Research on gender and language in the context of Japanese has typically concentrated on 'female' or 'feminine' or 'women's' language, and has either largely acted to naturalise it or to criticise such naturalisations. Researchers have concentrated on describing present or historical normative systems, or naturalised trends of use. A metapragmatically engaged perspective, applying the principles of previous work to a small case-study of books, and what they present about gender, as well as what they choose to be silent about.

2.1.1 Historical women's language

Abe (1995) represents the gendered speech of women as having historical continuity from the Heian and Kamakura periods (a rather large and heterogeneous combined period of time spanning from the 9th to the 14th centuries), but this is doubtful for a number of reasons. For a conflicting historical perspective, we could consider Inoue (2002). In the form of describing Japanese scholarship on gender as a history of ideologically motivated naturalisations, Inoue (2002) describes the discourse on women's language as one of national sentiments and about notions of culture and tradition in assumptions about women's language use. She states:

Evidence of women's language is traced in premodern literary works and in records of terminology used by sequestered groups of feudal women such as court ladies, Buddhist nuns, and women in the pleasure quarters (geisha and prostitutes). (Inoue, 2002: 398)

Historically, scholars who have studied or opined on women's language are numerous. The famous linguist Kindaichi Kyosuke notes on the subject of women's language: "Japanese womanhood is now being recognized as beautiful and excellent beyond compare with the other womanhoods of the world. Likewise, Japanese women's language is so fine that it seems to me that it is, along with Japanese womanhood, unique in the world" (Kindaichi, 1942:293). Even further back, Kikuzawa Sueo, another linguist credited with being one of the first to talk about women's language in academic discourse in Japan, similarly stated:

“Women’s speech is characterized by elegance, that is, gentleness and beauty. Moreover, such characteristics correspond with our unique national language” (1929:75). These statements may seem old-fashioned today, but the sentiments they express are very much alive and well in the ideological gardens of both the public and academic worlds of Japan, which makes it relevant to contrast them here with modern, more critical conceptualisations.

The history of women’s language is not only ideological, but also very practically political. With this in mind, Inoue further argues that “[t]he emergence of women’s language was and has been intensely modern and national”. It did not involve, as previously indicated, discovering the voice of an existing “Japanese womanhood” as much as (re)appropriating the “vulgar” speech of Meiji-era schoolgirls in “realist” novels that also played the role of being supposedly instructional texts on language. These forms were originally considered just that; vulgar forms not fitting for proper middle-class women. The Meiji-era writers used the characteristics of this group to represent modern women and index their gender. According to Inoue, this type of speech “became elevated to the rank of “Japanese women’s language” only after it was displaced, grafted, quoted, recycled, and circulated in the network of newly available representational genres and media” (ibid: 411), by which she implies the connection with consumer culture in the early 20th century. In this sense, Japanese gendered language, especially that of ‘women’s language’, was never the question of an essential language of women, but of a socially constructed standard imposed upon women (against which it can be argued that a masculine default language can be posited as another side of the same metapragmatic coin).

2.1.2 Dialects and situatedness

In another vein of research, we find Shibamoto Smith and Occhi (2009) concerning dialect prestige in women’s speech (with romantic heroines favouring urban dialects, especially the Tokyo dialect, over rural dialects). We also find Itakura (2009), who finds that masculine and feminine Japanese presents ways for non-native professionals to gain native speaker status in Japanese, which in turn leads to professional advantages (Itakura, 2009: 40), showing the value of what Irving Goffman would call “giving off the right impression”. While the status of dialects may well be appropriate subject matter for an advanced class, most basic Japanese classes focus on “standard Japanese”, seen as the variety spoken by middle-class Tokyoites. For the purpose of this article, I will primarily discuss textbooks from this level, and thus exclude this otherwise exciting and potentially relevant area.

2.1.3 Grammar and pragmatics

In addition to aforementioned research, previous work on linguistic features as indexes of gender has included research on sentence final particles seen as gendered (Sakata 1991), the connection between power relationships and the strategic use of directives by professional Japanese women (Takano 2005), communicative stances in formal contexts (2009), etcetera. While this body of work forms the basis upon which this paper stands, much of it takes idealisations of (primarily feminine) gendered language for granted, such as when Takano (2005) states that polite language is “a noted property of Japanese women’s language” (ibid: 658).

