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Bridget Jones's Femininity Constructed by Language:
A comparison between the Japanese translation of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, and the
Japanese subtitles of the film

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Abstract

The language found in Japanese translation and original fiction is very different from that used by Japanese women in their real lives. Present-day Japanese women do not use literary language or so-called authentic women's language; however, they read it as female characters' speech, particularly those in non-Japanese novels and stories. This tendency has become a kind of convention in Japanese translation. In addition, Japanese has a wide variety of language choices depending on the speaker's perceived level of femininity or masculinity. So a translator's language use greatly affects the image of the characters, and their femininity level is constructed differently in each translation.

In this paper, I will analyse the Japanese translation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and the Japanese subtitles of the film version to explore the differences in Bridget's femininity from a linguistic perspective.

Even in a contemporary novel such as *Bridget Jones's Diary*, an exaggerated female figure can be seen. A linguistic analysis of the Japanese translation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and real women's discourse shows that the eponymous protagonist overuses feminine and sophisticated forms in the translation. Bridget is a 30-something working woman in London, and her speech style is modern and colloquial. Hence, there is a striking gap between Bridget in the original and that in the Japanese translation. The motivation of this paper is to investigate how differently Bridget was perceived by the audience of the film and the readers of the translation.

The markedly feminine figures in Japanese translation are created by social expectations of an 'ideal feminine speaking style,' and translation functions to reinforce an ideal model of how women should speak. I will further argue that translation is a shaper of gender ideology.

Key Words

Literary Translation

Film subtitles

Femininity

Japanese Women's Language

Bridget Jones's Diary

1. Introduction

The language found in Japanese translation and original fiction is very different from that used by Japanese women in their real lives. Present-day Japanese women do not use so-called authentic women's language in conversation. They do, however, read it as used by female characters, particularly those in non-Japanese novels and stories; its use is a convention of Japanese translation (Inoue, 2003; Nakamura, 2007b). Women's language in this sense is neither simply a linguistic construct, nor is it real Japanese women's language. But this is 'a culturally salient category and knowledge' (Inoue 2006: 13) that women are supposed to know. The female representation in literature is constructed by the fabricated language use, and this is a reflection of social expectations of what women should be like.

Japanese is characterised by the explicit marking of femininity and masculinity. The speaker's femininity or masculinity level is indicated by different sentence-final particles, such as '*wa*' or '*no*' (Inoue, 2006: 2). For example, a simple utterance 'I will go' can be expressed in at least five different ways; '*Iku-wa*' (I'll go + particle '*wa*,' very feminine), '*Iku-no*' (I'll go + particle '*no*,' moderately feminine), '*Iku*' (I'll go, neutral), '*Iku-yo*' (I'll go + particle '*yo*,' moderately masculine), or '*Iku-ze*' (I'll go + particle '*ze*,'

strongly masculine). That is, one sentence can convey a character's strong femininity, moderate femininity, strong masculinity, or moderate masculinity. Therefore, when a translator renders a foreign character's speech, she or he has to decide how feminine or masculine the character is in the original text, and choose the appropriate level of femininity or masculinity. Hence, a female character's femininity level may be different in each Japanese translation if the same novel is translated by several different translators.

This paper uses stylistic analysis of translation and actual speech, focusing on gender marking in the Japanese translation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* (*BDJI*¹, translated by Yoshiko Kamei in 1998) and the subtitles of the film version (*BDJ2*, 2001). It considers two questions: 1. How and to what extent do female characters' speech patterns in the Japanese translation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and the Japanese subtitles of the film version not reflect Japanese women's contemporary language practice? 2. How differently was Bridget perceived by the readers of the translation and the audience of the film?

There are some analyses on the artificial use of women's language in literature; however, there has been no empirical study. This paper, therefore, explores the gap between female characters' speech patterns in Japanese translation and Japanese women's contemporary language practice using numerical data.

