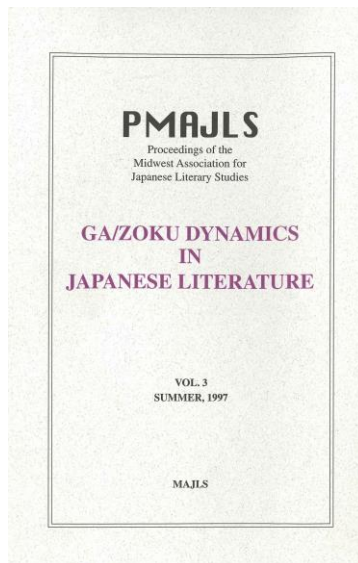


“Vernacularism and the Construction of Gender in
Modern Japanese Language”

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Vernacularism and the construction of gender in modern Japanese language

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Gender differentiation in modern Japanese language

A Japanese woman, teaching at a Japanese school in New York, looked at the textbook for the first-year children and was surprised. On the first page of the language textbook, it says "Boku to Watashi." Translated simply into English, it means "I and I." It does not make sense. These are virtually the first words children encounter in school: gender differentiated first person terms as an introduction to Japanese culture.

It was not so long ago that gender differentiation was introduced to the Japanese language. Local languages, mistakenly called "dialects" but which in fact were the vernacular language of the locals, did not differentiate first person terms by gender. They simply used "Ore" and "Washi" regardless of gender.

The recent rise of interest in the construction of the modern nation-state has referred to the nationalization of language. Gender differentiation is a part of this modern project. As national identity is constructed by language, literature plays an important role to promote a nationalizing project. Without exception, recent studies have laid the blame on national history (Kokushi), national literature (Kokubungaku), Folklore Studies (Minzokugaku) and art history (Nihon Bijutsu) for constructing national identity.

Since this conference is focused on Ga/Zoku, I think it would be appropriate to talk about vernacularism in language. Scholars like Komori Yōichi and Suga Hidemi argue that vernacular reform, known as Genbun Itchi Undo in the early Meiji period (let me

tentatively label it “Meiji vernacularism”), played a great part in the formation of standardized Japanese. Contemporary Japanese language is still limited within the scope of this Meiji vernacularism. Yet, Another shift is taking place, which I call “Heisei vernacularism,” and which pushes beyond the limits of Meiji vernacularism. Conservatives condemn it as disintegration of the language. Inspired by Komori's writings on Heisei vernacularism, arising one century after the Meiji vernacularism movement, I would like to discuss the modern Japanese language as a historical transition between two reforms. I will particularly focus on how gender plays a role in constructing and deconstructing the standard language, as gender is itself a modern product. I will illustrate this gender differentiation by referring to literary texts, which I consider representative of this transition.

Meiji vernacularism and transvestite stylistics

Returning to the subject of *Ga/Zoku*, Japanese language has expressed this binary opposition throughout the history. It coincides with the dualism between written language and spoken language. There is always a gap between the two, and when language reform takes place, it aims at dissolving the gap by making the written language closer to the spoken language. This is why language reform takes the form of vernacularism.

Prior to the standardization of the language, people from different regions had difficulty in understanding each other because of the diversity of local languages. Yet written language served as the common language of communication, a role similar to Latin in medieval Europe. The gap between the two was taken for granted, creating a bilingual situation for literate people. If we include the form of Chinese known as Kanbun, some people

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were even trilingual.

In written language, gender difference was minimal. There was no gender differentiation in first-person terms, as they used "Ware" or "A" regardless of the gender. First-person terms in vernacular languages at local levels were also gender indifferent.

Maeda Ai, a student of Meiji literature and a pioneer who combined literary studies with cultural studies, was the first to pay attention to the drastic change in writing in the early Meiji period. He edited a volume on stylistics, or Buntai, in the series on modern Japanese thought published by Iwanami Shoten. He saw the change in writing as a political event. Due to Maeda's sudden death, his project was interrupted and taken up by Katō Shūichi. According to Katō, prior to the establishment of standard Japanese, pre-modern Japanese made almost no use of punctuation or citation marks, and did not distinguish singular subject from collective subject. It rarely mentioned the subject, including first-person terms, too.

It is well epitomized in the example from Satō Kyōden, a representative vernacularism in the Edo literature.

ムスコそんなら客にほれたのがあるだらう女郎人にほれるのはき
らひさムスコそんならわつちらにはなをだらうね女郎ぬしにかへ
跡は申すめへムスコじらしなさるね女郎わつちやたつたひとつ
ねかひがござんすよムスコどふ云ねがいだ女郎わつちがほれた客
しゆのきなんすやうにさムスコおめへ今ほれたものはねへといつ
たじやねへか

(山東京伝「傾城買四八手」、1782)¹

¹ Due to the difficulty of access to the first prints or the original publications of the references quoted in this essay, most quotes are from contemporary publications that are available at hand in the form of anthologies, paperback versions, and collected works.

Customer: You've got to have a lover among your customers, don't you? Courtesan: I don't like falling in love with customers. Customer: Then there's no question about me. Courtesan: About you? That goes without saying. Customer: Not worried, huh? Courtesan: I have only one hope. Customer: What's that? Courtesan: I hope my favorite will come. Customer: But you just said you didn't have a lover!

Santō Kyōden, "Keiseigai shijūhatte" (48 Techniques for Playing With Courtesans)

In a conversation between a customer, a son of a wealthy household, and a courtesan of the pleasure quarter, the use of first- and second-person terms reflects status rather than gender. The gender-differentiated first person term, *Boku*, now widely established as textbook language, was merely an invention of the Meiji period together with "Wagahai," which was popular among the youth of the day.

The second example, from Tsubouchi Shōyō, was no different from conventional Edo literature in its stylistics, though he wrote about new trends among youth. Katō argues, "Shōyō pours new wine into an old bottle."

年の頃二十三、四、近眼と見えて鉄枠の眼鏡をかけた書生。知りのあたりの赤くなつた白地の単物を被て、白木綿の屁子をまきつけ、腕まくりをしたる容体、見た所からして強そうなり。胎毒の記念と見えて、頭の後の方はまるでげたり。背後から見れば薬缶を肩の上へのツけたようなり。アア暑うてたまらんたまらん。ヤイ須河。マアおれの部屋へ来いというに、マア来いよ。甘いものがあるぞ。(須)なんぢア。また菓子パンぢやろう。我輩の部屋へ来てみイ。えい桃をかうて来たぞ。オイ桐山こつちへ来いヨ。

(桐)なんだ桃だ。おれは西瓜を一つかうて来たがやなア。(中略)トいいながら握拳をふりあげて、西瓜の真中を一つくわらせる。(坪内逍遙『当世書生気質』、1886)

A young man of about twenty-three or twenty-four, wearing

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a pair of glasses with a metal frame. At a glance he appears so vigorous, with his bare arms protruding from his sleeves, wearing a white summer kimono worn at the ass, revealing his white cotton underwear. The back of his head is almost bald, maybe a memento of some pre-natal poisoning. Viewed from behind, it looks like he is putting a kettle on his shoulder. Oh, how hot, it's unbearable! Listen, Sugawa, come to my room, come on in. I've got something sweet. (Sugawa): What've you got? Pastries again? How about coming to my room. I bought some good peaches. Hey, Kiriya, you come over here. (Kiriya): Peaches, so what! I bought a watermelon! And he gave a punch to the watermelon.