2.1.4 Linguistic gender ideology

On the subject of gender norms in the Japanese language, Okamoto (1997), Okamoto and Shibamoto Smith (2008) are illuminating works. Gender norms have often been taken as objective, especially when posited by scholars. As previously mentioned, such scholars have in fact been influential in shaping conceptions of gendered language, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as Japan modernised and set about creating a nation state similar to those that existed or were being constructed in Europe and the American continents.

In modern discourses on gender, folk psychological explanations abound, and scholars often run the risk of (re)producing dominant normative rather than truly scholarly accounts of gender as expressed in language, according to studies such as Okamoto & Shibamoto Smith (2008). This unreflected role of scholars in shaping language ideology means that, on one hand, their descriptions of gendered language use must be read critically against their societal, historical and scholarly backgrounds, and that, on the other hand, additional work must be aware of this conflict between description and prescription. This conflict has been the *raison d'être* of modern linguistics since its roots, but it has in this case long been taken for granted that linguists can stand apart from prescriptive norms. Sometimes, this is far from the case.

Okamoto and Shibamoto Smith (2008) identify two aspects associated with normatively feminine Japanese speech, namely “(1) its general stylistic features, such as *polite*, *gentle*, and *refined*, and (2) its specific linguistic forms, including phonological, morphological and lexical features” (ibid: 88, emphasis in original). They further refer to these as first- and second-order norms, respectively. First-order norms concern general expectations on behaviour and stylistics, while second-order norms concern how the first-order norms are expressed through concrete linguistic features, such as high pitched voices, honorifics usage, sentence final particles, etcetera (Okamoto and Shibamoto Smith, 2008).

Okamoto and Shibamoto Smith (2008) make note of both the tenuous relationship between first- and second-order norms – some examples of women’s speech are still normatively feminine, but in no way polite, gentle or refined – as well as the limited understanding of how standard language and regional dialects interplay with regard to negotiating normative femininity. They also note that how “real speakers” understand dominant gender and language ideologies is little understood. To this problem, this paper would add that not only the understandings of speakers, but also those of *listeners* are poorly understood.

On the side of masculine gender and language, SturtzSreetharan (2006) is a rare article that examines the linguistic practices of men in relation to sentence final politeness and “gentlemanly gender”. She found that young men and retirees use less clause-final polite language in informal contexts, while middle-aged salarymen use higher frequencies of clause-final polite language. She also emphasises the need to not homogenise linguistic practices according to rough group categorisations. Nakamura (2008) connects the construction of a masculine “national language” with the marginalisation of (imagined) feminine varieties of this language, situating this in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This approach is remarkable in a field that otherwise spends a disproportionate amount of time talking about women’s language varieties (and their ties to women’s oppression by men), avoiding men’s language varieties (and their ties to men’s oppression of women). Although Nakamura holds that “[b]y repeating the gendered opposition from the level of national language to the level of linguistic forms, the abstract ideology of ‘national language’ is associated with physical, concrete features,” (Nakamura 2008: 43) the only

concrete features brought up are pronouns and the name suffix *-kun*, meaning approximately ‘young mister’ (which will appear in more detail in the discussion). Nonetheless, it stands to reason that a linking of the concrete and the abstract is at work both in language ideology in a wider sense, and textbooks and language teaching in a narrower sense.

2.2 Textbook studies on gender

Taking us somewhat away from the Japanese language itself, in the area of gender in language teaching and textbooks, influential studies have typically focused on biases in the dialogue roles given to men and women respectively in textbooks or on textbook materials representing men and women differently in images, for example Jones, Kitetu, and Sunderland (1997). The same work also features a more full characterisation of some of the problems involved in making assumptions of learning outcomes based on ‘sexist’ materials. A slightly different approach has been taken with regard to how teachers talk about gendered materials (Sunderland 2000; Sunderland et al. 2000), which may include endorsement and subversion of texts (Sunderland et al. 2000). Sunderland et al. (2000) argue that it is impossible to predict how a text will be managed, but the authors still talk about texts as ‘progressive’ and ‘traditional’. One finding was that teachers would occasionally subvert gendering in texts or even exaggerate it (ironically or not). However, the actual identification of materials as progressive or not is still an open question, and more so with the extensive gendered vocabulary, grammar and speech forms of Japanese. Most textbook studies with regard to gender have been done in the English-speaking world or on other ‘Western’ languages, a critique levelled at the discipline by, among others, Ullah and Skelton (2013) in the context of Islamic feminism in conflict with Western feminism. The same can be said for Japanese contexts, which necessitate a somewhat different lens due to both linguistic and so-called cultural differences. Also, there is a lack of transparency in exactly how texts are identified as progressive or traditional. Is it the number of turns taken by male vis-a-vis female roles in textbook dialogues (Jones, Kitetu, and Sunderland 1997)? Is it the number of appearances men and women make, the order of those, and the words used about them that matter (Lee 2014)? Is it in the visual images in the textbook (Yasin et al. 2012)? The point here is that there is not a consensus on what to look for, and while there is plenty of room to argue that all these things matter, and that we can see gender inequality in them, this does not necessarily mean that an absence of gendered forms—let us call it ‘gender blindness’—automatically means that all is well and all learners have received an equal treatment.

