Variability and multiplicity in the meanings of stereotypical gendered speech in Japanese

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Abstract
Recent research on the use of gendered speech in Japanese has demonstrated extensive within-gender diversity, suggesting that the relationship between linguistic forms and gender is variable, not fixed. While this diversity in use suggests a diversity in interpretation, the latter has not been adequately examined in its own right and deserves closer attention, given that it has important implications for the relationship between linguistic forms and social meanings. To address this gap, this article analyses both native speakers’ metapragmatic comments on the use of gendered linguistic forms and the interpretation of such forms used in situated conversations. It considers how and why forms normatively interpreted as feminine or masculine may be (re)interpreted differently by different persons or in different social contexts. Drawing on the notion of indirect and variable indexicality, I consider how such diverse and multiple interpretations can be accounted for in a theoretically coherent manner.

KEYWORDS: GENDER, INDEXICALITY, LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY, JAPANESE
1. Introduction

Language and gender research has undergone major changes in both theory and methodology since the early 1990s. What these changes reflect is a fundamentally different way of conceptualising the relationship between language and gender. In the earlier approach, which mainly addressed linguistic gender differences, linguistic forms were linked straightforwardly to women or men. Questioning this static approach, recent research has shifted its focus to more critical examinations of the relationship between language and gender as being indirect, socially constructed, and dynamic, and hence potentially variable, multiple, and diverse (e.g. Bucholtz, 2014; Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). Corresponding to this general change, Japanese language and gender research has also shifted its focus from the structural description of joseigo ‘women’s language’ and danseigo ‘men’s language’ as distinct categories to a more critical approach with the understanding that these categories represent linguistic gender norms or stereotypes. This shift in turn has led to two kinds of research: one concerning the historical norm construction (e.g. Inoue, 2004, 2006; Nakamura, 2007a, 2014) and the other concerning within-gender diversity in language practice (e.g. Abe, 2010; Itakura, 2015; Maree, 2013; Okada, 2008; Okamoto, 1995; Okamoto and Shibamoto Smith, 2004; SturtzSreetharan, 2004, 2009).

While these recent studies have greatly advanced Japanese language and gender research, there are many gaps yet to be filled. Here I note only two issues. First, recent studies have tended to examine either the norm construction or actual speech practice separately, but it is important to consider the relationship between the two, that is, the relationship between the macro-sociological facts and micro-level language practice, as increasingly recognised in recent years (see, for example, Agha, 2005; Mills & Mullay, 2011; Okamoto & Shibamoto Smith, forthcoming; Pennycook, 2010; Silverstein, 2003). The second issue concerns the interpretation of linguistic forms, in particular gendered language.

While these two issues are closely related and together raise important questions concerning the relationship between language and social meanings, including gender, the present article focuses on the second issue, namely, interpretation. Previous studies on diversity in the relationship between Japanese language and gender have tended to look at it from the production side, considering how and why speakers use gendered linguistic forms – an approach largely based on the view that meaning resides in the speaker and can be retrieved (see, for example, Duranti, 1993 for a critical discussion of this matter). However, the speaker’s meaning (or what is regarded as the speaker’s meaning by the researcher) may differ from other persons’ meanings. That is, the same linguistic form may be interpreted differently by different individuals and in different contexts (Cole & Pellicer, 2012; Eckert, 2008; Johnstone, 2013). Concerning the variable meanings
of dialectal forms, for example, Johnstone (2013, p. 393) explains the source of this variability as follows:

Particular forms can index multiple meanings at the same level and at multiple levels of abstraction. This is a consequence of the fact that language is never completely shared and that different individuals experience the linguistic and sociolinguistic environment in different ways, depending on the context (who is talking, in what circumstances) and the co-text (what else is being said or done at the same time), and meaning can change.

This argument is not limited to dialectal forms, but also applies to the interpretation of gendered language (and other linguistic variables).

While recent research regarding Japanese has demonstrated within-gender diversity in language use, which suggests a diversity in interpretation, the latter has not been adequately examined in its own right. Its close examination is essential for enhancing our understanding of the nature of the relationship between linguistic forms and social meanings. Focusing on gendered linguistic forms in Japanese, in this article I consider the issue of semiotic variability and multiplicity by addressing how they may be interpreted in specific social contexts and how the variability and multiplicity in their interpretations can be accounted for in a theoretically coherent manner by considering what gives rise to different interpretations. In what follows, I first discuss the theoretical underpinnings for this article, drawing on the notions of indirect and variable indexicality and language ideology. I then examine sample metapragmatic discourses to illustrate possible diverse interpretations of gendered forms in Japanese, followed by analyses of the possible diverse meanings of gendered linguistic forms in situated practice. Lastly, I present a brief conclusion.

2. Variable indexicality and language ideology

The sentence-final form *wa yo* or *zo* is a female or male form, respectively. The self-reference term *atashi* or *ore* means that the speaker is a woman or a man, respectively. These exemplify common characterisations of gendered speech forms in earlier research based on the direct indexicality approach (Ochs, 1993). This approach, however, has been found inadequate by many studies of actual language use (see, for example, Abe, 2010; Maree, 2011, 2013; Miyazaki, 2004; Okada, 2008; Okamoto & Shibamoto Smith, 2004; Sunaoshi, 2004), which show that the link between a linguistic form like *wa yo* (or *zo*) and gender is neither direct nor fixed, and that social meanings are not inherently associated with linguistic forms. Eckert (2008, p. 455) argues that:
The very fact that the same linguistic variables may stratify regularly with multiple categories – e.g. gender, ethnicity, and class – indicates that their meanings are not directly related to these categories but to something that is related to all of them. In other words, variables index demographic categories not directly but indirectly (Silverstein 1985), through their association with qualities and stances that enter into the construction of categories.

For example, the form *wa yo* may be associated with such qualities as gentleness and politeness, which in turn may be linked to not only women, but also to people in higher social classes (see also Ochs, 1993 for a discussion of the notion of indirect indexing). Obviously, not all women are gentle and polite, nor are all people in higher social classes, but it is the common belief that they (should) have such qualities and therefore (should) speak gently and politely.

In other words, the link between *wa yo* and women is mediated by language ideologies, or “‘commonsense’ sets of beliefs about language and their links to ‘reality’ and to social value that speakers can and do use to rationalise their language use and their attitudes toward the language use of others, with consequences for language structure and language change” (Shibamoto Smith & Chand, 2013, p. 36). An ideology reflecting the interest of a specific social or cultural group (Kroskrity, 2000, p. 8) is by definition contested. A dominant ideology gains hegemony, but it is a product of contestations, because hegemony is never complete (Briggs, 1998; Gal, 1998). This means that the normative interpretation of a linguistic form based on the dominant ideology may not be universally shared in a society. As emphasised by McConnell-Ginet (2014, pp. 318 and 322), meaning-making is “fundamentally social”, and with different ideologies, different interpretations are possible. In this respect, non-normative interpretations are not simple exceptions. As argued by Blommaert (2010, p. 80), “‘the margin’, so to speak, is not necessarily a space in which people fail to meet norms, but it can as well be seen as a space in which different but related norms are produced, responding – ‘ecologically’, so to speak – to the local possibilities and limitations”.

The foregoing discussion points to the importance of the role played by specific interactional contexts for the interpretation of linguistic forms. Introducing the notion of indexical field, Eckert (2008, p. 453) argues that “the meanings of variables are not precise or fixed but rather constitute a field of potential meanings – an indexical field, or constellation of ideologically related meanings, any one of which can be activated in the situated use of the variable”. In other words, it is only in a specific context that a linguistic form is fully interpretable. Furthermore, the semiotic variability and multiplicity of an indexical sign is largely made possible through the process of its repeated (re)interpretation, or (re)semiotisation, in context. Drawing on Silverstein’s (2003) notion of indexical order, Eckert (2008)
concludes that the link between form and meaning is made and remade through participation in discourse, which involves “a continual interpretation of forms in context, an in-the-moment assigning of indexical values to linguistic forms” (p. 462). Thus a form with a stereotypical social meaning may be given a different or additional indexical value in a particular context.

