

How Speech Measures Identity

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Introduction

Language is an integral part of the lived human experience; beyond simply allowing individuals to communicate their thoughts and desires, it also serves as a tool for expressing one's identity. Through an individual's linguistic choices one can make a statement about how they want to be perceived by others. Thus, the interlocutor plays a key role in defining the individual's identity, interpreting the linguistic choices made by the speaker and using them to interpret something about the speaker's identity. This paper will explore instances in the Japanese language where speakers manipulate masculine and feminine speech in ways that portray something about their identity. Inspired by the work of Brian Paltridge, this paper defines identity as "a socially constructed self that people continually co-construct and reconstruct in their interactions with each other."¹ The three sections of this paper build off of Paltridge's work, investigating three linguistic phenomena in Japan that relate back to this notion of co-constructing identity through discourse. The first is *onee-kotoba*, a variety of Japanese that is used by gay men which incorporates linguistic features typical of Japanese feminine speech. The second relates to *ousama-kotoba* 'lady's language' used today by young girls who subscribe to the fashion culture of Gothic and Lolita; they are known as gosurori girls. They choose to speak in a hyper-feminine and traditional 'women's speech' called *ojousama-kotoba* which emulates the historical identity of a "daughter of royalty." Finally, the third linguistic phenomena explored in this paper regards the varying use of masculine or feminine speech based on an individual's occupation. Through these examples, this paper aims to illustrate how speakers are aware of the impact that language can have in defining one's identity, and making clear linguistic choices that influence the way they are perceived by others.

¹ Brian Paltridge, "Discourse and Society: Discourse and Identity." In *Discourse Analysis: An Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 27.

Literature Review

Onee-Kotoba and Queer Speech in Japan

Onee-kotoba is a variety of Japanese that is spoken primarily by gay men. The word *onee-kotoba* translates to “speech of older sister” or colloquially, as Japanese linguist Hideko Abe translates it, “queen’s speech.”² *Onee-kotoba* utilizes characteristically feminine speech patterns, which men then incorporate into their own language usage to convey certain messages or emotions. Defining *onee-kotoba* as one singular entity is difficult, as every individual who uses *onee-kotoba* can have a different perception of it and its meaning. In her book, “Queer Japanese: Gender and Sexual Identities through Linguistic Practices,” Abe interviews several gay men in Japan to form an overarching view of what *onee-kotoba* is, how it’s used, and its significance to the gay community. Many of the men that Abe interviews highlight the “(1) sentence-final particles and forms; (2) certain types of hedges or interjections; (3) person pronouns; and (4) multiple sets of opposing linguistic features” that they feel are characteristic of *onee-kotoba*.³ One of the recurring points in Abe’s book is that *onee-kotoba* is not simply an imitation of women’s speech, or *josei-go*. In Abe’s view, *josei-go* represents a far more rigid set of speech patterns, yet with *onee-kotoba*, speakers have the freedom to choose when and how they engage particular gendered speech patterns.⁴ For instance, speakers of *onee-kotoba* may use first-person pronouns such as あたし (*atashi*) which is more feminine, or they may use a more masculine pronoun such as 僕 (*boku*) or 僕 (*ore*). Sentence-final particles are also another key

² Hideko Abe, *Queer Japanese: Gender and Sexual Identities through Linguistic Practices* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 77.

³ Abe, *Queer Japanese*, 143.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

feature of *onee-kotoba*, and again allow speakers the ability to move through different gender-based speech stereotypes and utilize a variety of speech patterns. わ (wa) and ね (ne), for example, are considered more feminine particles, and are often used by those who speak *onee-kotoba*. They will also sometimes drop the declarative だ (da) at the end of a sentence which is typical of *josei-go*. However, these same speakers can also switch and use more masculine-sounding sentence-final particles, including the declarative だ (da), ゾ (zo), and よ (yo) to either sound more masculine or gender-neutral.⁵

In her research, Abe notes that there is no one standard use of *onee-kotoba* across all gay men, and she argues that this is part of what sets *onee-kotoba* apart from *josei-go*. She posits that “each user [of *onee-kotoba*] manipulates the linguistic resources usually reserved for women (while also preserving the linguistic resources for men), but turning them into something original and to their advantage.”⁶ *Onee-kotoba* does not restrict speakers to conventional rules enforced by the gendered speech of binary, heteronormative society. It enables speakers to construct their language in a way that suits them and this can look different depending on the user and the situation. Regardless of the different ways it is employed, *onee-kotoba* is unique to gay men and describing it as solely an imitation of women’s speech reduces its impact and significance.

