Co-Constructing Gender Binaries in a Japanese Interaction

Miyabi Ozawa
University of Colorado, Boulder

1. Introduction

This study investigates how binary gender identities are co-constructed in Japanese conversations. The analyzed conversations are between female participants in Tokyo, and they discuss a public incident involving male students at a neighboring college. For analyzing binary gender identities, this study particularly focuses on the use of references including *minna* 'everyone' for the male students and overt first-person pronouns and also the stances the participants take up regarding appropriate public behavior.

2. Theoretical frameworks

This study combines Ide's (1995, 2012) interdependent-self model with the concept of identity, that is emergent in discourse (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005; Hall, 2014). Adopting the perspective of an interpersonal self, this study considers how the speaker positions the interlocutor and the characters of the story dynamically in these domains over the course of interaction.

2.1 The interdependent self in Japanese society and culture

In terms of the concept of identity, its dynamicity over the course of an interaction is considered. An important and relevant point about identity with regard to Japanese society and culture is the concept of the interdependent-self. Markus and Kitayama (1991) show that Eastern Asian societies including Japan has "interdependent self" -as opposed to an "independent self" in Western societies—in which the self changes in many ways in different contexts, depending on the closeness or distance of the participants. Even within the context of East Asian cultures, the Japanese interdependent self has a unique structure, which is flexible, changes easily, and adjusts to those close to it with whom it interacts.

In early papers, Ide (1995, 2012) proposes the Japanese self structure model in order to explain linguistic politeness in Japanese culture, in which linguistic expressions are used

differently depending on the interlocutors. The fragile Japanese self, according to Ide, includes the notion of *uchi, soto,* and *yoso,* meaning 'ingroup,' 'outgroup,' and 'outside of outgroup,' respectively from the center as shown in Figure 1 below, as compared to Figure 2, which shows an American independent self structure. *Uchi* 'ingroup' includes family members, close friends, co-workers, teammates, and other people with whom one is close and relaxed, and informal interaction is expected with them. *Soto* 'outgroup' includes people who are not ingroup, but with whom you interact in daily life, and markers of formality, such as honorifics and indirect expressions, are used for them. Finally, *Yoso* 'outside of outgroup' includes people who are around you every day, but with whom you do not interact. The fragile Japanese self is interdependent with familiar people in the domain of *uchi* 'ingroup', which is surrounded by a hard boundary that separates them from the outgroup. Then, the outgroup is surrounded by a hard boundary that separates the outsiders in *yoso.*

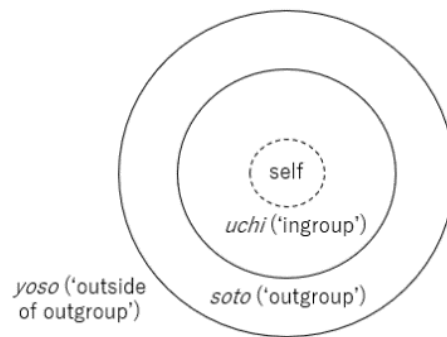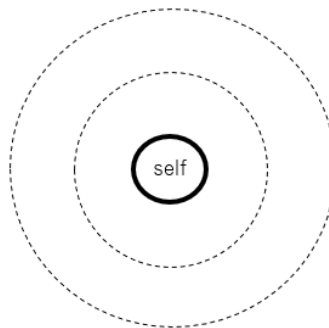Figure 1: Japanese self structure (Ide 1995, 2012)

Figure 2: American self structure (Ide 1995, 2012)

2.2. Identity as a process

According to Bucholtz and Hall (2005) and Hall (2014), identity is not pre-determined, but rather ongoing and interactively emergent. From this perspective, identity encompasses "temporal and interactionally specific stances" (Bucholtz and Hall 2005, p. 592) as it emerges in interaction through several related indexical processes. In addition, identity is relational in a way that is "intersubjectively constructed through several, often overlapping,

complementary relations" (Bucholtz and Hall 2005, p. 598). One relational category that contributes to the creation of identity is similarity and difference, which is also known as "adequation" and "distinction" (Bucholtz and Hall 2005, p. 599). While adequation is accomplished by the speakers' emphasis on their similarity to the interlocuter(s) or to a related group, distinction is accomplished by distancing oneself from an identity that contrasts or conflicts.

Marking similarities and differences relates to the creation of a binary. The gender binary is preserved and reproduced as we continuously do things based on our ideologies of gender (Goffman 1977). An example of a male gender ideology in the United States is toughness, which is often opposed to feminine traits like softness and thus constitute a normative gender binary (Eckert 2014, p. 530). Therefore, in conversations, we use these binaries to formulate gender identities.