In the ensuing sections, I examine the interpretation of Japanese gendered speech to illustrate how the indexical approach discussed above may help us understand the variability and multiplicity of its indexical meanings.

3. Variable meanings: Examples from metapragmatic discourse

Metapragmatic activities take a variety of forms, such as direct comments on language and language use (as seen in self-help books on speech and opinions about speech expressed in readers’ columns in newspapers and online blogs) and indirect comments indicated through speech representations (as seen in different speech varieties spoken by characters in novels, TV dramas, and so forth). Metapragmatic comments are not accurate descriptions of how people speak, but they tell us about native speakers’ beliefs about how one should or should not talk, or their awareness of social significance of different language varieties or ways of speaking (Kroskrity, 2000; Woolard, 2008). While they often serve to endorse and reinforce dominant language ideologies, they may also involve expressions of competing views. Examining metapragmatic comments is thus helpful in understanding native speakers’ views about social values and meanings of language varieties and language use, as they may have important bearings on actual language practice. This section examines metapragmatic comments that illustrate diverse views concerning gendered speech.

Joseigo and danseigo have been characterised in terms of a set of specific linguistic forms involving features such as self-reference and address terms, sentence-final forms, and honorifics, and also in terms of general stylistic features such as politeness, gentleness, and refinement (for joseigo) and forcefulness, decisiveness, and roughness (for danseigo) (see, for example, Kinsui, 2003, pp. 135–137; Okamoto & Shibamoto Smith, 2008, p. 92 for summaries of these stereotypical characteristics). Furthermore, the characterisations of joseigo and danseigo are generally given in terms of Standard Japanese (SJ, hereafter) forms rather than in regional dialectal forms (Inoue, 2004, 2006; Nakamura, 2007a, 2014; Okamoto & Shibamoto Smith, 2008), an indirect metapragmatic comment that suggests the underlying “standard language ideology” (Milroy, 2001) that regards SJ, or its speakers, as the model, or “icon” (Irvine & Gal, 2000), of the Japanese language while degrading or disregarding regional dialects and their users.
The practice of treating SJ as the model is still common in education (as in school textbooks and Japanese language textbooks) as well as in the media, even though it is increasingly recognised that Japanese people’s attitudes toward regional dialects have become much more positive today (e.g. Tanaka, 2011). For example, as an indirect metapragmatic comment SJ-based *joseigo* and *danseigo* tend to be associated with the “traditional” forms of femininity and masculinity and used in the media, particularly for heroines and heroes in fictional worlds such as *manga*, TV dramas, *anime*, and novels (Kinsui, 2003; Nakamura, 2007b; Okamoto & Shibamoto Smith, 2008, forthcoming; Satake, 2003; Shibamoto Smith, 2004). In other words, SJ-based gendered language can be considered socially “typified”, whereby a set of linguistic forms is “regularly treated as indexical of a particular social type” and gives rise to a “metapragmatic stereotype” (Agha, 2005, pp. 45–46). In addition, self-help books for women’s speech published profusely every year is another media genre that emphasises SJ-based *joseigo* (Nakamura, 2007b, 2014; Okamoto, 2010; Okamoto & Shibamoto Smith, 2008, forthcoming). We also encounter comments expressed in readers’ columns in newspapers and magazines as well as online blogs that sharply criticise women and men whose speech is respectively considered unfeminine (Inoue, 2006; Okamoto, 1995) and unmasculine (see below for examples).

However, non-normative interpretations have also been expressed. For example, it has been pointed out that linguistic femininity does not always need to rely on specific SJ forms, that feminine characteristics can be expressed using regional dialects (Okamoto & Shibamoto Smith, 2008, forthcoming), and that the use of SJ forms may not necessarily translate into femininity if it is not accompanied by the appropriate para- and extra-linguistic elements such as the tone of voice and non-verbal behaviour (e.g. bowing, facial expressions; Okamoto, 2010). Furthermore, we often encounter differing, or non-normative, views of gender and language use, or direct metapragmatic comments, expressed in various genres of the media. In what follows, I present evidence of this diversity, first with regard to the interpretation of *danseigo* and then that of *joseigo*.

The sample comments are mainly drawn from the following online sites: *Minna no Q & A* ‘Everyone’s Q & A’, *Yahoo! Japan Chiebukuro* ‘Yahoo! Japan Knowledge Bag’, *Hatsugen Komachi* ‘Opinion Forum’ in *Yomiuri Online*, and *Nan-J Times* ‘Anything-J Times’. Each of these blog sites tends to have its own target audience and normative communication style and formality level (Nishimura, 2010). Moreover, the writers’ identities of these samples I present here are often unspecified; and even if they are mentioned, they may not always be reliable. Despite these issues, which can be more closely examined in future research, my main objective here is to simply illustrate that, even in the same site, for example, *Minna no Q & A*, widely diverse views are often expressed regarding a variety of
topics, including matters concerning gendered language.

Women’s use of danseigo, or otoko kotoba ‘men’s language’, has been criticised publicly, particularly since mass media became available in modern Japan (Bohn & Matsumoto, 2008; Endo, 1997; Inoue, 2006; Nakamura, 2007a, 2014). Such critical comments are not uncommon at all, even today. In particular, due to the wide availability of online blog sites, many ordinary people express their views about language and gender. For example, in *Minna no Q & A* there were more than ten threads (as of 10 April 2015) that concerned women’s kotobazukai ‘use of language’, and many of them denounce women who do not speak in a feminine manner. A 25-year-old woman, for instance, initiated a thread and criticised one of her female colleagues in her early 20s for using rough (ranbōna) language, such as *xx janee* ‘it’s not xx’, in which *nee* is a phonologically contracted form of *nai* ‘not’ and normatively considered strongly masculine, and *Omae maji fuzaken na yo* ‘You cut the crap, seriously’, in which the address term *omae* ‘you’ and the final form *n na yo* ‘don’t’ are normatively regarded as strongly masculine forms; *maji* ‘seriously’ is a slang word used widely by young people. (Note that the use of slang and vogue words has been normatively considered unfeminine since pre-modern times, as noted by Endo, 1997 and Nakamura, 2007a.) This initial blogger continued:

(1)

If I talk about ‘femininity’ (*joseirashisa*), I may antagonise some readers, but I think there is certain common sense (*jōshiki*) or prudence (*tsutsushimi*) that a woman (*josei to shite*) should have. I wonder if such [rough] language use is tolerated by young people. If, for example, one’s girlfriend uses such language, will he continue to love her? (*Minna no Q & A*, 11 April 2012)

There were several initial posts like this one in other threads as well, and some of them gave other example expressions of “rough” language, including *kuu* for *taberu* ‘eat’, *kuso* ‘(lit.) shit’ used as an intensifier as in *kuso-tsumaranai* ‘damn boring’, and some other slang expressions – e.g. *kimo* for *kimochi ga warui* ‘disgusting’. In response to these initial posts, many writers expressed agreement and characterised such women’s language use as *josei-rashikunai* ‘unfeminine’, *gehinna* ‘vulgar’, *kitanai* ‘dirty’, *hin ga nai* ‘unrefined’, *atama ga warui* ‘unintelligent’, *sodachi ga warui* ‘bad upbringling’, *hazukashii* ‘embarrassing’, *motte no hoka* ‘outrageous’, and *otoko ga hiku* ‘men find (such women) unattractive’.

