Toward Reconceptualizing the Teaching and Learning of Gendered Speech Styles in Japanese as a Foreign Language

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Meryl Siegal and Shigeko Okamoto

1. Introduction

It is well known that Japanese norms of behavior have traditionally been highly gendered. Compared with men, women are expected to play subordinate social roles (Lebra 1984; Reischauer and Jansen 1995; Sugimoto 1997); their conduct, including ways of speaking, must be feminine; and they are thus expected to speak more politely, gently, and empathetically than men (Jugaku 1979; Endo 1995; Nakamura 2001; Okamoto 2002). At the same time, it has been increasingly recognized in recent years that actual behaviors of women (and men) do not necessarily conform to the norms and expectations, and that there is wide within-gender variation in speech (see §2 for further discussion). Yet, it is still not unusual to hear criticisms of women’s speech when there are deviations from the prescriptive norms of femininity, as illustrated by the following excerpt from a recent letter to the editor of a major Japanese daily newspaper:

In addition to the use of childish words and final rising intonations, young women have even started using men’s language. Speaking in men’s language is one thing, but there are girls who even use dirty words . . . , which makes me wonder how in the world their parents and teachers are raising them. But then, their mothers are also actively using men’s language. On TV, I even saw a female professor using men’s language proudly; I felt it was deplorable and questioned her educational level. . . . for men it seems as tasteless as eating sand or grafting bamboo on a tree. . . . In Japan there is an attractive and adorable women’s language. If we teach men’s language to female foreigners, we will inevitably end up teaching the wrong Japanese culture. (Letter from a 59-year-old man to the readers’ column, Asahi Shinbun, November 2, 1992; translated from the original Japanese)

The writer astutely pinpoints individuals within a particular (elite) social class in contemporary Japanese society (note that he is not discussing language used by, for example, female fish sellers). For the writer, these
women should use gendered language in order to remain within a particular socio-political hierarchy that is comfortable for the writer. However, the writer is not really talking about language but rather about preservation of traditional gender roles, which he thinks are presently in the process of being transformed. In invoking “Japanese culture,” the writer further regards himself as a protector of that culture, as indicated by his concern to teach the “right” Japanese culture to foreigners. For him, teaching Japanese as a foreign language implies teaching “traditional Japanese culture,” a reified formation of society, which includes normative expectations of gendered language and other behaviors. Accordingly, he is concerned about teaching the “proper” women’s language, in his words “attractive and adorable feminine language,” to female foreigners in order to maintain traditional power relations as part of the “legitimate” Japanese culture.

If gendered language use is complicated and political, as suggested by this example, what kinds of language should be taught in a Japanese language classroom? In this paper we reconsider the notion of “idealized” language in teaching Japanese, drawing on Fairclough’s (1992) claim that not to examine the norms of “appropriateness” when teaching a foreign language is to be complicit in maintaining particular hegemonic structures. In addition, we suggest that the “idealized” learner be reconceptualized, placing students first and foremost at the center of the question. Although many in language teaching have discussed “student-centered classrooms” it seems still unusual for language teachers to recognize that along with differences in goals, motivations, and learning styles, learners differ in terms of how they “do gender” and how they perceive gender issues and sexual orientation in their own society. We also know that there are different linguistic and behavioral expectations of non-native speakers in Japanese society (Siegal 1994a, 1994b). Furthermore, many Japanese language learners in the United States are studying their third or fourth language and, thus, have a complexity of ideas regarding language behavior. Given this kind of diversity, should teachers teach only special forms of language based on traditional gender orientation? One may claim that language teaching should be prescriptive, and that cultural and linguistic norms should be taught. But what exactly are these norms, especially when we consider not only the diversity in Japan but also the diversity within language classrooms? Furthermore, what does it mean in a political and sociological sense to teach the “norms” of traditional gendered language? That is, what implications does prescriptivism have in language teaching? Can we take for granted that language teaching should be prescriptive, as discussed in Kubota (2001a) (cf. Kramsch’s [1993]
research exploring the language outcomes of the communicative approach with consideration of the cultural and psychological effects of speaking/learning an additional language. This paper addresses several of these issues through comparison of contemporary sociolinguistic research with current perspectives in teaching gendered language in Japanese from popular textbooks, a teacher survey, and learner-based data.

