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Degree Project

Bachelor's Degree

Gendered Language Use in the Japanese Game Streaming Community

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Subject/Main Field of Study: Japanese
Course Code: JP2011
Credits: 15
Date of Examination: 2017-08-21

Abstract:

The aim of this study is to examine Japanese gendered language use in online game streaming, and the differences in gendered language use between male and female streamers. The main aim of this thesis is to examine how, and to what extent, young Japanese adults use gendered language when broadcasting gaming streams online. I will examine how pronounced the differences in gendered language use are between male and female streamers, and see if the major theories about gendered language apply in the Japanese streaming community. To collect the data, I looked at 20 game streamers, with each stream lasting 15-30 minutes. I transcribed the streamers' commentary, and examined the frequency of certain sentence ending particles, personal pronouns, and polite speech/word choice. The streamers were chosen with regards given to certain criteria to prevent skewed results, and to control the independent variables to a certain extent. For example, the streamers must be playing alone to ensure that the streamer is the only person speaking. I analyzed the results using a qualitative method, which indicated that the greater gender differences are found in the use of personal pronouns, but not as much in the use of sentence ending particles or politeness level.

Keywords: Japanese, Linguistics, Gendered Language, Online Game Streaming

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1. Introduction

Gendered language is a concept that affects many different aspects of everyday communication in Japan. How politely you speak, what sentence ending particles you use, and even your choice of pronouns can make you sound more masculine or feminine. Historically these differences have been more pronounced, but while some (e.g. Nakamura 2014) claim that female language in particular is hardly ever used anymore, certain masculine and feminine elements are still very prevalent in everyday speech.

This study is focused on gendered language use online, specifically in game streaming. How people speak online may differ from how they would speak in other situations, for example when they are communicating with colleagues or superiors at work, or how they speak when among friends. While a person's speech may differ from their written language, online streaming could be considered a different category altogether. This is because while streamers do speak, they are not always communicating directly with another person, much like in TV news or radio shows. They are, however, performing for an audience, and this may or may not affect how they speak, depending on the image they want to portray for that audience. While some streamers may have no intentions of acting differently or putting on a persona, but rather act as they would among friends (or people with whom they have a greater social distance, depending on how they view their audience and how politely they want to treat them), some streamers may feel the need to act and speak differently from how they normally would. Streamers might do this to attract more viewers by portraying an image they believe the audience desires, or perhaps to portray an image that they themselves like. After all, it is easier to influence people's impression of one online than in real life, as you have total control of what parts of you and your life the public can access.

Other examples of computer-mediated communication where people often, though not always, may be attempting to portray a certain image include Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, blogs, and even online dating websites such as Tinder. An example of this is the so called 'Instagram Personalities', or 'Instagram Influencers'. These people share parts of their lives through pictures and short videos, oftentimes with huge audiences, carefully choosing how to act, what to say, and, most importantly, what parts to show to depict the best possible persona in order to increase their following and possibly attract sponsorships.

The reason I have chosen to focus on online streaming rather than any other form of computer-mediated communication is because not many studies, if any, have been conducted in this specific field. I also thought it would be valuable to see if the fact that online game streaming is a mainly male dominated field would affect the results in any way, even though that would be difficult to measure and quantify, as there is

no “right” way for men and women to use gendered language that applies in all situations regardless of context.

There are many factors that can be analyzed in gendered language such as gender specific word choice and vocabulary, interruptions, turn-taking, minimal responses, and politeness level. In Japanese, however, some of the most tangible factors are personal pronouns, sentence ending particles, and overall politeness level, and thus those are the categories that will be analyzed in this study. Personal pronouns and sentence ending particles in particular are most often distinctly masculine, feminine, or neutral, and as such they are easily quantifiable and suitable for this type of investigation. Overall politeness level is more abstract and depends more strongly on context, but the frequency of certain elements (such as specific word choices, swearing, etc.) can be measured. The study will be conducted by analyzing 10 male and 10 female streamers’ 15-30 minutes long game streams, focusing on personal pronouns, sentence ending particles, and overall politeness level.

This thesis examines Japanese gendered language in online game streaming, and the differences in gendered language use between male and female streamers. The main aim of this thesis is to demonstrate how, and to what extent, young Japanese adults use gendered language when broadcasting gaming streams online. I will examine how pronounced the differences in gendered language use are between male and female streamers, and see if the major theories about gendered language apply in the Japanese streaming community.

The results of this study suggest that the greater gender differences are found in the use of personal pronouns, but not so much in the use of sentence ending particles or overall politeness level.

2. Background and Previous Studies

In this chapter I will introduce the topics of gendered language, computer-mediated communication, and online streaming. Gendered language falls beneath the much broader subject of sociolinguistics, which Coulmas (1998) defines as studies of the relationship between language use and society. In short, sociolinguistics focuses on how society affects language, covering cultural norms, context and expectations, and how language is used. I will also define computer-mediated communication, as well as provide a brief overview of online streaming, specifically of the streaming platform twitch.tv.

2.1 Gendered Language

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) stress that gender is not part of a person's being, but rather an accomplishment and a part of what a person does. Furthermore they claim that gender is not only a way to categorize people, but it is also a number of actions through which we construct and claim an identity, in addition to being a way to handle social relations.

Notable scholars in this field include Robin Lakoff, a linguistics professor who in 1975 wrote *Language and Woman's Place*, which, while at its publication was considered wildly controversial, has also frequently been credited with establishing gender and language as a field of study in linguistics. Since the publication of this work, linguists have approached language and gender from a number of different perspectives, namely; the deficit approach, the dominance approach, the difference approach, and the dynamic or social constructionist approach (Coates, 2004).