Many of these comments seem to assume that the ideal form of femininity emphasises, on the one hand, women’s “powerlessness” (e.g. *tsutsumashii* ‘modest’ and not *ranbo* ‘rough’) and, on the other hand, women’s class status (e.g. not *hin ga nai* ‘unrefined’, not *sodachiga warui* ‘bad upbringing’). They also assume
heteronormativity; for example, the initial writer in the example above wondered if a man would continue the romantic relationship with his girlfriend if she used rough language. Two other men wrote that they felt disenchanted by such women.

On the other hand, there are also many bloggers who disagreed with these critical comments on women using rough language. For example, a female college student wrote in Minna no Q & A that she and her friends use rough language because it is like slang to them and feels liberated (kaihōteki). The 25-year-old initial poster mentioned above also acknowledged that some of these expressions might be used as banter towards familiar colleagues or close friends. The female college students interviewed in my earlier study also reported that they used otoko kotoba among friends to convey a sense of intimacy, or nakama ‘same-group members’ (Okamoto, 1995). It seems that, while these young women recognise normative speech, breaking the norm can make them feel liberated and reinforce the solidarity relationship among friends. In this reinterpretation, such meanings as forcefulness and decisiveness are linked not only to masculinity, but also to (higher-order) indexical meanings, such as solidarity and liberation. Note that the use of masculine language by these women does not mean that such linguistic forms cease to index masculinity. As long as these women feel “liberated” by using such forms, the meaning of masculinity as their normative indexical value must be recognised. Furthermore, the report that these (SJ-speaking) young women use masculine speech in limited social contexts suggests that they use gendered speech as a resource to construct a different identity, or persona, depending on the situation, which supports the idea that one's identity is not predetermined, but variable and multiple (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, 2005).

Another (female) writer in another thread also expressed disagreement with the negative interpretation of women’s use of danseigo as vulgar, rough, and so forth, pointing out the possibility of regional and contextual differences in the perception, as shown in (2).

(2)

I think it depends on where one lives. The language use that may be normal (futsū) in one regional area may sound harsh (kitsui) to people in other areas. There are also occasions in which such language can express one's emotions better. For example, one can express anger better with ttaku ano kuso-babā! ‘Really, that damn hag!’ rather than nani ano hito ‘What’s [wrong] with that person?’, right? (Minna no Q & A, 2 July 2005)

This writer’s point about regional differences has also been recognised by Sunaoshi (2004), who argued that, although the farm women in a rural area in Ibaraki that she observed used forms normatively considered danseigo, it is not perceived as unfeminine in the local community and rather can serve to reinforce solidarity.
among the local speakers (see below for further discussion on this point).

In Example (2), the writer also asserts that rough language can be a useful means for a woman to express a strong emotion like anger effectively. Similarly, the female college students observed in my earlier study sometimes used strongly masculine forms (such as zo, ja nee) in expressing certain emotions (e.g. anger) or speech acts (e.g. protest) in a forceful manner (Okamoto, 1995). In other words, such stances as forcefulness and decisiveness associated with danseigo forms are linked to certain emotions or speech acts. Abe (2010) found that many of the lesbian women she observed used danseigo forms as resources for indexing their identities as lesbians interacting in lesbian bars as well as for certain emotions (e.g. anger) or speech acts (e.g. argument).

Danseigo forms used by men, on the other hand, are supposed to index normative masculinity through stances such as forcefulness and decisiveness associated with these forms. However, not everyone seems to share the same perception. For example, a female blogger initiated a thread in Minna no Q & A (posted on 5 April 2007) and asked the readers what they think of men who use rough (ranbōna) language towards women, such as meshi kū ka ‘Will you eat (a meal)’? instead of gohan taberu and ...janee ka ‘isn’t it...?’ instead of ...janai no. The characterisation of such language as ranbō ‘rough’ suggests her negative attitude towards it. Among the thirteen people who responded, four clearly stated that they dislike men who use such language because it is gasatsu de arappoi ‘rough and coarse’, indicates sodachi no warusa ‘bad upbringing’, or dansonjohi-ppoi ‘like (the idea of) male supremacy’, or feels jibun ga somatsu ni atsukawareteiru ‘being treated without care’. On the other hand, three people wrote that it would not bother them if it fit the man’s personality. Several others pointed out that it depended on the situation, and that it would be fine if it were used towards familiar persons in informal situations, suggesting that such language use may serve in indexing or constructing a friendly relationship.

I now turn to the interpretation of joseigo. As mentioned above, female characters, particularly heroines, in fictional worlds still often use SJ-based joseigo today. Even when the story is set in regional Japan, the heroine, often a young, beautiful, and/or middle-class woman, tends to use joseigo, while the marginal female characters tend to use the (simplified) regional dialect (see Okamoto & Shibamoto Smith, 2008). Repeated media representations such as these serve to reinforce the stereotypical association of SJ joseigo (or regional dialect) forms with socially desired (or less desired) images of femininity. The use of stereotypical SJ joseigo forms, however, may not necessarily be perceived as feminine or appropriate for all Japanese women. Metapragmatic comments reported in previous research illustrate diverse interpretations. For example, based on survey data concerning the use of stereotypical (strongly feminine) sentence-final forms such as wa and
kashira, Mizumoto (2006) reports that the male respondents tended to perceive it as onnarashii ‘feminine’ or evoking an image of otona no josei ‘adult women,’ while the female respondents regarded it as a style they used when talking with elderly people or their superiors, but not with their friends, except when they made fun of such speech (see also Matsumoto, 1996 and Inoue, 2006 for similar examples). The association of these forms with adult women was also shared by young female college students I interviewed (Okamoto, 1995). On the other hand, the use of these forms as an object of mocking suggests their association with a particular kind of femininity, one that they do not wish to identify with, because they may find it to be too old-fashioned, overly feminine, too pretentious, and so forth. Such mocking use in turn may serve as a sign of in-group solidarity. These interpretations suggest that stereotypical feminine forms are simultaneously related to age and class status. In my earlier study (Okamoto, 1995), one of the middle-aged women, who hardly used joseigo forms at all, asserted that such forms are used by pretentious (kidotta) women in higher classes who wish to distance themselves from lower-class women (see Okamoto & Shibamoto Smith, forthcoming for more example blogs).

It is not only women but also men who may use joseigo. According to the example blogs we saw above, there are people, especially women, who disapprove of men who use rough masculine language. However, this does not necessarily mean that those people prefer men who use stereotypical feminine speech. Here, too, perceptions vary among individuals, as observed in numerous blogs. This suggests that men’s “crossing” (Rampton, 1995) of linguistic gender boundaries is an issue equally as controversial as women’s crossing of such boundaries. For example, in Hatsugen Komachi in Yomiuri Online, one woman wrote (posted on 18 April 2008) that she could not stand her husband’s use of onna kotoba with a gentle voice and feminine prolonged intonation. There were almost 50 responses. Many, agreeing with the initial post, wrote that men who used such language were not manly (otokorashikunai) and sounded like hysterical women. On the other hand, an equally large number of posters disagreed and regarded men who used onna kotoba as gentle (yawarakai, yasashii), calm (odayaka), polite (teinei), or cute (kawaii). One poster wrote that such men were better than those who tried to look masculine by using masculine language when in fact they were not. Another example, a thread in Minna no Q & A, concerned the use of the polite prefix o- for nouns – a well-known stereotypically feminine form. The initial writer is attracted to a man from Kyushu, but bothered by his frequent use of o- for such unexpected words as o-sora ‘sky’ and o-soto ‘outside.’ Three posters out of the six respondents evaluated the use of this prefix by men positively as being polite, gentle, and a sign of good upbringing. The remaining three resonated with the initial poster, characterising it as effeminate (memeshii) and irritating. One of
them wrote that it was strange (hen), but not in the bad (warui) sense of the word hen, which seems to imply that he did not think the man in question was gay.

