

## Non-Pronominal Self-Reference and the Construction of an Alternative Japanese Femininity

Sakiko Kajino  
Georgetown University  
Robert J. Podesva  
Georgetown University

Sociolinguistic work on self-referential terms in Japanese, partly constitutive of Japanese Women's Language (JWL), has focused on gender ideologies encoded in first-person pronoun choice (Miyazaki 2004; Ide 1997). Although scholars have noted that JWL was fabricated by men (Inoue 2006; Washi 2004), it has nonetheless come to index the ideal Japanese woman (*ryosai kembo* 'good wife and wise mother'). In this paper, we identify an innovative form of self-reference: the use of one's first name to refer to oneself, or non-pronominal self-reference (NPSR). We argue that although NPSR can index femininity, it contrasts with conventional Japanese *ryosai kembo* femininity by connoting youthfulness.

NPSR predominates in childhood, when Japanese children acquire the complex sociolinguistic etiquette governing the choice of more than 6 variants for the first-person singular pronoun (e.g., Cherry 1987). This pattern gives rise to NPSR's connotations of youthfulness. The link between NPSR and youthfulness is evident in our longitudinal study of Ayumi Hamasaki, a Japanese pop star who often employs NPSR in commercial endorsements. Although Hamasaki is the iconic user of NPSR, her speech exhibits a decline in its use over time, corresponding to the presentation of a more mature, serious self.

NPSR's connotations of youth are also exploited in the mass media, which we illustrate through an examination of *Sister Princess*, a popular animated cartoon depicting a heterosexual male fantasy world. Of 12 sisters featured in *Sister Princess*, 6 use NPSR. They are portrayed as more childish than the other 6 sisters, through their more playful behavior, shorter heights (132-149 cm vs. 150-159 cm), and higher maximum pitch levels (730 Hz vs. 471 Hz,  $p < 0.002$ ). While NPSR indexes youthfulness, it is distinctly feminine, as the sisters are presented as feminine ideals.

The double meaning of NPSR (youthful and feminine) is most evident in our third data source, cross-situational recordings of three young Japanese women. Intraspeaker variation patterns and metapragmatic commentary in interviews reveal that although speakers use NPSR liberally at home (47% of self-references), they avoid it at work (0%) in order to project maturity. In contrast, NPSR use is heightened among boyfriends (100% for one speaker) and/or potential boyfriends (one speaker suggested that men flirted with her *because of her NPSR use*), illustrating the link to heterosexual femininity.

We draw three conclusions regarding the linguistic construction of Japanese femininity. First, the co-presence of youthful and feminine meanings of NPSR indicates that Japanese women traverse a sociolinguistic landscape in which gender is not the only relevant dimension. Second, while research on alternative femininities often focuses on the subversive use of "male" linguistic forms, we show here that ideologies of gender can be contested by using forms that are no less feminine than those against which they contrast. Finally, we suggest that investigations of the linguistic construction of Japanese femininity may benefit from additionally considering novel features that do not constitute JWL. In contrast to JWL (a man-made "vicarious language" (Inoue 2006)), NPSR has arisen organically and represents a less-studied but increasingly-heard voice of Japanese women.