The deficit approach was distinguishing for some of the earlier research conducted in the field. Probably one of the most well known is Lakoff (1975), where she claimed to establish a so called 'women's language', which is depicted as weak and timid. It defines men's language as the standard, making women's language inferior, or 'deficit'. This approach has been strongly criticized, as it implies that there is something inherently wrong with women's language.

The dominance approach emphasizes the idea that women are an oppressed group and defines differences in men's and women's language in terms of women's subordinance and men's dominance. According to researchers using this model, everyone who takes part in discourse, men and women alike, help maintain male dominance and female oppression.

The difference approach suggests that men and women belong to different 'sub-cultures', which results in differing communicative styles of men and women

(Coates, 2004). A famous scholar who advocates this position is Deborah Tannen, who is perhaps most well known for *You Just Don't Understand*, which explores what women and men seek from conversations, and how these differences may cause discord between the speakers. Regarding these differences between male and female communication, Tannen (1990) claims that for many women conversation has the purpose of creating a comfortable feeling and good consensus (rapport), which is achieved through talking about common experiences and thoughts. For many men, on the other hand, conversation is a way to protect and improve their own social status by declaring (report) their own knowledge, skills, and orientation. Due to these differences in communication sometimes misunderstandings occur, which can result in discontent and anger between men and women. This approach (as well as Tannen's book) is considered controversial, as critics claim that mixed talk cannot ignore the issue of power.

The dynamic approach, which is the most recent, puts an emphasis on dynamic features of interaction. Researchers who support this approach take a social constructionist perspective. In short, gender identity is considered a social construct rather than a natural social category (Coates, 2004).

These approaches formed in a historical sequence, but the rise of an additional approach did not automatically mean that the preceding approaches immediately became outdated. However, today the deficit approach is generally considered outdated, and most researchers support the dynamic approach (Coates, 2004).

2.2 Male and Female Language in Japan

In this section I will be introducing some of the characteristics for male and female language in Japan. While there are many different perspectives that can be researched in modern day Japanese male and female language, it is perhaps mostly defined by sentence ending particles and personal pronouns, as well as politeness level.

Loveday (1986) claims that the semantic function of sentence ending particles is a way for women to soften or put emphasis on their statements, and for men to express power and assertiveness. He also states that the particles themselves are not inherently feminine or masculine, but rather that women's and men's frequent use of specific particles has led to associations with a certain gender. The particles are placed at the end of the sentence to for instance seek agreement, or to put emphasis on the statement.

According to Kawasaki and McDougall (2003) there are many different components within Japanese that demonstrate the speaker's subjective sentiment towards the

speech act, the proposition, or the speaker's addressee, and one of the most commonly used components is sentence ending particles. While sentence ending particles convey the speaker's emotion or attitude, they are also frequently associated with gender. Furthermore, Kawasaki and McDougall (2003) claim that in recent years it has appeared that female speakers are moving away from traditionally feminine forms towards more neutral and sometimes even masculine forms, while the more traditional gendered-specific depiction of the language is still maintained in Japanese language textbooks. Their study, which treats the subject of 'to what extent male and female sentence ending particles are presented in textbooks reflects how they are used in real life', shows that mainly the older age group (women, ages 45-57) used typically feminine forms, while the younger age group (women, ages 18-23) used significantly fewer feminine forms, while simultaneously tending to use more neutral and sometimes masculine forms. The sentence ending particles used by the younger age group was more similar to the portrayal of male speakers in textbooks than to that of female speakers.

Table 1 below demonstrates Kawasaki and McDougall's classifications of male, female, and neutral sentence ending particles (2003, p.45). It is worth noting that this chart is a slightly modified version of that provided by Okamoto and Sato in 1992, which consisted of the more nuanced categories "moderately feminine/masculine" and "strongly feminine/masculine".

Table 1. Gender and sentence ending particles (Adapted from Kawasaki and McDougall 2003, p.45)

Gender Neutral	**Masculine**	**Feminine**
ne	*zo*	deletion of copula
yo	*ze*	*wa* (to be used independently or with *ne* and/or *yo*)
yone	*sa*	*no* with *ne* and/or *yo* after a noun or a *na*-adjective

plain predicate without sentence ending particle	*na*	*kashira*
	plain imperative form of a verb, alone or followed by *yo* (e.g. *ike* 'Go!', or *ike yo* 'Go!')	

The use of personal pronouns also differs between men and women. While there exist numerous Japanese pronouns, some of which are only used in specific regions or by specific age groups, for the sake of simplicity only the most common ones will be examined in this section. Table 2 summarizes the most commonly used pronouns in modern Japanese, and is adopted from a table by Shibatani (1990, p.371).

Table 2. Gender and personal pronouns (Adapted from Shibatani 1990, p.371)

	Neutral	**Masculine**	**Feminine**
1st person	*watashi*	*boku*	*atashi*
	watakushi	*ore*	*atakushi*
		ware	
		(jibun)	
2nd person	*anata*	*omae*	
	anta	*kimi*	

There exist many different opinions on which pronouns are male or female, and the definitions vary depending on region and dialect, but also depending on if one wants to measure the level of politeness. For example, both men and women can use the word *kimi* ("you"), but it is considered more formal when used by a man than by a woman. *Watakushi* and *watashi* can both be considered neutral since they are used by both genders, however not always in the same context. According to Ide and Yoshida (2001), men tend to use *watashi* in formal contexts, while women tend to use the even more formal *watakushi*. In more informal contexts, men can use *boku* or even *ore*, while women use *watashi* (or *atashi*). This shows that women's speech in general is expected to be more polite than men's speech. In many cases, it would be considered effeminate for a man to refer to himself as *watashi* when talking to his equals (friends) in informal settings.