As the last comments indicate, men who use feminine speech are often criticised harshly. Moreover, there are many people who regard (stereotypical) feminine speech used by men not just as joseigo, or onna kotoba, but as onee kotoba or okama kotoba, that is, feminine speech associated with (effeminate) gay men and wonder if the users are gay men. Numerous blogs comment on men who use onee kotoba. For example, in one thread in Yahoo! Japan Chiebukuro, the initial (female) writer reported (24 May 2007) that, when she characterised a male colleague who used feminine speech as gentle and nice, other colleagues responded, “What? He is like a woman (onna-ppoi)” or “He is like an okama gay man (okama-ppoi).” She then asked readers if they found such a man to be kimochi warui ‘disgusting.’ The responses were again divided into contrastive evaluations of such men: positive ones (e.g. yasashii ‘gentle’, hanashi yasui ‘easy to talk to’, anshinkan ga aru ‘feels secure, kōkan ga moteru ‘likable’) and negative ones (e.g. kimochi warui ‘disgusting’, otoko-rashikunai ‘not manly’, okama tte omou ‘I think (the speaker) is an okama gay man’, and ren’ai-taishō ni sarenai ‘won’t be a target of romantic love).

Another issue brought up by quite a few bloggers concerned the association of a particular variety of Japanese, particularly SJ, with femininity and/or homosexuality. For example, the initial poster of a thread in Yahoo! Japan Chiebukuro (posted on 24 August 2011) wrote that he was from Fukuoka, Kyushu and asked the readers if those from Fukuoka found men who use SJ kimochi warui. He added that, when he heard men speaking in SJ, it sounded to him like onna kotoba and made him wonder if they were okama gay men. Two bloggers agreed, while two others disagreed. One of the latter, an SJ speaker, wrote that, when he moved from Tokyo to Fukuoka, he received comments like the initial poster’s, which he characterised as incomprehensible since it is regarded as the standard language (hyōjungo), or the common language (kyōtsugo), of the nation. In a long thread in the Nan-J Times (the initial post on 10 June 2012), there was a debate between those who perceived SJ, or the Kanto dialect, as okama-ppoi ‘okama-like’ and kimoi ‘disgusting’ and those who perceived a regional dialect, especially the Kansai dialect, as such. These comments illustrate how subjective and biased the perceptions are. Regardless of their actual sexual orientation, if men use feminine speech, they may be criticised as okama-ppoi and kimoi, as though it were one of the worst insults one could give to men (see Cameron, 1997, p. 56 for a similar example involving English). These comments indicate that (normative) gender assumes heterosexuality (see also Abe, 2010; Maree, 2013; Okamoto & Shibamoto Smith, forthcoming) and also that for some people regionality plays a role in the construction of heterosexual gender.
The foregoing observations concerning the interpretation of stereotypical
gendered linguistic forms indicate the extent of the complexity and diversity of
potential meanings in their indexical fields. Qualities associated with danseigo,
such as forcefulness and decisiveness, may be linked not only to masculinity, but
also to many other ideologically mediated meanings. That is, when used by (cer-
tain kinds of) women, they may be interpreted as indexing a sense of liberation,
solidarity, a lesbian identity, certain emotions or speech acts, and so forth; and
when used by (certain kinds of) men, they may be perceived as indexing the
speaker’s attitude of male superiority or his social background (e.g. bad upbring-
ing), and so forth. Qualities associated with joseigo, such as politeness, gentle-
ness, and refinement, may also be linked not only to women and a higher social
class, but also to many other meanings. That is, when used by (certain kinds
of) women, they may be construed as indexing the female speaker’s (older) age,
certain speech acts (e.g. mockery), solidarity, pretentiousness, aloofness, and so
forth; and when used by (certain kinds of) men, they may be perceived as index-
ing gentleness, good up-bringing, effeminacy, homosexuality, and so forth. These
lists of (re)interpreted meanings are, of course, not meant to be exhaustive. In
specific social and historical contexts, many other meanings may emerge, as the
indexical fields of linguistic forms are fluid and open-ended.

4. Variable meanings: Examples from situated language
practice

This section examines samples of gendered linguistic forms used in specific social
contexts to see how they may be interpreted in light of the potentially diverse and
multiple meanings indicated by the metapragmatic comments examined in the
preceding section. My aim here is to illustrate the context-dependent nature of
the semiotic variability and multiplicity of particular gendered linguistic forms.
For this study, I consider the interpretation of certain features of danseigo through
analyses of the six conversations listed in Table 1.9

Speakers FA, FB, MC, and MD grew up in the Gunma area, a part of the Kanto
region; at the time the data were collected, FA and FB were students of the same
university in a town adjacent to two major cities in Gunma,10 while MC and MD,
both college graduates, worked at local offices of different auto companies. In
the recordings, they spoke SJ except for a few dialectal forms used by the two
male speakers. Speakers FE, FF, FG, and FH grew up in the central area11 of the
Yamagata prefecture, part of the Tohoku region. FE and FF only had elementary
school education; they had never lived outside the area. FG lived in the area until
she graduated from high school and then attended a university abroad. FH lived
in the area throughout her life and was a nursing school student; the conversa-
tion was recorded when FG went home for the summer. They all spoke the local dialect, although Speakers FE and FF used more dialectal features than Speakers FG and FH, suggesting that the Japanese of the younger generation is more stand-

ardised.

In analysing the data, I focus on the use of “strongly masculine” forms, in particular the phonologically contracted form /ee/ for /ai/ or /oi/ and sentence-final forms such as zo and ze. (Following the classification used in Okamoto & Sato, 1992, in what follows I use the term “strongly masculine” forms as shorthand without quotes to refer to forms that have been normatively or stereotypically regarded as strongly masculine.) The use of these forms was frequently commented on in the metapragmatic comments examined in the preceding section. I first present analyses of four conversations (Gunma 1 and 2 and Yamagata 1 and 2), each of which lasted 30 minutes to one hour and allowed me to obtain 130 consecutive sentences for each speaker. I discuss the conversation in the TV shows separately, as I could not obtain 130 sentences for each speaker.

Table 2 shows the use of sentence-final forms that have been normatively regarded as strongly masculine. According to Table 2, the two elderly women in Yamagata, FE and FF, used strongly masculine sentence-final forms most frequently, while the two young women in Gunma, FA and FB, especially FA, used them least frequently. Between these two groups were the two young women in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gunma 1</td>
<td>FA: female, 20 years old, college student</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FB: female, 20 years old, college student, FA’s close friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunma 2</td>
<td>MC: male, 25 years old, employee of a local office of an auto company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MD: male, 25 years old, employee of a local office of another auto company,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MC’s close friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yamagata 1</td>
<td>FE: female, 75 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FF: female, 81 years old, FE’s close friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yamagata 2</td>
<td>FG: female, 23 years old, college student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FH: female, 23 years old, student of a nursing school, FG’s close friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV show 1</td>
<td>Kurisu (Chris) Matsumura, gay celebrity, age unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misttsu Mangróbu (Mitz Mangrove), gay celebrity, 36 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV show 2</td>
<td>Kurisu Matsumura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misttsu Mangróbu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Yamagata, FG and FH, and the two men in Gunma, MC and MD, who exhibited similar frequencies.