Tsubouchi Shōyō, Tōsei shosei katagi (Lives of Today's Youth)

By contrast, Futabatei Shimei, a leader of Meiji vernacular reform, made created a new stylistics. The use of punctuation, citation marks, paragraph breaks, clear markers of gender difference (so that you can tell the gender of the narrator without knowing the subject) made his writing fresh for the times.

お勢は不思議そうに文三の容子を眺めながら

「親より大切な物、親より....大切な....者....親より大切な者は私にもありますワ。」

文三はうな垂れた頸を振揚げて

「エ、貴嬢にもありますと。」

ハア有りますワ。」

「誰....誰れが。」

「人ぢゃないの、アノ真理。」

「真理。」

ト文三は慄然（ぶるぶる）と胴震をして唇を喰いしめたまま暫らく無言（だんまり）、稍あつて俄に喟然として嘆息して

「アア貴嬢は清浄なものだ潔白なものだ、、、親より大切なものは真理...アア潔白なものだ...しかし感情という者は実に妙なものだナ（中略）」（二葉亭四迷『浮雲』、1887）

Osei looked at Bunzo with a mystified air and said, "Something more important than my parents. Something . . . more important than . . . my parents? . . . Yes, there is something more important to me than my parents!"

Bunzo raised his head, "Hm! You say there is?"

"Yes, sure there is."

"Who? Who is it?"

"It's not a person, it's . . . truth."

At this Bunzo trembled, and pursed his lips. After a short silence he ventured to say with a sigh, "Well, you certainly are a pure, clean creature! . . . Truth is more important to you than your parents. . . Ah, what a pure creature! But emotions are strange things.

Futabatei Shimei, Ukigumo (Floating Clouds)

Vernacularism contrasted sharply with conventional Gabun writing, such as that of Kōda Rohan and Higuchi Ichiyō. Known as a refined writer, Rohan wrote a story in the classic style two years after the publication of Futabatei's Ukigumo. Though it was written in the midst of language reform, it shows no impact of vernacularism.

エツと驚き振仰向け場、折柄日は傾きかかつて夕栄の空のみ外に
明るく屋の内静に、淋し気に立つ彫像計り。さりとは忌いまし、
一心乱れてあれかこれかの二途に別れ、お辰が越えを耳に聞し
か...妄想の役法師に馬鹿にされ、有もせぬ声まで聞し愚さ、簡程
までに迷わせたるお辰め、汝（おのれ）も浮世の潮に漂う浮草の
ような定なき女と知らで天上の菩薩と誤り、勿体なき光輪（ごこ
う）まで付たること口惜し.....。あまりの御言葉、定めなきとはあ
なたの御心。あら不思議、髓に其声、是もまだ醒ぬ無明の夢かと
眼を擦つて見れば（後略）（幸田露伴『風流仏』、1889）

With a start, he looked up and thought he discerned in the silence of the room, lit only from the outside by the sun which was just at that moment sinking in the twilight sky, statues standing in solitude . . . I thought I heard Otatsu's

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voice. My own imaginings make a fool out of me, the folly of hearing a voice that doesn't even exist, to mistake you for an angel, not recognizing that you are a fickle woman who floats like a weed in the current just as I do, how I regret it, putting that vain halo on you! . . . Your words are superfluous, and what's fickle is your heart. Wondering if he were still dreaming that illusory dream, or whether by some strange chance it was her voice he heard, he rubbed his eyes and looked.

Kōda Rohan, Fūryūbutsu (A Buddha in Fantasy)

Higuchi Ichiyō, the first woman writer in print capitalism, provides an interesting example of the construction of gender in stylistics. Ichiyō, known as the last writer of Gabun, wrote *Takekurabe* eight years after *Futabatei's* writing. As a mistress of a literary salon, she was aware of the new trend in literary journalism. Yet she was almost reactionary in transcending contemporary language reform.

廻れば大門の見かえり柳いと長けれどおはぐろ溝に燈火うつる三階の騒ぎも手に取る如く、明暮れなしの車の往来にはかり知られぬ全盛をうらないて、大音寺前と名は仏くさけれど、さりとて陽気の町と住みたる火との申き (後略) (樋口一葉「たけくらべ」、1895)

Looking behind, the willow leaves by the main gate to the pleasure quarters were so long, and it almost seemed you could grasp in your hand the noise from the third floor brothel, whose lights were reflected in the dark canal; you guess the unknown measure of its prosperity from the coming and going of traffic there day and night; the name *Daionjima*e (Before the Temple of the Great Sound) sounds Buddhist, but the people who live there call it *Yoki no Machi* (The Gay Quarters) . . .

Higuchi Ichiyō, "Takekurabe" (Comparing Heights)

Recently, feminist literary criticism has begun to reevaluate Ichiyō's work in a new light, which contradicts the existing image of Ichiyō as, in Sōma Gyofū's words, the "last woman of the old Japan." Ichiyō's supervisor advised her not to "write as a woman," but rather to "write like a woman," if she ever wanted to be successful in commercial journalism. The fact that something was written by a woman does not in itself make it feminine. Just as a transvestite Kabuki actor serves a model of womanhood based in male fantasy, more feminine than actual women, women's writing has to follow male standards in order to be seen as feminine. Seki Reiko (Seki, 1993), a feminist literary critic, rightly labeled it "transvestite stylistics." Thus, feminine writing signified Ichiyō as a woman writer, giving birth to what we know as Joryū sakka. She applied conventional *Gabun*, with its sophisticated elegance, consciously, in reaction to the rise of a new standard Japanese based on male-centered colloquial language among contemporary youth.

A question arises: was it really vernacularism? In fact, spoken language among Meiji intellectuals was by no means their native tongue; it was an artificial construct based on the middle-class, male language of Tokyo with a mixture of some Chōshū dialect.² The gap between written language and spoken language was not really a gap; spoken language itself was created in the process of

² In a recent dialogue with a novelist, Kuroi Senji, a literary critic, Iguchi Tokio, mentions about Meiji vernacularism and says, "Genbun Itchi is a newly created style based on the masculine language in a neutral guise." (Kuroi & Iguchi, 1997). Kuroi, on the other hand, refers to the new vernacularism (*shin genbun itchitai*) and points out that it is an attempt to create a new writing style, and not a spoken language. In other words, vernacularism as a language reform is always a reform of writing but not that of speaking.

vernacularism. Gender difference was a part of this project.