Men can use more crude pronouns such as *ore* in first person, and *omae* in second person, which would be unacceptable in more formal contexts, but there are no corresponding pronouns in female speech for neither older or younger women (Ide & Yoshida, 2001). However, some younger women (often students) have started referring to themselves with the masculine pronoun *boku*, which is usually used mainly by younger men (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). This could be seen as a way for women to assume a pronoun that does not categorize them as humble, weak, or shy, or perhaps it is simply a trend among younger women, where they do not necessarily put any specific thought into *why* they use it.

Politeness level, such as the use of *keigo* is also said to differ between men and women. According to Shibatani (1990), women often use more polite language than men, such as more frequently using *bikago* ("word beautification"), even in incorrect situations. When using *bikago*, the speaker will place the prefix *o-* (or *go-*) in front of nouns referring to the person or people that are worth the respect of the speaker. However, women also commonly use the prefix in front of elements that refer to one's own belongings in situations where a marker for respect is unnecessary.

Apart from what pronouns a person chooses to use, or if they use *keigo*, there are of course many other ways of expressing politeness level. Ide and Yoshida (2001) bring up the topic of addressee honorifics, which can be summarized as a way of expressing the social status of the person being spoken *to*, i.e. to create a respectful attitude towards "the hearer". They also bring up referent honorifics, which express the status of the person being spoken about. There is also a way of speaking where the speaker is humble, and lowers their own status in relation to the other speakers.

Other ways of expressing politeness level include the practice of adding a polite suffix to the name of the person being spoken about or spoken to. In some circumstances, such as when speaking with people one wants to show respect towards, it would be considered rude to use second person pronouns such as *kimi* or *anata*. Rather, one should use the person's name with a polite suffix attached to the end, such as *-san* or *-sama*, or the title of the person, such as *-sensei* (used for teachers, doctors, or "masters").

Men and women tend to choose different words to say the same thing, and this could be attributed to the aforementioned different expectations on how politely one should be speaking. Apart from different pronouns, men tend to swear more than women, and can choose more crude options such as *kuu* (to eat) instead of the neutral *taberu* (Ide and Yoshida, 2001).

Regarding *why* different politeness levels are used, Ide and Yoshida (2001) mention that politeness is a way of avoiding potential conflicts by showing respect to others both in verbal and nonverbal ways. Furthermore they claim that women's use of

keigo is due to the fact that frequent opportunities that demand higher forms of politeness have emptied the polite language of its politeness, and thus women do not realize the actual politeness level of certain forms, and must then use even stronger polite language. On the other hand, Thomas (1995) claims that the politeness level of the linguistic form (in this case the use of *keigo*) does not necessarily reflect the actual politeness of the statement. She goes on to explain that in an intimate relationship, these types of utterances seem inappropriately indirect, which causes them to have the opposite effect. Therefore it would be considered rude to use *keigo* in these contexts.

2.3 Computer-mediated Communication

This section provides background information on the issue of gender and power in the context of computer-mediated communication. A commonly used definition of computer-mediated communication is as follows:

> *Computer-mediated communication (CMC) refers to human communication via computers and includes many different forms of synchronous, asynchronous or real-time interaction that humans have with each other using computers as tools to exchange text, images, audio and video.* (Webopedia.com, 2017).

According to Tidwell and Walther (2002), CMC provides a different perspective for understanding social networks and human behaviour, and could now be considered similar, if not completely equal, to face-to-face communication as a natural way for people to communicate

Herring (2001) claims that the internet is commonly regarded as a democratic force that evens out the differences between gender and socio-economic power; however, when looking into earlier research regarding CMC and gender some studies suggest that issues such as gender bias and power struggles that are found in the physical world are found online as well, and perhaps some cultural reproduction is inevitable (Herring, 1993, 2001). Gender issues online exist, and they cause difficulties. One example of this is that women tend to be more likely to hide their gender when communicating online (Jaffe, Lee, Huang, Oshagan, 1995). The reasons why women chose to do this vary from fear of sexual harassment or even stalking, to efforts at dominance or intimidation by men (Herring, 1993). This does usually not apply in online game streaming as the streamers tend to include footage of themselves alongside the video of the game they are playing. The problem with gender issues still stands however, and the power dynamics between the genders may very well affect how the female streamers choose to present themselves (e.g. it

may cause them to use more masculine language in order to sound more assertive and confident).

According to Calvert (2002), many physical attributes (such as gender, race, or age) and social or cultural directives (such as morality, sexuality, or linguistic norms) become more adaptive in online contexts, and the online persona and anonymity provided in these contexts grant people an opportunity to explore identity construction.

2.4 Online Streaming

This section will be focusing on online streaming, more specifically on the platform twitch.tv. Twitch.tv is a live streaming video platform that was formed in June 2011, and is a social platform and community for gamers, game culture, and creative activities. It boasts a total of over 9.7 million active users per day, along with over 2 million unique streamers per month. Content on the site is focused on video games, and includes live streams of eSports championships, playthroughs, and other creative content. Hamari and Sjöblom define eSports, or electronic sports as "*a form of sports where the primary aspects of the sport are facilitated by electronic systems; the input of players and teams as well as the output of the eSports system are mediated by human-computer interfaces*" (2017, p.17). And a playthrough of a video game, also commonly referred to as a "let's play", is defined by White (2013) as a "*video showing a screen captured video of a gaming session wherein the player provides commentary over what is happening*". The content on the site can be viewed both through live streams and via video on demand.