Table 3 shows the use of the contracted form /ee/ in 30 consecutive tokens for each speaker. There is a striking difference between the two younger Gunma women and the other six speakers in that the former used contracted forms much less frequently than the latter, although there are individual differences.
I now consider how the forms in question used by these eight speakers may be interpreted, paying special attention to differences in the manner in which these forms are used, as it is not only differences in the frequency of use, but also qualitative differences that provide helpful cues for interpretation. First, the two Gunma women’s use of strongly masculine forms was quite limited as compared to the other speakers. It was limited not only in frequency, but also in the context of use. That is, FA and FB used these forms in special contexts, such as when engaging in certain speech acts (for example, criticising someone, complaining, protesting, emphasising, and joking) or expressing strong emotions (for example, anger and disbelief). It seems that these are contexts in which expressing a stance of forcefulness or roughness through the use of these forms is effective. Moreover, FA and FB tended to use them in conjunction with some kind of qualifier, such as laughter, giggling, and hedges (for example, *tte kanji* ‘it’s like’, *mitai na* ‘like’, *X toka itte* ‘say X or something’). Such use of strongly masculine forms is not unique to FA and FB. Another conversation of two college female students in Gunma, who were two years older than FA and FB, also exhibited similar distribution patterns of such forms (Okamoto & Shibamoto Smith, forthcoming) and so did the conversations of twenty college students examined by Okamoto and Sato (1992) and Okamoto (1995).

Examples (3) and (4) are from Conversation Gunma 1. (In the following examples, normatively strongly masculine forms are boldfaced.)

(3)

FA and FB, talking about an article in a music magazine that gives instructions for playing a bass guitar.\(^{13}\)

1 FB:  

```plaintext
@@@ Konnan dekiru ka:: mitai na ga kaite atte,
```

this can Q like SM written and

‘It [the instruction] is written like “How can I do this?”’

2 FA:  

```plaintext
[un.]
```

yeah yeah

‘Yeah, yeah.’

3 FB:  

```plaintext
[ma::] yaru kedo, @@ yaru kedo sa::, u::n, yarun dattara.
```

well do but do but PRT uh do if

‘Well, I will do it, if I [have to] do it, I will, but.’

4 FA:  

```plaintext
U::n, nanka nan darō, nanka sa:: (1.5)
```

uh somehow what I wonder somehow PRT
Uh, somehow, I wonder what it is. Somehow, as expected, when seen from the professionals’ [point of view], somehow, they say it easily, but it’s like, “Don’t say it so easily,” right? Honestly.

In Example (3), FA and FB are complaining about the instructions for playing a bass guitar in a magazine article. In line 1, FB expresses her reaction to the instructions using a strongly masculine final form *dekiru ka:* ‘(how) can do (this)?’, but it is followed by the qualifier *mitai na* ‘like’. FB also utters this with laughter. Similarly, in line 4, FA uses the strongly masculine final form *yū na yo* ‘don’t say it’ with the qualifier *tte kanji da yo ne* ‘it’s like X, right?’ It is as though FA and FB directed these strong expressions to the writer of the magazine article as an imagined addressee. If they were talking to the writer in reality, they would probably avoid using such expressions toward her/him, who is most likely to be an unfamiliar and older person, and try to present a more normatively gendered persona. The limited and qualified use of these forms in their conversation suggests that FA and FB used these forms for special effect, such as making their
complaint sound stronger, dramatic, and fun. Itakura (2015, p. 189), examining the use of masculine forms in quotations, observes that quoted speech may not accurately correspond to the original speech, but serves as “an involvement strategy” to dramatise the playful talk that may contribute to creating intimacy. This observation also pertains to the use of strongly masculine quotative remarks by FA and FB. In Example (4), FB uses a contracted form nee in hatarakanee ‘doesn’t work’, but both FA and FB are laughing, suggesting they are being playful and having fun. The use of these forms by FA and FB in these examples thus seems to contribute to reinforcing their friendship and solidarity through breaking the gender norm and through engaging in humorous and fun talk – interpretations also supported by some of the metapragmatic comments seen earlier.

The limited frequency of use and the qualified manner of delivery may be interpreted as a way of indicating that FA and FB are mindful of gender norms and that their use of strongly masculine forms is not their normal speech for the given situation. Yet those who uphold the normative gender ideology may find FAs and FB’s speech to be rough and unfeminine. On the other hand, it seems that FA and FB, while recognising this normative interpretation, find additional meanings, or higher-order indexical values. Furthermore, it has been reported that these forms are generally used (by young SJ speakers) only among close friends, as we saw earlier in some of the metapragmatic comments (Okamoto, 1995; Miyazaki, 2004; see also Itakura, 2015, who offers indirect support for this observation). This suggests that these forms serve to index and help construct a context-sensitive persona and interpersonal relationship, in particular friendship and solidarity, by sharing the act of crossing linguistic gender boundaries in a kind of transgression. Such a use then must rely on the recognition that these forms are normatively interpreted as masculine, and hence considered unfeminine when used by women. That is, higher-order indexicality in this case builds on this “original” interpretation. Note, however, that there may be SJ-speaking women who use strongly masculine forms frequently without any qualifiers as part of their “normal” speech. The possibility of such uses of strongly masculine forms and their interpretations needs to be investigated in further research.

The use of the gendered forms in question by the two Gunma men is quite different from that of the two Gunma women examined above. As shown in Tables 1 and 2, MC and MD used these forms, particularly the contracted form /ee/, more frequently than FA and FB. More importantly, there were also significant qualitative differences; that is, the use of these forms by the two men was not restricted to special contexts, as in the case of FAs and FB’s use of these forms, nor was the delivery of these forms qualified or accompanied by laughter or giggling. Examples (5) and (6) illustrate these points.
MC and MD, talking about playing baseball.
1 MC: A::: so:: iya sa:::, yakyū yan nee no?
   oh that say PRT baseball play NEG PRT
   ‘Oh, speaking of that, don’t you play baseball?’

2 MD: A, kiite nee ya.
   Oh hear NEG PRT
   ‘Oh, I haven’t heard about it.’

3 MC: Kike yo. Nan de meeru kaette konai n ka to omotte sa.
   listen PRT why email return come NEG AUX Q COMP wonder PRT
   ‘Listen. I was wondering why an email message hasn’t been returned [in response].’

4 MD: Wasurechatta. Yaritee n?
   forget AUX PST play want PRT
   ‘I forgot. Do you want to play?’

5 MC: Yakyū yaritee daro, sorosoro suzushii shi.
   baseball play want to right? gradually cool and
   ‘We want to play baseball, right? It’s gradually getting cool and’

MC and MD, talking about their friend MI who is not good at playing computer games and starts bombing immediately.
1 MC: Nan mo kangaetenee na aitsu.
   nothing think PRG NEG PRT that guy
   ‘That guy is thinking nothing.’

2 MD: Sō.
   right
   ‘Right.’

3 MC: Ana hore yo.
   hole dig PRT
   ‘Dig a hole.’
In Example (5), both MC and MD used the contracted form /ee/ (in lines 1, 2, 4, and 5), MD also used the final form ya in nee ya (in line 2), and MC used a direct imperative final form kike yo (in line 3). None of these strongly masculine forms was accompanied by a qualifier or laughter/giggling. Nor do their utterances involve any special speech acts, as in the case of FA and FB’s conversation. In Example (6), MC and MD were criticising or complaining about their friend MI, who was not present. In line 1, MC used the contracted form /ee/. In lines 3, 5, and 6, MC and MD used direct imperative final forms towards the imagined addressee MI. It is possible that they thought that the use of strongly masculine forms was more effective for criticising MI, but it is also possible that this was simply part of their normal speech style used among friends because they neither used any qualifier nor laughed/giggled, as FA and FB did. This difference may be indicative of the different degrees of constraint the men and women felt toward the use of these forms. In fact, the men’s use of these forms may be interpreted as forceful and masculine, although, as we saw earlier, there may be people, especially women, who may not accept such speech as masculine and attractive.

