When Women Are in Charge: The Language Japanese Women Speak at Work

Claude-Eve Dubuc *University of Ottawa*

Abstract: Though in percentages still very few, women active in socially high and powerful positions are now an undeniable part of the Japanese public sphere. In the business context, these women make linguistic choices prompted by the necessity to perform in their roles as professionals and act as legitimate members of society. The resulting linguistic behaviour is revealing of their personal experiences, as well as of socio-cultural norms and expectations. Using analysis from fieldwork in Tokyo, the present article shows the importance of focusing not only on so-called Japanese women's language but also on the way women speak in Japan today.

Keywords: Japan, women, work, language, gender, power

Résumé : La présence de femmes occupant des positions socialement élevées dans la sphère publique japonaise est maintenant une réalité indéniable. Dans le contexte des affaires, ces femmes font des choix linguistiques en fonction de leur rôle professionel et social, choix qui sont donc alors révélateurs de leurs expériences personnelles, ainsi que des normes et attentes sociales. En se basant sur un travail de terrain effectué à Tokyo, le présent article illustre l'importance de concentrer les recherches académiques non seulement sur le soi-disant langage des femmes japonaises, mais aussi surtout sur la façon dont les femmes japonaises parlent aujourd'hui.

Mots-clés : Japon, femmes, travail, langage, genre, pouvoir

When looking at the Japanese public sphere and labour market today, one notices the growing number of women active in socially high and powerful positions. Though such individuals are still very few, and may not represent a stereotypical working Japanese woman, they are now an undeniable part of the ever-changing labour force. It is on the experiences and choices of such women that I will focus in this article, by using female managers' linguistic behaviour as a means of understanding the everyday reality of high-ranking women in large Japanese companies in Tokyo.

Many researchers have exposed how women's linguistic behaviour often reflects their lower social position and lack of power within verbal interactions (Fishman 1980; O'Barr and Atkins 1980; West 1990). In Japan, the so-called Japanese women's language[1] is said to convey, among many things, "softness," "avoidance of conflict," "non-assertiveness," "politeness" and so on (Ide 1979, 1990; Jungaku 1979; McGloin 1986; Okamoto 1995; Reynolds 1990; Shibamoto 1992). In the Japanese case, this speech is set within both strong socio-cultural values of femininity, and a particularly high level of social consciousness towards the way women speak or should speak (Inoue 2002, 2006; Nakamura 2007a; Takano 2005).

By succeeding in the business world, Japanese female managers find themselves in new social positions and interactional contexts. As female managers, we can assume that they are put in positions where, on the linguistic level, they are pulled in opposite directions. On one hand, as competent and capable businesspersons who have to lead teams, they need to express themselves directly with confidence and strength, and give orders and directions, a behaviour generally associated with markers of masculinity in Japanese (Ide 1990; Shibamoto 1992; Takano 2005). On the other hand, to succeed in a company established within a given society, in this case Japan, we can also assume that they will not be able to step too far outside the mold of socio-cultural norms and expectations

towards women without endangering the smoothness of their professional relationships, the outcome of their work, and chances for promotion.

In short, we can assume that women in powerful positions within the Japanese public sphere make linguistic choices prompted, amongst other things, by the necessity to perform in their roles as professionals and act as legitimate members of their society. The resulting linguistic behaviour is revealing of personal experiences, relationships with the surrounding people, the environment they evolve in, as well as of socio-cultural norms, values and expectations.

As I will show in this paper, it is crucial to focus not only on the so-called Japanese women's language, but also on the way women actually speak in Japan, and, through long-term fieldwork, analyse variations in their speech as legitimate manifestations of a diverse reality. In the present article, I will briefly introduce the academic as well as socio-cultural context, give a general overview of my research, analyze the data gathered during the course of one of four periods of fieldwork, its meaning and significance, and last, briefly lay out my overall findings and conclusions.

Theories on Women's Language

To begin, I briefly introduce the academic context of my research in relation to women's language. However, since I wish to present the historical as well as socio-cultural context in which working women in Japan find themselves, in no way is this meant to be an exhaustive overview.[2]

Considering the relationship between language and gender, Itakura (2001:23) states the gender of the speaker, "becomes relevant to the analysis of language only in so far as it is related to asymmetrical relationships within the social power structure." During the course of an interaction, speakers identify themselves with socially defined roles and norms, making their general understanding crucial to the analysis of the relationship between gender and language.

Moreover, since the 1990s, questions regarding the validity of establishing gender difference as a starting point for analysis have been raised more and more often (Crawford 1995; Freed 2003). The necessity to examine the complex and ever-changing nature of the concept of gender, as well as the heterogeneity within women's and men's linguistic behaviour, has increasingly been put forward. Therefore, insisting on the complexity of gender, its relation to language and the multiplicity of factors with which it interacts, Eckert and MacConnell-Ginet (1995) state that, "gender constructs are embedded in other aspects of social life and in the construction of other socially significant categories such as those involving class, race or ethnicity. This implies that gender is not a matter of two homogeneous social categories, one associated with being female and the other with being male" (470). This approach was developed in reaction to the marked tendency to establish women's linguistic behaviour as diverging from the norm, implicitly implied to be the masculine speech, and to the fact that gender's complex reality failed to be reflected in most analyses (Freed 2003). Today, researchers stress the complexity of gender and the importance of analyzing and understanding linguistic choices as coming from the multiple roles and identities available to both women and men (Gal 1995; Nakamura 2001; Okamoto and Shibamoto Smith 2004; Romaine 2003; Takasaki 2002).

Language is in constant interaction with society, which it not only reflects, but also creates. Social changes are eventually reflected in speech, but we cannot expect it to be in a direct, immediate and absolute way, since the relation between language, gender, society and culture is complex and multi-levelled. Linguistic variables communicate multiple and changing meanings acquired through their use within communities of practice. The understanding of these variables and their influence is crucial to the study of language and gender, and was an important stepping stone for the present research, which also strove to establish the importance of extensive fieldwork as a data collection method in research on women's language in Japan.