2. Representations of Men and Women and their Speech in Japanese Textbooks

In approaching this topic, we surveyed seven popular textbooks as representative of the texts used in Japanese language classrooms in the United States. They are: [IJI] (An Integrated Approach to Intermediate Japanese), [IMJ] (An Introduction to Modern Japanese), [JBP] (Japanese for Busy People), [JSL] (Japanese: The Spoken Language, Part 1), [NK] (Nakama II), [SFJ] (Situational Functional Japanese. Vols. 1–3, Notes and Drills), and [YK] (Yookoso: Continuing with Contemporary Japanese). Needless to say, their popularity attests to their excellence in many respects. Further, we understand that many of the views in these textbooks might not reflect the authors’ current perspectives regarding gendered language. Yet, we examine these volumes because they have been widely used and seem to have had considerable influence on the kinds of language taught in language classrooms in the United States.

Our analysis shows that language textbooks tend to portray stereotypical images of Japanese men and women. The characters’ roles in the model conversations in the textbooks largely conform to traditional gender norms. In many cases, men are given high-status roles, such as professors and supervisors, while women are in more subordinate roles, such as housewives and secretaries. There is no female character clearly defined as a supervisor (kachoo, buchoo, etc.). There is no office situation in which a woman gives an order or instruction. Nor is there a situation where a husband shares housework with his wife (see also Siegal and Okamoto 1996). These textbooks thus emphasize traditional gender stratification, while under-recognizing the diversity and change in gender roles and relations in contemporary Japan (Kondo 1990; Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 1995; Roberts 1997; Sugimoto 1997).

Like many previous linguistic studies on gender and the Japanese language (Kindaichi 1957; Ide 1982, 1990; Mizutani and Mizutani 1987; Reynolds 1985; Shibamoto 1985, 1990; McGloin 1990), these texts also emphasize the gender differences in speech patterns, referring to male/
female differential uses of a number of linguistic features, such as sentence-final particles, honorifics, and self-reference and address terminology. Characterizations of strict gender differences in language indicate a larger ideology within Japanese society. Such characterizations may help students understand speech patterns often used in films, novels, etc. However, they also tend to reproduce stereotypes or traditional gender norms in standard Japanese, and the use of such characterizations might act to de-value the wide within-gender variability in speech styles, which has been increasingly recognized in recent sociolinguistic studies (Takasaki 1993; Okamoto 1995, 1996a; Dunn 1996; Ogawa and [Shibamoto] Smith 1997; Matsumoto 2002; Miyazaki 2002; Sunaoshi forthcoming).

One of the “gendered” linguistic features that are commonly mentioned in the texts is sentence-final forms in informal speech, as illustrated in (1) below.

(1) Some Gender Classifications of Sentence-Final Forms

“Male” Sentence-Final Forms
(n) da, da yo, da ne, da yo ne, (plain form of a verb) ne, yo, ze, zo, ka, kai, kana, (y)oo (yo), the plain form of a verbal alone

“Female” Sentence-Final Forms
wa, wa yo, da wa (yo), wa ne, wa yo ne, kashira, no, na no, na no yo, (noun/adjective noun) yo, mashoo (yo)

The table in (2) illustrates these classifications with some example sentences taken from the focal textbooks.