Bridget Jones's Diary is a contemporary novel and the characters' conversations are held mostly in an informal situation. So this is an appropriate text to compare with real Japanese women's dialogues. *BJD*'s eponymous protagonist is a single working woman in London, in her thirties, and her speech style is modern and colloquial in the original. This novel was a worldwide bestseller with sales of over two million copies,

garnered the 1998 British Book of the Year, and was adapted into a film in 2001 (Memmott, 2006). As a benchmark to see the gap between literary language, supposedly authentic women's language, and 'real women's' language, I shall be using a linguistic analysis of Japanese women's conversation (Okamoto and Sato, 1992).

2. A Big Gap between Real Language, *BJD1* and *BJD2*

To answer the first question—how and to what extent do female characters' speech patterns in the Japanese translation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and the Japanese subtitles of the film version not reflect Japanese women's contemporary language practice?—I first compare *BJD* with the analysis of Japanese women's conversation. Then, the protagonist Bridget's femininity in the translation is compared with that in the film subtitles. The comparison clearly shows that femininity in Japanese translation and subtitles is constructed by the use of fabricated language, and the characters in the translation are over-feminised.

Firstly, I compare *BJD1* with the result of an analysis of Japanese women's conversations that occur in the context of close friendships (Okamoto and Sato, 1992). For the data of *BJD1*, I consider the protagonist Bridget Jones's conversations with three close friends: Tom, Jude, and Sharon. The studies focus on the analysis of sentence-final forms, which can be regarded as the clearest distinguishing characteristics of women's language. I compare the sentence-final forms with Okamoto and Sato's five classifications: strongly feminine, moderately feminine, strongly masculine, moderately

masculine, and neutral (Okamoto and Sato, 1992: 480-482). This methodology is also applied to the next comparison. Okamoto and Sato's analysis is based on the informal two-person conversations of three female homemakers, who are close friends aged 27-34, from middle- or upper-middle-class background. They were born in Tokyo and living there when the survey was conducted. Although their professions are different from Bridget Jones, and there is a six-year time difference of these data, Okamoto and Sato's study is a useful benchmark to see the gap between emphasised feminine speech style in *BJDI* and Japanese contemporary women's actual conversations.

Considering the data in *Figure 1*, there is a striking gap between Bridget's language use and that in real discourse. When examining feminine forms in the two sets of data, it is obvious that Bridget's language use is much more likely to be seen as feminine than real Japanese women's speech. Regarding masculine forms, *BJDI* seems to avoid masculine forms intentionally. Contemporary Japanese women used masculine forms at 14% in Okamoto and Sato, whereas there is only one masculine form in *BJDI*.

Figure 1 Use of Gendered Sentence-final Forms (*BJD1* and Real Language Practices)

Sentence-final Forms	Total Tokens Used (%)	
	(1992)	Okamoto and Sato (1998) <i>BJD1</i>
Feminine forms	24%	45.22%
-Strongly feminine forms	12%	28.70%
-Moderately feminine forms	12%	16.52%
Masculine forms	14%	0.87%
-Strongly masculine forms	0%	0.87%
-Moderately masculine forms	14%	0.00%
Neutral forms	62%	53.91%

Note (1): Total number of tokens = 390 (130 instances for each subject, Okamoto and Sato 1992) and 115 (*BJD* 1998)

Note (2): Each subject in Okamoto and Sato's survey aged between 27-34

Source of the data 'Okamoto and Sato':

Okamoto, Shigeko and Shie Sato. (1992) 'Less Feminine Speech among Young Japanese Females', in (eds.) Hall, Kira, Mary Bucholtz and Birch Moonwomon. *Locating Power: Proceedings of the Second Berkeley Women and Language Conference, April 4 and 5, 1992, Vol.1*, Berkeley and Calif, Berkeley Women and Language Group: 483

Note (4): As all figures in *BJD1* are rounded off to two decimal places.

Secondly, let us compare the two sets of data with the data from *BJD2* under the same conditions. In this analysis, Bridget's conversations with three close friends: Tom, Jude and Shazzer, a new character in the film in place of Sharon, are compared.

Figure 2 shows a similar tendency in Bridget's language use. The proportion of feminine forms in *BJD1* is 45.22% and that in *BJD2* is 45.00%. The frequency of neutral forms in *BJD1* is 53.91% and that in *BDJ2* is 55.50%. Considering the data in more detail, we notice that *BDJ2* shows more use of artificial language. Bridget in the film subtitles only uses strongly feminine forms or neutral forms. There are no moderately feminine forms or masculine forms of either type.

