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LEXICAL AND STYLISTIC VARIATION IN MALE AND FEMALE SPEECH IN MODERN JAPANESE

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Abstract

This study explores lexical and stylistic variation in male and female speech in modern Japanese, adopting a sociolinguistic and anthropocentric framework. Focusing on patterns of lexical selection and stylistic preference, the article examines how gendered speech forms function in present-day communicative settings. The analysis indicates that although traditionally gender-marked expressions remain part of the Japanese linguistic repertoire, their use is no longer governed solely by gender distinctions. Instead, social context, speaker roles, and communicative intentions play a decisive role. The findings argue for understanding gendered speech in Japanese as a flexible and adaptive system rather than a rigid linguistic division.

Keywords: gendered language, Japanese, lexical variation, sociolinguistics, speech style

1. Introduction

Contemporary linguistics increasingly recognizes language as a social practice shaped by human interaction, cultural norms, and identity construction. Within this anthropocentric paradigm, gender has emerged as a key factor influencing language use. Rather than being a biologically fixed variable, gender is understood as a socially constructed category that is continuously negotiated through discourse.

Japanese has long been regarded as a language in which gender-related differences in speech are particularly prominent. Conventional descriptions often emphasize clear distinctions between male and female speech styles, manifested in lexical choices, sentence-final expressions, and levels of politeness. However, modern Japanese society has experienced profound social changes, including the redefinition of gender roles and the expansion of communicative domains. These developments call into question the extent to which traditional gendered speech patterns continue to operate in contemporary usage.

The present article aims to reassess lexical and stylistic differences in male and female speech in modern Japanese and to clarify their current functional status in everyday communication.

2. Gender, Language, and Lexical Differentiation

Gendered speech can be defined as patterned linguistic behavior associated with socially recognized gender roles. In Japanese, such patterns have historically been encoded through

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specific lexical items, pragmatic markers, and stylistic conventions. These features have functioned as symbolic indicators of gender identity and social positioning.

Lexical differentiation constitutes one of the most visible dimensions of gendered language use. Male speech has traditionally been linked to linguistic features expressing directness and assertiveness, while female speech has been associated with politeness, emotional nuance, and interpersonal consideration. These tendencies reflect broader ideological expectations embedded within Japanese society.

Nevertheless, recent studies suggest that lexical choices related to gender are increasingly fluid. Rather than being applied uniformly, they are selected strategically according to communicative context, interpersonal relations, and situational demands.

3. Lexical and Stylistic Tendencies in Male Speech

In present-day Japanese, male speech frequently displays lexical patterns that convey confidence and decisiveness. Such tendencies are especially noticeable in contexts where authority, expertise, or leadership is emphasized. Lexical economy and relatively straightforward expression often characterize this style.

At the same time, informal interaction among male speakers may involve relaxed structures and reduced politeness marking, contributing to a sense of familiarity and immediacy. Importantly, younger speakers tend to employ traditionally male-associated forms in a selective manner, adjusting their speech according to context rather than adhering strictly to established norms.

This flexibility indicates a gradual shift from fixed gendered styles toward more individualized patterns of expression.

4. Lexical and Stylistic Tendencies in Female Speech

Female speech in Japanese has conventionally been described as polite, gentle, and attentive to interpersonal harmony. Lexical choices often aim to soften statements, mitigate potential conflict, and maintain positive social relations. Such features have historically aligned with expectations surrounding femininity in Japanese culture.

In contemporary communicative settings, however, female speakers frequently adopt neutral or conventionally masculine lexical forms, particularly in professional and institutional contexts. This pragmatic adjustment reflects the changing roles of women in society and the need for linguistic resources that signal competence and authority.

As a result, female speech today demonstrates considerable stylistic diversity, resisting simplistic or uniform categorization.

5. Comparative Analysis

A comparison of male and female speech in modern Japanese reveals that gendered lexical and stylistic differences persist but operate in a highly context-sensitive manner. Rather than

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forming a binary opposition, gendered speech styles function as flexible options within a broader communicative repertoire.

In informal, private interactions, traditional gendered features remain relatively salient. In contrast, formal and public settings tend to encourage more neutral linguistic behavior. This pattern suggests that gendered speech in Japanese is not disappearing but undergoing functional reconfiguration.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that lexical and stylistic differences between male and female speech in modern Japanese continue to exist, yet their application is no longer strictly determined by gender categories alone. Communicative context, social role, and speaker intention play a central role in shaping linguistic choices.

By viewing gendered speech as a dynamic and adaptive phenomenon, this article contributes to a more nuanced understanding of language use in contemporary Japanese society. Future research may build upon this framework through empirical investigation across diverse social groups and communicative settings.

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