(2) Example Sentences with “Gendered” Sentence-Final Forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kiree da</td>
<td>kiree or kiree da wa</td>
<td>‘It’s pretty.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nihon-jin na n da</td>
<td>Nihon-jin na no</td>
<td>‘S/he is Japanese.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>takai ne</td>
<td>takai wa ne</td>
<td>‘It’s expensive, isn’t it?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii yo</td>
<td>ii wa yo</td>
<td>‘It’s fine.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>miru</td>
<td>miru wa</td>
<td>‘I will see it.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hoshii naa</td>
<td>hoshii wa</td>
<td>‘I want it.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iku no kai?</td>
<td>iku no?</td>
<td>‘Are you going?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ikanai ka?</td>
<td>ikanai?</td>
<td>‘Won’t you go?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iku zo/sa/ze</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>‘I’m going.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iku ka na</td>
<td>iku kashira</td>
<td>‘I wonder if s/he goes.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ikoo yo</td>
<td>ikimashoo yo</td>
<td>‘Let’s go.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soo da yo</td>
<td>soo yo</td>
<td>‘That is so/right.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soo da ne</td>
<td>soo ne</td>
<td>‘That is so/right, isn’t it?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>itsu iku n dai?</td>
<td>itsu iku no?</td>
<td>‘When are you going?’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Model conversations in these textbooks are also consistent with these gender classifications. Further, most of the texts contrast male and female versions of the same kind of conversations, as shown in example (3).

(3) (JBP, p. 175)

(female version)
Onna no gakusee A: Ara, hisashiburi ne, genki?
Onna no gakusee B: Un, genki yo. Issho ni o-hiru-gohan tabenai?
Onna no gakusee A: Ee, ii wa ne. Doko ni iku?
Onna no gakusee B: Oishii karee no mise shitteru wa.
Onna no gakusee A: Ja, soko ni shimasho.

(male version)
Otoko no gakusee A: Yaa, hisashiburi da naa, genki ka?
Otoko no gakusee B: Un, genki da yo. Issho ni hiru-gohan tabenai ka?
Otoko no gakusee A: Aa, ii ne. Doko ni iku?
Otoko no gakusee B: Oishii karee no mise shitteru yo.
Otoko no gakusee A: Ja, soko ni shiyoo.

(our translations)
Female/Male student A: Oh, I haven’t seen you for a long time. How have you been?
Female/Male student B: Yeah, I’m fine. Shall we have lunch together?
Female/Male student A: Yeah, that’s nice. Where shall we go?
Female/Male student B: I know a store that (serves) good curry (rice).
Female/Male student A: Then, let’s go there.

These textbooks thus give the impression that learners must strictly follow the gender classifications of sentence-final forms. However, as pointed out by a number of recent studies, the actual speech of Japanese men and women often diverges from these gender “norms.” For example, many women, including younger women and speakers of regional dialects, do not use many of the “female” forms given in these textbooks: wa, wa yo, da wa (yo), wa ne, wa yo ne, kashira, and (noun/adjective noun) yo. Furthermore, they widely use many of the “male” forms: (n) da, da yo, da ne, da yo ne, (plain form of a verb/adjective) ne, yo, kana, (y)oo (yo), and the plain form of the verb alone (see Okamoto 1995, 1996a; Matsumoto 2002; Sunaoshi forthcoming). For example, in the following excerpt from a naturally-occurring conversation between two female college students, no stereotypical feminine forms are used, while many expressions traditionally classified as male forms (in boldface) are used (data collected in 1992 by Okamoto):
Likewise, men also use many of the female forms, such as no, na no, and plain forms of verbs and adjectives, while the uses of such male forms as kai, dai, zo, and ze are situationally restricted (Sturtz forthcoming). Accordingly, we need to reconsider to what extent speech styles shown in such textbook examples as (3) are used in reality.