I now turn to Conversations Yamagata 1 and 2. As Tables 1 and 2 show, the four Yamagata women used strongly masculine forms frequently, even more frequently than the two Gunma men, although there were some individual differences. Examples (7) and (8) illustrate the use of strongly masculine forms by the Yamagata women.

(7)

FE and FF, talking about the food FE is serving and also about a person they both know.

1 FE: Omae, nasuzuke na kanekega ya::
    you pickled eggplants something like eat NEG PST Q PRT
    ‘You didn’t eat things like pickled eggplants?’
2 FF: Un.
   right
   ‘Right.’

3 FE: Nasu mo kanee?
   eggplants also eat NEG
   ‘Won’t you also eat eggplants?’

4 FF: Un, gozzo naru.
   yeah treat receive
   ‘Yeah, I will receive the treat/eat it.’

5 FE: (?) mame mo, mame mo hodai shio haizu,
   beans also beans also so much salt that
   shoppagunee na. Shio haizu, hodai haitenee hage da ga::
   salty NEG PRT salt that so much put in NEG because AUX Q
   ‘(?) the beans also, the beans are also not that salty. Is that because not much
   salt was put in?’

6 FF: Aki-chan-da::, kornee ga::: Midagonee ya.
   SFX PL come NEG Q see NEG PRT
   ‘Don’t Aki and others come [visit you]? I never see them.’

7 FE: Aizu mo isogasui gashite, sugada na mishenee.
   he also busy perhaps because show up NEG
   ‘Perhaps because he is also busy, he doesn’t show up.’

(8)

FG and FH, talking about Tokyo Tower.

1 FH: Tōkyō Tawā sa igidai no.
   tower to go want to PRT
   ‘I want to go to the Tokyo Tower.’

2 FG: Tōkyō-eki kara doganneen da.
   station from far NEG AUX
   ‘It’s not far from the Tokyo station.’

3 FH: Tōkyō Tawā.
   tower
   ‘The Tokyo Tower.’
The use of strongly masculine forms by the four Yamagata women, as illustrated in Examples (7) and (8), is very different from the use of these forms by the two Gunma women in terms of the frequency and context of use and the manner of delivery. In fact, it is much more similar to the use of these forms by the two Gunma men. That is, as illustrated by Examples (7) and (8), the four Yamagata women used these forms frequently without restricting them to certain contexts (within each of their conversations) and without using any qualifiers or laughter/giggling. (Note that the two older women, FE and FF, also used the normatively masculine self-reference term *ora* and address term *omae*.)

Despite the surface resemblances in the use of these forms by the two Gunma men and by the four Yamagata women, however, their indexical meanings seem quite dissimilar from each other. From the viewpoint of SJ-based dominant gender norms, the use of strongly masculine forms by the Gunma men may be regarded as forceful and masculine, while their use by the Yamagata women may be seen as rough and unfeminine. However, the Yamagata women used these forms frequently without any qualifiers, suggesting that for them using them is nothing noteworthy, as it is part of their normal speech (at least when talking with friends within the community). This makes it difficult to construe it as an attempt to intentionally deviate from linguistic gender norms to create a special effect, as in the case of the two Gunma women. Rather, it seems that there are local linguistic norms that these women are following. From this perspective, then, their speech is unlikely to be perceived as rough and unfeminine – an interpretation also supported by some of the metapragmatic comments examined earlier. If these women used SJ *joseigo*, it would likely be perceived as pretentious or aloof, again, as indicated by some of the metapragmatic comments seen earlier. This suggests that, within their community, these women use the forms in question as part of their own dialect that can index and/or help construct solidarity and/or mutual assurance for their regional identity.

The foregoing discussion points to the possibility that, as far as the forms examined here are concerned, their use by the four Yamagata women in the local community operates outside the realm of dominant gender norms based on SJ *joseigo*. The historical process of establishing SJ-based *joseigo* as the normative
women’s language in modern Japan (Inoue, 2006; Okamoto & Shibamoto Smith, forthcoming) suggests that it is only after dialectal forms were viewed in a “new” context, that is, in the national context, in reference to SJ that their use by female speakers of regional Japanese came to be reinterpreted as unrefined and unfeminine. In other words, it is possible that the indexical fields of these normatively strongly masculine forms may be quite different for these Yamagata women and for the two Gunma women. That is, potential meanings in the indexical field of a linguistic form may vary depending on the community, generation, and other social variables – an interesting possibility to be explored in future research.

I also emphasise that, while evidence suggests that as far as the strongly masculine forms examined here are concerned, the dominant SJ-based joseigo norms may not be relevant to the Yamagata women’s use of these forms (at least in familiar conversation in their community), this does not mean that these women are not concerned about gender norms. On the contrary, their conversations included many features that are considered stereotypically feminine, including the use of a variety of politeness strategies and many supportive backchannels and in the case of the two younger women, the self-reference term atashi (used by FG). This observation suggests the need to consider the construction of femininity (or masculinity) at the discourse level examining the social meanings of a variety of resources available to speakers, but this is beyond the scope of this study (see Chapter 6 of Okamoto & Shibamoto Smith, forthcoming for a discussion of the strategic use of multiple resources for the construction of gender at the discourse level).

Lastly, I consider the use of strongly masculine language by gei tarento ‘gay talents/celebrities’. I examine two instalments (TV shows 1 and 2) of the variety programme Sanma no Honto no Koi no Kamasawagi ‘Sanma’s Empty (Gay Men’s) Fuss about Real Love Affair’. In each show, ten gay, transgender, and transsexual celebrities were invited as guests as well as a few straight media celebrities. Each segment of each show I examined lasted for about 60 minutes. In this analysis, I focus on the speech of two guests: Kurisu (Chris) Matsumura and Mitsu Mangurobu, or Mitzi Mangrove (Table 1). Both Kurisu and Mitsu are openly gay.

While the focus here is on the indexical meanings of the stereotypically masculine forms used by Kurisu and Mitsu, I first discuss their use of stereotypically feminine forms, or onee kyara kotoba (Maree, 2011, 2013), in order to contextualise the use of masculine forms. In both shows, both Kurisu and Mitsu used addressee honorifics (desu/masu), particularly when they were speaking to the host Akashiya, as well as plain forms (of verbals), particularly when they were talking to other gei tarento guests. Gendered sentence-final forms tend to be used with plain forms rather than with addressee honorifics. I examined the sentences with plain forms, which were 20–30 sentences for each of them in each show.
In these sentences, Kurisu and Mittsu often used forms normatively regarded as strongly feminine, as illustrated by the underlined forms in the following examples: Kurisu: Anata ki o nuiteru wa yo ‘You are not paying enough attention’, Iya atashi nenrei wa nakutte yo ‘No, I’m ageless’, Ara watashi heya machigaeta kashira to motte ‘I thought, oh, did I mistake the room?’; Mittsu: Watashi-tachi hitsuyō nai wa yo ‘We don’t need it’, Sugoku suki na no yo ‘(he) likes (her) very much’, Hontō ni aishiteta n da to omou wa ‘I think he loved her truly’.