The language use of Japanese women has become less feminised, and nowadays there are few female sentence-final forms which are actually used by women (Mizumoto, 2005; Endo, 1997). Notwithstanding this tendency, Bridget shows a strong inclination

towards feminine forms. The enormous gap between Bridget's language and real life language is noteworthy.

Figure 2 Use of Gendered Sentence-final Forms (*BJD1*, *BDJ2* and Real Language Practices)

Sentence-final Forms	Total Tokens Used (%)		
	Okamoto and Sato <i>BJD2</i> (1992)	Okamoto and Sato (1998)	<i>BJD1</i> (1998)
Feminine forms	24%	45.22%	45.00%
-Strongly feminine forms	12%	28.70%	45.00%
-Moderately feminine forms	12%	16.52%	0.00%
Masculine forms	14%	0.87%	0.00%
-Strongly masculine forms	0%	0.87%	0.00%
-Moderately masculine forms	14%	0.00%	0.00%
Neutral forms	62%	53.91%	55.50%

Note (1): Total number of tokens = 390 (130 instances for each subject, Okamoto and Sato 1992), 115 (*BJD1* 1998) and 20 (*BJD2* 2001)

Note (2): Each subject in Okamoto and Sato's survey aged between 27-34

Source of the data 'Okamoto and Sato':

Okamoto, Shigeko and Shie Sato. (1992) 'Less Feminine Speech among Young Japanese Females', in (eds.) Hall, Kira, Mary Bucholtz and Birch Moonwomon. *Locating Power: Proceedings of the Second Berkeley Women and Language Conference, April 4 and 5, 1992, Vol.1*, Berkeley and Calif; Berkeley Women and Language Group: 483

Note (3): As all figures in *BJD1* and *BJD2* are rounded off to two decimal places, and there is a systematic error when they are totalled.

When we compare Bridget's language with that of her two close female friends, it becomes clear that the novel's central character is not supposed to be particularly 'womanly.' In *Figure 3*, I analyse Sharon's and Jude's conversations with Bridget in *BJD1*. Both of them are independent working women in London of around the same age as Bridget. Their characters are described as more decisive than Bridget's in the novel. Sharon is strongly influenced by feminist theory. Jude has a successful career and hires a personal shopper.

Figure 3 Use of Gendered Sentence-final Forms (Bridget, Sharon and Jude in *BJD*)

Sentence-final Forms	Total Tokens Used (%)		
		Bridget	Sharon
Jude			
Feminine forms	45.218%	45.883%	47.692%
-Strongly feminine forms	28.696%	31.765%	36.923%
-Moderately feminine forms	16.522%	14.118%	10.769%
Masculine forms	0.870%	0.00%	0.00%
-Strongly masculine forms	0.870%	0.00%	0.00%
-Moderately masculine forms	0.000%	0.00%	0.00%
Neutral forms	53.913%	54.118%	52.308%

Note (1): Total number of tokens = 115 (Bridget), 85 (Sharon), and 65 (Jude).

Note (2): As all figures are rounded off to three decimal places, and there is a systematic error when they are totalled.

Although some differences can be seen in the use of strongly feminine forms and moderately feminine forms, there is no more than 2.5 % difference in any category: feminine forms, masculine forms, and neutral forms. Surprisingly, Bridget's use is less feminine than her friends' and the frequency of strongly feminine forms is more than 8 % less than Jude's. The three sets of data clearly illustrate that the language use of each is surprisingly close the others no matter how feminine they are.