One of the few studies done with regard to Japanese is Siegal and Okamoto (2003), which considers gender representations, including language, in a number of textbooks, as well as teacher and student attitudes toward gendered speech in Japanese. In many ways, the current paper builds more on the textbook part of this study, although it recognises the problematic put forth by Sunderland et al. (2000) that the end result depends on what is done with the materials.

However, as we shall see, it can be questioned whether it is truly possible to be ‘gender blind’ in language teaching. In short, does one always have to choose a side?

2.3 Metapragmatics

Metapragmatics in the context of this paper refers to two out of three levels of

metapragmatics, as described in Brown and Caffi (2006). While the first level of metapragmatics pertains to the epicentre of the discipline of metapragmatics itself, the metapragmatic perspective suggested here deals with the half-spoken gender in the conventionalised gender indexicality under examination, which deals with (1) how to communicate (i.e., the basic conditions of communication, including cultural and group-bound ones), and (2) the reflexivity concerning this communication and the knowledge it springs from (Brown and Caffi 2006).

Brown and Caffi (2006) note where the strengths of metapragmatics lie.

Metapragmatics specializes in the control of the argumentative conditions and strategies, lending itself easily to becoming a critical instrument of fundamental importance in digging up and highlighting the underlying presuppositions as well as the different kinds of the unsaid. (Brown and Caffi 2006: 87)

Those underlying presuppositions are very much at work in how gender is talked about, and how gender in talk is perceived and talked about. Textbooks are thus possible to see as both objects with which teachers and learners engage metapragmatically with varying degrees of reflexivity, and metapragmatic statements in themselves. The point of bringing metapragmatics to the table here is to suggest it as a lens through which to further nuance analyses of textbook presentations of language.

In Silverstein (1976), metapragmatics has another mode as well, being speech about speech. This is contrasted with metasemantics, which concerns speech about ‘meaning’ (in the narrow, lexicological sense). Thus, the metapragmatic engagement of students and teachers would invariably consist of more or less overt metapragmatic statements. While these fall outside the scope of this paper, it is an argument for the inclusion of a metapragmatic perspective on textbooks.

Related to this vein of theory, in linguistics relating to identity expression, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) stands out as a particularly useful approach to keep in mind when considering indexes of gender. The following is a short summary of the framework Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 588-606, summarised below), which outlines five important principles for a sociocultural linguistic framework. They can be summarised as:

1. **Emergence.** Rather than the root of linguistic and semiotic conventions, identity is a product and a social and cultural phenomenon. Therefore, characteristics such as gender are not essential, but rather emergent.
2. **Positionality.** Identity includes macro-level, demographic categories, situationally temporary positions and roles, and locally constituted cultural positions.
3. **Indexicality.** Identity is indexed linguistically through the use of linguistic systems.
4. **Relationality.** Identity is composed relationally of several often overlapping aspects (e.g., similarity/dissimilarity, genuineness/artifice, authority/delegitimacy).
5. **Partiality.** Identity can be, either exclusively or simultaneously, partly intentional, partly conventional and without conscious thought, partly a result of contextual interaction, partly the result of another’s perceptions, partly a result of wider ideological processes.

This framework is taken to be compatible with Butler’s (1999) gender performativity, Goffman’s (1974) frame analysis, and Okamoto and Shibamoto Smith’s (2008) first- and

second-order gender norms. Keeping this in mind, gender is considered a *position* that is *emergent* from linguistics forms, and *indexed* through the use of linguistics systems.

2.4 Critical approaches to language study

There is a large body of work concerning critical discourse analysis and its tools, but here one work in particular will serve as a model. Lancaster and Taylor (1992) considered how a language awareness course in Britain in the late 1980's constituted a critical perspective on language study, in a similar way to how the present paper attempts to engage with textbooks.