The presence in Japanese of a distinct feminine speech is well known and researched (Endo 2001b; Ide and McGloin 1991; Inoue 2002, 2006; Nakamura 2007a, 2007b; Okamoto and Shibamoto Smith 2004; Sasaki 2006; Shibamoto 1985, 1992) and is described by Endo (1995) with the following characteristics: the use of exclusively female expressions; avoidance of formalistic words; high frequency of expressions of respect; politeness and courtesy; roundabout and tentative speech patterns; high-pitched voice; repetitive speech; high level of adjective use; and distinctive behaviour. "Japanese women's language" is also often described as being repetitive, concrete, conservative, emotional and syntactically loose, and as reflecting women's traditionally lower social status (Itakura 2001; Okamoto 1995; Shibamoto 1981).[3]

One of the elements of particular interest in Japanese is the very high level of social consciousness regarding femininity in speech and the value it is given. This can be observed in the frequent critiques toward its supposed "disappearance" or "corruption" (Inoue 2006; Miller 2004). These linguistic forms and the femininity they are said to represent are most often idealized, depicted

as coming from an ancient past, and as representing the Japanese nation and its tradition. In reality, the way in which Japanese women speak has evolved throughout history and varies according to many factors such as age, social status, education, occupation and so on (Inoue 2002, 2006; Nakamura 2007a; Okamoto 2004; Takasaki 2002). Still, the idealized category of "Japanese women's language" and what it represents remains strong even today.

Japanese Women and the Public Sphere

Women have been active members of the work force throughout Japan's history[4] and have joined wage employment since the early Meiji period (Faison 2007; Hunter 1993; Lam 1992). However, government and mainstream discourse often continues to imply that it is acceptable for women to enter the labour market, only as long as they perform their role as housekeepers and mothers according to society's view (Dubuc 2009; Fujimura-Fanselow 1995; Mirza 2010). Many times, young women's salaries continue to be considered and depicted as a means to enjoy themselves or prepare for a future marriage, and married women's earnings as being only a secondary input to the family budget (Hayashi 1996; Suzuki 2007). This holds an undeniable influence on the choices and goals of female workers,[5] as well as on the way employers perceive and make use of this labour force.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Law

In 1985, under international and national pressure, Japan passed the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL), which was characterized by (and later criticized for) a categorization of demands towards enterprises in prohibitions or exhortations, the latter one having no legal power (Lam 1992, 1993). However, most prohibitions stipulated by the law only reflected legal decisions that had already been made, and therefore did not bring anything substantially new to the situation (Weathers 2005).

Still, a decrease in the most obvious forms of direct discrimination against women was observed. This was especially true regarding new employees' recruitment, conditions of employment, and job advertisement (Lam 1993). However, improvements, more then often than not, were made only in form and distinctions between "male jobs" and "female jobs" generally remained (Creighton 1996; Lam 1993). Therefore, critics have stated that with companies introducing the "two-track system" (see below), indirect forms of discrimination were simply institutionalized as a result of the law (Asakura 2004; Weathers 2005). Other critics also stated that the EEOL only provided a limited number of qualified women with the opportunity for equal employment, while forcing the majority of the female labour force into jobs with even lower wages and status (Creighton 1996). In 1997, 1999 and 2007 revisions were made, but even with the government insisting on its efforts to create a gender-equal society, the law's lack of coercive power remains a major issue.[6]

Japanese Companies and the Labour Force

Large Japanese companies have often been characterized by the lifetime employment system, although the economic crisis of the 1990s brought on important changes in employment and working conditions (Bernier 2009; Ono 2010). Under this system, new graduates (a majority of whom are men) are hired and trained by the company for which they will work until retirement. Women, especially before the EEOL, were hired with the expectation, and resulting pressure, that they would retire after a few years to marry or have children (Dubuc 2009; Kawashima 1995). Women were mostly employed right out of high school or junior college because four-year university graduates were seen as having fewer years left until "retirement," and required higher wages (Creighton 1996). These female workers did not receive the same training as men, were mostly assigned gendered tasks, and were kept outside the promotion system.

In this context, the two-track system[7] was the solution adopted by the majority of large companies in response to the EEOL (Kimoto 2003; Lam 1992, 1993; Nakano 1996). With this system, employees "chose" a career path upon entry in the company, a choice then reflected in their wages, assignments and access to promotions throughout their career. This, in theory, made differences in treatment the result of each employee's own career choices and not that of discriminarory practices. It was a way for companies to answer pressure to eliminate discrimination against women, to make use of career-oriented competent female workers as a solution to the labour shortage, and to institutionalize differential job assignments, promotions and wages (Kawashima 1995).

The two-track system consists of the career track[8] (*sōgōshoku*) and the clerical track[9] (*ippanshoku*). In the career track, employees are assigned to various departments in order to gain broad-based experience and knowledge. They are subject to transfers to faraway locations, work long hours, and eventually rise to management positions. Employees in the clerical track, almost exclusively women, are assigned clerical work, or "support work," and are excluded from promotions. Companies say the career track is open to everyone; however, hiring quotas are often lower for women and competition generally much higher (Asakura 2004; Benson et al. 2007; Lam 1992, 1993).

With the lack of childcare facilities adapted to working mothers, and the lasting expectation towards women to be the ones in charge of household chores, choosing the career track has often been associated, for women, with abandoning future prospects to have a family (Fujimura-Fanselow 1995; Lam 1993; Rindfuss et al. 2010; Suzuki 2007). Even when a woman is successful professionally, she is often considered as not having fulfilled her true role as a woman, and is looked upon with a certain pity, if she is not married or does not have children (Creighton 1996). Furthermore, though images and values are changing, "career women" are often viewed or depicted in a somewhat negative manner (more or less explicitly), and with the absence of positive role models, an openly stated career choice is still difficult to make for many female workers (Dubuc 2009).

Today, many companies continue to hire under the two-track system, but others have departed from it and are now using temporary workers (*haken shain*) to fill low-wage, low-status jobs (Benson et al. 2007; Weathers 2005). This category of labour emerged during the 1980s (Coe and al. 2011) and, for the clerical positions, mainly consists of women[10] (Bernier 2009). These workers belong to temporary employment agencies by which they are dispatched to other companies to work for short periods of time. They receive no salary from their agency between contracts, have no bonuses, promotions or raises, and no compensations when a contract is terminated. Contracts with a particular company are generally signed for a period of three months, after which the company is free to renew or not. Many companies also set a maximum period of time a temporary worker can be employed, and have rules prohibiting them from becoming regular employees (Dubuc 2009).