Fictional characters are not necessarily supposed to represent real people. Women in a novel might represent exceptionally feminine figures. However, what I would like to argue here is that female characters tend to be over-feminised by women's language in Japanese translation no matter how the characters' femininity is represented in the original text. This tendency is not only seen in *BJD1* and *BJD2*. I have also analysed a Japanese novel *Kitchen* (by Banana Yoshimoto, 1988), three different translations of *Pride and Prejudice* (by Jane Austen, first published in 1813), which are currently on the market in Japan—Akira Tomita's version (1950), Yoshio Nakano's version (1963) and

Kōji Nakano's version (2003)—and three translations of *Emma* (by Jane Austen, first published in 1816): Shoko Harding's version (1997), Masashi Kudo's version (2000), and Kōji Nakano's version (2005). Surprisingly, all of the texts show over-feminised tendencies. Thus, Japanese readers reading Japanese translations perceive a double-layered femininity constructed by the descriptions in the novel and the translator's language choice.

3. Translation of swear words

To answer the second question—how differently was Bridget perceived by the readers of the translation and the audience of the film?—I will examine how swear words are translated in the Japanese translation and the subtitles.

In the original novel, for instance, Bridget uses swear words such as 'Bastard!' (126, 168), 'Bastards' (127), '[...] the bloody bastard' (ibid), and 'Bloody bastard' (ibid). However, most of them were modified in the Japanese translation: '*Rokudenashi!*' [A good-for-nothing] (Kamei: 166), '*Rokudenashidomo!*' [Good-for-nothings] (Kamei: 167), or '*Usuratonkachi no rokudenashi*' [A foolish good-for-nothing] (Kamei: 167). Only once does the translator use a masculine particle '*ga*' to emphasise Bridget's anger to 'fuckwittage' (188) men: '*Rokudenashidomo ga!*' [Losers!] (Kamei: 245). The particle '*ga*' indicates Bridget's abusive language use (*Shinmeikai Japanese Dictionary*, 2005: 214).

In the film version, Bridget also shows a liberal use of swear words such as 'Oh, shit!', 'Bollocks!', 'Oh, bugger bugger!' ... However, most of them were deleted in the

Japanese subtitles. For example, ‘Oh, bugger bugger!’ is not translated at all and there is no subtitle for the line.

Some other examples can be seen in the Japanese subtitles. When Bridget is preparing for her birthday party and cooking for her close friends, the sauce overflows from the mixer and causes a mess. Then she cannot find tuna in the refrigerator. In her anger she says: ‘Where the fuck is the fucking tuna?’ This sentence is simply translated as ‘*Tsuna ha dokodakke?*’ [Where is the tuna?]. Although this Japanese phrase is fairly colloquial, Bridget’s foul-mouthed character is lost.

In the last scene, Darcy visits Bridget’s flat and finds her diary. It says ‘Darcy is a boring person. The wife who left him was right,’ and so on. Darcy leaves the flat, and Bridget says ‘Oh, shit!’ This is rendered as ‘*Taihen*’ [Oh my God!]. The nuance is modified in the subtitle. Bridget then runs after him in a hurry without putting on her shoes, though it is snowing outside, and she exclaims: ‘Bollocks!’ This word is translated as ‘*Tsumetai!*’ [It’s cold!]. This subtitle explains the context; however, it does not express her despair at all. There is only one literal translation of ‘Oh shit!’ ‘*Kuso!*’ [shit] throughout the film. However, Bridget does not use other swear words at all in the Japanese subtitles.

4. Women’s Language as Ideologyⁱⁱ

Modern use of women’s language was promoted politically during the Meiji period (1868-1912), and its typical use, such as a series of sentence-final particles, became established (Kindaichi, 1988: 39; Tanaka, 2004: 26). The Meiji period is linked

to Japanese modernisation, given that it was during this time that Japan became an industrialised society. Capitalist development and state centralisation were mutually related and occurred at the same time (Inoue, 1994: 324), and they also involved the construction of a gender ideology through the new education system. The notion of women's language can thus be seen largely as a consequence of political motivation (Nakamura, 2001: 216), and the construction of women's language and its strong connection to gender ideology played a fundamental role in the society of the time (McConnell-Ginet, 2003: 281).

Women's role is clarified in the modernisation of society in accordance with the compulsory education system at that time (Endo, 1997: 113-124). In 1878, coeducation was prohibited by law and 'feminine training' started (Nakamura, 2007a: 139). Girls' education was to teach 'the culturally standardized code of propriety' (Lebra, 1984: 42) to create domesticated wives who supported their husbands, the industrialised nation's main bread winners. Inoue indicates that compulsory education emphasised 'efficient homemaking and consumption, a demeanor of modesty and obedience to one's father and husband, high morality and chastity, and frugality and thrift' (1994: 324).