A goal of a critical language study approach is allow students "to develop an *explicit* understanding of themselves as language users in the society in which they live" (Lancaster and Taylor 1992: 256, emphasis in original). Lancaster and Taylor's (1992) work centres on 'critical language awareness', which is crucial in making these explicit understandings possible. In this paper, the aforementioned work in particular contributes a perspective from which criticality will be viewed; here, 'criticality' is taken to be a form of metapragmatic engagement. Not all metapragmatics are critical, as we shall see, but all criticality concerning language use is metapragmatic.

3. Materials and method

Based on the literature review, the research questions were threefold: (1) How are linguistic gender norms managed and presented in textbooks for Japanese as a foreign language? (2) What consequences could this have for teaching and learning? (3) What are the implications for research on classroom situations in which Japanese is taught?

The method chosen was analysis of the presentation of language in textbooks, identifying points of analysis which were to be, to borrow the term used by Sunderland et al. (2000), gender critical points in the textbooks. In this case, these were points at which gender was either explicitly mentioned or conspicuously avoided in the texts. While gender is seen as socially negotiated or 'constructed' in language use, textbooks are also seen as texts (in the sense of pieces of metapragmatic discourse) that potentially value this language use in connection to gender. The aim here is to question taken-for-granted knowledge, and the presentation of gendered forms in the material was viewed from the perspective of social constructionism (Burr 2003).

The following textbooks were selected for analysis, forming a small case study from which examples were drawn. They do not represent an exhaustive list of available publications, but rather a selection of telling cases. They are spread out over time as well, giving the case study a diachronic element of different directions of gender in the teaching of Japanese as a foreign language.

The textbooks are directed at various levels of learners, from young learners to various levels of university study. Thus they represent contexts with varying needs, which serves a twofold purpose here. First, it allows for some diversity inside the small scope of this case study. Secondly, it provides room to recognise that different groups of students may have different needs, thus providing some practical indication of how intersectional considerations such as age also matter in language teaching.

The textbooks used are given below, and again in the references section. We shall return to the specific textbooks in section 4 and onwards.

- Association for Japanese-Language Teaching (1998). *Japanese for Young People*. Tokyo: Kodansha International
- Bunka Institute of Language. (2013). *Bunka shokyu nihongo II, tekisuto, kaiteiban*. Tokyo: Bonjinsha
- Banno, E; Ohno, Y; Sakane, Y.; Shinagawa, C., (2011a [1999]). *Genki I* (second edition). Tokyo: Japan Times
- Banno, E; Ohno, Y; Sakane, Y.; Shinagawa, C., (2011b [1999]). *Genki II* (second edition). Tokyo: Japan Times
- Mizutani & Mizutani (1988 [1977]). *An Introduction to Modern Japanese*. Tokyo: Japan Times
- Mizutani & Mizutani (1990 [1987]). *How to be polite in Japanese (Nihongo no keigo)* Tokyo: Japan Times)

4. Overview of gendered repertoires in Japanese

A short overview of some basic features of Japanese is in order here. The idea here is to describe how the natural language can function, and how parts of it are erased through a policy of selective ‘gender blindness’ in textbooks. While the text may read as a compressed grammar book of Japanese, it is by necessity abridged and general. For a fuller account, there are many scholarly works on the subject, such as Martin (1975) .

Japanese is often seen as an exceptional language, which is a political or ideological stance, rather than a strictly linguistic one. Japanese has no grammatical gender, contrary to many Indo-European languages. However, as Prewitt-Freilino et al (2012) point out, the effects of grammatical gender are complicated, and their lack or presence does not necessarily indicate the salience of gender issues in society. Also, Japanese is thought of as having a complex system of gendered speech, to the degree of the different varieties being referred to as “different languages”. While such a claim is easy to dismiss on typological grounds, it does influence how textbooks are constructed. The newest edition of the textbook *Bunka shokyu nihongo II* includes a chart of forms men and women supposedly use, in complementary distribution, which will be discussed in more detail later. “Supposedly” should be emphasised here, since differences in speech are on one hand not limited to grammatical constructions, and on the other hand not dependent on simplistic, naturalised gender labels such as “woman” and “man”.

Concretely, women’s and men’s types of speech are thought of as differing on the lexical, grammatical and pragmatic levels. Women and men are seen as showing a marked preference for different lexical items and negative politeness (as defined by Brown and Levinson 1987). This is tied to, or at least difficult to divorce from, metapragmatic norms of ‘propriety’ and ‘vulgarity’.