While speakers may utilize *onee-kotoba* in various different ways, it remains an integral part of Japanese gay identity. It forms a solidarity between gay men in Japan. The ability to use *onee-kotoba* allows speakers to bond with other gay men and find pockets of queer communities where they can fully express themselves. This can be especially meaningful in a heteronormative country like Japan, where gay people have historically been left out of the mainstream. Thus, *onee-kotoba* is a way for gay men to challenge stereotypical notions of language, whether that is

⁵ Ibid., 87.

⁶ Ibid., 133.

in a public arena like television or media, or within intimate spaces amongst peers. *Onee-kotoba* is a wide-reaching tool that gives speakers the power to wield language in radical and inventive ways, creating new ideas of how language can be manipulated.

Identity Portrayed Through Fashion and Speech

Japanese culture is well known for its set-in-stone traditional expectations and has done well to preserve the collective consciousness of its society. The language itself reflects how deeply rooted their values are for having a set speech patterns that divide women from men, higher status from lower status and so forth. However, with each new generation comes opposition towards old norms, and the past century has been a turning point for women to break free from conventional identities. One emerging identity is gothic lolita. Isaac Gagné, former graduate from Yale University, writes in his graduate thesis, “Urban Princesses: Performance and “Women’s Language” in Japan’s Gothic/Lolita Subculture” on the uprising of Japanese fashion and speech styles and how it works to break conventional norms. He describes that among those who choose to deviate from the set language expressions, are women who indulge in the fashion genre known as gothic lolita, better known as *gosurori* (an abbreviation of Gothic Lolita in Japanese pronunciation). *Gosurori* girls reveal their individuality through physical appearance and, most importantly, specific speech patterns. The gothic lolita fashion is characterized by dark Victorian-era clothing, embracing “antiquated dresses” and palettes with black, navy blue, blood red, and gray.⁷ The look is also coupled with iconic motifs like crosses, coffins, bonnets and Mary Janes. It must be noted that someone who simply appreciates this aesthetic is not a *gosurori* girl. One is only considered a *gosurori* girl when the fashion and language usage are

⁷ Isaac Gagné, “Urban Princesses: Performance and ‘Women’s Language’ in Japan’s Gothic/Lolita Subculture” in *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, (2008), 2.

intentionally combined to deliver characteristics of regality and high status. *Gosurori* is not a label but an identity, as a label insinuates the name was put on rather than claimed by the individual. Identity reveals autonomy and a will to subscribe to whatever best expresses one's true self, thus it is important to distinguish the term *gosurori* as a name.

Gosurori speak with *ojousamago* or “lady’s speech” which can be described as an archaic and incredibly formal style that only “daughters of noblemen” used. The speech uses quaint honorific words like *osore irimasu* (excuse me) and formal pronouns such as *watakushi*, to complete the identity of a noble lady. Gagné highlights two prominent phrases used by *gosurori*, “*sayo*⁻ *de gozaimasu no* (Is that so?) and *go-kigen yo*⁻ (goodbye, hello).”⁸ In standard modern Japanese, the translations for these phrases are *sou desu ka* and *konnichiwa* respectively. While the meanings are the same, the former is deliberately used in order to evoke a sense of royalty and regality from the user. It is not enough to look the part, but to embody its mannerism, deliverance, and presentation through-in and through-out.

Those who partake in the style of *ojousamago* can even find a community online. They are most notably found within magazines and web forums, even going as far as to having a specialized lexicon of neologism. Gagné brilliantly describes them as a “linguistically distinct community.”⁹

To *gosurori* girls, this identity helps them cope with their self-worth and value in society. Girls choose to represent themselves this way in order to attain their idealized version of themselves. The identity of a *gosurori* is unique to every girl, but what is common among all of them is that it is within their expression of fashion and speech that they find solace within their own self. Speech style is used to remedy the gaps that our identities lack; there is power in the words we choose to delegate to our bodies and souls, revealing just how potent our words can be.

⁸ Gagné, “Urban Princesses,” 9.

⁹ Gagné, “Urban Princesses,” 2.