The phrase '*ryosai kenbo* [good wife and wise mother],' which is derived from Chinese Confucian ideas, illustrates women's role in Japanese society at that time. The idea that women should be good wives and wise mothers was state propaganda popularised by the Education Ministry through compulsory education, and '*ryosai kenbo*' became the aphorism for the government policy (Nolte and Hastings, 1991: 152, 158). It is clearly significant that this phrase was used for the first time during the Meiji period and the educational policy was based on the idea of '*ryosai kenbo*' (Inoue, 1994: 324). In

contrast, there is no Japanese word for ‘good husband and wise father.’ This fact also indicates that this kind of suppression was only aimed at the education of girls. In the late Meiji period, the elementary school moral book (published in 1903, by the Ministry of Education) denied women’s inferiority to men for the first time in an educational publication. However, it still clearly instructed that there were different roles determined by gender; the book says that you should not forget that men’s duty and women’s duty are different and each should fulfil his or her own duty (Endo, 1997: 124).

Such feminine training, including speech training, was to ensure women expressed their femininity and learned that modesty demanded overall reticence, a soft voice, a polite and feminine style of speech, an avoidance of exposing the oral cavity (the wide-open mouth should be covered with a hand) (Endo, 1997: 42). Through training, the Meiji government supported the ‘genderization’ (Tanaka, 2004: 26) of the Japanese language. In other words, Japanese women’s language has been shaped by male-dominant authorities and politically determined throughout history.

As Beauvoir (1949) writes in her epoch-making book *The Second Sex*, a man is the One, a woman is the Other. Beauvoir’s logic is applicable to Japanese society. The role of women was rigidly clarified through the nation-building process, and not only language, but also behaviour is still highly gendered in society. There is an iron ceiling with a few holes in it rather than the glass ceiling as some data show; the percentage of Japanese female chief executives is 0.8 %. In contrast, that in Britain is 10 % and in Sweden it is 23%. Only 30 % of Japanese women are reinstated into their former post after giving birth to a first baby (*The Independent online*, 7 March 2008).

Spender (1980) explores women's language in English and indicates that men's language is the standard, and women's language is marginal. In Japanese, there are distinctive disparities between how men and women speak. When standard Japanese was established, the concept of the language was 'men's' standard language: the Japanese government adopted the language of middle-class educated males in Tokyo as the standard Japanese language at the turn of the 20th century (Nakamura, 2007b: 43-45). Women's language, though, is a version of standard Japanese which emphasises femininity (Nakamura, 2007b: 35). Because the establishment of standard Japanese was closely related to nation-building (McConnell-Ginet, 2003: 278), standard Japanese is for men, and women's language is considered marginal. The characteristics associated with—being polite, formal, sympathetic, soft-spoken, indirect, hesitant, and non-assertive (Inoue, 2006: 2; Okamoto, 1995: 307)—create 'an image of powerlessness, social sensitivity, and femininity' (Okamoto, 1995: 307). For men, apart from the standard language, it is possible to use men's language, a masculinised version of standard Japanese which is mainly used in informal situations. The language identifies masculinity with characteristics such as offensiveness, roughness, and violence.

Whilst men are rarely taught to use men's language especially in formal situations, women are still repeatedly taught to speak like women through their upbringing (Tanaka, 2004: 26). There are many books available that educate women in how to speak in the correct way. A female writer points out in her bestselling book that if women do not use polite language properly, they will be considered ill-mannered and inappropriately brought up women. This book, titled *Kashikoi Hito ni Narinasai: Utsukushiku Ikitai Anata ni* [*Be a Wise Woman: To You Who Want to Live Beautifully*]

(Tanaka, 1986), was reprinted 73 times between 1986 and 1995. The big success of this book shows the popularity of how-to-speak books for women (Okamoto, 2004: 42).