Online game streaming on twitch.tv is a predominantly male dominated field. According to Online Performers Group (2015), only 19.49% of the streamers on twitch.tv are women, whereas men constitute 71%. The remaining 9.5% are groups, companies, or others. Furthermore, among the top most-followed 500 streamers (globally), less than 10% are women. However, it might be worth noting that, on average, men stream five times as many hours as women. According to Online Performers Group (2015), men receive approximately five more followers per day than female streamers, but considering that they stream five times more hours, male and female streamers are quite even. However, a big difference lies in concurrent viewer growth. Men (among the top most-followed 2500 male streamers) gained on average 10 new concurrent viewers over a 60 day period, while women (among the top most-followed 2500 female streamers) only gained on average 1.5 new concurrent viewers.

3. Methodology and Material

3.1 Material

The source of all data collected in this study is the aforementioned website twitch.tv. Content on the site can either be viewed live or via video on demand, but for this study only streams available through video on demand will be analyzed as not all live streams are made publicly available after they have been broadcasted live, meaning that they will be impossible to transcribe.

I will be watching 20 different game streams, 10 conducted by male streamers, and 10 conducted by female streamers, with each stream lasting for approximately 15-30 minutes. It is worth noting that many streamers stream for up towards 10-12 hours, sometimes even longer, but transcribing only 15-30 minutes should suffice to gather enough data to make a worthwhile analysis.

According to a study conducted by the Online Performers Group (2015), 71% of all streamers on twitch.tv are men, and as of December 2016, 89% of the Japanese viewers were men. This clearly shows an unbalanced distribution of men and women on the site, which makes sampling more difficult. Moreover, while there is a continuous influx of new streamers, these statistics hardly change.

3.2 Sampling Strategy

When examining the linguistic practices of a particular group, some sort of sampling strategy is necessary. The strategy employed in this project was fairly simple, and somewhat randomized. The streamers were all chosen at random from a list of Japanese streamers on twitch.tv, meaning that they might not be the most popular on the site overall. In addition to this, I made an effort to find streamers with varying amounts of followers, which offered more diverse results than if I had chosen subjects based solely on their amount of followers or unique views. This also resulted in the majority of the streamers playing different games.

Considering that twitch.tv caters mostly to men it was slightly more difficult to find female streamers, and the difference in popularity is noticeable when looking at the follower count and the amount of views. How this might affect the female streamers' speech styles may be worth taking into consideration when analyzing the results.

In order to avoid skewed results, the streamers must also fulfill certain requirements. Firstly, all streamers must be playing alone, since analyzing the streamers' speech will become much more challenging if they communicate with someone else while playing. This is because it might be more difficult to determine who is speaking if

more than one person is involved, and moreover it may skew the results as people tend to adapt their speech style (to a certain extent) to match that of the person to whom they are speaking.

Secondly, most streamers should be playing different games, and not more than 3 streamers of either group (male or female) may play the same game. If I were to deliberately choose streamers who were *all* playing the same game it might skew the results (e.g. because certain types of people may be drawn to certain types of games). It is acceptable for *some* of the streamers to be playing the same games (since certain games are far more popular than others on twitch.tv it seems plausible that many of the most popular streamers will be playing some of those games), as long as not *all* the streamers are playing the same game.

3.3 Categories to be Analyzed

When conducting a study within gendered language, there exists an abundance different categories one can choose to analyze, such as turn-taking, tag questions, or tone. For this research project, I have chosen to analyze sentence ending particles, personal pronouns, and politeness level. By politeness level I mean what level of politeness the streamers use, e.g. do they use polite/honorific/humble, normal polite ("long form"/*masu*-form), regular ("short form"), or downright rude language? Do they swear or use insults? I will also look into the streamers' use of *bikago*, or "word beautification". The overall politeness level will be in focus (i.e. if the streamers consistently use a certain politeness level, or if they combine different levels) rather than every separate utterance. For the sake of clarity, copula omission will not be counted as a sentence ending particle as it sometimes might be too difficult to identify where they should have been used, and thus can be counted as an omission.

3.4 Methodology

The material will be collected by utilizing the observational method. While this approach generally has its drawbacks, e.g. I will be unable to control *all* variables, it is a fairly controllable environment nonetheless. I will watch 20 different game streams, each lasting 15-30 minutes, and transcribe them in order to more easily analyze the commentary. I will note all occurrences of any of the three specified categories, and compare the results to see if any particular patterns emerge. The male streamers will be referred to as M1 - M10, and the female streamers will be referred to as F1 - F10.

In the Japanese language, the use certain words and particles are considered "female", "male", or "neutral", and in this research project I will examine the

language use of male and female streamers, and how it differs between the sexes and compared to gender language norms.

This project is in the field of variationist sociolinguistics. The purpose of variationist sociolinguistics is to recognize discourse features that can be counted and measured, and then correlate these with social categories such as social network, ethnic group, social group, or gender (Tagliamonte, 2006).

Constructing appropriate methods for counting the different discourse features can be challenging. An example of such a method:

> *Since each instance is a specifiable length, pragmatic particles such as 'you know', or 'eh', are more sensibly quantified using an index involving number of words rather than time: for example, the number of instances of eh per 1000 words.* (Holmes, 2013, p.185).