Different Meanings Conveyed Through Different Speech Style Choices

Since the idea of gendered speech is prevalent in Japan, Japanese people are quite aware of the differences between masculine and feminine speech. It is generally believed that the speech style that people utilize is “sex-linked,” that women usually speak in a more polite way when using *ojousamago* (feminine speech style) and men’s speech is blunt and less polite, as claimed by several scholars, such as Okamoto and Shibamoto Smith.¹⁰ However, this idea was challenged by a recent study, which criticizes it for being too conclusive, and omitting the context of language use.¹¹ Okada advances her opinion by stating that different choices in speech styles are not only related to gender, but also influenced by people’s social roles and professions.

In the article *When the Coach is a Woman: The Situational Meanings of So-called Masculine Directives in a Japanese Boxing Gym*, the author presents the example of a typical female boxing coach in Japan in 2003, who utilized different speech styles during her coaching session.

According to Okada’s analysis, a Japanese speaker might employ different speech styles for conveying a particular meaning which is not necessarily related to politeness levels.

To begin with, the article presents the idea of masculine and feminine speech and elaborates on people’s stereotypes on the usage of different speech styles. Generally it is believed in Japanese culture that women should use polite forms rather than imperatives, which is considered more of masculine speech. However, this is not the case for Coach Naomi, who is the coach for boxing, a men’s sport in which female boxers and coaches are still rare. The speech

¹⁰ Misao Okada, "When the Coach is a Woman: The Situational Meanings of So-Called Masculine Directives in a Japanese Boxing Gym." In *Japanese Applied Linguistics: Discourse and Social Perspectives*, ed. Junko Mori and Amy Snyder Ohta (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008), 160.; Shigeko Okamoto and J.S. Shibamoto Smith, "Introduction." Introduction in *Japanese Language, Gender, and Ideology: Cultural Models and Real People*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3–20.

¹¹ Okada, "When the Coach is a Woman," 160.

style choice used by Coach Naomi is not only related to her level of politeness, but it also reflects her professional vision to help her trainees become more effective boxers.

During the process of analyzing several different speech style choices of Coach Naomi, the article focuses on three contexts. The first context is a sparring session in which a trainee is told to perform a certain movement rapidly. In this session, the trainee is practicing with another person and Coach Naomi uses so-called masculine imperatives to stress the strength, speed and immediacy required to perform one movement, while she uses normal form of speech when telling the trainee where to go and how to perform certain actions exactly. The second context is the one in which Coach Naomi points out the shortcomings of her trainee. She uses masculine imperatives when criticizing some prior boxing moves made by the trainee to encourage him to perform better in the following movements. This contrasts with her normal, polite feminine speech style used when concluding how the trainee should perform better next time after the training. This style shift suggests that Coach Naomi chose masculine imperatives during the sparring session to convey the immediacy of her comments and her choice did not have a direct relationship with politeness. The third context in which masculine imperatives are frequently used is during a focus pad session, in which Coach Naomi would use imperatives to give real-time instructions. The language used during the session reflects Coach Naomi's professional visions, which to some extent could only be facilitated by masculine imperatives rather than normal speech styles. All of these three scenarios in which imperatives are used are related to boxing training, in which instructions on movements are given to help trainees perform better.

To conclude, through analyzing the language used by a boxing coach, Naomi, the author illustrated that different choices in speech patterns do not relate directly to the level of politeness of speech but rather are connected to the context in which the speech is given. Moreover, through

analyzing a woman of a specific profession, boxing coach, Okada proposes that Japanese women might be aware of the ideology and norms incorporated in different speech patterns and deliberately choose one over the other to construct their social images accordingly. Hence, we argue that people should not judge other people's choice of speech style only based on gender. Rather, they should notice what kind of identity people are trying to construct when incorporating different speech styles and identify the goals others want to achieve.

As is evident by the previous sections, Japanese speakers intentionally choose feminine speech or masculine speech to express a variety of meanings beyond mere politeness or one's sexual orientation. In one instance, a speaker may use hyper-feminine speech to create an identity she can finally feel comfortable in, while others may recognize that there is no one set speech for their unique identity and create their own speech variation. Either way, it is in the articulation of words that one's identity can blossom. In the following section, we will first show an example of *onee-kotoba*, in which the speaker expresses both feminine and masculine speech in order to honor both sides of their gendered identity. In the second example, *ojousamago* will be used by an anime character to cement their identity as a *gosurori* girl, which demonstrates that speech style can aid in the way someone wants to portray themselves. Finally, in the third example, we will discuss how occupation dictates a woman's choice of speech style between feminine and masculine speech.

