'Feminine' speech in the Japanese Translations of Harry Potter

CAROLYN WOOD

Abstract

The worldwide popularity of J.K.Rowling's Harry Potter *novels has seen them translated into an unprecedented number of languages. Studies of these translations are few, however, and tend to concentrate primarily on the translation of specialised lexical items. Japanese in particular is interesting, as it has a unique set of pragmatic characteristics, such as a grammatically encoded hierarchical language (*keigo*), a wide variety of indexicals, and specialised sentence-final elements. The Japanese translations of* Harry Potter *provide an opportunity to find out how various pragmatic elements of the Japanese language appear in dialogue in the novels and how they influence characterisation and character interrelationships. This study focuses on these pragmatic elements and the ideological assumptions about 'polite' and 'gender appropriate' usage in Japanese that they implicitly perpetuate. The findings of the study suggest that ideologies about language use, influenced by both the source and target cultures, can be implicitly perpetuated through translation.*

1. Introduction

Due to their phenomenal popularity, the *Harry Potter* novels have been translated into an unprecedented number of languages. As stories heavily tied to their original British setting, they have presented translators with the arduous task of deciding how to ensure that the translations are familiar enough to readers from diverse cultures that they will be understood easily, while still retaining their original charm. To achieve this, a certain degree of creativity is required on the translator's part. However, just like the readers themselves, translators are able to put their own interpretations on the text, and so any translated text does not just bridge languages and cultures, but is also filtered through the perceptions of its translator (Hickey 1998).

As Japanese is a language with grammatically encoded hierarchical forms, it is particularly interesting to look at how the translator of the Japanese language versions of the *Harry Potter* novels has managed to keep the feel of the characters and their relationships, and how the forms chosen may or may not perpetuate certain ideologies. This paper deals with the Japanese-language ideology of feminine speech, and how it manifests in the translated texts.

2. Studies of Translations of *Harry Potter*

Though few, other studies dealing with *Harry Potter* as it is translated into other languages do exist. Of these, the majority deal with the glossing of names of people and places, and with J.K. Rowling's 'made-up' words (Munday 2001; Pringle 2007; Valero 2003). However, a few deal with the transfer of person pronouns into languages, such as French or German, which have more than one word for 'you' (Davies 2003; Jentsch 2002). Furthermore, Feral (2006) studied the French translation of *the Philosopher's Stone* and found that it perpetuated ideologies of 'correct' speech by eliminating the variance in the speech of the characters that is apparent in the originals, and having all the characters speak standard French.

3. Ideologies of 'Women's Language' in Japanese studies

Jorden (1974, cited in Shibamoto 1985), lists some of the characteristics of the speech of women as "special self-reference and address terms, special sentence-ending particles and exclamations, a particular pitch range and set of intonations, frequent use of the honorific style, avoidance of *kango* [words of Chinese origin], and avoidance of vulgar language". These ideas of a kind of 'women's language' in Japanese are "constructs that have been widely disseminated as linguistic norms in Japanese society not only through popular media but also by language policy makers and linguists..." (Okamoto & Shibamoto Smith 2004: 38). These kinds of linguistic forms, which are often described as characteristics of the speech of women, are what Okamoto (1999) gives the term 'canonical'. That is to say, they are the descriptions generally found in textbooks and, like all stereotypes, while still somewhat accurate, they are generally ideological.

4. Gender-specific pragmatic forms

This study looked at two pragmatic elements of the Japanese language: its person pronouns and its sentence-final particles. These were relevant as traditionally they are strongly associated with one or the other gender.

   The usage of person pronouns, when not avoided altogether, is influenced by the context in which an interaction occurs. The formality of a situation and the relationships between interlocutors are just two of the factors which determine the choice of form. According to canonical descriptions of pronoun usage, women tend to use more formal pronouns more frequently, and rarely use the more plain or vulgar forms. So, for instance, female speakers use the first person pronoun *watashi*,

or its special feminine form *atashi*, most often, whilst men use *watashi* predominately in only formal situations. See Table 1 for a comparison of male and female usages.

	Women	Men
Formal	*watakushi*	(*watakushi*)
	atakushi	*watashi*
Plain	*watashi*	*boku*
	atashi	
Deprecatory/Rude		*ore*

Table 1: Gender usage of first person pronouns

Certain sentence-final elements also vary with gender, according to canonical descriptions of Japanese. Those most generally regarded as feminine are *wa* and *kashira*, which serve to soften statements, with particles attributed to masculine speech generally being those that add emphasis. Some particles are used by both male and female speakers, and in these instances the element that precedes the particle can be identified with a particular gender (Yamaguchi 2007).

Research has found that the so-called 'feminine' characteristics are disappearing from the speech of younger women. The particle *wa* in particular is becoming rare (McClure 2000; Okamoto 1997). Even the casual speech of older women displays many 'masculine' characteristics (Okamoto 1997). Similarly, Miyazaki (2004) discovered, in her study of first person pronouns used by Japanese junior high school children, that certain groups of girls preferred the casual (and predominantly masculine) second person pronoun *ore*, as they believed it allowed them to project an air of strength and power. It can be seen from studies such as these that the descriptions of how women speak, as outlined in textbooks and in some older research, are not accurate descriptions of everyday Japanese-language usage.

5. Methodology

The results presented in this paper were part of a larger study of the portrayal of characters and character interrelationships in the Japanese translations of *Harry Potter*. In order to keep the sample size manageable, and due to their relative similarities in length, theme and target audience, only the first three novels in the series were included in the study. These are *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Nine characters were included in the study, and of these three were female. They were Professor McGonagall, the deputy head mistress at Harry Potter's school, his friend Hermione, and Ginny, the younger sister of his friend Ron. Each character's

utterances, when directed at one of the other characters in the sample, were documented, to give an accurate idea of that character's manner of speech.