In short, female workers are, even today, mainly confined to low-status, low-paying job categories that include part-timers, temporary employees, contract and home workers (Benson and al. 2007 Suzuki 2007), and often continue to be seen as a disposable labour pool. Regardless, at the time of my fieldwork in 2007, 48.5 per cent of women over 15 years old were working (73.1 per cent in the case of men), making up 41.4 per cent of the labour force (Zaidanhōjin Joseirōdōkyōkai: appended chart 1).

Women in Management Positions

The ratio of women in management positions (*buchō* level: director) for private corporations with more than 30 employees has slowly improved in recent years, going from 1.5 per cent in 1995 to 2.0 per cent during the first part of my fieldwork in 2006 and 3.1 per cent in 2009[11](Gender Equality Bureau 2010). However, even in fields in which the majority of workers are women, management and top positions continue to be occupied mostly by men (Cabinet Office 2007). Many variables are involved in this slow improvement, including the generation change of leaders, changes in the value system of women and society in general, a labour shortage resulting from the aging Japanese society, and the higher value given to women's points of view because of their powerful position as customers (Dubuc 2009; Lam 1993). However, women's presence in management still significantly decreases as the position rank becomes higher (see footnote 10).

For companies, the main issues given as obstacles to promoting women's advancement in 2006 were: "the need to consider family responsibilities" (47.7 per cent), "the average number of years worked by women is short" (42.5 per cent), "it is difficult to make them work after hours and at night" (35.8 per cent), and "women generally have low professional consciousness" (15.6 per cent) (Zaidanhōjin Joseirōdōkyōkai: appended chart 66). This shows that company and employee hesitations result from social expectations and legal constraints that still often bind working women's activities and hope for promotion.

Research Context

Based on theories and research on women's language, as well as on Japanese women's position in the labour market, the research revolved around the hypothesis that for a woman to succeed professionally and reach a management position within a Japanese company, she would have to prove herself as a capable businessperson while not going too strongly against cultural norms of femininity—a behaviour observable in her speech.

In order to examine this question, I conducted four field studies in Tokyo over a one-year period (2006-2007).[12] The field studies included a carmaker, a financial group, an advertisement company and a home electronics maker.[13] I established that the subjects should be in their mid-forties, which meant that they would have entered the Japanese business world during a period of great changes (mid 1980s), and would have been given more chances to survive and rise in the company hierarchy, while probably still encountering barriers in systems and mentalities.

The following characterize each field site: (1) the advertisement company's work environment was highly hierarchical, but rather informal; (2) the home electronics maker was characterized by a virtual absence of hierarchy paired with strong informality; (3) the financial group was both highly hierarchical and very formal; and (4) the car maker presented an environment strongly marked by

formality and hierarchy but the manager openly strove to minimize hierarchical gaps.

I visited each company for a period of three to four months, after which I sometimes returned for interviews or events. During individual field trips, I went to each office an average of three days a week to observe a single female manager throughout her working day. Three simultaneous methods were used for data collection: voice recording, video recording and note taking. This was possible since I was assigned a desk within each team's perimeter and was generally allowed to follow the female managers everywhere. Also, I ended each field trip with interviews of the managers and their team members. Because of the similarity in the type of data analyzed, I chose to mostly follow the method presented by Endo and Ozaki (2002) for my transcriptions,[14] using complementary notes and coding for significant information.

Since it is impossible here to introduce in detail all four field trips and the data collected during their course, I have chosen to focus only on the first one for the present article (rather than to give a shallow description of all four). However, in order to deepen my argument, I will also expose my general findings and analysis in relation to the entire research in the last section of this paper, thus introducing, to a certain degree, findings from the other companies.

The Advertisement Company Case

This first company I visited, an advertisement company, which I will call AC, was established in the centre of Tokyo at the beginning of the 20th century. At the time of my fieldwork, it was active in 27 countries and employed more than 16 thousand people. Though I was unable to get official numeric figures for female employees and their positions,[15] the apparent high ratio of women was misleading. Many of the women present in the office were in fact temporary staff hired for support work such as answering phones, serving tea, making copies and so on. They were not given business cards (a clear sign that they were kept outside the company circle) and were only employed for limited periods of time. As for full-time female employees, they were in much higher proportions in traditionally female-related departments such as administration,[16] and though many had reached medium-high positions (for example senior staff member), they were still strikingly underrepresented in management. Still, AC was generally known as a company that put the emphasis on performance, and provided employees with relatively equal opportunities. This was confirmed in interviews with female team members who stated that they had mostly been given the same types of tasks as their male counterparts.

Even though the working atmosphere and relationships seemed friendly most of the time, hierarchy was extremely strict and *dōki* relations (colleagues who joined the company the same year) were very important. Organizational hierarchy, mainly determined by the year of entry, was almost absolute in establishing the way people interacted. Therefore, the lowest ranking individual would push the buttons in the elevator, answer the phone if the temporary female staff was busy or absent, and amongst other things, organize team events such as welcome parties. It was also a key factor in choosing the order for giving out name cards, in task assignment, choice of address terms, as well as in the use of non-reciprocal levels of politeness and so on.

In AC, it was Ms. Yamamoto,[17] the planning director (the equivalent of department manager, *buchō*) of a marketing department, who participated in my research. Born and raised in a city in the Northwest of Japan, she came to Tokyo as a four-year university student to study cross-cultural communication.[18] She studied abroad during her fourth year, and joined AC as a new graduate at 23 years of age. In the spring of 2006, she was 43 years old, married, without children, and in her 21st year of employment in the company.

Yamamoto was hired in the career track in 1986, the year the EEOL was implemented. Though older women from AC later told her that it had been a lot of work preparing for her and the eight other women hired that year, she had not realized it at the time. However, she remembered the executive director saying that they should not think about working, and quickly retire to get married. Still, when asked if she thought that being a woman had been a setback in her career, she replied that, on the contrary, it had often worked in her favour when she was younger. She felt that in a company where new things are sought after and valued, being a woman had sometimes helped her get assignments. Yamamoto's biggest worry was not the fact that she was a female career employee; rather, she feared growing older as a woman within the company and becoming someone difficult to work with, especially as a manager. This is revealing of the negative image often linked to older women who continue to work.