According to Inoue (2003: 314-315), Japanese readers hear the most authentic Japanese women's language from foreign female characters such as Scarlett O'Hara, Queen Elizabeth II, or even Minnie Mouse, in translated novels, magazines, newspapers, or film subtitles and dubbing. This supposedly authentic women's language is very different from lived experience. As indicated above (Mizumoto, 2005), typical features of Japanese women's language, which indicate speakers' femininity, are almost dead among Japanese women under thirty. And yet, female characters in translation continue using such gender-marked language (Nakamura, 2007b).

A further study, Nakamura (2007b: 49, 60-61, 81-82), analyses representations of female speech in translation, and translated speech in newspapers and advertisements. In the Japanese translation of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1999), 11 year-old Hermione Granger speaks with conventional women's language which gives an impression of sophisticated, adult, and middle-to-upper-middle class on the readers. In an interview on the illegal immigration crackdown in a newspaper, a Mexican American female teacher's comment was translated with a stereotypical female sentence-final particle 'wa' (*Asahi Shinbun* [national newspaper], 12 April 2006). In a newspaper advertisement of the Japan committee for UNICEF, Audrey Hepburn's phrase 'Children—is there anything more important than a child?' was translated with a quintessential feminine sentence-final particle 'kashira' (*Asahi Shinbun*, 17 December 2006). Both these particles are considered stereotypical features of women's language but

in fact are already passé among contemporary Japanese women, as indicated above (Mizumoto, 2005). Furthermore, Yabe (2001: 176-179) analysed athletes' speech at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics in three Japanese national newspapers and found that foreign athletes tend to be translated with casual forms and with feminine or masculine sentence-final forms in their speech though Japanese athletes are likely to use formal and neutral forms. Yabe concludes that foreign athletes' remarks are filtered by translators with stereotypes of feminine or masculine speech. According to Chinami (2007), in translations of Japanese comics, especially in male-targeted comics, female characters tend to use excessive feminine forms and the language use functions to index the speakers' youth, good upbringing, good manners, and sexual attractiveness.

Interestingly, however, strong-spirited women's remarks tend not to be translated with women's language. For instance, the comments of former United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice were translated without women's language, but with assertive sentence-final forms (*Asahi.com*, 09 January 2009).

Stereotypes are often influenced by social expectations. If Japanese translation is affected by social expectations, it reinforces the spread of Japanese women's language as an ideology. When Japanese women's language is repeatedly used in translations, the repetition helps to implant the 'vicarious language' (Inoue, 2006: 4) into women's minds and to tell society 'how women should speak.' Stereotypically feminine expressions reflect gender bias, and help the bias to continue and be justified (Frank, 1989:109ⁱⁱⁱ). At the very least, the repetitive use of stereotypes in translations may induce women to fit into a socially-mandated mould even if not in regard to speech itself but in terms of

general behaviour and aspirations. Japanese readers are used to stereotypical feminine speech in fiction and translation, and the influence of stereotypes on women's speech, and on their views of themselves, has not been discussed enough in Japan.

5. Conclusion

This paper has analysed the enormous gap between real Japanese women's discourse and both the Japanese translations of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, and the Japanese subtitles of the film version. Also, the translation of swear words has been examined. To sum up, there are three conclusions in this study. Firstly, both the Japanese translations of and the subtitles for *Bridget Jones's Diary* incline towards the strong use of gender-marked women's language. Secondly, Bridget's use of swear words is modified or deleted in the translation and the subtitles. As a result, this new figure of femininity, especially her foul-mouthed aspect, is not shown to the Japanese readers and audience. And lastly, translators create and reinforce the consensus as to how women should speak, and their translations and novels mediate the reproduction of women's language as ideology.

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ⁱ The abbreviation *BJD1* is used for the Japanese translation of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *BJD2* for the subtitle of the film *Bridget Jones's Diary* in this paper.

ⁱⁱ Please note that this section is similar to Furukawa 2010 (forthcoming).

ⁱⁱⁱ '[i]t is clear that language not only reflects social structures but, more important, sometimes serves to perpetuate existing differences in power; thus a serious concern with linguistic usage is fully warranted' (Frank 1989: 109).