In a feminine guise

In his study of classic literature, Motoori Norinaga made a distinction between Masuraoburi and Taoyameburi, or masculine writing and feminine writing. He was by no means a biological determinist, but rather defined these two styles as strategies available to anyone, regardless of gender. Within the long tradition of gendered writing—Kanbun as male, Wabun as female—there have been instances of male authors writing in feminine guise, starting with the Tosa Nikki in the 10th century. Japanese men and women of letters have been fully aware of the construction of gender in writing. However, this is a trap, especially for women, since it is a man-made construction of gender. It is always men who can go back and forth between both stylistics, while women are limited to a feminine writing style defined by men. In the final analysis, it enables men to take over feminine writing as well.

This transvestism in stylistics is inherited by modern authors such as Tanizaki Jun'ichirō. As a translator of the Tale of Genji into contemporary Japanese, he himself promoted vernacularism. He wrote a couple of "I" stories in colloquial Japanese. The first example is Naomi, a confession story by a male protagonist. The story consists of a dialogue between a man and his lover. The use of Boku for a first person term and distinctive features of feminine language all construct the modern image of this couple.

「ねえ、ナオミや」

と、特にいつもより優しい口調で呼びかけました。

「ねえ、ナオミや、もうお互いにつまらない意地張りには止そうじゃないか。お前はどうか知らないが、僕はもう到底堪えられないよ、この頃のようなこんな冷ややかな生活には。……」

「ではどうしようって云う積りなの？」

「もう一度、何とかしてほんとうの夫婦になろうじゃないか。お前も僕も焼け半分になっているのがいけないんだよ。真面目になって昔の幸福を呼び戻そうと、努力しないのが悪いんだよ。」

「努力したって、気持というものはなかなか直って来ないと思うわ」（谷崎潤一郎『痴人の愛』、1924）

“Say, Naomi. Why don't we both drop this silly stubbornness? I don't know about you, but I can't take it anymore—this cold life we've been living.”

“What do you want to do about it?”

“Let's be a real couple again. We can't go on living in despair like this. We should be trying to bring back our former happiness.”

“Even if we try, feelings can't change that easily.”

Tanizaki Jun'ichiro, Chijin no ai (Naomi). Tr. Anthony Chambers. North Point Press, 1990, 164-65)

Tanizaki pays particular attention to woman's spoken language. The second example of his "I" novels is *Manji*, which he asked a native speaker to translate into feminine Kansai dialect. Kōno Taeko points out that the choice of the translator was not appropriate in terms of class and age for the literary world he described. It indicates that Kansai language was too alien for Tanizaki to judge the quality of the translation. But this distance is exactly what Tanizaki required in order to construct the woman's world as the cultural "other." In spite of its feminine guise, *Manji* carries a male fantasy of lesbianism. Femininity for him is something alien that he longs for but can never reach.

先生、わたし今日はすっかり聞いてもらうつもりで伺いましたの
 んですけど、折角お仕事のとこかまいませんですやろか？それはそれは委しに申し上げますと実に名がいのんで、ほんまにわたし、せめてもう少し自由に筆動きましたら、自分でこの子と何から何まで書き留めて、小説のような風にまとめて、先生に見ても

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らおうか思たりしましたのんですが..... (中略) でも先生わたしの
ために大事な時間滅茶滅茶にしられておしまいになって、えらい
御迷惑でございますやろなあ。(谷崎潤一郎『卍』、1928)

Do forgive me for bothering you again, but I simply had to see you today—I want you to hear my side of the story, from beginning to end. Are you sure you don't mind? I know how busy you are with your own writing, and if I go into every last detail it might take forever! Really, I only wish I could put it all down on paper, like one of your novels, and ask you to read it. . . . But I hate to let you waste your precious time for my sake.

Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Manji (Quicksand). Tr. Howard Hibbet. Vintage International, 1995, 3.)

先生(せんせ)、わたし、今日はすっかり聞いて頂こと思ひまして伺ひましたのですけれど、でもあの.....折角お仕事してなさるところをかま致しませんかしら?(中略)でも先生の大事なお時間を滅茶滅茶に致しましたりして、えらい迷惑なことで.....ほんまに宣いございますのん?(revised version by Kōno Taeko)

Spoken language in post-war literature

The first transvestite "I" novel right after the war was *Shayō*, written by Dazai Osamu. In the process of democratization in post-war Japan, Dazai wrote this story of the decline of a former aristocrat family in the feminine spoken language of nobility. The story was based on the journal of an aristocrat woman. In this sense, Dazai took over feminine writing both in style and content.

さっき私がお縁側に立って、渦を巻きつつ吹かれて行く霧雨を眺めながら、あなたのお気持ちの子とを考えていましたら、
「ミルクを沸したから、いらっしやい」
とお母様が食堂のほうからお呼びになりました。
「寒いから、うんと熱くしてみたの」
私たちは、食堂で湯気の立っている熱いミルクをいただきながら、

先日の師匠さんの子とを話し合いました。

「あの方と、私とは、どだい何も似合いませんでしょう？」

お母様は平気で、

「似合わない」とおっしゃいました。

(太宰治『斜陽』、1947)

A few minutes ago I was standing on the porch, and as I looked at the rain being blown and swirled about, I was trying to picture what your feelings are. Just then Mother's voice called from the dining room, "I have finished boiling the milk. Please come here."

"It's so cold today I've made the milk very hot," she said.

As we drank the steaming milk, we talked about the artist. I said, "He and I are not the least suited, are we?"

Mother answered tranquilly, "No, you aren't."

Dzai Osamu, Shayō (The Setting Sun). Tr. Donald Keene. New Directions, 1956, 92)

Feminine writing here functioned reactionarily in response to the new reforms in the post-war era as a symbol of deterioration. It demonstrated a sentimentality on the part of Dazai that was not well-suited to the "brave new world." In fact, one year after he wrote the story, he committed suicide.

Mishima Yukio is also known for his sophistication in writing about aristocratic society. Even though he knows the spoken language of upper class woman, he did not take the first person of a female protagonist. Instead, he takes a position of third person, a divine eye, so to speak. This makes his story an allegory, in which all the characters act under the perfect control of the author. In this respect, Mishima's work is similar to 18th-century allegories, and, accordingly, seem classic or almost old-fashioned in comparison with his contemporaries.