Yamamoto was promoted to management in 2004, during her 19th year of employment, which was neither early nor late compared to her dōki. This was a time when major organizational changes were made, which according to her, made her promotion and its acceptance easier. Like many other women interviewed during this research, managers or not, she had not been attracted by a management position and did not express a desire to rise in the company hierarchy.

The Yamamoto-group had 12 staff members, nine men and three women, and shared a female temporary staff with another team. The group's work consisted mainly of planning marketing and advertisement campaigns. Members were assigned a client or a project, and worked within teams of employees from different departments. This caused many members to be absent from their desks for long periods of time and it was the reason why Yamamoto was not directly involved in most of her subordinates' work, other then for administrative aspects.

Data Analysis

Of all four field sites, the data collected at AC covered the widest range of contexts and participants. From this enormous amount of data emerged linguistic choices and strategies that I will now introduce. What I wish to put forward here is not an analysis of details and specific markers in narrowly defined conversations, but rather language patterns that I was able to observe and which revealed the subject's situation within this business and socio-cultural context. Therefore, I have chosen to use descriptions and analysis to expose my findings rather than to give long lists of examples, which taken out of context would not add much to the argument (though I will give some to illustrate and clarify my analysis).

Traditionally-Given Overt Linguistic Markers of Femininity and Masculinity

Looking at first-person pronominal use, men in AC mostly used the masculine pronoun *boku*, both in informal conversations and in more serious work related exchanges. On the other hand, like women in general, female employees as well as Yamamoto chose to use the more formal and gender neutral *watashi* as their everyday pronoun.

In a business context, first-person pronominal use greatly varies according to companies and fields, and it is not the general norm for men to use the masculine pronoun *boku* since it may be associated with an image of immaturity (Sakurai 2002). A male team member confirmed this when he explained how he had first felt awkward hearing grown men use *boku* in AC, though now he too was using it as his main means of self-reference. The choice by Yamamoto and the other female workers, to avoid the "company standard," by not using the masculine form, confirms the hypothesis that empowering linguistic strategies adopted by female managers will not go through overtly masculine forms, but will rather be found at subtler levels of language.

Here, we cannot ignore that researchers have also reported the use of *boku* by some groups of girls (sometimes also of the more informal masculine *ore*) (Endo 2001a; Jungaku 1979; Miyazaki 2004). However, this is restricted to female students, and as stated by Sakurai (2002), there has been no research showing their use by women in the work environment. In fact, it has been reported these female students later abandon the masculine pronoun as they enter the labour force or marry, therefore becoming "members of the society" (*shakaijin*) (Okamoto 1995; Reynolds 1990).[19] Therefore, data and previous research enable us to assume that an adult woman would spark negative reactions, probably even questions regarding her capability and legitimacy as a professional, if she used the masculine first-person pronoun *boku* in the work context, endangering her position and work outcome. This confirms that gendered linguistic markers used as empowerment tools in some contexts, cannot necessarily be carried across context and participants while retaining the same linguistic outcome. Although *boku* may be used effectively as an empowerment or gender-distanciation tool by female students, even if it also creates some negative reactions (Endo 2001a; Miyazaki 2004; Okamoto 1995; Reynolds 1990). The use of this overt masculinity marker would not be effective as a linguistic empowerment strategy if used by professional women.

As for strong feminine markers, such as the sentence-final particle *wa*, they were also absent from Yamamoto's speech. We can assume that this is the result of a somewhat conscious choice, since she did sometimes use stereotypical feminine speech in humorous contexts, proving her knowledge and ability to use such markers (it is a manipulable gender marker as defined by Shibamoto [1985]). This shows, that most likely, she considered them inappropriate for her work environment or position. It is interesting to note that the other high-ranking female manager I met and interviewed in AC, who was from an older generation and had had a completely different career path than Yamamoto (see Dubuc 2009), did make an extensive use of these overt femininity markers. This manager was often criticized by co-workers and described as being too emotional, a characteristic also often given in regard to Japanese women's language (Shibamoto 1985). Since "the display of emotion affects perceptions of power, status, and dominance in interpersonal relationships"(Ragins and Winkel 2011:379), the clear avoidance of these linguistic forms by Yamamoto might thus also have been a more or less conscious way to differentiate herself, her work and management style, from this model of female management in AC, and from negative images of emotion display linked to lack of power in the work context.

Order Giving

Giving orders to staff members is an unavoidable part of a manager's role, but also one that may create friction. With

women being traditionally lower in social positions then men in the public sphere, and their language embodying this lack of power, order giving is a linguistic behaviour of interest when looking at the situation of female managers. Excluding declaratives (which I did not observe in my sample), orders in Japanese can be divided in three categories: imperatives, requests and desideratives, with women preferring the more polite forms (Shibamoto 1992).

In Yamamoto's case, I observed a clear preference for requests and an avoidance of imperatives, except when used in soft contexts. She also often used apologies and minimizers such as the adverb *chotto* ("little," "somewhat,") with her demands, thus lessening the weight the order. Her frequent use of question-type requests also took away the nuance of "order" and gave an impression of choice to the counterpart (real or not). The following example shows how she addressed the female temporary staff using such linguistic strategies.

Yamamoto: *[Myōji]-chan,* ***gomen, chotto go****an-nai shite* ***kureru?*** [Surname]-chan, **sorry, could you (do me the favour of)** show(ing) them the way?

This can be related to values of non-assertiveness and attention to others in ideologies linked to the Japanese women's language. Moreover, it illustrates how Yamamoto used linguistic forms that are not exclusively feminine but which, through their combination, frequency, or use in particular contexts, have a linguistic effect similar to that of traditionally defined femininity markers. They are not forms that can't be used by men, but the manner and frequency in which they are is less likely to be heard in men's speech, especially men in a hierarchically high position. They are gender markers by preference. This can also be said regarding the norm of non-assertiveness and attention to others, which are also valued in the Japanese language more generally, but to a lesser extent and towards different types of addressee then for the Japanese women's language.

