

Personal Pronouns and Gendered Speech in Popular *Manga* (Japanese Comics)
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Manga—Japanese comics—are often noted popularly as one location of linguistic change amongst young Japanese. Attention has been paid particularly to the role that *manga* play in changing gendered speech, and *manga* are often noted as an influential factor in young women choosing to use the masculine first personal pronouns *ore* and *boku* (e.g., Endo 2001, Nakamura 2007). Research hitherto has, however, focused on conscious surveys and interviews amongst young people on their personal pronoun usage and on why they chose their personal pronouns, and not on their actual use in *manga*. Before one can evaluate the role that *manga* may play, it is crucial that one have a clearer grasp of how personal pronouns are actually used. Here I attempt to help the situation by examining the distribution of personal pronouns in a corpus of popular *manga* titles.

The difference between male and female speech has often been given as one of the major characteristics of Japanese. These differences are non-obligatory, and mainly phonological, morphological or lexical (Shibamoto 1987). Such differences are realized in a variety of different forms and environments, but some of the more commonly noted points are intonation, emphatic sentence final particles, and personal pronouns. In recent years, however, there has been a marked decrease in the differences in speech patterns between male and female speakers. These changes can be seen in many different locations; however, one particularly prominent example is that of the emphatic sentence final particles. Sentence final particles give emphasis or show the relationship between speakers, with some being female (*wa*, *kashira*), others male (*ze*, *zo*) forms, and some neutral (*ne*). While they have been given as a typical example of gender-differentiated speech, reports in recent years show that the female-specific forms are essentially out of use amongst young women (Philips 2001, Ozaki 1999).

Personal pronouns, however, appear to be holdouts in gendered speech differences, showing comparatively little change. Japanese features many forms of first and second personal pronouns, and their choice depends on gender, but also on formality, the speaker's relationship with the listener, and their own preferences. Following Shibamoto (2005), for first pronouns, women tend to use *atashi* or *watashi*, whereas men tend to use *ore* or *boku*. For second person pronouns, women tend to avoid them altogether, and men tend to use *omae* or *kimi*. There are no exclusively female forms, but some examples of male ones are *kimi*, *omae*, and *temee*. Even with all these varieties, however, both Ozaki (3/2002) and Hishikari (2007) report that there are no common first person pronouns used amongst male and female young adults in Tokyo of junior-high-school to college-age.

This may not, however, be that clear cut, and some reports also point towards young women using the masculine first person pronouns *boku* and *ore* at at least some point in their lives. In a survey of a 136 female students, Endo (2001) found that 23 students have used at some point *boku* and *ore*, and 72 students reported seeing other girls use them, too. Miyazaki (2004) also describes some junior high schools girls using *ore*, and it appears that some girls are now choosing to use masculine pronouns, if only a minority. Such changes are attributed to many different factors, but mass media, and in particular, *manga* are a popular explanation. Endo (2001) also found that some respondents attributed their use and their acquaintances' use of *ore* and *boku* to *manga*. Such explanations are commonly found in popular discourse. Looking at Yahoo Chiebukuro (Yahoo Answers), it is not uncommon to find posts on the role of *manga* in girls' use of *boku* and *ore*. To answer a question as to why men use *ore* and women use *watashi*, one user wrote "I know girls who use *boku* because of *manga*'s influence (Anonymous 9/26/2005)." Out of four responses to another user's post asking if any girls around them used *boku* or *ore*, two said girls who read *manga* around them did (Taruruda 6/25/2007). To another user self-described as a female high school senior asking for opinions' on girls' *ore* and *boku* and who herself attests it to *manga*, two out of nine people replied that *manga* was influential (Misamisa091v 2/10/2009).

While it may seem strange to point towards comics as a possible source of linguistic change given their strong visual elements, *manga* play a major part in Japanese media. By some accounts, they comprise up to 40% of all items published in Japan (Schodt 1996), and the most popular series typically have strong narrative structures (Takeuchi 2006), making them dependent on language. They are also popularly viewed as being influential in young people's language use: 45% point towards *manga* as one of the factors influencing young people's speech in a 2007 survey by the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs (Agency for Cultural Affairs 2010). When it comes to answering how *manga* might have that influence, however, reports give contradictory result. Some have demonstrated data that seems to suggest that language in *manga* is realistic. For example, Aizawa (2003) demonstrated that the usage of feminine sentence final particles has gone down in girl-oriented *manga* over time, similar to real life. Similarly, Ueno (2006) describes young female characters in female-oriented titles as using some masculine sentence final particles, and feminine forms rarely. Yet others, however, argue that it is simulated. Kinsui (2003, 2008b) argues that gendered language in *manga* is used stereotypically to create characters, and Takahashi (2009) goes into detail of how this works in one popular series for girls, *Life*. There remains, however, no comprehensive studies on the distribution of personal pronouns in *manga*.