The goal of conducting such an analysis is of course to make generalizations in order to define general patterns, standards, and practices. In order to make feasible generalizations one must know all relevant observations, and how to measure these, and one simple but unrefined method would be observation time. For example, we are analyzing the amount of utterances of the sentence ending particle "ね" (*ne*), and we have two subjects, but where one has been recorded for 20 minutes, and the other has been recorded for hours, the results may be misleading. However, even if the two subjects were recorded for the same length of time, the results could differ if the subjects do not speak as much. I.e. one may be very loquacious, while the other one is taciturn. Therefore we also need knowledge of data quantity and ratio of the different types of observations. The most straightforward approach to estimating a subject's relative use of "ね" (*ne*) would be to count all their uses of sentence ending particles (e.g. よ (*yo*), な (*na*), よね (*yone*), ぞ (*zo*), etc.) and look at the percentage of "ね" (*ne*) as a fraction of all sentence ending particles used by the subject (Guy, 2013). Since the purpose of the study is to measure the frequency of certain gender specific words/particles/phrases, the analysis of the data will be done through a quantitative approach.

To clarify further how this approach will work in this research project:
We want to examine what percentage "feminine" sentence ending particles the streamers use during an approximately 15 minutes long stream. F1 (female streamer 1) uses a total of 20 sentence ending particles. Out of these, 10 are feminine (e.g. "わ" (*wa*) or "かしら" (*kashira*)), 7 are neutral (e.g. "ね" (*ne*) or "よ" (*yo*)), and 3 are masculine (e.g. "ぞ" (*zo*) or "な" (*na*)), which means that 50% of the time, the streamer uses feminine options. F2 (female streamer 2) uses 25 feminine sentence ending particles, 15 more than F1, but uses 70 sentence ending particle in total

(counting the feminine, masculine, and neutral particles), which means that she uses feminine options only 36% of the time. This means that even though the total usage of feminine particles is larger for F2 than F1, the frequency is lower (thus demonstrating the importance of defining and evaluating data quantity and ratio).

4. Results

4.1 Personal Pronouns

What personal pronouns the streamers preferred seemed to depend on their gender, as there is a clear divide between the male and female streamers.

Table 3. Personal pronouns in first person used by the streamers

Streamer	*watashi*	*atashi*	*boku*	*ore*	*jibun*	*sessha*
F1	X					
F2	X					
F3	X				X	
F4	X					
F5	X	X				
F6	X	X				
F7						
F8	X					
F9	X					
F10	X					
M1				X	X	
M2				X		
M3			X	X		
M4				X		
M5	X			X		
M6				X		
M7						
M8			X	X		
M9			X	X		X

M10	X					

Table 3 shows how the 20 streamers used personal pronouns when referring to themselves. While the majority of the streamers referred to themselves at some point, two of them, F7 and M7, did not.

One thing worth noting is the addition of the pronoun *sessha*, which is a masculine humble form that has primarily been used by samurai in the past, though nowadays it is often used by ninja in fiction. It fits the narrative of streamer M9, who goes by the username *TanukiNinja*, and who dresses in ninja clothing during his live streams. It is fair to say that his use of *sessha* is most likely not representative of his natural speech, but rather a part of the role he plays when streaming. It is important to keep in mind that some of the streamers might change how they speak to fit an image that they are trying to portray, which is different from how they would naturally speak in real life, and this was the clearest case in this study. I will further expand on M9's somewhat unique language in section 4.3.

While Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) claim that younger women have started to increasingly refer to themselves with the masculine pronoun *boku*, no female streamers used it in this study.

There is a clear divide between what pronouns the male and the female streamers prefer. All female streamers (except for F7) used the neutral *watashi*, and it is interesting to note that not many female streamers used explicitly feminine pronouns. Only two streamers (F5 and F6) switched between *watashi* and the feminine *atashi*. F3, on the other hand, mainly used *watashi*, but also used the masculine *jibun*.

As for the male streamers, the majority used the masculine pronoun *ore*. Only two streamers did not use *ore*; M7, who never referred to himself, and M10, who only used the neutral *watashi*. As mentioned in section 2.2, when a man uses *watashi*, it is usually in more formal contexts, so when it is used in this kind of informal setting it may be considered slightly feminine. Three male streamers (M3, M8, and M9) switched between using *ore* and the masculine *boku*, but M9 also used *sessha*. One streamer, M1, switched between *ore* and *jibun*.

Why the male streamers favored *ore* over *boku*, despite the fact that both are considered masculine, is difficult to know for certain. When looking at their general use of sentence ending particles and politeness level, one might assume that they are trying to portray a "cool" or simply more masculine image. Because while *boku* is masculine, it is mainly used by younger men (and is considered softer than *ore*), and could therefore be perceived as childlike or not as powerful by the male streamers.

4.2 Sentence Ending Particles

The streamers' use of sentence ending particles varied more greatly than their use of personal pronouns.