Softening Strategies

During the three months spent with Yamamoto, "statement softening" was one of the linguistic strategies to clearly emerge. What I call softening strategies is the linguistic behaviour in which the speaker uses forms such as "I think," "I have the impression that," "maybe," and so on. This takes away the assertiveness of a statement, regardless of the certainty of his/her argument or thought, as in the following example addressed to a male group member (in which she further softens her statement by implying that the final decision would be taken by everyone together):

Yamamoto: *Sō iu taimingu de* ***yacchaitai na to iu ki mo shite****. (...) Sore wa, minna de kimereba ii koto dakara, (...)*
I felt I might *want to do it in this timing. (use of informal spoken forms) .... Because that's something we can all decide together.*

Yamamoto often used them as means to make a statement without disturbing the relationship, in situations when the counterpart might have felt threatened. She also often used them as tools to keep the counterpart from strongly opposing what she was trying to get acceptance for, or from feeling threatened and reacting negatively. This is a linguistic behaviour also reported by Hirsh (2000) in her case study of a Japanese female manager. Furthermore, Yamamoto also used softening extensively with stronger statements. In such cases, softening appeared to be a means of saying something strongly, while preserving the general non-threatening tone of the statement.

This strategy reflects, to a certain degree, the difficulty for women to make powerful statements without prompting reprobation, even in the business context. Using linguistic forms that are not, per se, marked by femininity, Yamamoto thus continued to pursue the same linguistic goal of conflict avoidance that has been given as a characteristic of women's language, through the manner in which she used them.

Mothering Strategies

Another noticeable strategy to emerge from Yamamoto's linguistic behaviour is what I call mothering strategies. Shibamoto (1992) introduced the concept of "motherese strategies" as being the choice made by women in non-traditional positions (with male subordinates) to use order-giving forms that a mother would towards her child. This can be interpreted both as a way to go around socio-cultural norms disapproving directiveness for women, and as a means to establish solidarity. Such order-giving forms were not, taken separately, significantly present in Yamamoto's speech, but talking in a way a mother would to her child clearly was.

In the course of my fieldwork, I was quite surprised to hear Yamamoto talk in a childish voice and I had first interpreted it as a way to lower herself to be less threatening to her counterparts. However, after careful analysis, it became clear that the overwhelming majority of such speech acts were instances in which she was expressing

concern or scolding someone. She was not putting herself in a child's position, but rather in that of the parent addressing one. Through motherly patterns of speech, solidarity and intimacy were emphasized. By creating an *amaeru/amaerareru*[20] relationship, Yamamoto thus established herself as the one to whom group members could rely upon. This was used more as a relationship tool than as a means of directiveness, and the linguistic forms included a much larger spectrum then the ones given in the case of "motherese." Therefore, I chose to differentiate it from Shibamoto's description to avoid confusion, by calling it "mothering," a denomination I felt also suggested its relation to Shibamoto's concept.

Yamamoto: *Gomen. Kyō, purezen* ***na no****?*
Sorry. You have a presentation today?
(soft question expression showing concern, like to a child)

MGM (younger male group member): *Hai.*
Yes.

Yamamoto: *Hayakunatta* ***no?***
It was put earlier? **(same soft question expression)**

MGM: *Etone-,*
Er,

Yamamoto: *Sōiu wake jyanai* ***no?***
That's not the case? **(same soft question expression)**

MGM: *Mushiro, osoku natte.*
Rather, it's later.

Yamamoto: *Osoku natta* ***no?***
It's later? **(same soft question expression, the repetition also emphasises concern and the mothering tone of her speech)**

Mothering strategies were used in informal contexts, mainly towards much younger staff members. They were mostly characterized by the use of a "baby talk" tone, a soft and cute high-pitched intonation, articulation and stretch of final syllables. Yamamoto also used mothering strategies towards other team members, but in a more limited manner. This would, for example, be the case in conversations related to personal worries, such as health problems or being caught in crowded trains. In these instances, she would often lightly tilt her head to emphasize her expression of concern.

Yamamoto also used mothering as a way to express disapproval in a soft manner. Overwork was a big problem in AC, for which the company was receiving a lot of heat. This was also the case for Yamamoto's group, for whom very long working hours were the norm, resulting in pressure from higher management on Yamamoto to cut her team's overtime. However, the group members' heavy workload made it difficult for her to pressure her team in return. This was a conflict situation for Yamamoto, since while knowing that overtime was unavoidable, her position as manager forced her to reprimand her staff for it. In such instances, using the intonation and expression of a mother scolding her child gave a lighter general tone to her words, while keeping the message intact. Knowing that the overtime problem was a difficult issue between managers and staff, mothering strategies made it possible for her to perform management work, by putting herself in a superior position, while establishing and protecting solidarity with her group. It is important to note that while strongly emphasizing solidarity, mothering strategies also established Yamamoto as the authority figure, therefore empowering her at the same time.

Compartmentalization: Informality and Politeness, Distance and Proximity

Another important pattern to emerge in my analysis of Yamamoto's speech behaviour, and also stressed by many team members during interviews, was the compartmentalization strategy. I define compartmentalizing as the strict division of levels of politeness and formality in speech according to specific contexts or participants. This again, is not something restricted to women, as the Japanese language is known to be highly sensitive to context, participants, and social distance (Itakura 2001). However, the level of compartmentalization observed in Yamamoto's speech went to much farther extremes of the spectrum than other people present, making it a meaningful marker.

The most striking example of this strategy was observed in the weekly group meetings. During these, Yamamoto addressed her group members using very high levels of honorific language when communicating messages as their manager and superior. Therefore, she would make statements using highly honorific forms as in the following:

Yamamoto: *Sore kara, ano, getsu ka, tsuitachi futsuka nan desu* ***keredomo****, minasan,* ***goshussha*** *no* ***goyotei degozaimasu deshōka?***
Also, er, regarding Monday and Tuesday, the 1st and the 2nd, everyone, do you have the intention of coming to work?
(Very high-level honorific speech, using beautification prefixes (*go*), formal word choices and question type, and a highly honorific verb form).