Below are three very basic examples of how students of Japanese are consistently taught to use the language. The examples are constructed, but consistent with spontaneously spoken, grammatical Japanese.

- (1) *Watashi¹ wa o-sushi o tabe-mashita.*
 I TOP HON-sushi OBJ eat-POL.PST
 ‘I ate sushi.’ (polite speaker)
- (2) a. *Boku wa sushi o tabe-ta.*
 I.MASC TOP sushi OBJ eat-FAM.PAST
 ‘I ate sushi.’ (Masculine speaker.)
- b. *Watashi wa o-sushi o tabe-ta.*
 I TOP sushi OBJ eat-FAM.PAST
 ‘I ate sushi.’ (Feminine speaker.)

(1) shows the typical polite realisation of the given sentence, while (2a) and (2b) show masculine and feminine realisations in familiar contexts, where gendered language becomes more salient. Female learners are simply given the option to ‘step down’ the verb to a familiar or intimate form, while men are recommended to do away with the honorific prefix, and switch out the pronoun. *Boku* is ‘softer’, ‘boyish’, and relatively limited to men in everyday speech. This does not reflect the full range of strategies available to learners, but is consistent with all the textbooks looked at.

Previous research concerning Japanese pronouns has given us a number of observations that are relevant in explaining their typologically unexpected characteristics. Ono and Thompson (2003) summarise the scholarly debate on the status of Japanese pronouns by saying that their status as pronouns in a similar sense to pronouns in Indo-European language is open to critique, and that they also have sociocultural meanings not commonly associated with other pronouns. As a large part of their data is made up of (*w*)*atashi* – which the Ono and Thompson (2003) consider to be one word with two forms used by females – the authors tangentially consider gender as a factor. While the authors admit that the outnumbering of *boku* and *ore* by (*w*)*atashi* in their dataset may have skewed the results, it is still an interesting example as *atashi* is still never brought up by the textbooks considered in this paper.

Women and men are also considered to show grammatical differences in sentence patterns, such as the copula being omitted in some sentence patterns if the speaker is a woman, but not if they are a man. Additionally, Japanese women and men are thought of as using different sentence-final particles (Sakata 1991).

- (3) *Shinkansen wa benri da ne.*
 Shinkansen TOP practical COP PART
 ‘The Shinkansen is practical, isn’t it?’ (male or gender neutral speaker)
- (4) *Shinkansen wa benri ne.*
 Shinkansen TOP practical PART
 ‘The Shinkansen is practical, isn’t it?’ (female speaker)

1 Similarly as for (1), (2) includes a non-exhaustive list of pronouns, of which the last two are generally not taken up in teaching situations but are nonetheless commonly encountered, especially *atashi*. *Watashi* is gender neutral in polite speech, but is described as gendered in familiar or intimate speech (e.g., in Bunka Institute of Language, 2013)

- (5) *Kaze o hiita-n.da*
cold OBJ draw-MOD
'I have caught a cold.' (male or gender neutral speaker)
- (6) *Kaze o hiita no.*
cold OBJ draw-MOD
'I have caught a cold.' (female speaker)
- (7) *Oishii ne!*
Tasty PART
'Tasty!' (male or gender neutral speaker)
- (8) *Oishii wa ne!*
Tasty PART PART
'Tasty!' (female speaker)

no in (8) is often seen as a 'feminine' sentence-final particle for explanation modalities, and *wa* is similarly explained as a very feminine "soft assertive" when taken up in teaching materials and situations.

Furthermore, metapragmatic (in the sense of judgements on how to do things with language) expectations on behaviour are common, and sometimes problematic for women learners of Japanese, as they are expressly told not to use certain forms, such as imperatives. Women are thought of as using the 'softer' imperative *-nasai*, which is considered a part of the language of teachers and, importantly, mothers. They are also considered to use the polite hortative *-mashoo* in an imperative role, stereotypically as mothers speaking to children or in a teacher role. In contrast, the negative imperative *-na* is rude to the point of being nearly impossible to use unless you are a police officer talking to a criminal caught red-handed.

- (9) *Ugoku-na!*
Move-NEGIMP
Don't move!
- (10) *Haya-ku ne-nasai.*
Early-ADV sleep-POLIMP
Go to bed soon.
- (11) *Benkyoo shi-mashoo!*
Study do-POLHORT
Study! (literally "Let's study!")