Table 4. Sentence ending particles used by the streamers

	ne	*yo*	*yone*	*zo*	*ze*	*sa*	*na*	*wa*	*none*	*noyo*	*kashira*
F1	1	2	1								
F2	3	2	4		2		1				
F3	8	5	2			2	9				
F4	17	15	6			2	9	1	2		
F5	19	22	4			1	4	7			
F6	23	14	7			8	12	2	1		
F7	2	6				1	2	3			
F8	44	4	7			2	4	1			
F9	13	19	3		1	2					1
F10	11	3	3	1	1	6	7				
M1	6	10	1		2	6	13				
M2	14	6	1	2	1	2	18				
M3	14	8	1	1		2	9				
M4	2	8			1		11				
M5	20	11	4				8				
M6	5	8	5				15				
M7	7	6					10				
M8	9	6	4		1	6	2				
M9	2	2					3				
M10	7	6	2		1	2	22	2			

Table 5. The streamers' use of sentence ending particles as a percentage of their individual total use (FA represents the female streamers' average use of particles, and MA represents the male streamers' average use)

	ne	*yo*	*yone*	*zo*	*ze*	*sa*	*na*	*wa*	*none*	*noyo*	*kashira*
F1	25%	50%	25%								
F2	25%	16.7%	33.3%		16.7%		8.3%				
F3	30.7%	19.2%	7.7%			7.7%	34.6%				
F4	32.7%	28.8%	11.5%			3.8%	17.3%	2%	3.8%		
F5	33.3%	38.6%	7%			1.8%	7%	12.3%			
F6	34.3%	20.1%	10.4%			11.9%	18%	3%	1.5%		
F7	14.3%	42.6%				7.1%	14.3%	21.4%			
F8	71%	6.5%	11.3%			3.2%	6.5%	1.6%			
F9	34.2%	50%	7.9%		2.6%	5.3%					2.6%
F10	34.4%	9.4%	9.4%	3.1%	3.1%	18.6%	21.9%				
FA	**33.5%**	**28.2%**	**12.4%**	**0.3%**	**2.2%**	**5.9%**	**12.8%**	**4%**	**0.5%**	**0%**	**0.3%**
M1	15.8%	26.3%	2.6%		5.3%	15.8%	34.2%				
M2	31.8%	13.6%	2.3%	4.5%	2.3%	4.5%	41%				
M3	40%	22.9%	2.9%	2.9%		5.7%	25.7%				
M4	9.1%	36.4%			4.5%		50%				
M5	46.5%	25.6%	9.3%				18.6%				
M6	15.2%	24.2%	15.2%				45.5%				
M7	30.4%	26.1%					43.5%				
M8	32.1%	21.4%	14.3%		3.6%	21.4%	7.1%				
M9	28.6%	28.6%					42.9%				
M10	16.7%	14.3%	4.8%		2.4%	4.8%	52.4%	4.8%			
MA	**26.6%**	**23.9%**	**5.1%**	**0.7%**	**1.8%**	**5.2%**	**36%**	**0.5%**	**0%**	**0%**	**0%**

Table 6. Distribution of neutral, masculine, and feminine sentence ending particles

Streamer	Neutral	Masculine	Feminine
F1	4 (100%)		
F2	9 (75%)	3 (25%)	
F3	15 (57.7%)	11 (42.3%)	
F4	38 (73.1%)	11 (21.2%)	3 (5.7%)
F5	45 (78.9%)	5 (8.8%)	7 (12.3%)
F6	44 (65.7%)	20 (29.8%)	3 (4.5%)
F7	8 (57.2%)	3 (21.4%)	3 (21.4%)
F8	55 (88.7%)	6 (9.7%)	1 (1.6%)
F9	35 (89.7%)	3 (7.7%)	1 (2.6%)
F10	17 (53.1%)	15 (46.9%)	
M1	17 (44.7%)	21 (55.3%)	
M2	21 (47.7%)	23 (52.3%)	
M3	23 (65.7%)	12 (34.3%)	
M4	10 (45.5%)	12 (54.5%)	
M5	35 (81.4%)	8 (18.6%)	
M6	18 (54.5%)	15 (45.5%)	
M7	13 (56.5%)	10 (43.5%)	
M8	19 (67.9%)	9 (32.1%)	
M9	4 (57.1%)	3 (42.9%)	
M10	15 (35.7%)	25 (59.5%)	2 (4.8%)

To summarize from section 2.2 (Male and Female Language in Japan), the gender neutral particles are *ne*, *yo*, and *yone*, the masculine particles are *zo*, *ze*, *sa*, and *na*, and the feminine particles are *wa*, *none*, *noyo*, and *kashira*.

Table 7. Average use of neutral, masculine, and feminine sentence ending particles by each gender

Streamer	Neutral	Masculine	Feminine
F	73.9%	21.3%	4.8%
M	55.7%	43.8%	0.5%

What sentence ending particles the streamers preferred varied greatly. Table 4 shows which particles the streamers used and how many they used of each kind. Table 5 shows the streamers' use of individual sentence ending particles as a percentage of their total use. Table 6 shows the distribution between neutral, feminine, and masculine sentence ending particles both as the total number of particles used per category, as well as a percentage of the total number of particles used by the streamer. The exact amount of particles (e.g. F6 used 8 neutral, 3 masculine, 3 feminine) is somewhat irrelevant as the streams varied both in length and in how much the streamers actually spoke, but is included simply to highlight this discrepancy. Table 7 shows the average use of particles based on the percentages in table 6.

It is clear that the use of feminine sentence ending particles is very limited even among the female streamers. While six female streamers did use feminine particles, they all used masculine particles as well. The majority of these six streamers all used more masculine particles than feminine (F7 used an equal amount of feminine and masculine particles), and only one streamer, F5, used more feminine particles than masculine. In fact, all streamers except for F1, who only used neutral particles, used masculine particles. All female streamers show a preference for neutral particles however, as they all use them at least 53.1% of the time, though the average is even higher at 73.9%.