「それはお忙しいことはわかっていてよ」と節子は言った。「で

も八時のお約束があれば、どっちみち、今日は八時までしかお会いしていられなかったわけだわ。それを言って下さる汐時があったと思うのよ。私が遅れて来て、怒っていらしたまぎれに仰言るなんて」

彼女はもっぱら、自分の錨をおさえ巧みに利用する土屋の狡さを責めたつもりである。しかしこんな怨み言は、いっそう節子を不利にするものだった。土屋がやさしく言った。 (三島由紀夫『美德のよろめき』、1957)

"I know you're busy," Setsuko said. "But since you have an appointment at eight, it was clear from the beginning that I could only meet with you today until eight. You should have told me much earlier. It would be unfair to tell me now, when you are angry about my coming late.

She meant to blame Tsuchiya for his sly way of manipulating even his own anger. But Setsuko's own resentment put her at a disadvantage. Tsuchiya spoke to her gently.

Mishima Yukio, Bitoku no yoromeki (The Temptation of a Woman of Virtue)

It was not until the time of One Kenzaburō that the first language reform was made in post-war literature. When he was awarded the Akutagawa literary prize in 1958, most critics were impressed by his fresh writing style. However, compared with the "new" quality of the characters and the content of the story, his stylistics were not really "new."

犬を百五十匹殺します。と男はいった。専門の犬殺しは一人向うで準備していますが、明日から三日ほどで処理していただく。

(中略)

ペイはずいぶん良いわね、と女子学生がいった。

君は引受けるつもり？と驚いて私大生が尋ねた。

引受けるわ、私は生物をやっているんだし、動物の死体には慣れているわ。

僕も引受ける、と私大生がいった。

僕は十字路で立ちどまり耳を澄ませたが犬の声は聞こえなかった。

街路樹の葉を落した枝を夕暮れの風が口笛のような音をたてて渡っていた。駆けて二人に追いつくと私大生が僕を詰問するように見つめた。僕も引受けるよ、と僕はいった。(大江健三郎「奇妙な仕事」、1957)

The man said, we're going to kill 150 dogs. A dog-killing specialist is making all the preparations and starting tomorrow, we'll get it done in about three days [. . .]

The pay is really good, said the coed.

You plan to take the job? another student, a boy from a private college, asked in surprise.

Sure, I'll take it. I'm majoring in biology, so I'm used to animal carcasses.

I'll take it too, the boy said.

I stopped at the intersection and strained my ears, but couldn't hear any dogs barking. The evening breeze passed through the bare branches of the trees along the road with a whistling sound. When I came running after the two of them, the boy fixed me with an accusing stare. I'll take the job too, I said.

Ōe Kenzaburō, "Kimyōna shigoto" (A Strange Task)

The use of gender differentiated first-person terms, gendered markers in conversation, a clear distinction between story-line and citation... all of these conventions stay within the scope of writing set by Meiji reformists.

The language of student activists: from left to lib

Thanks to post-secondary education on a mass scale, university students are no longer "elites" in post-war Japan. Yet they are still the vanguard of language reform.

Shibata Shō's work, "Saredo wareraga hibi" served as a bible for student activists in the sixties. His story is often written in the form of confession, with deep inner reflection and self-criticism. The first-person term, Boku, still gendered, was written in

Hirakana, demasculinizing the subject.

こうして山の宿にきてから、五日め。一週間の級かもそろそろき切れようとしています。いったい、何をしにきたのか。そう考えると、ぼくの心は否応なしに、床の間のポストンバッグに向います。その底には、東京を出る前、あちら、こちらの薬局で買い集めた睡眠薬の箱が数ヶ、入っているはずです。

それに手をつけずに、ここを発てるかも知れない。そうしたかすかな希望が、ここにきてから、ぼくの心にきざしたようです。ですが、一方で、ここを発って再び東京に帰ったっていったいそこでどう生きていくのか。そういう思いが、心を重く圧しつけます。

(柴田翔『されど我らが日々』、1963)

Five days have passed in this way since I came to this hotel in the mountains. My one week holiday is running out. What did I come here for? Thinking these thoughts, my mind compulsively confronts the suitcase in the alcove. In the bottom of it are the several bottles of sleeping pills I went all over Tokyo buying at this and that drugstore before I left.

I might be able to leave this place without touching them. A faint desire to do just that seems to have grown in my heart since coming here. But, on the other hand, if I leave here and return again to Tokyo, how can I go on living there? The thought of it weighs me down.

Shibata Shō, Saredo, wareraga hibi (Our Days, Nevertheless)

Ten years later, another confession was written by a young woman, Takano Etsuko, at the peak of the student movement of the late '60s. The use of the jargon of the student movement, and the old-fashioned stylistics gives it a masculine guise. But behind the pretentious gesture, what was written was rather naive. With the publication of her diary after her suicide, Takano became famous; she was popular not because she was a hero among student activists but because she was "one of us."

一人一人の学生の会いだの断層は深い。渡しの中には、東大の機

勲隊要請を当然だと認める一面が存しているのだ。反面、教授は論外だが東大のあの様相をみていた学生が、何故それを止めるべく直接行動を起こさずに、権力に売り渡したのかとも思う。(中略)

東大闘争では常に自己の主体性が問われた。立命にその危機が内在する以上、己れのものとして考えざるを得なかった。しかし、それも疲れてしまった。弱すぎる。(中略)

「独りであること」、「未熟であること」、これが渡しの二〇歳の原点である。(高野悦子『二〇歳の原点』、1971)

There is a huge discrepancy between individual students. A part of me recognizes that it was natural for the police to attack the students rioting at Tokyo University. On the other hand, leaving aside all question of the professors' role, I also wonder why the students who witnessed the situation at Todai didn't take direct action and put a stop to the police intervention instead of selling out to their authority. . . In the student struggle at Todai, the autonomy of the individual was continually questioned. Since Ritsumeikan faced the same danger, I can't avoid thinking about it as my problem too. But right now I'm worn out. Too weak . . .

"I am solitary." "I am immature." From these facts I took my starting point at the age of twenty.

Takano Etsuko, Nijusai no genten (My Starting Point at the Age of Twenty)

In the same year as the collapse of the student power movement, Japanese women's lib was born from its ashes as an unexpected by-product. Contrary to the prejudiced belief that women's lib is a female counterpart to militant leftism, it was in fact born out of rage and disappointment with male chauvinism among male activists. The women's struggle was more expressive than instrumental, and feminist discourse shift the battlefield from masculine heroism to everyday life. They introduced new language against male-defined reason, rationality, and logic. Tanaka Mitsu,

a representative voice of Japan's uuman ribu, even resisted to be understood by men. Tanaka was conscious of creating a new discourse apart from leftist jargon. It reflects women's everyday language and was closer to spoken language with its rhythm and breath.