Another gender difference often noted in Japanese language textbooks concerns the use of honorific and other formal expressions. It has been said in the Japanese linguistics literature that, compared to men, women speak more politely, using more honorifics and other formal expressions (Ike 1982, 1990; Reynolds 1985; Niyekawa 1991). Language textbooks also offer the same kind of characterization, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

(5) In general, women are more apt to use polite-style and/or distal-style than men. . . concentrated polite language and/or concentrated distal-style are more feminine. (JSL, p. 228)

The plain form has been used, in this textbook, in phrases within sentences, but it is also used to end sentences in familiar speech, especially that of men. The following two conversations between a husband and wife are typical of the use of the familiar form by the husband and polite form by the wife that is used by most middle-aged married couples. (IMJ, p. 139)
Example sentences and conversations in the textbooks are also consistent with these characterizations. For example, women mostly use ee meaning ‘yes’ or to give feedback in informal conversations, while men use more informal un or aa ‘yes’, as in (3) above and (6) below; women, but not men, use so-called referent honorifics in informal speech, such as... hon katte kite kudasatta? ‘Did you buy the book?’ (IMJ, p. 268) and Raishuu mata irassharu? ‘Are you going again next week?’ (JSL, p. 219); women use more addressee honorifics than men, as in (6) below; and wives speak in formal style, while their husbands use informal styles (IMJ, pp. 139, 208, 268; IJ, p. 197).

(6) (IMJ, pp. 144-145, 151)

(male version)

Y: Tenki wa daijoobu datta?
‘Was the weather good?’

M: Un, tsutte iru aida wa daijoobu datta yo. Kaeroo to shita toki furi-dashita kedo.
‘Yes, it was while we were fishing. It began raining when we started back, though.’

Y: Soo. Boku mo ikoo to omotte ita n da kedo, zannen datta.
‘Did it? I really wanted to go with you. Too bad I couldn’t.’

M: Raishuu ka sa-raishuu issho ni ikoo yo.
‘Let’s go together next week or the week after next.’

Y: Un, soo shiyoo.
‘Yes, let’s.’

(female version)

Y: O-tenki wa daijoobu datta?

M: Ee, tsutte iru aida wa daijoobu datta wa yo. Kaeroo to shita toki furi-dashita kedo.

Y: Soo. Watashi mo ikoo to omotte ita n da kedo, zannen datta wa.

M: Raishuu ka sa-raishuu issho ni ikimashoo yo.

Y: Ee, soo shimashoo.

From the standpoint of language norms and ideology, it is true that women are encouraged through various channels such as education and media to speak more politely than men, as illustrated by the existence of numerous how-to materials that teach women “proper” ways of speaking, including the use of honorifics (Nakamura 2001; Okamoto 2002). Thus, it may be useful to refer to this fact in textbooks. However, it must be noted that actual language practices do not necessarily conform to norms and expectations. As is well known, in informal conversations where conversants know each other well, both men and women use non-honorific
forms, or plain forms of verbs, as in (4) above (see also examples 5 and 11 in Matsumoto and Okamoto in this issue). Women also widely use the informal un instead of ee for ‘yes’. In formal situations, on the other hand, both men and women, in particular, lower-status persons, make extensive use of honorifics and other formal expressions. Furthermore, as pointed out by several recent studies (Miyake 1995; Dunn 1996; Okamoto 1996a, 2002; Matsumoto 2002; Sunaoshi forthcoming), there is wide within-gender variability in the use of honorifics. There are numerous situations in which women and men may not necessarily use “expected” honorific expressions. The use of honorifics is highly dependent on complex situational factors, such as age, occupation, the nature of relationships, setting, genre, speech-act types, and one’s attitudes toward speech styles (Cook 1998; Ikuta 2002; Mayes 2002). The broad characterization that women speak more formally and politely thus may reinforce “normative” expectations, but it may not be very helpful to learners of Japanese unless the presentation of these language issues can be more nuanced and context-specific.

3. The View from Japanese Language Teachers and Learners

In the fall of 2001 we carried out a small-scale survey of Japanese language teachers at the college level to explore their views regarding the teaching of gendered language. Eleven teachers responded to our questionnaire; they were both male and female and both native and non-native speakers of Japanese. They were also teaching in different geographical locations in the United States. We wanted to know whether their views coincided with what we found in our textbook survey. Some of the questions we asked teachers to respond to were: Do you teach about differences in male and female speech patterns (for example, some textbooks might say that men use zo, ze, boku, ore, etc., and women use wa, kashira, atashi, etc., among others)?; If yes, what kinds of differences do you teach?; If no, why?