However, during the discussion parts of the same meetings, other meetings, and conversations in the office, Yamamoto usually spoke to her group members in a mix of informal/neutral and polite speech, with the former being overwhelmingly predominant. This informality was generally created through many means other than the single use of neutral forms, and included a high frequency of sentence-final particles, the frequent use of laughter, and mothering linguistic forms.

No one, other than her subordinates, was present during group meetings. Therefore, Yamamoto used levels of speech at both extremes of the politeness/formality and informality spectrum with exactly the same counterparts, but only the context/message differing. Though Yamamoto used humour in many instances, in the interactions described here, context, message and tone made it clear that these were not a form of irony. The use of such high levels of politeness and formality, much higher than the ones used by group members towards her, gave an official nuance to Yamamoto's speech. This officiality can in turn be interpreted as a necessary means of legitimization, resulting from a need, when communicating official company business, to legitimize the message by underlining that it does not come from her nor is it spoken on her personal behalf. It is no longer the individual speaking, but the company's decision being communicated through the manager. We can say that the use of this strict formality separates, in a way, the speech act from her personal will. Therefore, this extreme division may also be interpreted as a means to preserve solidarity while transmitting sometimes-unpleasant messages.

With this, I conclude a very brief overview of my first field site and the linguistic strategies observed. In the following section, I introduce my general findings and results, while referring to my overall research in order to deepen the analysis and strengthen my argument.

Findings and Results

As previously stated, Japanese women's language, or *onna kotoba,*[21] is an aspect of the Japanese language and culture that has been the focus of numerous studies both inside and outside Japan. Recently, researchers have shown how the so-called women's language is closely tied to language ideologies, and how it cannot be understood without taking them into account (Inoue 2002, 2006; Nakamura 2007a; Okamoto and Smith 2004). Language ideologies related to women's language in Japan are very strong. They can be seen in studies of its idealized history, as well as in publications and media attention towards the supposed degradation of Japanese women's speech (Endo 2001b; Inoue 2006; Miller 2004; Nakamura 2007a). Regardless of the reality of women's linguistic use, the image painted by language ideologies, and the values they are associated with, hold an undeniable influence on both women's and men's linguistic choices. This influence takes different forms and degrees according to many other inter-related factors, such as context, message and participants, as well as age, education, class and so on.

In the present study, I focused on the linguistic behaviour of female managers in the specific context of their work environments, and in relation to such linguistic ideologies. I did not compare their language use with the way they spoke at home, with other categories of women's use, or with men's. Gender was relevant in the context of this research, not to create a binary opposition between the male forms and the female forms, but rather because of its place within socio-cultural norms and ideologies, including the ones related to linguistic use.

Though we cannot isolate gender as a distinct and independent factor, the influence of gender-related language ideologies was clearly present in the linguistic behaviour of the four female managers observed. Therefore, just as Yamamoto during my first fieldwork, none of the four participants used masculine forms, except for very isolated and particular interactional contexts (such as jokes or quotes). Data clearly showed that there was no masculinization of their speech, contrary to what public discourse in Japan often suggests. On the other hand, it was also apparent that they did not use forms strongly marked by femininity, as defined by language ideologies and previous research, though softer feminine markers were used from time to time (for example, the self-interrogative *kashira*). What was most striking and significant in their linguistic behaviour, was the use of forms and speech patterns communicating the same nuances as those valued in language ideologies related to "Japanese women's language."

Therefore, norms that value non-assertiveness[22] (Ochs 1992; Okamoto 1995) were found in linguistic choices related to order giving, an important part of managers' work. Each speaker had their specific linguistic patterns (Dubuc 2009), but all completely avoided the strongest imperatives, forms that may be associated with masculinity in speech (Ide 1990; Shibamoto 1992; Takano 2005). Therefore, the speakers either chose specific softer forms, or paired orders with other words to further take away the assertiveness and authority nuance. For example, as I have described earlier, Yamamoto made a particularly extensive use of minimizers, forms such as *chotto* ("little," "somewhat," and so on) that took away the weight of what was being asked. In a similar manner, the home electronics maker's manager used a noticeably high

level of volitives. These forms include (on the linguistic level) both the speaker and the counterpart in the action being ordered, thus softening the statement's assertiveness. Furthermore, the financial group's manager generally avoided overt orders and had a marked preference for indirect forms suggesting what was being asked (Hirsh [2000] also describes similar linguistic behaviour by a female manager). In his analysis centered on directives, Takano found similar strategies used by Japanese female managers and analysed them in relation to power as follows:

> Language not only is defined by the context but also helps define a context in which particular aspects of speaker-addressee relationships are foregrounded, and distribution of power and rights/obligations are strategically negotiated or controlled by the speaker. [Professional Japanese women in charge] PWC's choices of particular directive strategies are context-defined, in that PWC, being subject to the socio-cultural norms of indirectness and politeness, vary their language use in ways appropriate to the face-threatening elements in the immediate context of use. At the same time, their strategic uses of directives along with the invented contextualization cues are context-defining, in that they help define a context in which it becomes natural for subordinates to comply voluntarily with requested acts. [2005:657]

Because of the variety of these managers' experience, work environments, relationships, and so on, the strategies used were multiple, but the general tendency to choose expressions which took away the assertiveness of orders was clear and shared.

Another nuance underlying linguistic forms valued for femininity is the attention to others, through, among other things, the expression of empathy and consideration (McGloin 1986; Okamoto 1995; Shibamoto 1992), which was also observed in my sample. For example, in the case of Yamamoto, this was particularly apparent in her use of mothering strategies. Talking in a motherly tone to her subordinates made it possible for Yamamoto to express disapprobation in a non-face threatening way, while simultaneously showing concern and emphasizing solidarity. Laughter was also used to soften strong remarks and render them less threatening, which communicated attention towards the counterpart's position. With a similar intent, the manager from the financial group used confirmation-seeking forms at a much higher frequency than other participants. These were expressed through negative-form questions in affirmative statements, and use of the sentence-final particle *no* (and its contraction *n*) that puts the emphasis on shared knowledge between the speaker and the hearer (McGloin 1986). By using these forms, she involved her counterparts in her statements, showing covert concern for their comprehension and approval. This was also the case for the carmaker's manager who, for her part, underlined her consideration for others through acknowledgment of their opinions and work. She used backchannels extensively, both in the form of a clearly verbalized "yes" and through accentuated nodding, stressing not only her understanding, but also her open stance towards her subordinates.