本音、本音と、よくあたしも使うことばだけど、時々人間己れ自身の本音をどれ程意識できるものなのだろうか、ふと考えることがある。まれにだが講師？の口がかかってくるものがあって、このあたしに！という半信半疑の気持ちにひかれて出かけてみるが、しかし、大抵の場合、およそ無残な結果に終わる。(中略) しかしいくらあたしでも、理由もなくとり乱す訳はないんであって、そこに三かしている人の中に、「なんていったって、妻として、母として生きるのが一番よ」、とタカをくくった想いが、例えば、一人につき三〇パーセント位ある場合、それが何人かまとまればそれなりの会場の雰囲気をかもしだす訳で、その雰囲気と喰ったり喰われたりしているうちに、引くに引けない後家のガンバリになってしまうのだ。(田中美津『いのちの女たちへ』、1972)

People often use the word “true intention,” and so do I, but I sometimes ponder to what extent a person can be conscious oneself of one’s true intentions. It’s rare, but I’ve been asked now and then to give public speeches—yes, even someone like me! So I go, not really believing it’s for real, but in most cases, the outcome is disastrous. . . However, no matter how reasonable I am, if there is, for example, among the audience about thirty percent who think “no matter what you say, the best life for a woman is as a wife and mother,” that thirty percent together winds up creating an atmosphere. Buffeted by that atmosphere, I wind up feeling like a widow struggling with all her might to no avail.

Tanaka Mitsu, Inochi no onna tachi e (For Women of Life)

Tanaka was a contemporary of Takano Etsuko. While Takano

followed the man-made leftist jargon, which pushed her to death, Tanaka struggled to create a new "feminine" discourse without getting trapped by masculine speech. In 1972, when members of the Japanese red army were arrested and found to have murdered their own comrades at their camp site, it came as a great shock to the public that it was a woman leader who had passed the death sentence. Her name was Nagata Hiroko. In a controversial manner, Tanaka claims "Nagata Hiroko is me," and asks herself, "What made us take different directions?" She answers, "Man-made logic denies woman's life. This is where feminism begins."

Heisei vernacularism

A century after Meiji vernacularism, a new language reform has risen from recent trends in feminine speech. To be more precise, it began with the writings of transvestite male writers such as Hashimoto Osamu. He wrote a series, Momojiri musume, in which a high-school girl plays the protagonist in the first person. It is written in a slangy spoken language currently used among teenage girls and young women.

大きな声じゃ言えないけど、あたし、この頃お酒っておいしいな
て思うの。黙っててよ、一応ヤバイんだから。(中略) その点日
本酒はねえ、いいんだ、トローンとして官能の極地、なーン
ちゃって、うっかりすると止められなくなっちゃくワ。どうしよ
う、アル中なんかになっちゃったら。ウーツ、おぞましい。やだ
わ、女のアル中なんか。男だったらアル中だってもまだ見られる
けど、女じゃねえ。

マ、そんなもんなのよ。高一って。(橋本治『桃尻娘』、
1977)

Listen, keep this to yourself, but lately, I've begun to get a taste for wine. Don't tell anyone, it's really bad. . . On that point, sake is especially good. When your vision starts to

blur—it's ecstasy. What if I end up an alcoholic? Wow, that'd be weird. Yuck, an alcoholic woman. Maybe if I were a man, it'd be okay, but not as a woman. But hey, that's life, for highschool sophomores.

Hashimoto Osamu, Momoshiri musume (Peach Bottom Girl)

Hashimoto went beyond contemporary stories, translating the classic texts into up-to-date language on the eye-opening premise that the ladies who served at the imperial court were the ancient counterpart of today's career women. He translated Seishōnagon's collected essays, *Makura no Sōshi*, in the girlish "Momojiri language," and thus promoted vernacularism.

春って曙よ！だんだん白くなってく山の上の空が少し明るくなつて、紫っぽい雲が細くたなびいてんの！（橋本治『桃尻語訳枕の草子』、1987）

Dawn in spring, no question!

As the sky gets brighter over the mountain, thin clouds of lavender trail off. My favorite!

Hashimoto Osamu, Momoshiri-go yaku Makura no sōshi (The Pillow Book translated into Peachbottom Lingo)

Hashimoto's contemporaries have carried out a similar transvestism in their "I" novels. But Hashimoto makes a sharp contrast with other writers. While others construct the female protagonist as Other, Hashimoto's girl thinks and behaves as if he were a she. She is as intellectual as Hashimoto himself.

Let me give you one example by Uno Kōichirō, known as the transvestite writer who first applied young women's language in his writing. But his feminine guise betrays him. It is obvious that the description of the body of a female protagonist as "slender" and "well shaped" originates in the male gaze.

あたし、エアロビクスのインストラクターなんです。ぴったり体に合ったフィットネスウエアやタイツをつけて、「一、二、三、四、エイ、エイ、エイ」

と号令をかけながら、飛んだり、跳ねたり、手を突き出したり、するんだけど。

そのせいか、あたし、体形がスッキリして手、体も、とてもよく動くんです。(宇野鴻一郎『むちむち混浴ギャル』、1993)

Yeah, I'm an aerobics instructor.

I wear skin-tight leotards,
shouting "One, two, three, four, ei, ei, ei..."

I leap, stretch, wave my arms and so on. Maybe because of that, my body's in great shape and I can really move.

Uno Kōichirō, Muchi-muchi kon'yoku gyaru (A Glamorous Girl in a Coed Bath)

Another example is found in Murakami Ryū's transvestite writing, in which the protagonist is a girl working in an S and M club. In spite of the feminine guise, his stylistic itself reflects his stereotypical view of women in the sex industry, even though he insists that he sympathizes with them.

ロープとか浣腸とかバイブレーターをバッグにしまっていると男のあれの形をした赤いろうそくを落としてしまってドアの隙間から転がってしまって外に出るとあらしより若い女が三人いてその中の一人がろうそくを持って不思議そうな顔で、これ、と言ってあたしに差し出して、その女の子達はどこかの大学の謝恩会らしくて二人が振り袖でろうそくを持った子はベルベットのイブニングを着ていて三人ともあたしよりきれいで背も高くてあたしは恥ずかしくなって自分でも頬が熱くなるのがわかって、ひったくるようにろうそくを取って出て行こうとすると、何よあんた、ちょっと待ちなさいよ、とベルベットの女が目を吊り上げてあたしの手をつかんだ。(村上龍『トパーズ』、1988)

When I was putting away all that stuff like the rope, the enema equipment, the vibrators, I dropped a red candle shaped like a man's cock and it rolled under the door; when I went out to get it there were three girls younger than me and one of them handed it to me with a look on her face like she couldn't figure out what it was; those girls looked like they were dressed for a farewell party at some university, two of them in fancy kimono and the one who handed me the candle wearing a velvet evening gown; all three of them were much prettier and taller than me; I felt ashamed of myself and feeling my own cheeks burning, I grabbed the candle out of her hand and was about to take off when the girl in the velvet gown caught my eye, clutched my arm, and said hey you, wait a minute!

Murakami Ryū, *Topāzu* (Topaz)

Long-running sentences with little punctuation, the use of "Atashi" as a first person term, and slangy colloquialisms constructs an image of the heroine as indecisive and unintellectual. Murakami's male chauvinism is clear in his other essays as well.