Firstly the speech of the characters was described in terms of its pragmatic characteristics, and then it was further analysed from the perspective of critical discourse analysis. This allowed for an analysis of not only the linguistic forms the characters used in the translations, but also of the deeper implications of using one form rather than another, which may be ideologically based.

6. Results

The three female characters included in the study were all found to use speech considered stereotypically feminine. Professor McGonagall's speech is consistent with canonical descriptions such as those discussed in section 3. For instance, 84 per cent of her utterances use the 'polite' *masu* form of the verb or *desu* copula form (see Table 1.2). She also uses the first person pronoun *watakushi* in all situations, which is consistent with descriptions of the language of women as being more formal. Both of the other characters use *watashi*, with Hermione using it exclusively. Ginny uses the special form *atashi* most often.

In the following example, her first line in *the Philosopher's Stone*, Professor McGonagall uses *watakushi* (underlined).[1] Once again in accordance with descriptions of the speech of women as being more formal, she also uses honorific language in this example. It is directed at Professor Dumbledore, and whilst she has no doubt known him for many years, he is her senior in age and in social status.

(1)
　　　「どうして<u>私</u>だとおわかりになりましたの？」
　　　 Dōshite <u>watakushi</u> da to owakarininari-mashi-ta no?
　　　 How　 I　　　 Cop Quot know(Hon)-Pol-Past
　　　"How did you know it was me?"
<div align="right">(p 13 E, p 18 J Phil.)</div>

All three characters use sentence-final particles considered indicative of feminine speech, such as *wa*, *kashira* and *no*. Whilst they appear in Professor McGonagall's speech the least often, they are quite prevalent in that of the other two characters. Hermione in particular uses the particle *wa* often. In her first appearance in the novels half of her 24 utterances end in this particle. In a scene from the *Prisoner of Azkaban* she quits a class in anger, and whilst she uses the plain form, her parting comment ends with this softening sentence-final particle (underlined):

(2)
   「やめた！　私、出ていく<u>わ</u>！」
   Yame-ta Watashi, de-te-iku <u>wa</u>
   end-past I(Pol) leave-Te-go SFP
   That's it! I'm leaving!
            (p 218 E; p 427 J *Azka*.)

In her much smaller part in the novels, Ginny uses all three sentence-final particles consistently. See Table 2.

Character	Ttl utter.	% *teineigo*	% *wa*	% *kashira*	% *no*
McG	306	84.0	1.3	0.3	0.7
Hermione	966	2.0	18.2	1.3	11.0
Ginny	23	0	17.4	4.3	30.4

Table 2 Raw data from study

It could be argued that the effect these 'feminine' forms have on the portrayal of the characters is that they may appear deferent, or perhaps even weak. This is not how the three characters come across in the English originals. On the other hand the fact that Professor McGonagall, for instance, uses appropriate 'polite' forms may serve to convey the sensible, correct aspect of her character. Similarly, the proliferation of softening sentence-final elements in the speech of Ginny and Hermione may be in line with their status as new students only just finding their feet at the school and amongst their peers.

  Despite speculation however, the fact that all three characters use canonical 'feminine' speech bears some investigation. From a critical discourse analysis perspective, the proliferation of stereotypical language would suggest that the translator is using the text (perhaps unwittingly) to perpetuate ideologies and stereotypes of how women speak. Though gender and linguistic forms are not as closely linked as some texts would have us believe (Yukawa and Saito 2004), this is not to say that every instance of a gender-marked form in the dialogue is wrong or ideological, as these canonical usages still make up a part of real speech. However, a prevalence of such 'textbook' speech and absence of other non-canonical usages suggests that ideological notions of how people of each gender are expected to speak are perpetuated by the translation, and it is at the expense of portraying characters realistically.

7. Conclusion

During the process of translation the setting must be made familiar enough to the reader that the text will be enjoyable to read; however, the translator too projects his or her ideas onto a text, and he or she must be careful of how this process is carried out, lest his or her assumptions about the receiving language introduce ideologies or perpetuate them in the text.

While the research and results presented here form part of a larger study, the span of the study was necessarily narrow, and so considerable scope remains for further research. As only the first three books were included in this study, there is opportunity for looking at the other books in the series, and the heavier themes that are introduced in them, such as racism and good and evil. It is also perhaps worth looking at the treatment of some of the more minor characters in the books, who, in the originals, tend to be based on recognisable stereotypes. Furthermore, due to the large number of languages into which the books have been translated, with each different receiving culture comes the potential for different ideological assumptions to make their way into the text.

There is also scope for more research into translations of dialogue from English into Japanese, dealing with the transfer of indexicals, illocutionary force, and how these contribute to characterisation.

Finally, the findings here call for an awareness of the gap between canonical descriptions of the characteristics of Japanese and how the language is used in real-life casual conversation. Ultimately it shows that translators must always be wary of projecting their own assumptions about their language, or those of their culture, onto a translated text, and that the readers of such texts should remain alert to the possibility that in the texts they read, not all may be as it seems.

Notes
[1]Although two readings of the kanji (Chinese character) 私 are possible, that is, both *watakushi* and *watashi*, the inclusion of *furigana* (small *hiragana* characters) above the kanji in the Japanese text avoids ambiguity as to which reading is expected in each case.

*Author notes:
Carolyn Wood has recently completed a Bachelor of Arts with Honours (2A) in Languages and Applied Linguistics at Griffith University, Brisbane. Her dissertation was entitled *Ideology in Translation: The Pragmatics of Character Interrelationships in the Japanese Translations of* Harry Potter. Her areas of academic interest include pragmatics and intercultural communication, ESL and Japanese language and culture, as well as literary studies.

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