The male streamers showed a more even distribution between neutral and masculine particles, and only one streamer, M10, used feminine particles.

(1) びっくりしたわ。
Bikkuri shita wa.
'That really surprised me.'

Example 1 shows that he used the feminine particle *wa*; however, according to McGloin Hanaoka (1993) there exists a masculine *wa*, and the difference lies solely in the intonation. Due to my own linguistic inability it was not possible for me to determine with complete certainty whether it was a masculine or a feminine *wa*, but based on M10's use of *watashi* as well as his general language, I believe that it is a feminine *wa*.

The feminine particle combination *noyo* was never used, and the particle *kashira* was only used once by F9. Instead both the male and female streamers used the

neutral *kana*, which has the same meaning, but the use of this particle has not been included in the tables above. Overall the feminine sentence ending particles were hardly ever used by either the male or the female streamers.

4.3 Politeness Level

The politeness level switched often in the different streams, but since it is more abstract it cannot be counted or quantified in the same way as the use of personal pronouns or sentence ending particles. While none of the streamers, male or female, used consistently polite language, overall the female streamers used more polite language than the male streamers. Only two female streamers (F2 and F5) consistently used casual language, while half of the male streamers (M1, M2, M4, M7, and M9) did the same. The rest switched between using polite and casual language. It is also worth noting that only three female streamers (F5, F9, and F10) used impolite forms such as in example 2 (taken from F5's stream), but seven of the male streamers (M1, M2, M4, M6, M7, M8, M10) did the same.

(2) 何もしてねえよ。
Nanimo shitenee yo.
'I'm not doing anything.'

Another interesting discovery was the fact that none of the female streamers used any swear words or insults, but six of the male streamers did. Furthermore, two of the female streamers (F1 and F8) used humble language, and one (F6) occasionally used *keigo*, albeit with a casual conjugation (example 3), but none of the male streamers did.

(3) こんばんは！みんないらっしゃい。
Konbanwa! Minna irasshai.
'Good evening! Welcome, everyone.'

What politeness level the streamers used seemed to depend on whether they were referring (or talking) to themselves, or if they were addressing their viewers. When addressing their viewers, both the male and female streamers most often used polite language. However, sometimes they used casual language when talking to their viewers, but this appeared to be because the viewers had already addressed the streamer using casual language. In other words, the streamers often (though not always) tended to match the politeness level of the comments made by the viewers. One example where the streamer did not match the politeness level of the viewer was F2. She consistently used casual language, but switched to polite language when talking to herself during moments of stress in the game, perhaps to indicate how strongly she felt or how stressed she was.

The female streamers did not use *bikago* more frequently than the male streamers, nor did they add any polite suffixes to the names of the people they were speaking to or about to any greater extent than the male streamers. This was mainly due to the fact that most streamers did not talk to their viewers directly very often, and when they did, they mostly answered questions or remarked on comments made by the viewers without mentioning whoever posted the comment, e.g. “Have you ever played this or that game?”. The exception to this, which applied to both the male and the female streamers, was when they were greeting people at the start of the streams. If a viewer called Person01 left a comment saying *konbanwa*, the streamers would often answer “*Person01-san, konbanwa!*”.

5. Discussion

When analyzing the results, it becomes apparent that the differences in language use between the male and female streamers are fairly small, with one of the largest notable differences being which personal pronouns the streamers preferred to use. All the female streamers, except for F7 (who never referred to herself at all), referred to themselves using *watashi* which has been defined as neutral by Ide and Yoshida (2001). It may be worth noting that F5 and F6 also used the feminine *atashi*. To confirm these initial findings I watched an additional 10 videos by female streamers. Out of those, 6 streamers used *watashi*, 2 used *atashi*, and 2 did not refer to themselves, which seems fairly consistent with the findings of my study. Meanwhile, only one of the male streamers used *watashi*, and as it was done in an informal context, it would be considered feminine. Only 3 male streamers used *boku*, with the majority (8 streamers) preferring *ore*. It was somewhat surprising to see that none of the female streamers referred to themselves using masculine pronouns, as they used masculine sentence ending particles quite frequently.

The female streamers used an overall fairly high frequency of masculine sentence ending particles (an average of 21.3%, compared to 4.8% feminine particles), which supports Kawasaki and McDougall's (2003) claim that in recent years, younger women have started to move away from traditionally feminine forms towards more neutral or masculine forms. Example (4), (5), and (6) show utterances by the female streamers where they have used masculine sentence ending particles. (4) was uttered by F2, (5) by F5, and (6) by F10.

(4) ヘッドバンしてるぜ。。。
Heddoban shiteru ze…
'He's really headbanging...'

(5) あっやべえ！出すのさ。
A yabee! Dasu no sa!
'Oh shit! I'll play (this card)!'

(6) がんばるぞ！
Ganbaru zo!
'I'll do my best!'

The question is how much the context of online game streaming matters to these findings, as the results of this study naturally do not apply to all women in all contexts. Furthermore, there exists no "standard" masculine or feminine Japanese to compare to. It is therefore difficult to determine to what extent, if at all, the female streamers' use of gendered language deviates from any kind of "average" use. As stated above, Loveday (1986) claims that no particles are inherently masculine or

feminine, but have been categorized as such due to men and women's frequent use. Therefore it might be worth questioning if the female streamers' use of so called masculine particles differs from how they are used in general in other contexts, or if this use should be regarded as normal for women, and thus some of these particles should be considered neutral. For example, both *sa* and *ze* was on average used slightly more frequently by the female streamers than by the male streamers, despite the fact that they are considered a masculine particles.