Tanaka Yasuo's award winning novel, Nantonaku Kurisutaru, provides another example. Using the form of a diary written by a young woman living a sophisticated urban lifestyle, he includes exhaustive details of trendy goods and events. Because of this, his work became a symbol of materialism among the younger generation, and it is in fact a conscious caricature of materialism based in self-reflection.

ベッドに寝たまま、手を伸ばして横のステレオをつけるてみる。目覚めたばかりだから、ターン・テーブルにレコードを載せるのも、なんとなく億劫な気がしてしまう。.....白金合のアンティーク・ショップで買って来た、淡い色をしたライティング・デスクの上には、なぜかオレンジ色のデジタル目覚まし時計が置いてある。でも、肝心のその時刻が読み取れない。.....ひとえに、私の視力が弱いためだ。(田中康夫『なんとなく、クリスタル』、

1980)

Without getting up, I stretch my arm towards the stereo next to the bed and try to turn it on. I'm somewhat reluctant to put a record on 'cause I just woke up . . . On top of a pale-colored writing desk that I bought at an antiques shop in Shiroganedai, there's an orange digital alarm clock (--why is it there?). But I can't read the time. . . simply because my eyesight is weak.

Tanaka Yasuo, Nantonaku, kurisutaru (Somewhat Crystal)

His writing is somewhat unconvincing as a woman's writing, because it is full of citations from current popular journalism. His transvestite stylistic is more neutral than feminine, as he does not make much use of distinctive features of feminine speech, and in this sense in fact reflects the reality of today's woman. But there are still some unconscious slips in his writings; the over-use of difficult Chinese letters, which are not available to today's youth, unintentionally shows his knowledge, but not that of the female protagonist.

Precedents to the Heisei vernacularism

Shoji Kaoru pioneered language reform a decade before Heisei vernacularism. He came and went like a comet in the literary world, leaving only one award winning work, *Akazukin-chan ki o tsukete*. This "I" novel, written in updated boy's colloquial language, represented a coup with its witty brilliance to the so-serious world of *Junbungaku* or "pure literature."

でもぼくは（根が快活な楽道家なのだろうか）、とにかく「いなごの大群」に腹いっぱい食べさせてやりすごしてしまうともうかなりさっぱりとした（つまりぼくは、こういう自分に対する悪口

を、別に否定するわけじゃないのだ)。それどころか、ぼくはふとまた、あのぼくの腰に頬をうずめてまるで子供みたいにすやすやと眠ってしまった彼女のことを思い出して、なんとなく石でもころがってたらポンと陽気に蹴りたいような気分さえ感じた。つまりぼくには、ぼくを襲った悪口を全部認めても、まだなんていうか「字あまり」みたいに残るなにかわけの分らぬぼくだけのものが確かにあるのだ。(庄司薫『赤頭巾ちゃん、気をつけて』、1969)

But it felt good anyway (maybe I'm a good-natured person after all) to feed that bunch of hungry kids and let them go (you see, it's not that I'm trying to deny all the bad things people have said about me). On the contrary, I recall how she slept just like a child on my lap and I feel like I want to kick a stone or even whistle with joy. In other words, although I acknowledge the bad things they've attacked me for, still there really is something extra left out of the account that's all my own, though even I can't say what it is.

Shōji Kaoru, Akazukin-chan ki o tsukete (Watch Out, Little Red Riding Hood)

The following generation of writers, such as Murakami Haruki, has received both implicit and explicit influences from Shoddy. His writing was genuinely epoch-making in post-war literary history. Compared with Shōji's vernacularism, the seemingly "new" writing of Ōe Kenzaburō still remains in the realm of Junbungaku in terms of conventional stylistics. Shōji's achievement was too early and so original that he had to wait for another decade to develop a following in the generation of Murakami Haruki.

Katō Ten'yō, a literary critic belonging the same generation of Murakami, tried to join the reform. He went half-way but failed. Among male writers in his generation, it became common to write Boku in Hirakana. Katō places Boku in the context of political argument, giving it an intentional dissonance. Apart from

the distinction between Boku and Watashi as gendered first person terms, there is another distinction between men's use of Boku and Watashi respectively assigned to the private and public spheres. Men are not allowed to use Boku in an official statement. The common use of Boku in literature indicates the private nature of the writing. Katō, however, extends the use of Boku to the public sphere. On the one hand, it can be a sign of the ignorance and lack of discipline of the post-war generation, but on the other, it reveals under-socialization and non-conformity in counter-cultural discourse. Katō's use of Boku in Hirakana symbolizes his choice of speaking from his personal self, a refusal to speak as a collective self. In his book, "In the Shadow of America," he argues about the policy of the occupation army, using Boku as a first-person term. He was aware, unlike the young patriots in Meiji, of the impossibility of taking a position as a "public self." Yet even if we were to replace the "Boku" in his writing with more conventional words such as Watashi or Wareware, it would make no difference. It still follows the conventions of the written language of high culture in its use of intellectual jargon.

江藤惇が『なんとなく、クリスタル』をほめている。(中略) こんど、そのことを思い出すかたちでこの一年前のベストセラーを読んだのだが、この田中康夫の小説は、ぼくには面白かった。そのきっかけは、「海」四月号にのった吉本隆明と江藤惇の対談「現代文学の倫理」である。

この対談もやはり、ぼくには面白かった。(中略)

「アメリカ」は「国家」をつうじてぼく達一人一人の内面を統治するから、その「国家」という中間項を欠かした内面にたいしては、..、無力である。(加藤典洋『アメリカの影』、1985)

Eto Jun praises Nantonaku, kurisutaru (Somewhat Crystal) . . . Remembering that, this time I tried reading his bestseller from last year and found that for me too, this novel by Tanaka

Yasuo was interesting.

I picked it up because of a dialogue in the April issue of Umi between Yoshimoto Takaaki and Eto Jun on the “Ethics of Contemporary Literature.”

I found this dialogue interesting too, of course.

Since “America” rules our interiority through the concept of “the state,” it is powerless vis-a-vis that interiority that isn’t penetrated by the mediating term “state.”

Katō Ten’yō, Amerika no kage (The Shadow of America)

Tanaka Yasuo’s writing well epitomizes the current transition of spoken language in written dialogue.

「でも、あなたは今、私と浮気をしているじゃない」

「そりゃ、僕は男の子だから、仕方ないよ。飽くことなき征服欲があるのだもの」

「随分と、勝手な論理ね」

「じゃあ、君はどうなの。君だって今、僕と浮気をしていることになるじゃない。それを聞きたかったんだ」

「淳一は認めているわよ。私が他の男の子と一対一で会ったりすることを」

「へー」 (田中康夫『なんとなく、クリスタル』)

“But, you’re cheating on someone with me, aren’t you?”