In reality, women use imperatives in so much as these are used at all; an actual imperative is rare in normal (i.e., polite) speech for both men and women, an issue brought up in any number of textbooks. While performative differences (in the meaning used by Butler (1999) and earlier Goffman (1959)) are not non-existent, real Japanese use considerably muddies the waters for learners.

Additionally, the honorific prefix *o-*, usually attached to Japanese nouns, is often described as being more extensively and frequently used by women (e.g., by Mizutani & Mizutani (1987)).

There is also a system of address in Japanese that ranges from the well-known and somewhat impersonal *-san* suffix, roughly equivalent to English Ms or Mr, to *-kun* which is used exclusively with reference to subordinated men (however, at the same time indicating them as a part of the speaker's in-group, from which women and foreigners are generally excluded).

Finally, as a side note in connection with this, there are descriptions of women's voices as stereotypically being artificially high pitched, but this is not taken up in any textbooks and thus – while of considerable interest to the author – regrettably falls outside the scope of this paper.

5. Discussion

5.1 Implied audiences of textbooks

Here I will briefly account for the textbooks chosen in very broad strokes. The focus will be on the kinds of audiences they appear to be intended for, and how this may connect to their presentation of linguistic gender norms.

Banno et al. (2011a; 2011b) have a mixed cast of characters, although the principal focus is on a female, American exchange student in Japan named Mary. The characters are roughly split equally between men and women, Japanese and foreigners. Dialogues often revolve around one of the foreign students interacting with the Japanese characters in different situations. In Banno et al. (2011a), *-san* is the only personal suffix used (to the point of appearing odd to native speakers), and *-kun* is introduced in Banno et al. (2011b) in chapter 14 (Banno et al. 2011b: 50) and exclusively applied to men in the dialogue, although it is not explained as being gendered in any way. We will return to this in the next section, as it appears to be an example of gender blindness. The first person pronoun *boku* is introduced in the former book (chapter 5), and gendered as male.

Association for Japanese-Language Teaching (1998) focuses mainly on the activities of the protagonist, Mike Bird, a fictional American teenage schoolboy. Other characters include his American family and the families of his Japanese classmates (the two named classmates are male), and his female Japanese home room teacher. This focus extends to the comparatively early introduction of explicitly gendered forms for “boys” and “young men”, but not for “girls” or “young women”. The specific forms here are *boku*, given as “I (informal male speech)” (Association for Japanese-Language Teaching, 1998: 22), and the previously mentioned explanation of *-kun* as “mainly used when addressing younger men or boys” and “never used between women and addressing elders” (Association for Japanese-Language Teaching 1998: 1). A fuller description would be that *-kun* is generally used when addressing lower or equal status men in one's own in-group (*uchi*), although this schematic explanation is far from the only possible understanding of this gendered item. For my purposes here, it shall however suffice.

Mizutani and Mizutani (1988) mainly deals with interactions between men; when it introduces more female characters in the latter half of the book, it is usually to show differences between male and female speech in situations such as a conversation between a male and a female student or husband and wife. When something is said about gendered speech, it is explained as “men instead say X”, even to the point of on occasion foregoing to

overtly mention women or a speech pattern associated with them, effectively making them invisible in the comments on the dialogues:

(12) “*Soo. Zannen-ne.*

[Is that so? That’s a shame.]

Men say *zannen-da-ne* instead of *zannen-ne*.”

(Mizutani & Mizutani 1988: 163; emphasis in original; my translation of the Japanese example in brackets)

While this may be variously interpreted, and immediately afterwards a small table is given of male and female speech, the fact that only explicit directions for men are given makes the text read as directed to a male audience. It bears remembering that Mizutani and Mizutani (1988) is a more dated textbook, although this gives us something to contrast with when comparing other textbooks with it.

Mizutani and Mizutani (1990) deviates from the norm here in that it is not a basic textbook, but instead a manual on Japanese politeness. The reason for including it here is that it also means to be educational, and the subject matter is highly gendered. While it like Mizutani and Mizutani (1988) is not contemporary, it still reflects a construction of knowledge regarding gender that is still common in today’s discourse. It is liberally flavoured with statements about the speech of women. These include that women “tend to speak more politely than men.” At the same time, they note that public and impersonal speech does not differ much between men and women; “a female candidate for the Diet talks just as a male candidate does” (Mizutani & Mizutani 1990: 72).