It has been observed that, these days, strongly feminine final forms, such as wa and kashira, are used only infrequently by SJ-speaking women (Mizumoto, 2006; Okamoto, 1995; see also some of the metapragmatic comments seen earlier). It is possible that Kurisu and Mittsu use more exaggerated, or strongly stereotypical, feminine forms than many SJ-speaking straight women do in situated practice. Note that Kurisu even used the form te yo, a stereotypical strongly feminine form that is hardly used today.17 Their feminine speech style can thus be considered a parody (cf. Maree, 2011, 2013) and an instance of “stylised crossing” (Bucholtz & Lopez, 2011)18 in that they appropriate forms stereotypically associated with another group, that is, (heterosexual) women. Multiple ways of interpreting Kurisu’s and Mittsu’s appropriation of stereotypical feminine forms are possible. It may be construed as indexing their personae as gay men, which may also be considered a challenge to the linguistic gender norms built on the heteronormative social order (Bucholtz, 2014); it can point to the artificial, or “imitative”, nature of gender (Butler, 1993), or femininity, that may otherwise be taken for granted. Stylised crossing may also be perceived as a stage performance, indexing their professional personae as (effeminate) gei tarento, in that due to its non-normative nature, it draws the attention of viewers, who may find it funny, humorous, or entertaining, because of the multiple incongruities they create. For example, their expression of stereotypical femininity is incongruent with the fact that they are not “authentic” women. The use of exaggerated feminine speech actually serves to “deauthenticate” their speech as fake by “maximizing the intertextual gap” (Bucholtz & Lopez, 2011) between their performance and real women’s speech, a strategy that may bring about humorous effects. Maree (2013) observes that these gay celebrities are often sharp-tongued, which also betrays their apparent efforts to appear to be “authentic” women, which in turn is expected to create comedic effects. Maree (2013, p. 84) argues that these onee (effeminate gay) tarento are represented as nisemono ‘imitation’ and kokkeina sono-zai ‘comical/funny existence’. Moreover, the use of feminine speech by gay men is normally restricted to the private domain, but as noted by Maree (2011), gei tarento use it in the public domain, or national TV shows, which may also bring about comical effects because of the blatant violation of normative expectations. In other words, the multiple incongruities noted above seem to be intended to be received as fun and entertaining, and both Kurisu and Mittsu in my data can
be viewed as exploiting it as a linguistic resource and as a commodity, just like those *onee tareto* Maree (2011, 2013) observed. However, there may be viewers who find it annoying or disgusting, as some of the bloggers examined earlier did.

We now turn to the use of strongly masculine forms. Kurisu’s and Mittsu’s use of such forms was extremely rare. Each of them used such a form only once in TV show 1; that is, when he/she was the target of teasing by other guests, Kurisu raised his/her voice and shouted at one of the guests, *Urusai*! *Omae no sei de yakedo shiteru n da yo!* ‘Shut up! Because of you, I’m being burned/in trouble.’ *Urusai* is a conventionalised command to shut up with a strongly masculine ending; the final form *da yo* was uttered in a forcefully accusatory tone. Note that *omae*, an address term considered strongly masculine, is also used. Similarly, when Mittsu was being teased by other guests, he/she says, *Baka, deeto ja nee yo, kono yarō* ‘Stupid, it’s not a date, damn you!’ He/she used the strongly masculine final form *ja nee yo*, which also includes the contracted form *nee* (instead of *nai*); he/she also used the word *baka* ‘stupid’, a direct and harsh insult, as well as the strongly masculine address term *kono yarō* ‘damn you!’ It is not only Kurisu and Mittsu who used strongly masculine forms. Two other guests (Matsuko Derakkusu and Haruna Ai) used them in a similar manner.

Such use of strongly masculine forms can be considered a strategy, or part of the performance. As discussed above, both Kurisu and Mittsu in the two shows can be seen as constructing their personae as *oneē*, or effeminate gay men, using (exaggerated) strongly feminine forms. They are not supposed to use strongly masculine forms. Thus, when they used such forms suddenly, the audience burst into laughter because of the unexpected reverse stylised crossing. Here, too, strongly masculine speech serves as a linguistic commodity for the entertainers. The use of both strongly feminine and strongly masculine forms may be a way to index their personae as gay men who cannot, or refuse to, be categorised as (heterosexual) women or men. And as in their use of strongly feminine forms, their use of exaggerated strongly masculine forms may also be construed as an index of their role as entertainers. It may also be interpreted as indexing other meanings, including humorousness, a particular speech act (e.g. protesting), or emotion (e.g. anger).

It is evident that both the strongly feminine and strongly masculine forms used by Kurisu and Mittsu evoke multiple meanings. Yet these interpretations, or higher-order indexical meanings, rely on the dominant gender norms that link certain linguistic forms to (heterosexual) women or men because the act of crossing and reverse crossing must assume the existence of normative gender boundaries. In other words, Kurisu’s and Mittsu’s use of gendered forms may challenge the dominant heteronormativity to some extent, but it could also (ironically) serve to reinforce the stereotypical indexical meanings. This is parallel to the interpre-
tation of the use of masculine forms by the two Gunma women discussed earlier in that, while it may be seen as breaking the norms, it must rely on the existence of boundaries to cross. (Note, however, that the higher-order indexical meanings in the case of Gunma women are not the same as those in the case of Kurisu and Mittsu.) This also reminds us of the use of stylised African American English Vernacular by the White male protagonists in the two Hollywood films that Bucholtz and Lopez (2011) analysed, in which the act of crossing racial boundaries is potentially subversive, but at the same time serves to actively re-establish such boundaries through the process of “indexical regimentation”.

5. Conclusion

While recent research has demonstrated the substantial diversity in the use of gendered linguistic forms in Japanese, the diversity in the interpretation of such forms has not been adequately examined in its own right. In order to address this gap, in this article I have considered how and why forms normatively interpreted as feminine or masculine may be interpreted differently by different persons or in different social contexts and how such diverse interpretations can be explained. In considering these issues, I have drawn on the notion of indirect and variable indexicality (Eckert, 2008) as a theoretical basis and presented examples of supporting evidence for the argument that the normative relationship between linguistic norms and gender is ideologically constructed through the indexical process of linking a particular social group (e.g. women) assumed to possess certain qualities and stances, such as politeness and gentleness, to linguistic forms associated with such stances and qualities. Furthermore, my analyses have illustrated the process in which this normative relationship, or interpretation, when situated in new or different contexts, may gain additional or different meanings.

In this study, I analysed two kinds of data: native speakers’ metapragmatic comments on the use of gendered speech, and actual conversations in which gendered linguistic forms are used. The analyses of metapragmatic comments illustrated the possibility of a wide variability and multiplicity of indexical meanings of the same gendered linguistic forms. It was observed that qualities associated with normative danseigo and joeigo may be linked not only to masculinity and femininity, respectively, but also to many other ideologically mediated meanings related to the speaker’s persona (e.g. good/bad upbringing, aloofness, pretentiousness, class status, age, sexual orientation), the nature of the interpersonal relationship (e.g. friendship, solidarity, distancing), and certain emotions (e.g. sense of liberation, anger), speech acts (e.g. criticisms, protest), and rhetorical effects (e.g. humorousness, emphasis).
In light of these findings, I examined the possible meanings of gendered linguistic forms in situated practice, focusing on the strongly masculine forms used by speakers with diverse social backgrounds. The use of these forms by the Gunma and Yamagata women may be interpreted as rough, unrefined, and unfeminine from the viewpoint of normative gender norms. However, the examination of the frequency, the context of use, and the manner of delivery indicated that other interpretations are also possible. In the case of Gunma women, their use of strongly masculine forms may be interpreted as indexical of friendship or solidarity that may stem from sharing a sense of breaking the norm and/or as a sign of a particular speech act or emotion (and possibly some other meanings). In the case of Yamagata women, it did not seem to be an intentional act of breaking gender norms, but rather part of their normal speech, indexing their regional identity as well as friendship within their local community (and possibly some other meanings). The use of strongly masculine forms by the Gunma men, on the other hand, is normative and can be interpreted as forceful and masculine, although there may be people who do not share such an interpretation. The use of those forms by the gei\ tarento also illustrates the possibility of diverse (re)interpretations, indexing such meanings as their sexual orientation, their professional personae as entertainers, and a particular speech act or emotion; it may also be interpreted as humorous and entertaining, although there may be people who find it unpleasant.