“Hey, I can’t help it, I’m a guy. We all have an insatiable lust to conquer.”

“Sounds like convenient logic.”

“Well, what about you? You’re cheating on someone by having an affair with me aren’t you? I wanted to ask you about that.”

“Jun’ichi accepts it—my dating other guys!”

“Hmmm.”

Tanaka Yasuo, Nantonaku, kurisutaru

Murakami Haruki is also known as a good writer of a witty dialogue.

「ねえ、これだけは覚えといて。確かに私は飲みすぎたし、酔払ったわ。だから何か嫌なことがあったとしても、それは私の責任よ。」

彼女はそうい言う とヘヤブラシの柄で殆ど事務的に何度か手のひらをピシャピシャと叩いた。僕は黙って話の続きを待った。

「そうでしょ？」

「だろうね。」

「でもね。意識を失くした女の子と寝るような奴は.....最低よ。」

「でも何もしていないぜ」

彼女は感情の高まりを押さえるように少し黙った。

「じゃあ、何故私が裸だったの？」

「君が自分で脱いだんだ。」

「信じられないわ。」（中略）

「ねえ、本当に何もしなかったってあなた証明できる？」

（村上春樹『風の歌を聴け』、1979）

“Listen, I know I had too much and got drunk, that much I remember. So if something improper happened, it was my responsibility.” As she spoke, she was striking the palm of her hand with the handle of the hairbrush in an almost business-like manner.. I kept quiet and waited for her to go on.

“Right?”

“I guess so.”

“But really, the kind of guy who would sleep with a girl who’s lost control . . . He’s a jerk!”

“But wait—I didn’t do a thing to you.”

“Then how come I was naked?”

“You did it to yourself.”

“I don’t believe you.” . . . “Can you prove that you really didn’t do anything to me?”

Murakami Haruki, Kaze no uta o kike (Listen to the Song of the Wind)

Still, in both cases the use of gender indicators, quotation marks and paragraph breaks in conversation follow the rules created by Meiji vernacularism. The stylistics are too conventional

for dialogue that portrays changing gender relationships. It leads us to suspect whether a young woman in the late '70s really talks in such typically feminine speech.

Another pioneer of the Heisei vernacularism is Shiina Makoto.

吉野は用心深く身がまえ、じりじりと時田に追っていった。

「うじえー！！」

と、時田が低いくぐもった声を張り上げ、吉野のふところに飛び込んだ。「ポコッ」とどこか拳で打たれた鈍い音がした。(中略)

吉野はくるりと反転し、逆に時田の上のしかかかっていった。

(中略)「うぐぐぐ」と、時田の喉あたりでいやな音がした。吉野の荒い息が激しくなった。(椎名誠『哀愁の町に霧が降るのだ』、1981)

Yoshino, watching him cautiously, tentatively trailed after Tokita.

“Ujeeeee!” shouted Tokita in a low voice and flew into Yoshino’s arms. “Bong,” there was a dull thud as if someone had struck something . . . Yoshino turned around and jumped on Tokita. . . “Uggggg,” Tokita made a weird choking sound in his throat. Yoshino, breathing hard, now began to pant.

Shiina Makoto, Aishū no machi ni kiri ga furu no da
(Mist Falls in a Melancholy Town)

The influence of comics is obvious in his writing with its use of unique onomatopoeia. But again, if we remove these effects, his stylistics would be no different from anyone else's. The seeming novelty in his writing, known as Shōwa Keihakutai, or light prose, though it challenged the heaviness of Junbungaku, turned out to be only superficial.

Young women writers and the impact of girls' comics

Heisei vernacularism began with feminine speech. In this respect, no one denies the impact of the girls' comics. Contrary

to the common notion of comic or Manga as commercialized popular culture, it has been the site of great achievements, expressing women's inner world in almost metaphysical ways with tremendous esthetic sophistication. Many young women writers today confess that they are influenced by comics. Yoshimoto Banana is one of them. In some cases, the story-telling is essentially a verbal reproduction of comics, which would otherwise be given visual representation.

私は、2度とという言葉の持つ語感のおセンチさやこれからのことを限定する感じがあまり好きじゃない。でも、その時思いついた「2度と」のものすごい重さや暗さは忘れがたい迫力があつた。と、私は神かけて、そういうことをけっこう淡々と、ぼんやりと考えていた、つもりだった。(中略)

しかし、気づくとほおに涙が流れてぼろぼろと胸元に落ちているではないですか。

たまげた。(吉本ばなな『キッチン』、1988)

Never again. I don't care for the loaded sentimentality of those words or for the feeling of limitation they impose. But just then they struck me with an unforgettable intensity and authority. I intended to think them over dispassionately. Jostled by the motion of the bus, I was determined to keep that dirigible, so far off in the sky, in sight no matter what. But then, overpowered by their enormous weight, I found that tears were pouring down my cheeks and onto my blouse.

Yoshimoto Banana, Kicchin (Kitchen, Tr. Megan Backus, Washington Square Press, 1993, 34)

Yoshimoto's simple writing serves as a litmus test of literary taste. Her work cannot be evaluated in terms of conventional esthetics. She writes,

"The Tokyo sky at sunset is... awesome!"

A connoisseur dilettante in literary criticism, Kawamoto

Saburō, pays Yoshimoto tongue-in-cheek homage, saying "no one else has ever described the Tokyo sky at sunset like she does."

Compared with Yoshimoto, Yamada Eimi is a skilled writer of refined Japanese. Though both writers openly confess that they are influenced by comics, their stylistics contrast sharply. In spite of the air of scandal, Yamada writes romantic love stories easily understood by older generations. Her view of sex as a signifier of love is so classic it brings tears to the eyes.

スプーンは私をかわいがるのがとてもうまい。ただし、それはわたしの体を、であって、心では決して、ない。私もスプーンに抱かれることは出来るのに抱いてあげることが出来ない。何度も試みたにもかかわらず。他の人は、どのようにして、この隙間を埋めているのか私は知りたかった。 (山田詠美『ベッドタイムアイズ』、1987)

Spoon is good at petting me. That is, he only pets my body, never my heart. Though I can be embraced by him, I'm never able to embrace him in return. No matter how many times I've tried. How do other people manage to bridge that gap? I wanted to know.

Yamada Amy, Beddo taimu aizu (Bed-time Eyes)

Yoshimoto has her predecessors in girls novels such as those by Himuro Saeko.

うっふっふっふ。
ふっふっふっふっふ。
うふっ、うふうふ.....
けけ、けけけ、えっへへー。
へっへっへ.....ふふ.....