Finally, the presence of softening forms in all four managers' speech was one that communicated avoidance of conflict and self-affirmation, a value also found in Japanese women's language ideologies (McGloin 1986; Okamoto 1995; Reynolds 1990). The use of forms such as "I think" or "I feel" is often characteristic of formal speech contexts, but their presence in the language of the female managers from this research clearly went beyond rules of formality (see Dubuc [2009] for detailed analysis). They were particularly present when pointing out mistakes or omissions, and served as means to render statements less face-threatening, and therefore less likely to prompt negative responses that may lead to conflict. They could also be observed in the use of laughter, especially when discussing difficult matters. This was particularly apparent in the financial group, where the female manager's extensive use of expressions such as "I'm thinking maybe perhaps..." and especially "but" (*keredomo, kedo*) in affirmative statements played a clear role of conflict avoidance by softening self-affirmation.

As we can see, although the female managers observed did not use the overt and marked forms of the so-called Japanese women's language, covert nuances and values underlying these forms were still clearly present in their speech. In other words, the linguistic behaviour observed demonstrates how the participants changed external linguistic forms, each adapting them in different but sometimes similar ways to their own work environment or relationships while preserving interactional goals linked to women's language in Japan. By doing so, they avoided threatening their status as businesspersons and managers, while making sure not to prompt reprobation and endanger their work or position. These linguistic strategies are, among many factors, highly related to context and participants and therefore must be understood within an ensemble of inter-related variables, something I strove to attain in the present research through the use of long-term fieldwork.

The lack of role models for female managers has often been underlined (Benson et al. 2007). However, the presence of "negative" images related to career women is also

easily noticeable and should not be ignored. This must be considered as a factor indirectly influencing linguistic choices of female managers in two directions. On one hand, there is the negative image associated with overt use of women's language (as defined by ideologies) by working women. First, the negative image embodied by older female employees who have worked for many years in assistant positions and are depicted as critical and irritable figures. Designated under the term *otsubone-san*, they are considered difficult to work with, and are often imitated by individuals through the use of overt feminine forms (*wa*, *kashira*, and so on) as well as overuse of highly honorific language. Second, women working in career positions are also faced every day with the highly visible presence of receptionists, who are regarded as a separate category of workers. Though the negative image associated with these workers is not as clear as for the otsubone-san, it is undeniably present in their exclusion from the status of businesspersons. In this case, overt femininity expressed through speech, appearance (for example uniforms), and behaviour, is associated with the absence of business responsibility and skills other than support. This creates an opposition between an overt expression of femininity and the image of a capable businessperson. Therefore, in all these aspects, a negative image is often linked to overt femininity within the work environment.

On the other hand, negative images are also associated with a strong divergence by working women from norms of femininity. This is clearly present in the media's representation of successful career women, who are generally depicted as cold and self-centered individuals (Dubuc 2009), a phenomenon also observed in the companies I visited. There, the masculinization of female managers' communication styles, described by individuals as the use of strong and directive forms more than that of specific masculine markers, was unanimously referred to in a very negative manner and as something both female employees and managers alike wished to avoid. Although none of the four participants belonged to the category of "masculinized" speakers, examples of female managers and employees with these characteristics were strongly stigmatized.

These two marked tendencies in the perception towards the linguistic behaviour of working women in general, and of female managers in particular, confirm my hypothesis. Since women in management are in a position where they have to behave both as businesspersons, without being too strong or "masculine," and as women within Japanese society, without being overly "feminine" because of the business context, female managers developed linguistic strategies keeping the linguistic goals valued by women's language ideologies, without expressing "femininity" in an overt manner. They adapted the women's language as defined by socio-cultural norms, changing its external forms and avoiding ones considered inappropriate for the work environment, to create language behaviours suited for their position, activities and interactional goals. Therefore, I hope to be able to introduce an analysis of how speech acts were received and perceived by the managers' counterparts (and how this in turn influenced their choices) in a future article.

Multiplicity and Diversity

Researchers who have studied Japanese women's linguistic behaviour, have often done so according to two different standpoints. On one side, there are those who have studied it as the so-called "women's language" found in related ideologies. They identified generic speakers, generally female and male for comparison, whose linguistic use they have analyzed with a focus on forms traditionally given by language ideologies, to produce descriptions of the characteristics found in "women's language" (Ide 1979; McGloin 1986; Shibamoto 1985). Some also use historical descriptions and general observations to describe, once more, the "women's language" (Horii 1990; Sugimoto 1998). On the other hand, others have focused on specific speakers whose linguistic use they have described as deviant and as being of interest because of this deviance from the norm, implied as being the "women's language" (Kataoka 1997; Okamoto 1995). These researches were very important in setting the grounds for the analysis of Japanese women's linguistic behaviour as one that must be understood within a specific historical and sociocultural context, in relation to language ideologies.

However, looking at women's actual linguistic use, we cannot ignore important variations from the supposed norm, and the multiplicity of forms and strategies employed. This is not something new, as Nakamura and Inoue have shown. Contrary to what language ideologies suggest, the way Japanese women speak has always been very diverse, and public fear in regards to the disappearance of the idealized women's language have also constantly been heard (Inoue 2002, 2006; Nakamura 2007a). Therefore, as more and more researchers have put forward, it is crucial to consider language ideologies in the analysis of the so-called Japanese women's language (Okamoto and Smith 2004; Yukawa and Saito 2002).

Moreover, it is important to analyze variations in linguistic use, not as generic or non-generic behaviour, but as legitimate manifestations of a diverse reality. Throughout my fieldwork, one comment was made to me recurrently by the female managers themselves and the individuals

surrounding them. Everyone agreed that their team was unique and that the manager was not representative of the typical woman (manager or not) in the company. The specificity of the teams might have come in part from the presence of female managers, or again, it might have been the specificity of the teams themselves that permitted the presence of female managers in fields where their numbers were still so low. However, what I felt was most significant was this variation itself and what it meant to the study of women's language. Looking at the reality of linguistic use, it becomes clear that we now need to focus not on women's language, but on the way women speak. When considered in relation to language ideologies, context, relationships, and so on, linguistic choices and strategies become relevant to the understanding of the individual's situation. Though some might be common with other female speakers, or to female and male speakers, the reasons behind their use and the context surrounding it heavily influence their significance.