Data Analysis

Matsuko Deluxe Utilizing Onee-kotoba to Express Anger

Onee-kotoba is uniquely set apart from typical feminine speech in Japanese, which is why linguists have asserted that it is its own distinct dialect of Japanese, as opposed to a mere imitation of feminine speech by Japanese men in the queer community. This example, taken from a Japanese talk show, features popular Japanese TV personality Matsuko Deluxe, who is a cross-dressing gay man. In this particular clip, Matsuko Deluxe is arguing with another panelist about J-POP versus K-POP and the success or validity of each style. As the conversation progresses, Matsuko Deluxe's language moves between masculine and feminine, a prime example of how the use of *onee-kotoba* is subjective and manipulated by the speaker to express different feelings or emotions.

This conversation was transcribed from a YouTube video published in 2012.¹² As a note, the ellipses (...) included in the transcription are used to indicate when an individual was speaking but got interrupted by another panelist.

リュウ・ヒジュン：例えば、日本の芸能界は、えっと、草野球レベル。韓国の芸能界
はプロ野球レベル。

Ryu-hui-jun: For instance, Japanese entertainment is like, uh, grass-lot baseball. Korean entertainment is like professional baseball.

マツコ・デラックス：あ、ちょっと待って。これちょっとね。あたし全然納得できないのが。結局はあ
たしね、K-POPとか見るとアメリカのパクリにしか見えないの。で、
えっと、世界で通用するってさつきからずつと言ってるけど、その世
界っていうのどこを指してるの？っていうね。

¹² Alethia Huerta, “Nakayoshi TV Matsuko Deluxe gets angry about K-pop,” (Alethia Huerta, 2012) YouTube video, 1:37, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JsyMZ42Z14>.

Matsuko Deluxe: Wait a minute. Hold on. I don't agree with that at all. After all, K-POP looks like it's just a rip-off of American music. You say it's world class, but where is the world that you are referring to?

リュウ・ヒジュン：はい。．．． [Ryu-hui-jun raises his hand to speak, but Matsuko Deluxe interrupts]

Ryu-hui-jun: Actually...

マツコ・デラックス：いや、ちょっと待ってよ[Stops ヒジュン]。だからアジアの同じような顔をしたところで、アメリカの模倣品をやって、キャーキャー言われるのが世界の市場だと思われてるんでしたらそれで結構ですけれども。

Matsuko Deluxe: Wait a minute. Hold on. So, if you believe that being a copy-cat of American performance and only playing to Asian audiences who all look the same is the “global market,” then that's fine with me.

リュウ・ヒジュン：米国の市場に今K-POPは上陸したんですよ。

Ryu-hui-jun: K-POP merely entered the U.S. market.

マツコ・デラックス：上陸しただけでしょ？

Matsuko Deluxe: It just now hit the market?

リュウ・ヒジュン：そのが証拠にビルボードのランクにK-POPのランキングが出ているんで。アメリカをトレースしようとしまいがとは関係なしにしてJ-POPはそこまですら行けてない。

Ryu-hui-jun: The proof is that K-POP is on the Billboard ranking. Even if it is similar to American music, J-POP hasn't even been able to make it on the American rankings.

マツコ・デラックス：て言うか、行こうとしてないもん。

Matsuko Deluxe: You don't get it. It's not trying to.

リュウ・ヒジュン: それは. . . [Matsuko interrupts and speaks over ヒジュン]

Ryu-hui-jun: That is...

マツコ・デラックス: アメリカで評価されることが全てなの? あなたたちは?

Matsuko Deluxe: So everything that matters to you has to be recognized by Americans?

リュウ・ヒジュン: 全てではなくて. . . [Matsuko interrupts ヒジュン again]

Ryu-hui-jun: It's not all...

マツコ・デラックス: K-POPチャートがビルボード出ることが成功なの?

Matsuko Deluxe: Does K-POP being on the Billboards mean success to you?