Bunka Institute of Language (2013) appears to primarily feature Yoshiko (female) and Takeshi (male) as the protagonists, although Takeshi seems to have more focus as he appears without Yoshiko, but she does not appear without him. Adding to this is a rather extensive cast of characters, but many of them lack agentic speaking roles. Interestingly it is the only book to contain a dedicated section on gender in informal or intimate speech that lists equivalent forms side by side (Bunka Institute of Language 2013: 69), although this only consists in offering men *boku* as a first person pronoun and giving women the option of dropping the copula *da* and adding the sentence-final particle *wa* (often described as “soft assertive“, which would be not very assertive at all) or retaining the “masculine” forms. No mention is made of other alternatives for women.

5.2 Selective gender blindness

Gendered speech is not presented equally in most books, both in terms of quality and depth. Many of the examples from the books make it seem like there are few items in Japanese for the proactive use of female speakers aside from grammatical ‘softening’ of dropping the copula and a small selection of sentence final particles to express demureness, indecision, and ‘femininity’, in effect potentially confining learners to a limited (and limiting) form of femininity as their only possible persona in the language. Meanwhile, men can be both brutal and boorish, or boyish, or gentlemanly.

It has been argued that these ‘soft’ and ‘sensitive’ traits are essential parts of Japanese women and/or femininity. This is quite obviously not true, but skilfully elided by textbooks and most scholarly accounts; there are, for example, a number of pronouns that are not approached in

textbooks, and concerning which there is a conspicuous lack of scholarly attention. *Atashi* and *atai* are alternative forms of *watashi*, and normatively connected with the often disparaged speech of young women. Their use is less felicitous in formal or non-intimate contexts, much like *ore* and often *boku* are for men. While they are often described as being used by overly feminine women, this does not explain why they are not given any treatment at all in any of the textbooks reviewed when *boku* is (and when *ore* is known to be brought up in teaching). Gender specific pronouns for men are in some cases introduced very early and in other cases later, but are in all cases introduced as an option in casual conversation. No equivalent offers of any similar linguistic items are made for female learners, other than the ‘feminine’ softening forms, which form what appears to be a very unidirectional femininity in the context of teaching. It is this femininity that I argue has not been sufficiently engaged with in a metapragmatic manner in any textbooks, and here the question is ‘what does this mean for teaching?’.

Instead, female learners are often encouraged to avoid certain forms or informed that something does not apply to them, such as the familiar suffix *-kun* (compare Association for Japanese-Language Teaching (1998), but see also the ‘gender neutral’ (or rather “gender blind”) explanation in Banno et al (2011b)), which may lead them into conflict later, as “forewarned is forearmed”. Their language is often subject to control and seemingly arbitrary restrictions, while men’s language is hardly restricted at all (other than any implicit assumptions of conformance to masculine norms in and outside of the classroom). While it is true that listeners may form opinions of a female speaker’s character if she uses a first pronoun such as *atai* (a feminine pronoun not taught in any of the books), similar situations with *boku* (present in all teaching materials) appearing unsuitably childish (which there are numerous anecdotal accounts of, including in the experience of the author of this paper) or *ore* (almost universally taught in the classroom context even if not present in teaching materials) sounding coarse, brutish and vulgar. These masculine pronouns and expressions are not less problematic or less difficult to master than their feminine counterparts, but in their case that is apparently not sufficient grounds for their exclusion from teaching.

In fact, Bunka Institute of Language (2013) presents an approximately similar array of examples for each part of the gender binary, which at first glance seems to run counter to any ambitions of equality. However, one valid counterargument (in line with an interpretation of Sunderland (2000)) would be that this can open up norms to critical analysis by teachers and students alike, even if the array presented does not, as mentioned in 4.1, actually give equal scope to the arrays. Just the act of putting norms side by side and giving them equal space on the page marks it out as remarkable.

The books also interestingly differ in how they approach the system of name honorifics in Japanese. These are loosely equivalent to ‘Mr’ and ‘Ms’ in English and similar systems in other languages, albeit with slightly different distributions of gender representation and social power. The ones most frequently encountered in basic Japanese courses are *-san*² and *-kun*. *-san* is comparatively impersonal, indicating politeness without familiarity, especially when used to address members outside the speaker’s own in-group. It is also used with women both in-group and out-group. *-kun* is closer, in practice generally used to address younger men (often male colleagues or classmates). While it is used toward subordinated men, they always belong to the in-group. However, Textbooks 1 and 2 avoid using it with male characters and

2 A close relative of *-san* is *-sama*, which belongs to a polite register that exalts the referent. Since it falls somewhat outside of the scope of the current paper, it is mentioned here only for the sake of completeness.