Therefore, we cannot assume cause and effect between single-handed factors and linguistic behaviour. Company X will not automatically produce a female manager X who uses a women's language X. Just, as the variables at work in linguistic choices and behaviour are multiple, the possible answers to their influence are numerous. It is in the analysis of women's diverse way of speaking, not as deviations from the norm, but as responses to general and specific factors, which include the presence of strong language ideologies related to women's language in Japan, that we can obtain a meaningful understanding of their situations and experiences. This is being put forward by more and more researchers (Gagné 2008; Hirsh 2000; Nakamura 2007b; Okamoto and Smith 2004; Takano 2005), and it will, in turn, help widen the understanding of modern Japanese women, their experiences, choices and everyday reality.

More than the linguistic forms themselves, it is the reasons why they are used and their significance for the participants that are meaningful in understanding the linguistic choices of Japanese women today. This corresponds with Takano's (2005) findings on female executive's use of directives in relation to power and linguistic strategies, according to which contextualization in the analysis of Japanese women's speech is of the most importance to the understanding of their specific responses to dilemmas. Although little research on how Japanese women speak has been undertaken with long-term fieldwork as a data collection method of natural speech events, the present paper has attempted to show the necessity of its use in order to shed light on aspects of linguistic choices and strategies otherwise difficult to understand.

Because of the importance of context, we can easily assume that female managers' linguistic use will vary according to whether they are in the work environment, with friends, or at home. In future research, I believe that putting the focus on the way women, who work in non-traditional positions change their register of speech according to contexts and participants outside the work environment, will help create more layers in the understanding of their social position. This will in turn widen our knowledge of modern Japanese society and culture.

Claude-Eve Dubuc, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Ottawa, 55 Laurier Avenue East, Desmarais Building, Room 8101, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1N 6N5. E-mail: cdubuc@uottawa.ca.

Notes

1 In the present article, I use the phrase "Japanese women's language" not to refer to the way Japanese women actually speak, but according to Inoue' definition as "a space of discourse in which the Japanese woman is objectified, evaluated, studied, staged and normalized through her imputed language use and is thus rendered a knowable and unified object" (Inoue 2002:392).

2 See, among others, Takano (2005) for a detailed review of publications on Japanese women's language and power, and Bucholtz (2003) and Freed (2003) for reviews on theories related to women's language in general.

3 See Shibamoto (1985) or Endo (1997), among many, for a general comprehensive description of the characteristics generally associated with "Japanese women's language."

4 This includes agricultural work, domestic labour, work in family businesses and so on (for example Hara and Sugiyama 1985; Lebra 1991).

5 This influence can also be observed on the private level as, among other things, women delay marriage more and more (see Mirza 2010).

6 Problems and causes preventing the achievement of true equal opportunity are analyzed in details by Weathers (2005).

7 Also called the dual-track system or the career-tracking system.

8 Also called the management track or the comprehensive track.

9 Also called the general track.

10 For more specialized temporary workers with recognized skills and higher status and salaries, the male ratio is higher (Bando 2001; Sato 2001).

11 The numbers during the same years for a lower management level (*kachō*) are 2 per cent, 3.6 per cent and 5 per cent; and for section chiefs (*kakarichō*), they are notably higher higher at 7.3 per cent 10.5 per cent and 11.1 per cent (Gender Equality Bureau 2010).

12 The fieldwork was set in the course of a seven-year stay in Japan for my graduate studies.

13 For factors leading to the choice of these companies, see Dubuc (2009).

14 For the transcriptions, I used field notes to make lists of the interactions, which I then divided by type, place, and participants. Since the volume of data made it impossible to transcribe everything, I randomly chose representative interactions for each, which I partially transcribed for further analysis. Events or conversations that stood out, or seemed meaningful for a variety of reasons, were also chosen for transcription. I established a basic transcription format with only minor differences for each company, and each speech event was given a separate transcription sheet. Aside from the transcriptions of the participants' conversations, they included detailed information on data location (CD, DVD and field notes), the participants (number, hierarchical position in relation to the female manager and gender), the context (nature and place of the exchange), and any other relevant information. Since I did not aim at doing conversation analysis in a quantitative manner, analysing length of silences and so on, I decided not to follow the strict transcription system introduced by Jefferson (1996), but simply to write down in Japanese what had been said, using complementary notes for significant information, as suggested by Have (1999).

15 I interviewed a female office director, who was the highest-ranking woman in AC and the only one in her position. According to her, though the number of female department managers (my participant's position) was slowly increasing (around 34 to 35 women, including offices outside Tokyo), there were only two higher-ranking women at the time, herself and one general manager.

16 Though the situation was slowly changing, women were very much under-represented, if not absent, in departments dealing with traditionally male-centred fields (car making, newspapers and so on) or in fields that necessitated after-work interactions with clients (going to hostess bars and so on).

17 The manager's name has been changed to protect her privacy.

18 Since the so-called Japanese women's language is known to belong to standard Japanese (a form based on Tokyo's dialect), the birthplace of the participants was considered as a possible issue influencing their linguistic use prior to the fieldworks. However, because (1) all participants had spent at least half of their life in Tokyo, (2) no team member reported dialect use, and (3) norms and values related to Japanese women's language are well embedded into society and culture even outside Tokyo, this was not evaluated as problematic for the present analysis.

19 However, Endo (2001a) has also noted recent cases in which the person continued using boku even as an adult.

20 This is a very important concept in Japanese society and culture in which a person relies or depends (*amaeru*) on another (*amaerareru*) (Funabiki 2003).

21 Literally meaning "women" and "language," and also designated under the term *joseigo*.

22 As previously stated, these are also norms that apply to the Japanese Language in general, but are especially emphasized in Japanese women's language ideologies and for "Japanese femininity." This is particularly true within the specific context analysed here, the work environment. Therefore, they are gender markers by preference rather then by exclusivity (Bodine 1983).

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