We have also seen that, while the non-normative use of gendered linguistic forms by the Gunma women and gay celebrities may be reinterpreted variously, as noted above, such reinterpretations cannot be made independently of the normative interpretations of those forms as long as their use relies on the sense of crossing normatively delineated linguistic gender boundaries. In the case of the Yamagata women, on the other hand, it is possible that within the local community their use of strongly masculine forms may operate outside the dominant gender norms, that is, gender may not be the most relevant aspect to consider as far as the forms examined are concerned – an interesting issue that requires closer examination in future research.

The findings of the present article serve as additional pieces of evidence for the extensive semiotic variability and multiplicity of linguistic forms (e.g. Cole & Pellicer, 2012; Eckert, 2008; Johnstone, 2011). Needless to say, the possible indexical meanings of gendered linguistic forms identified in this article by no means constitute an exhaustive listing. Different social and historical contexts and different individuals may point to, or activate, other meanings. That is, the potential meanings constituting the indexical field of a particular gendered linguistic form are open ended and variable. Furthermore, although I have treated certain linguistic forms as normatively gendered, their status as a dominant norm
cannot be taken for granted because it may vary depending on the linguistic form as well as on the context, including the community and the individual. Lastly, this article has focused on the variability of interpretation of the same gendered linguistic form. In passing, I noted the possible context-dependent variability in the use of gendered linguistic forms by a single speaker, suggesting the linguistic construction of a different persona and interpersonal relationship according to each situation. The two issues are closely interrelated and deserve further research. For example, those Yamagata women may use “masculine” forms differently when speaking with a friend in the local context and when speaking with an unfamiliar person outside the local context; the Gunma men may use masculine forms differently when talking to each other and when talking to their superiors. And in each case, the indexical values of the same gendered form are likely to vary. Clearly, more research that examines the interpretation of gendered linguistic forms used by socially diverse persons speaking in socially diverse situations is called for in order to further explore the nature of indexical fields and indexical process concerning gendered linguistic forms.

About the author

Shigeko Okamoto is Professor in the Department of Languages and Applied Linguistics at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her research interests include discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and Japanese linguistics. She has many publications in these areas, including her co-edited book Japanese Language, Gender, and Ideology: Cultural Models and Real People (Oxford University, 2004) and the forthcoming co-authored book The Social Life of the Japanese Language: Cultural Discourses and Situated Practice (Cambridge University Press, in press).

Notes

1. This is an extension of part of Chapters 5 and 6 of Okamoto and Shibamoto Smith (forthcoming). I express my gratitude to Daniel Kádár for insightful comments on earlier versions of this article as well as for his patience. I thank two anonymous reviewers for valuable comments. I also thank Shigeko Kumagai and Janet S. Shibamoto Smith for extensive discussions related to the issues raised in this article. I am grateful to those who assisted me with data collection, in particular Emi Kudo and Shie Sato.

2. I use the term context to include both linguistic (e.g. genre, speech act and activity, discourse organisation, topics) and extra-linguistic (e.g. participants and their identities and relationships, domain, locale) environments of a given discourse.
3. I use the term *indexical meanings* as context-related meanings and the term *indexicality* as the process, or way, in which a linguistic form (as a variant of a variable) is linked to social meanings related to the context. The notion of direct indexing refers to the way in which the two are linked straightforwardly and hence static and invariable, while indirect indexing refers to the way in which the link between the two is ideologically mediated and hence variable and also multiple.

4. *Minna no Q & A* (by Rakuten) and *Yahoo! Japan Chiebukuro* are sites where one posts a question regarding a wide variety of matters, mostly concerning personal life, and receives the answers from (usually multiple) readers. *Hatsugen Komachi* is a site of *Yomiuri Online*, an online version of *Yomiuri Shinbun*, one of the largest newspaper in Japan; the bloggers, who are said to be mostly women, discuss a wide variety of topics presented by the initial posters. *Nan-J Times* presents threads that had more than one hundred responses in Channeru 2 ‘Channel 2’ real time. Compared to the first three sites, in which relatively formal styles of writing are used, this is a much more informal site, in which it is not uncommon to encounter direct and sometimes offensive comments.

5. The classification of (moderately or strongly) masculine or feminine forms is based on that used in Okamoto and Sato (1992).

6. All blog examples are translated from the Japanese original to English by the author.

7. Ibaraki is located in the north-eastern part of the Kanto region that includes Tokyo.

8. *Okama*, literally meaning ‘cauldron’, is used to refer to effeminate gay men.

9. Conversations Gunma 1 and 2 were audio-recorded in 2010; Conversations Yamagata 1 and 2 were audio-recorded in 2006; TV show 1 was broadcast on 13 April 2011 and TV show 2 on 23 August 2011.

10. The name of the town is Tamamura-chō and the two major cities are Maebashi-shi and Takasaki-shi with the combined population of about 70,000. The major industry in this area is manufacturing.

11. Nishikawa-chō and Sagae-shi. The population of Nishikawa-chō is 5586 as of 2015; its main industry is agriculture (https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E8%A5%BF%E5%B7%9D%E7%94%BA). The population of Sagae-shi is 41,202 as of 2015; its main industry includes agriculture, manufacturing of agricultural products, and high-tech industry (https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E5%AF%92%E6%B2%B3%E6%B1%9F%E5%B8%82).

12. The term *sentence* is used to refer to a clause that has a finite verbal form. The maximum number of sentences in one of the conversations was a little over 130. I chose 130 to be consistent with Okamoto and Sato (1992), which also examined 130 sentences for each speaker.
13. The transcription conventions used in this study are as follows:

- falling intonation, slight fall indicating continuity
- rising intonation, prominence
- lengthened segment, laughter
- “xxx” overlapping with “yyy”, pause of one second

Abbreviations used in this study are as follows:

- AUX: auxiliary verb
- COMP: complementiser
- GN: genitive marker
- NEG: negative auxiliary
- PL: plural
- PRG: progressive aspect
- PRT: particle
- PST: past tense
- Q: question marker
- SFX: suffix
- SM: subject marker
- TM: topic marker

14. Itakura (2015) examined a conversation between a male student and a younger female student and found that the latter did not use any strongly masculine forms even in quotations (while the former used them in quoted speech), possibly because of the hierarchical relationship between the two.

15. The host of the show Akashiya Sanma had a regular series called Sanma no Koi no Karasawagi ‘Sanma’s Empty Fuss about Love Affairs’ in which the guests were straight women. After this series ended in 2011, Sanma no Honto no Koi no Kamasawagi, in which the main guests are all gei tarento, has been shown occasionally as a parody of the original series. The word okama (the polite prefix o- followed by kama, literally, ‘pot’) is used to refer to effeminate gay men. Here it is a pun with kara ‘empty’, as in karasawagi ‘much ado about nothing’.

16. Maree (2011, 2013) distinguishes onee kotoba ‘drag queen speech’ and onee kyara kotoba ‘drag queen character speech’, characterising the former as a parody of stereotypical women’s language used within their community in the private domain, and the latter as a stereotypical media-hyped women’s language used by gay and transgender/transsexual tarento ‘talents’, or celebrities, for entertainment in the public domain.
17. The form *te yo* is one of the final forms of a “variety” called *teyo data kotoba* ‘*teyo dawa* language’ that is said to have been used by schoolgirls in the Meiji era and have become part of stereotypical women’s speech (Bohn & Matsumoto, 2008; Inoue, 2004, 2006; Nakamura, 2007a, 2014).

18. Bucholtz and Lopez (2011) examined two Hollywood films in which the white male protagonists use highly stylised African American Vernacular English by crossing racial boundaries and by relying on the limited number of stereotypical AAVE features.

References