Although the number of respondents was small, what is striking and also informative is the variety of views among the teachers surveyed. Some believe that the “language gap” between the genders was disappearing so they do not teach any overt gender distinctions. Others view language learning as “an act of identity” and create classrooms where students try on different identities in role-play using varieties of language, including both stereotypical and non-stereotypical gendered speech styles. There were some respondents who believe in teaching the norms of gen-
derized language because they feel it is a part of Japanese culture. And still others, realizing the political implications of teaching such norms, relegate this phenomenon to an advanced class on Japanese language, culture, and society, outside of the regular language classes. Importantly, teachers reported that gendered language use tends to be taught at the intermediate or advanced level when informal conversational Japanese is the focus. Furthermore, some of these teachers also related that they had students who had spent time in Japan and experienced the reality of conversational Japanese. Upon returning to the U.S. classroom, they wanted more in-depth explanations of how gender and language work within the Japanese socio-cultural and socio-political system. One respondent reported that the female students in her class “wrinkled their noses” when she began to talk about male/female speech styles. This teacher said she would like to discuss more contextual aspects of gendered language use, and she admitted to being confused about the disparate situational variation.

Furthermore, we also need to consider the learners’ perspectives when teaching gendered language. In Siegal’s study (1994a, 1994b), female language learners living in Japan generated hypotheses about who used what they perceived as extremely feminine behavior and language and who didn’t. They were attuned to contexts; for example, one learner, Sally, noted that her Japanese roommate used gendered language including high-pitched tones when speaking with her boyfriend or around other men, but with female college classmates, her language use was decidedly different. The strategies the learners used to cope with their perceptions of language and gender also varied. Another learner, Arina, strengthened her Sino-Japanese vocabulary and avoided certain behaviors and honorifics because she thought they were “too humble.” Sally also believed that women should speak politely, yet stuck to the plain form in everyday conversation and used the desu/masu (polite) form when talking to elders. She, too, did not use what she perceived as gendered language. Mary, the eldest learner in the study, constructed an identity using the pragmatic particle desho (often incorrectly) to indicate softness and feminine politeness, yet on the other hand, in day-to-day conversations she did not subjugate herself but, rather, overtly took charge of conversational topics and used honorifics infrequently. Other researchers have also found female learners reluctant to acknowledge or use language that stereotypes women. Kubota (1996) notes a situation in which a female American student, being a feminist, refused to accept the existence of stereotypical women’s speech in Japanese. Endo (1991) reported that female Korean students were against using the term shujin (literally ‘master’ but traditionally
used to refer to one’s husband) because of the politicized connotation of the word.

4. Re-examining Gender in the Japanese-as-a-Foreign-Language Classroom

In sum, our analysis indicates that Japanese language textbooks currently available often overemphasize stereotypical gendered speech styles (cf. Banno, Ohno, Sakane, Shinagawa, and Tokashiki 1999 for a different treatment of gendered speech). Yet, sociolinguistic research shows that what are considered proper speech styles for men and women may vary widely depending on the individual and situation. Japanese language teachers and students realize that gendered forms of language exist and that context plays a large role in use. Furthermore, in considering matters of pedagogy and multiculturalism, learners in foreign language classrooms today are as diverse as the student population found throughout classrooms in the United States. Today’s learners of Japanese as a foreign language are multicultural and multilingual, and they vary in terms of gender orientation. Furthermore, being a *gaijin* (literally ‘foreigner’) in Japanese society creates different expectations of non-native speakers among native speakers and thus further distinguishes and complicates language use for Japanese language learners (Siegal 1994a, 1996). In Japan, non-native speakers of Japanese are still questioned about their Japanese language skills and praised for low-level skills. These observations suggest the need to reconceptualize language teaching to consider not only ideologies of gender but also ideologies regarding non-native speakers using Japanese.