「瑠璃姫さま、気味の悪い笑い声はやめてください」

火桶に炭をつぎ足していた小萩が、咳払いした。

「年ごろの姫気味の笑い方ではありませんわ、お下品な」 (中略)

「いよいよ今夜、ですわね」

小萩はイミあり気に、にんまりと笑った。

あたしはわれ知らず赤くなってしまっ、言い返せなくなっちゃった。

うあな女房（侍女）よね、仕える姫君をからかうなんてさ。（氷室冴子『なんて素敵にジャパネスク』、1984）

Ufu, fu, fu, fu,

Fu, fu, fu, fu, fu.

Uhu, ufu, ufu . . .

Keke, kekeke, efe, fe.

Fe, fe, fe . . . Fufu . . .

“Would you mind stopping that weird laughter, Princess?”

Kohagi said, clearing her throat and adding more charcoal to the hibachi.

“It’s improper for a lady of your age.” . . .

“Though it will be . . . tonight.”

smiled Kohagi, with a meaningful laugh.

In spite of myself I blushed, and was at a loss to reply.

What an annoying maidservant, ridiculing me like that.

Himuro Saeko, Nante suteki ni Japanesuku (How Wonderfully Japanese)

Himuro freely reconstructs classic literature in contemporary girls' language. In fact, her stories are a verbal reproduction of what has already been done by girls' comic writers. In this respect, Hashimoto is not a real pioneer. His idea of translation of classic literature into contemporary Japanese had already been realized in the comics. Readers were familiar enough to this world prior to Hashimoto's work.

Then what about the writing by comic artists? Popular comic artists are now welcomed in the mass media as columnists and essayists. Saibara Rieko, author of the Chikuro Yōchien series in which a little girl victimizes her playmates with innocent violence, is representative. Her up-to-date colloquialisms and phonocentrism

accurately reflect contemporary language as spoken among young women.

というワケで活字は信用できない。(中略)何を隠そう、この西原こそ盲目的な活字信仰の被害者で、本はもちろん、お父さんの持って帰ったエロ本まで、活字だってゆーだけで、全部信用しちゃってた。思い出すだけで自分のバカさ加減にムカつくが、例えば

「新事実！男性の7割は処女でなければ結婚をOKしない！！」

という記事を読んだ中学生の西原は、

「わー。あたし、結婚するまで絶対、処女でいる。」.....どーしてくれるんだよ、このクソ週刊誌。返せよあたしの青春をよ、ちくしょー。(西原理恵子『怒涛の虫』、1993)

Therefore, I do not trust anything in printed form. . . Why try to hide it. I, Saibara, had been a victim of blind trust in the printed word. I trusted everything in print—books of course, but even the pornography my father brought home. Just remembering that I am disgusted with my stupidity. For example:

“Startling discovery! Seven out of ten men say no to marriage with non-virgins!”

Reading that article as a middle-school student I thought, “Wow, I’m gonna keep my virginity until I marry!”

. . . How could I be so stupid, damn that lying magazine. Give me back my wasted adolescence. Shit!

Saibara Rieko, Dotō no mushi (A Worm of Anger)

Gender difference is almost nonexistent, as feminine speech has become closer to masculine speech. In addition to the first person term, *Atashi*, Saibara also refers to herself by her last name, which is now common among youth regardless of gender.

Saibara's writing reflect the spoken language of female characters in girls' comics. Yoshida Akimi's well-known comic, *Sakura no Sono*, portrays the reality of today's cool and hip

high-school girls.

「学校にバレんな あの調子じゃ」
 「.....ったく すぎやまがつっぱるからさあ
 せっかくあたしが泣いてやったのにあーゆーのはすぐあやまっと
 けばいーのよ」 (吉田秋生『桜の園』、1986)

“It'll get out to the teachers, if she goes on like that.”
 “Shit! She's so stubborn! I even cried about it when I spoke
 to her—why can't she?!”

Yoshida Akimi, Sakura no sono (A Garden of Cherry Blossoms)

Except for the gendered first-person term, *Atashi*, the dialogue shows no gender difference. Some girls dare to use *Boku* in referring to themselves. The current shift in girls' language often shocks conservatives who condemn its lack of femininity. It is only shocking to those who are unfamiliar with the everyday life of teenagers, in which the shift has already taken place. The shrinking gender gap can be observed in the opposite direction, in which masculine speech is becoming closer to feminine speech. A group of young men known as *new half* use transvestite speech or *Onee Kotoba* by using the first-person term *Atashi*.

In closing, let me cite a suicide note, written by a 13 year-old girl on the day before she killed herself, which provides a perfect example of the absence of gender difference.

消えてやるよ。てめえらも、オレ自身もそれを望んでるはずだ。
 なら望みどおり消えてやるよ。
 てめえらのそのうざったくござかしい「いじめ」もなくなるし、
 そのすさんだカオも見らずにすむ。ただし1カ月後、頂度オレの
 誕生日になる28日だ。だがおぼえとけ。
 オレはテメェらに殺されたも同じだ。(女子中学生(13才)遺書
 [朝日新聞95年5月2日付け])

I'll just disappear. You want me to, and so do I. So I'll disappear, just like you want me to.

That'll put an end to your sneaking around, bullying me, and I won't have to look at your disgusting faces anymore. It'll happen exactly a month from now, on the 28th, my birthday. Just remember. It's the same as if you'd murdered me.

Anonymous school girl, age 13, suicide note, Asahi Shinbun, May 2, 1995.

She makes it clear that her death was caused by bullying, by her classmates. At the end of her short life, she performed a "speech act" as a curse on victimizers. It is almost pointless to label her writing as transvestism. Some might argue that she dared to take a masculine writing in order to take a courage to commit suicide. Yet recent surveys support the fact that spoken language had already been de-gendered in everyday life among young girls,³ so that we can speculate that she did not have to take a masculine guise. Her document can be seen as an attempt to put an end to the gender differentiation of the modern Japanese language.

Conclusion

We might wonder if gender differentiation in speech lasted

³ Asahi Shimbun reports, in the article, "Buntai sekkin" (smaller gender difference in writing style), the result of the survey by a linguist on the historical transformation of women's writing that appeared in letters from readers in the past 40 years. The survey concludes that the gender difference in stylistics has been disappearing (Asahi Shimbun, 1996). Other socio-linguistic observations also support the similar conclusion in everyday use of language among young women, in particular.

for only one century between the first and the second vernacular reform. The standardized language as a modern product of the nation-state constructs gender difference. As the national language was based on masculine speech, feminine speech had to be given gender specific markers to make it sound more indirect and redundant. Then it is reasonable to say that the second language reform began with women's spoken language. Gender, originally a linguistic term, was redefined by feminists to refer to socio-cultural gender difference. Feminists had enough reason to do so, if gender is a construct of linguistic performance. Then it is natural that gender changes as language changes.

Language is alive; it is in continuous transition throughout history. I have no tears for lost femininity. Only the reactionaries would bemoan the change as the destruction of a Japanese tradition—a “tradition” that was in fact nothing but a modern product.

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