instead scrupulously uses the more gender neutral but distancing *-san*, except in chapters where gendered speech appears (most notably one regarding Valentine's Day in chapter 14). It is however treated by the vocabulary section as non-gendered (Banno et al, 2011b: 53), which can be interpreted as either single-mindedly 'gender neutral' or dangerously obfuscatory. The same chapter offers opinions on what are "gender neutral" and "more feminine" forms, so gender does not otherwise completely escape the authors. In short, Banno et al. (2011a; 2011b), in contrast to Bunka Institute of Language (2013), appear to avoid gendering learners throughout, adopting a policy of what I would call 'selective gender blindness'. Although it presents forms commonly gendered as gender neutral in as far as possible, it can be argued that this actually makes it harder for students and teachers to conceive of and engage with gender norms, resulting in maintaining hegemonies in practice through making students poorly equipped to handle them, as well as denying teachers a floor from which to do subversive work. If there is nothing disagreeable in a text, it is difficult to challenge it. While Siegal and Okamoto (2003) briefly consider the book as gender neutral and seemingly progressive, it is the argument of this paper that its gender blindness could just as equally be dangerous to learners' outcomes. Needless to say, further classroom studies in the vein of Jane Sunderland et al. (2000) are necessary.

While any textbook must prioritise what content to include, included "preferred readings" necessitates that teachers and students have to engage those readings before subjecting them to endorsement, subversion or just nuancing. This constitutes what I would call critical language awareness (see Lancaster and Taylor (1992)) or metapragmatic engagement.

6. Conclusions

Now we return to our questions (1) How are linguistic gender norms managed and presented in textbooks for Japanese as a foreign language? (2) What consequences could this have for teaching and learning? (3) What are the implications for research on classroom situations in which Japanese is taught?

It is the conclusion of this paper that gendered speech in textbooks can serve normative or cautionary functions, depending on both the presentation itself and the treatment given to it by teachers and students. Also, some textbook descriptions are characterised by gender blindness, which may prevent teacher and student engagement with what we might, again borrowing Sunderland et al.'s (2000) term, call gender-critical points in teaching. I consider this to be partially in accordance with the argument in Sunderland et al. (2000), but emphasis is here placed on the presentation of linguistic items themselves, rather than dialogue roles or teacher talk about a text. One obvious shortcoming of the present study is that it is only a look at textbooks, not at teaching. Another is that the sample is rather small, so any conclusions cannot be more than tentative, even if we may find them suggestive of a different direction in which to take research on gender in Japanese language education.

However, this is to be seen in connection with a call for more studies on teacher-student interactions and classroom talk about and around texts, but this time considering what we may call 'sociocultural positions' (see Bucholtz and Hall 2005) with Japanese in mind. Indeed, teachers and students often "laugh off" the simplistic notions presented in some books, while at other times students may feel frustrated at not being able to negotiate the linguistic terrain in the manner expected of them, regardless of the textbook. However, a

textbook can vary in how easy it makes the teaching situation, being a starting point from which teaching must continue by not only giving treatment to the language, but to the textbook as well. Thus there is often no completely escaping the textbook, at least for the time being. Also, textbooks often act as the students' first window into the world of the target language, and are thus not only linguistically but also socially normative. This is especially true for the very basic level textbooks at issue here. They also act as reference works for students, meaning that their power extends beyond the immediate teaching situation. While the actual effects of any textbook cannot be fully known in the absence of its treatment in the classroom, neither should it be ignored that textbooks are ways of organising knowledge structures, and that these can – wilfully or accidentally – serve different agendas, and provide different backdrops for teacher-student interactions. The conflicts between public knowledge on how women and men should speak and private selves made visibly negotiated in language are resolved by teachers and students in a multitude of ways, but the playing field as such is not as equal between differently gendered speakers as it could be. Textbooks, have a place as tools to represent and frame issues of gender normativity, in order to equip students to make their words play to their own wishes.

By challenging knowledge structures and casting language use as having the public, performative traits that it should be accorded, we can both engage critically – metapragmatically – with gender norms in the target culture, an approach suggested by Siegal and Okamoto (2003), and provide speakers of all different positions – not just those on the male end of a male-female gender dichotomy – with ways of managing gender norms, whether they personally wish to uphold, manipulate, or resist them. Textbooks are not the only way of doing this, and possibly not even the most critical, but their salience as concrete ways of organising knowledge is all too easily ignored.

Textbooks

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