According to Shibatani (1990), women tend to use more polite language than men, such as more frequently using *bikago*. The results of this study do not support this claim, as none of the female streamers used *bikago* at all, nor did they use more *keigo* than the male streamers. Unlike TV news or other similar forms of broadcasting media, the overall atmosphere of the streams was quite informal with the streamers mainly using short form or even impolite language, as examples (7) through (10) illustrate. (7) was uttered by F7, (8) by F9, (9) by M1, and (10) by M3.

(7) いっぴき倒したんだけど、もういっぴき。。。
Ippiki taoshitan dakedo, mou ippiki...
'I did kill one, but there was another...'

(8) あいつ落とせねえよ。
Aitsu otosenee yo.
'I seriously can't beat him.'

(9) 知らねえから。
Shiranee kara.
'(Because) I've no idea.'

(10) そう、イベントとかでゲットした？
Sou, ibento toka de getto shita?
'Yeah, you got it at an event or something like that?'

The streamers may have been attempting to create a friendly environment where they wished to connect with their viewers as equals, thus making the use of *keigo* impolite as it would have created distance between the viewers and the streamer, which corresponds with Thomas's (1995) claims.

Polite forms in general, such as adding the suffix *-san* when addressing the viewers by name, were used quite equally frequently by both the male and female streamers. (11) was uttered by F10, and (12) by M7.

(11) リンレイさん？ありがとうございます。
Rinrei san? Arigatou gozaimasu.

‘Miss Rinrei? Thank you very much.’

(12) イーさんはフレンドだけど。
Ii san wa furendo dakedo.
‘Mr. E is my friend though.’

Whether or not they chose to use polite forms seemed to depend more on contextual factors rather than the streamers’ gender. It may also be worth noting that the games the streamers were playing do not seem to have affected the results.

The general politeness level was very casual, which is interesting when comparing with traditional broadcasting media where the broadcasters will typically use more formal and polite language. As mentioned previously, some streamers may be attempting to play a role or project a certain image (e.g. they may want to seem “assertive and manly” or “sweet and feminine”), which in turn affects how they speak.

Unlike written online communication (e.g. blogs, e-mail, etc.), the streamers do not have total control of how they portray themselves (they can try, of course, but it is difficult to control every utterance), and by extension, they cannot completely control how they are perceived by their audience. While the streamers can choose to use a specific speech style (e.g. a female streamer can choose to use traditionally masculine pronouns and sentence ending particles), their interactions and commentary occur in real-time, thus they cannot edit or retract things they say or do that contradict the image they are attempting to portray.

Calvert (2002) claims that certain cultural or social directives, such as linguistic norms, become more flexible in online contexts, which seems consistent with the findings of this study. The female streamers’ language use could indeed be classified as rather masculine, but if this was a direct result of their environment or if they simply speak like this regardless of context is impossible to say without conducting more studies on these particular individuals and their language use in other contexts.

Historically, what has been considered masculine or feminine speech has shifted. Thus, it is fair to assume that a gradual transformation is occurring currently as well, and while the Japanese language will probably never become completely gender neutral, it is perhaps futile to attempt to categorize particles and pronouns as explicitly masculine or feminine forever and in all contexts, as the language is constantly evolving.

6. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine to what extent young Japanese adults use gendered language when broadcasting game streams online. While gendered language has been a part of the Japanese language since at least the Kamakura period, it has changed between the different time periods, and is still gradually evolving today.

While it has proven difficult to make many definitive generalizations from the results of this study, the following can be concluded:

1. The female streamers greatly preferred masculine sentence ending particles over feminine sentence ending particles, however, they favored gender neutral particles above all. If this affinity for masculine particles is due to the context of online game streaming, or if it is simply how young women speak nowadays, is impossible to determine using only the limited data of this study. The male streamers, on the other hand, generally spoke in a strongly masculine manner, with only one subject (M10) using feminine sentence ending particles.
2. The largest difference between the male and female streamers was the use of personal pronouns. All female streamers referred to themselves using the neutral *watashi*, and some also used the feminine *atashi* (except for F7, who never referred to herself). M10 was the only male streamer who referred to himself using *watashi* exclusively, which, in such an informal context, would be considered feminine. The other male streamers preferred *ore* (or *boku*, in a few cases).
3. Use of keigo and overall politeness level barely differed between the genders. The one exception to this was swearing, as none of the female streamers used any swear words, while six of the male streamers did. If this is a difference caused by the streamers' respective genders or if it simply depends on their individual personalities is difficult to say for certain; however, since there is such a distinct difference between the two groups, one may conclude that it *is* due to the streamers' gender.

This study did not account for dialect or regional differences in speech, which might have affected the analysis of the results. While certain sentence ending particles might be considered masculine in some regions, they could very well be considered neutral or even feminine in others. This is something that should be controlled if further research is carried out within this field. I.e. only streamers from the Kansai region should be investigated. This was difficult to accomplish in this study, as the website from which the streams were retrieved did not offer an option to sort streamers by region (only by language/country).

Apart from not accounting for regional dialects, the method for measuring and quantifying the use of personal pronouns and sentence ending particles worked quite well. However, perhaps a larger sample size would be required in order to make generalizations, as this sample size was quite small. 40 streams (20 male streamers, 20 female), each roughly 30 minutes long, with all streamers located in the same geographic region, might produce more meaningful results.

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