キム・ヒヨンギ: ちょっと待って。 そうしたら、 今日本がレディー・ガガにめっちゃハマっているん
じゃないですか。 それはどういうことなんですか。

Kim-Hyeon-gi: Wait a minute. So, right now in Japan people are really addicted to Lady Gaga.

What do you say to that?

マツコ・デラックス: いや、いいじゃない。だからあんた達の国の人たちちゃんと受け入れてやつ
てんじやないのよ。

Matsuko Deluxe: Isn't it good? That's why we're accepting music from your country, too, don't
you get it?

キム・ヒヨンギ: そうそうそう。だから全てさ. . . [Matsuko interrupts]

Kim-Hyeon-gi: That's right/ Therefore, everything is...

マツコ・デラックス: それでいいじゃないよ! なんていう素敵なおかのよ! 世界の文化を受け入
れてるじゃない! 何よ! なんで文句があるのよ! これだけ懐が深い国
がどこにあるんだよ! 他に! 出でけ! 嫌だったら出でけ!

Matsuko Deluxe: It's good, is it not? What a nice country! We are accepting culture from
everywhere in the world! What? What complaints could you have? Where

does a country with such compassionate tolerance exist? Leave! If you don't like it [Japan], then get out!

In the beginning of this interaction, Matsuko Deluxe starts off by speaking in a characteristically feminine speech style. One example of this is the frequent use of the pronoun, *あたし* (*atashi*), which is a first-person pronoun meaning "I."

あ、ちょっと待って。これちょっとね。あたし全然納得できないのが。結局はあたし
ね、K-POPとか見るとアメリカのパクリにしか見えないの。

However, *あたし* (*atashi*) is highly connotated with femininity and feminine sounding speech. Even in modern Japan which sees younger generations less constrained by gendered speech, it is rare to hear a Japanese man using this pronoun, unless he is speaking *onee-kotoba*. In addition, from this example, one can also see how Matsuko Deluxe drops the declarative 「だ」(*da*) which male speakers typically use before ending particles such as 「ね」(*ne*) and 「よ」(*yo*). This further contributes to the feminine-sounding speech that characterizes *onee-kotoba*. These are all conscious choices on the part of Matsuko Deluxe which reinforce his identity as a cross-dressing gay man.

Later in the segment, Matsuko Deluxe grows increasingly frustrated, and in an attempt to effectively convey his anger and frustration, he begins to incorporate more masculine speech, which in turn makes his speech sound more intense and direct. This can be seen especially in the last line spoken by Matsuko Deluxe.

それでいいじゃないよ！なんていう素敵な国なのよ！世界の文化を受け入れて
るじゃない！何よ！なんで文句があるのよ！これだけ懐が深い国がどこにあるん
だよ！他に！出てけ！嫌だったら出てけ！

Here, Matsuko Deluxe begins by speaking femininely, using 「じゃない」(*janai*), along with the feminine 「よ」(*yo*) and 「のよ」(*noyo*). After this, however, he transitions to more masculine speech to indicate his anger. A clear indicator of Matsuko Deluxe's incorporation of male speech patterns is the expression 「出てけ！」(*deteke*) which he repeats twice. This particular conjugation makes Matsuko Deluxe's request for the other panelist to leave much more intense. An appropriate English translation would be yelling, "Get the hell out!" to someone. It should be noted here that rudeness or politeness in Japanese is largely expressed through the conjugation of the verb, rather than the inclusion of expletives, as is often the case in English. This particular conjugation used by Matsuko Deluxe carries a harsher tone, which is much more often utilized by male speakers than female speakers, as it is more direct and rude. However, because Matsuko Deluxe is using *onee-kotoba*, he can switch between masculine and feminine speech much more freely to better express himself. One may think that Matsuko Deluxe stops speaking *onee-kotoba* simply because he begins using masculine speech. This is not the case, though. Once again, *onee-kotoba* is used subjectively by the speaker and incorporates both masculine and feminine speech styles to create a variation of Japanese that is unique to gay men who wish to display both feminine and masculine qualities.

Anime [Gate: Jieitai Kanochi nite, Kaku Tatekaeri], Season 1 aired on July 4th, 2015, TokyoMX

GATE is a fantasy anime adapted from a light novel written by Takumi Yanai. The anime is set in modern times and begins with the emergence of a mysterious portal from another magical world opening in the center of Ginza, Tokyo. The story follows the main character, Itami Youji, an Officer of The Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF), as he navigates his way through this portal and meets all sorts of fantasy characters who embody modern Japanese archetypes.