This study attempted to deal with this problem by utilizing a 578,709 character (45,055 utterance) corpus of eight popular titles (volumes 1-3 each). The titles were selected through sales ranking and a survey on high schooler students' *manga* reading habits, and four titles each were selected from boy-oriented titles (*Death Note*, *Meitantei Konan*, *Naruto*, *One Piece*) and girl-oriented titles (*Kimi ni Todoke*, *Nana*, *Nodame*, *Rabukon*) as a point of comparison. The corpus includes all data in comics and categorized into one of eight groups based upon how they appear in the text: lines, thoughts, narration, onomatopoeia, background text, background lines/thoughts, comments, titles. Additional tags have also been made for page, frame, and category numbers, as well as for sex in regards to voiced categories as either male, female, both/unclear, onomatopoeia, animal. Here I limit the study to male (267,980 characters/17,623 utterances) and female lines (140,302 characters/9,284 utterances). I based my search upon primarily the groupings made in Shibamoto (1987, 2005), with some modifications. All orthographic variations were included, and some phonetic variations thought not to be separate forms were also grouped together (e.g., *omae* vs. *omee*). Overall, the ratio of lines between male and females was somewhat skewed, with more male lines (62.9%). This was the result of the extremely high average percentage of male lines in boy-oriented series (79.9%). Girl-oriented series tended to be more balanced, with women's lines slighter only more common on average than men's (55.5%). These factors must be kept in mind as they will effect the net numbers of personal pronouns.

Looking at the distribution of first person pronouns, I found that the central male first person pronoun was *ore* (603 instances, in 5.72% of male lines), whereas the central female first person pronoun was *atashi* (452 instances/4.87% of female lines). However, female characters in male-oriented series tended to use *watashi* more commonly than *atashi*, with in fact few examples of *atashi* (209 instances/9.24% of female lines, vs. 15 instances/0.03% lines). Male characters show more variety in first person pronouns than females overall, but not all of these are forms commonly used in real-life, such as *washi* (79 examples/0.46% of male lines). There were also differences between series. *Death Note* and *Meitantei Konan* use *ore* infrequently (3 and 8 examples respectively) in favor of *boku* and *watashi* (*boku*: 122, 30 respectively, *watashi*: 122, 62 respectively). Both feature numerous public scenes because of their plot lines; that may have influenced characters towards the more formal *boku* and *watashi*. Female characters in *Nodame Kantaabire* also use the first person pronouns infrequently. They may be using alternatives forms like their first names. Male characters in *Kimi ni Todoke* also have a very low percentage of first person pronouns, possibly because there are very few male lines in general, giving perhaps insufficient environments for their appearance. As opposed to the way that *manga* is commonly perceived, however, there were no examples of masculine first person pronouns amongst female

characters, although one male character used *atashi* – a female-identifying transsexual (*RabuKon*). Interestingly, they also lack the feminine *uchi* and masculine *jibun*, which Hishikari (2007) reports as recently being in common use.

In regards to the distribution of second person pronouns, it appeared that the main male second person pronoun was *omae* (416 examples/3.54% of male lines). The main female second person pronoun was *anta*, with *anata* a close second (53 examples/2.34% of female lines and 46 examples/2.03% of female lines, respectively). As with the first person pronouns, male characters tend to use a wider variety of second person pronouns, but this difference was somewhat less dramatic. There were also some differences between series. In particular, male characters in *Meitantei Konan* tended to favor *anata* over *omae* (77 examples vs. 48 examples); this may again have to do with more public scenes, as *omae* is extremely familiar. There were also some examples of female characters using masculine second person pronouns. Some characters used *omae*, although they tended to be older women – or, in the more specific case of *Death Note*, be non-human. There were also some examples of female characters using the highly masculine *temee*, but these were almost all attributable to the punk character Nana in the series of the same title. Interestingly, however, there appears to be an asymmetrical usage here within gendered first and second person pronouns: while Nana refers to others commonly in the familiar, masculine and rude *temee*, she also uses the feminine *atashi* to refer to herself.

The question remains, then, why it is that, for all that *manga* are described as being one source of girls' using masculine first person pronouns, there lack any examples of such. These results go somewhat against Ueno (2006)'s finding that young female characters used some moderate masculine speech patterns. One possible reason is that it was not a sufficient sample. While the corpus has an acceptable number of characters in it, the number of series are limited, with only two genres. Many of the story-lines are similar, and the social environments in which characters are in may be too limited for unusual speech patterns to appear.

What seems more likely, however, is that *manga* are the ones being influenced by real world changes, and so show a lag in adopting them as in Yamane (1986) on cute handwriting and *manga*. The age gap between authors and their characters may also be important; as non-users of those patterns, authors may not be in touch with such changes, as Mizumoto (2006) suggested for television dramas. This may also be the reason that the popular *uchi* and *jibun* are not present. Female characters may also not be at issue. While boys tend to read more restrictedly, girls read a variety of works, including boy-oriented series (Allen and Ingulsrud 2005). Female readers may identify more with male characters, as the psychologist Takashi Tomida suggests in an interview (WXR 8/22/2008), particularly given the low percentage of female lines in boy-oriented series.

While such possibilities remain conjecture, there is clearly a gap between the way that the popular perception of *manga* and its linguistic reality. Certain modifications to the data may make them more informative in future surveys. In addition to increasing the sample, additional tags may also be helpful. Particularly, given that the relationship between listener and speaker are essential to personal pronoun choice, supplying more information about the speaker (e.g., name and age), may prove useful.

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