

Variation of Japanese Women's Speech Between Prewar and Postwar

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to compare the selected linguistic features in the female speech in informal situations between prewar and postwar. Linguistic variations in female speech can be encountered more often during informal situations especially with the usage of pronouns (Finegan, 1994; Ide, 1994; Jordan 1974; Shibamoto, 1985). Japanese sociologists have claimed that women's speech has changed over time as the social status of women has changed especially under legal protection of the Japanese women's rights after World War II. Postwar, Japanese women have gained more equal status in the societal framework of the country. Accordingly, Japanese women are considered to converse on par with men. The linguistic characteristics of female speech in the Japanese language have realized substantial transformations.

2. Method

Four novels of prewar (*Three Sisters*, *A Bonfire*, *Natsuko's Adventure*, and *Human Revolution* Vol.1) and three novels of postwar (*About Love*, *Candidates for Ghost*, and *Goodbye Prairie*) were selected to reflect the middle-class people in the Japanese society at that time. The numbers of words were 613 and 394 respectively. Conversations between women and men with similar age were selected as randomly as possible from the novels. Conversations between husband and wife of similar age in each period of pre- and postwar were selected in *Human Revolution* and *Goodbye Prairie* respectively. Unfortunately, conversations among young women in similar age groups in each period were not found in the collected novels. The following linguistic features were selected based upon the framework of the sociolinguists (Ide, 1994; Shibamoto, 1985; Shibatani, 1990): 1) exclamatory expressions, *maa*, *ara*, and *chotto*; 2) first person pronoun, *watakusi*, *atakusi*, *watasi*, *atasi* and second person pronoun, *anata*, and *anta*, 3) honorific prefixes, *-o*, *-go*, and *-omi*, and 4) sentence-final particles *wayo*, *na no ne*, *wa ne*, *no yo*, *wa*, *na no*, *no*, *yo*, and *ne*.

3. Results and Conclusion

First, exclamatory expressions did not show a significant difference ($t = 0.38$, $p > 0.05$) between pre- and postwar. There were only two occurrences found in each period. Therefore, not only more exclamatory expressions but also corpuses might have been needed to obtain a more reliable and valid result.

Second, there was no honorific prefix in postwar corpus whereas there were 10 honorific prefixes in pre-war. Comparison between pre- and postwar was outstandingly significant ($t = 2.37$, $p < 0.01$).

Third, as for first- and second pronouns, there was an obvious variation in first- and second pronouns between prewar (6.52%) and postwar (1.33%) and the difference was statistically significant ($t = 3.02$, $p < 0.01$). *Human Revolution* had the highest percentage of pronouns. All pronouns found from this novel were second person pronoun *anata*, which is an address term to call husbands in Japanese: prewar novel, *Human Revolution* (11.33%) versus postwar novel, *Goodbye Prairie* (3%). Speakers and addressees of these novels were wives and husbands. Besides age difference (a couple of *Human Revolution* seemed a little older than *Goodbye Prairie*), the topic might have affected the result. The situations of *Human Revolution* were that the wife welcomed home her husband who had just been released from jail with warmth and affection whereas the conversation in *Goodbye Prairie* between wife and husband was to detect a murder

case. Therefore, the conversation of the wife in *Human Revolution* might have revealed more female linguistic features. In addition, the imbalance of the number of words of each novel might have biased the results between these novels: *Human Revolution* (43) versus *Goodbye Prairie* (180). *Natsuko's Adventure* had the second highest percentage of the first pronoun among prewar novels (21 occurrences, 6.95%). The first person pronoun, *atakusi* was used frequently in *Natsuko's Adventure*. The first pronoun, *atakusi* strongly identifies the female linguistic feature and is not used by men (Ide, 1994; Shibamoto, 1985). Only women in both formal and neutral situations exclusively used *atakusi* in *Natsuko's Adventure*. This indicates that *atakusi* strongly revealed femininity. There were 14 occurrences of *atakusi* in *Natsuko's Adventure* whereas there was none in the other novels. Another attention drawn from this novel was the number of occurrences of the second person pronoun *anata*. *Anata* is used mostly by wives to call their husbands as respectful address words; otherwise this second person pronoun is usually avoided by speakers in the Japanese language. The story of this novel is a romance of several men with Natsuko who is a single woman. Therefore, the author might have frequently used female linguistic features to appeal femininity to the addressees (males) and also to the readers.

Fourth, as for sentence-final particles, the data were gathered separately with *yo* and *ne* and without *yo* and *ne* since some studies indicate that *yo* and *ne* need to be reconsidered to characterize female speech. There were statistically significant differences in the usage of sentence-final particles between pre- and postwar (with *yo* and *ne*, $t = 1.85$, $p < 0.05$; without *yo* and *ne*, $t = 1.64$, $p < 0.05$). A postwar novel, *About Love*, had the highest percentage of occurrences of particles among the postwar novels (all particles with *yo* and *ne*, 10.1%; particles without *yo* and *ne*, 6.74% respectively). Not only the topic but also psychological aspects (e.g. intimacy) between the speaker and the addressee might have affected the result of the data of this novel since the story was about a romance.

As I hypothesized, all of the linguistic features of the female speech, except for exclamatory expressions showed a distinctive dividing line and a significant difference between pre- and postwar, especially in pronouns and honorifics. The result of this data showed that there was a significant difference in the female linguistic features between pre- and post war ($t = 2.03$, $p < 0.05$).

References

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