In this paper, we focus on the third episode of the first season, in which the audience is introduced to Rory Mercury.¹³ In this scene, Itami and his fellow JSDF officers have crossed the portal and have just saved some townsfolk from a dragon attack. As they are heading back, the officers are looking through their binoculars when they first see Rory and her peculiar fashion. From her clothing, he can already associate her with the modern-day *gosurori*, but it is in her *ojousamago*, that her archetype is manifested.



Outside

伊丹:カラス?ええと。。。ゴスロリ少女!

Itami: Crows? Let's see... Huh! A gothic lolita girl!?

倉田:え?

Kurata: What!?

ローリー:あなたたち、どこからいらして、どちらへ行かれるのかしらあ?

Rory: From where do you come from? I wonder where you are going?

¹³ AnimeOtaku-English, “A Gothic LOLI[GATE]|| Funny anime Moments of 2020 || 冬の面白いアニメの瞬間,” YouTube video, 2:34, June 16, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9ebxKmboJo>.

伊丹:え、なんて言った？

Itami: What did she say?

倉田:さあ。。

Kurata: I have no idea..

黒川:見た目は子供のようですね。

Kurokawa: She appears to be a child.

村の子供たち:神官様だ！

Village children: It's the Oracle!

伊丹:神官？

Itami: Oracle?

ローリー to the 村の子供たち:どおこから来たの？

Rory to the village children: Where did you come from?

村の子供たち:こだ村からです！

Village children: From Coda Village!

村の叔母さん:村を逃げ出しておりまして。

Village Grandma: We fled from the village.

村の叔父さん:炎龍が出てきて。みんなでここまで。

Village Grandpa: A flame dragon appeared. We had to run.

黒川:祈りを捧げているように見えますね。

Kurokawa: They appear to be praying to her.

伊丹:あの変な格好は宗教的な意味があるってことか。

Itami: So there's some religious reason for that weird outfit?

Rory notices Itami and his fellow JSDF officers.

ローリー:この変な人たちとは?

Rory: Who are these strange people?

村の子供:助けてくれたんだ!いい人たちだよ!

Village child: They saved us! They're good people!

ローリー:いやいやつれて行かれるわけじゃないのねえ。

Rory: So you aren't being forced out of your village.

村の子供:うん。

Village child: Nope!

Rory is talking about the JSDF's car

ローリー:これどうやって動いてるのかしら?

Rory: I wonder how this moves?

In this example, Rory constructs her *gosurori* identity not only through her clothes but through her usage of *ojousamago*. In standard Japanese speech used widely by young people, one can use “*no kana*” at the end of their sentences to express assumptions and guesses. However, Rory chooses to say, “*no kashira*,” which is a speech ending used in *ojousamago*. While it still has the same meaning, culturally it is different. The latter conveys nobility and high status, which fits with Rory’s identity as a *gosurori* girl. Therefore, the way she dresses is not the only aspect that defines her character, but also the way she speaks that cements her archetype. Another example of how this hyper-feminine speech plays into Rory’s identity can be seen when she says, “*dokokarairashite*.” The ending expression, “*irashite*” is the honorific version of “*kite*” (来て), meaning it is a word used in *sonkeigo* or respectful language. *Sonkeigo* is not to be used frivolously. There are situations where you do not use it, emphasizing the importance it

holds when it is properly employed. An older man would not use *sonkeigo* with a young girl because societal norms state that he is in a higher position of power. However, *gosurori* strive to be the “perfect princess” in their own image, therefore, they freely choose to speak in *sonkeigo*. To them, speaking in a hyper feminine and formal way shapes their “royal dignity” and princess identity. Without these deliberate choices of speech patterns, the identity of a *gosurori* would be incomplete and hollow on the inside.

Anime Naruto, Episode 96, San Sukumi no Tatakai (三すくみの戦い)

Naruto is an anime which talks about a world with superpowers and ninjas. The anime is set in the old times when people did not have modern technologies and lived in villages. The leaders of the villages are often strong and usually are male, but one female character, Tsunade, has outstanding power and is the leader of one of the ninja villages. Usually, she would speak and behave like a leader in both daily lives and during battles, which requires her to use more imperatives in her speech that are considered to be more of masculine. However, she also uses more feminine speech styles when speaking to someone she cares about.