Considering teachers’ views and attitudes, Japanese language textbooks, and the reality of current trends in Japanese society, how might Japanese-as-a-foreign-language pedagogy respond to the mandate of creating classrooms that are more effective for learning pragmatic competence in the face of diversity (see Nelson 1999)? In light of our research and as a response to both classroom and societal complexities, we propose a critical approach to Japanese language pedagogy (see also Kubota 1996 and Ohara et al. 2001). An initial intervention designed to teach gendered language in Japanese from a critical, feminist perspective was designed and documented by Ohara et al. (2001). Using a reading by a noted sociolinguist on pitch and gender and four Japanese TV commercials that the teacher-researchers chose, first-year Japanese language students were asked to discuss the reading and the commercials vis-à-vis their knowledge about Japanese culture as it relates to gender and language. The authors
note that “central to the concept of critical pedagogy is the idea of dialogue between students and teacher” (Ohara, Saft, and Crookes 2001:116). The classroom interactions that ensued achieved the kind of critical thinking and questioning regarding Japanese language and culture that the researchers were striving for. The final part of this four-day module had students apply their knowledge of language and culture by creating their own advertisements for Japanese products, which resulted in creative and playful manipulation of gender roles and gendered language. Thus, the authors demonstrated how critical pedagogy and a full course curriculum can be implemented without loss to the integrity of the classroom.

Encouraged by the implementation of feminist and critical perspectives in the classroom and building from some curricular threads we saw emerging in our surveys, we provide further suggestions below for curriculum responses to sociolinguistic data. These suggestions are meant to be examined, critiqued, responded to, and then creatively implemented by those involved in teaching Japanese in order to begin to reconfigure pedagogical responses to the social and linguistic diversity inside and outside the language classroom.

(a) Identity is constructed in part through language. Teachers can provide various level-appropriate authentic texts in the auditory, visual, or written modalities (see Byrnes 2002) that portray diverse Japanese gender identities through language in different contexts. For example, one of our teacher survey respondents spoke about the extent that manga plots are constructed through specific traditional gendered roles. It has also been noted that both stereotypically and nonstereotypically feminine speech styles are used to create socially diverse women in manga and films (Okamoto 1996b). Discuss these with your students (see also Ohara et al. 2001). Using the genre-based language examples you have brought to class, have students create their own projects such as manga texts or short skits which focus on gendered language use, while reminding them to keep in mind the various issues that can affect language choice, such as age, socio-economic status, level of formality, and intimacy.

(b) As in (a), different genres of texts can be used in the language classroom, but rather than materials being chosen by the teacher, students can do their own investigations, either by pursuing a particular topic related to gendered language use or by investigating different genres of texts from the perspective of gender and language. Student projects
can make use of various materials, such as magazines, novels, comic strips, or visual materials such as movies, videos, and TV dramas. Students act as discourse analysts and ethnographers in compiling “data” for class discussion. Such analyses would make it easier for students to understand that there are contextual, strategic reasons why different kinds of language use might occur. Furthermore, having students thinking about these issues and discovering answers on their own will enhance their learning and motivation. If they have access to Japanese chatrooms where there is ongoing dialogue between interlocutors or to other authentic internet-based conversation, this would provide another venue for language discovery, deep learning, and a “genre”-based (Byrnes 2002) curriculum. Importantly, the motivation for particular investigations (into, for example, movies, games, popular books, or manga) comes from the student and is guided by the teacher.

(c) Let your students choose, practice, and model the identities that they wish to have as Japanese-language speakers. These identities, which can cross genders, could range from martial arts expert to exchange student, store clerk, vendor, NGO representative, secretary, etc. The teacher, through readings and class discussions, can help students to understand the sociopolitical ramifications of their language use in each “role.” The teacher can also emphasize different ways to “play” a role that would allow students to develop sociolinguistically informed latitude in using the Japanese language in different contexts. Importantly, students need to clearly identify contexts and the criteria for language use within these contexts.