The conversation below is taken from a scene in which Naruto fought really hard to protect Tsunade and got injured badly. Tsunade then tried her best to save him while conversing with her adversary.¹⁴

...

綱手:あの時か？心臓周辺の筋肉を切り裂いたっていうのか？

Tsunade: That moment...? Did he (kabuto) shred the muscles around his (naruto) heart?

かぶと:鳴人君はもうダメだよ。治るはずがない、例えあなたでもね。

¹⁴NARUTO JIRAIYA, “Naruto, Jiraiya and Tsunade vs Orochimaru and Kabuto,” Youtube video, 15:20, December 7, 2018, <https://youtu.be/MfGzXd1pTAo>.

Kabuto: It's all over... for Naruto. There is no way he can recover... even with you.

綱手:うるせえ！てめえは後で殺す。

Tsunade: Shut up! I will kill you later...

鳴人:賭けには、勝ったぜ。

Naruto: The bet... I won it.

かぶと:馬鹿な！

Kabuto: That's impossible!

綱手: (鳴人へ)もう一度だけ、あんたにかけてみたくなつた。

Tsunade: Just one more time... I want to bet on you.

...

綱手:かつゆ、そのガキをしづねのところに連れて行け。

Tsunade: Katsuyu, take that kid to Shizune.

かつゆ:はい、分かりました。

Katsuya: Yes, ma'am.

In this example, Tsunade uses different personal pronouns for Naruto and her adversary Kabuto. *Teme* in Japanese is a rude pronoun 'you' which usually incorporates some kind of negative emotions and is considered to be part of masculine speech vocabulary. *Anta* is an informal pronoun 'you' which can express intimacy among other meanings. It could be easily seen that Tsunade was very mad at that time, that all her speech style changed into masculine speech. “*Urusee*” is a blunter expression for “*urusai*”, with both having the meaning of “shut up”. Usually when women are angry, they would use the direct style “*urusai*” instead of its polite counterpart, “*urusai desu.*” “*Urusee*” is a variation of “*urusai*” which is considered to be

rude/blunt and part of masculine speech vocabulary. The sentence Tsunade said to Kabuto, who is her adversary, is full of masculine speech and wrath. In contrast, when she finally healed Naruto and saw him awaking, she was filled with joy and spoke to Naruto inside her heart in a softer way, for which she used a more feminine speech style. In order to convey her identity as a fighter and a ninja leader who needs to give command to others, Tsunade chooses to use more powerful speech, which results in her choice of masculine speech over feminine speech. She yells at her adversaries and expresses her power through both her action and her speech. When she commands Katsuyu, she uses masculine speech to speak in a manner appropriate to a ninja leader.

Conclusion

Based on our review of literature and data analysis, we fully believe that gendered speech is a vehicle for identity. With *onee-kotoba*, a gay man's identity is revealed, with Gothic clothing and *ojoosamago*, a *gosurori*'s identity is revealed, and with interchanging feminine and masculine speech, a woman's identity in the workplace is revealed. Masculine and feminine speech work to measure one's identity in ways that define the words that roll off our tongues. The very words we speak should be allowed to be seeped in identity. The beauty of gendered speech is that it doesn't just uphold patriarchal standards but destroys it as well. As people of the queer community find strength in molding pronouns to their freedom, there is a progressive shift in identity. Gothic and Lolita fashion is looked down upon as the definition of "declining morals" and yet their hyper-feminine speech completely debunks such stereotypes. With gendered

speech, Japanese language speakers are able to enact their full agency, resisting stereotypical and often oppressive gender roles.

Novice Japanese learners should be aware of these nuances in gendered speech styles and not place constraints on the use of gender-based speech by themselves or others. Japanese is a highly contextualized language, where meanings are often conveyed through the combination of both language and context. Therefore, individuals should not rush to conclusions about what exactly the language or the word choice stands for before really understanding the context. Those coming from languages where gendered speech is not prevalent, including English, must familiarize themselves with the grammatical structure of Japanese gendered speech, as well as the social nuances it carries. It is through patience and careful examination can one fully understand and appreciate the beauty of another language and culture. There is power in speech, and in realizing and harnessing that power, individuals can empower themselves and take ownership over the construction of their identities.

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