(d) In relation to (c), it would also be helpful to discuss questions such as the following (see Kubota 1996). How might different “plays” of the same role be evaluated or perceived by Japanese? Under what circumstances are traditional gender and language “norms” most likely to be employed for such evaluations? How and why have such “norms” come to exist in the history of Japan? What roles have they played in Japanese society? How have such “norms” been changing, if at all? How can one deal with these “norms” and expectations? These issues are suitable for Japanese language and culture courses. Furthermore, in advanced language courses, some authentic writings that discuss these issues could constitute the reading materials for the course.

(e) Allow time for reflection in the classroom on how learners signal and
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Portray their gender identities and sexual orientations in Japanese as well as in other languages. As von Hoene (1995) reminds us, the foreign language classroom can be another place where students can be encouraged to recognize and appreciate diversity (see also Anzaldúa 1987; Minh-ha 1989). It is important to realize that not all students are heterosexual and that many may experience extreme discomfort when heterosexual ideologies are hegemonic in the classroom. In a paper on ESL and sexual orientation, Kappra (1998) gives the example of a Japanese ESL student who came to San Francisco to experience a sense of freedom in his sexual orientation and instead found homophobic tendencies and the presumption that all students are heterosexual within the language classroom.

Examine how languages have been portrayed and stereotyped in particular ways based on visions of the “other” and the “self” (Said 1978; Kubota 2001b). For example, strictly gendered linguistic forms and other aspects of speech (e.g., politeness, vagueness) may be exaggerated to exoticize an Asian language vis-à-vis Western languages. How then do visions of ourselves versus the “other” language we are learning color our notions of language learning and our identities as language learners?

In sum, as noted by von Hoene (1995), it is necessary to reconfigure the typical language classroom in order to construct a “critical pedagogy,” a language classroom that will be both responsive to the multiple voices of the learners and the heterogeneity of language use among populations.

Recently, regarding our earlier work on this topic (Siegal and Okamoto 1996), we received the following comments from a colleague: “(1) Should the ideology of the textbook writer be that of the liberal academic and should the textbook reflect this? (2) Should language textbooks be agents of change in the sense of portraying a world that liberal academics want to see?” What we question is whether the ideology of the textbooks should continue to maintain and in some ways create an oppressive and stereotyped hegemonic gender structure which could inhibit language learning among our students. We are not suggesting that traditional norms should not be taught at all. Rather, they should be taught as what they are—traditional norms that may or may not be followed in actual language practices for a multitude of reasons. Presenting only rigid traditional norms, or stereotypes, is not only misleading but disassociates language use from the learner’s own personality and sense of self (Norton 2000;
Siegal 1996; Kramsch 1993). In moving toward a critical pedagogy, using authentic materials and listening to the voices of learners are thus important areas for curriculum development in the Japanese-as-a-foreign-language classroom. While there are those who maintain that the traditional norms should be taught because they are an important part of Japanese culture, there seem to be many others who now think they should not be over-emphasized. In fact, the latter view may now be shared by some of the authors of existing textbooks, including those examined in this study. The existence of different views is understandable, and exchanging views is healthy. We hope our paper contributes to prompting more dialogue and serious consideration of this issue.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented as part of the panel on “Critical Perspectives on Japanese Culture and Language” organized by Ryuko Kubota at the 2001 ACTFL meeting. We thank the following people for their valuable comments: Ryuko Kubota, Mark Blum, and two anonymous reviewers. We are also grateful to the teachers of Japanese who responded to our survey.


3. One of the reviewers of this paper alerted us to this textbook. It introduces informal speech styles in several lessons, but rarely references stereotypical gendered speech patterns. Example conversations (e.g., conversations between a male and a female student) given are also quite gender neutral.

REFERENCES


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