3. Data and methodology

3.1. Data

In this study, two Japanese conversations are used from Mister O Corpus[1], which was collected at Japan Women's University in Tokyo, Japan in 2004. The participants of the first conversation are a female student and a female teacher. The second conversation involves the same female student and her friend, another female student. In these two conversations, the student is talking about a public incident that involves male students in her intercollegiate circle, and she frames it as non-normative by using Japanese words such as *bikkurishita*, 'surprising'. Intercollegiate circles consist of students from different universities. Some intercollegiate circles consist of multiple universities, while others consist of two universities; one is a women's university and the other is a co-ed university, which typically is of the higher academic ranking. As I will show, in the latter case, female students at the women's university and only male students at the co-ed university join the intercollegiate circle.

Adopting the perspective of an interpersonal self and ongoing identities, this study considers how the speaker positions the interlocutor and the characters of the story dynamically in these domains over the course of interactions.

3.2. Ideologies regarding the inferiority of students at women's universities

As a relating factor of the conversations in this corpus, it should be noted that there are ideologies regarding the inferiority of students at women's universities. The excerpt (1) of a conversation below is from the same corpus, and two female students at a women's university talk about what a first-class company wants in Japan, which shows these ideologies:

---

[1] 'Mister O Corpus' is a cross-linguistic video corpus collected for the project entitled "Empirical and Theoretical Studies on Culture, Interaction, and Language in Asia," under a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research from Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (No. 15320054 directed by Sachiko Ide). It consists of three types of interactions — conversations, narratives, and problem-solving tasks — of languages of Japanese and American English.

(1) 1. S1: *are nanjya nai, nanka, i, ichiryuu kigyou-dato*
          'isn't it true that a first-class company wants'
     2. S2: *nn*
          hmm
     3. S1: *mushiiro dekiru kyougaku-no onnna yori mo, jyosjidai de, kou*
          tsukaeru onnna no houga ii
          'those whom they can take advantage of ("use") from women's
          universities rather than those who are competent ("capable") from co-ed
          universities'

As S1 says on line 3, those who graduated from women's universities are able to be "used"
by a first-class company as opposed to those who graduated from co-ed universities who are
"capable" or competent. This contrast between two schools by a women's university student
shows that Japanese women's universities students have a stigma about their
social/academic status when compared with the co-ed universities, which have higher social/
academic status. The relation of this ideology and identity positioning will be discussed in
detail in the discussion section.

4. Data analysis

4.1. A conversation between a female student and a female teacher

In the two excerpts of the conversation between a female student and a female teacher,
which are going to be shown in this section, the student talks about a surprising episode of
the students at an intercollegiate circle that she belongs to. In her story, the students get
drunk after a gathering and sing their school hymn in public, which is framed as non-
normative behavior by her.

The two excerpts below[2] show that the student is making a binary between male
students and themselves, by showing the distinction and having affiliation (Stivers 2008) to
her negative stance toward the male students. While doing that throughout the interaction,
her discursive gender identity emerges, evidenced by the use of the exclusive reference
minna in referring to the participants of the non-normative incident; even though *minna*
literally includes male and female students, the student shows that only males are involved
in the non-normative incident by using the reference.

(2) 1. *Atashi-wa   uta -e   -nai -n   -de*
          I   -NOM sing-can -NEG-NOM-CONJ
        'Because I cannot sing (their school hymn)'
     2. __*Sugoina,-to   omot-te*
          great   -CONJ think-CONJ
          '(I) just thought (that they can sing) was amazing'
       (1 line omitted)
     4. *Souiu,   izakaya-no   mae   atari-de, nannka,*
          that kind of bar   -GEN in front of near-LOC well
        'In front of that kind of bar, '

---

[2] In the transcription, an underline means non-occurrence of subject and a parenthesis means the
subject which is added for the purpose of translating in English.

5. *minna-de,   kou*, *maaruku   nat -te*
    everyone-CONJ like making a circle become-CONJ
    'like, everyone gathers in a circle'

6. *Kou, __ kata   kunn-de*
    like   shoulder cross-CONJ
    '(They) put their arms around each other's shoulders like this'
7. *__ Utat-teru-n   -desu-yo*
    sing-ASP-NOM-COP-FP
    '(They) are singing'

In line 5, there is a reference, *minna-de,* which means 'everybody.' This *minna-de* appears not to include female students, because in line 7 she explains that *minna* sing their school hymn, but earlier than that, in line 1, she explains that she cannot sing it, and she was amazed by those who could sing.

Then, the excerpt (3) below shows why the reference, *minna,* excludes herself and also other female students.

(3) 1. *Minna   gakuran   kite*
        everyone school uniform   wear
        'Everyone wore his school uniform'
      (4 lines omitted)

   2. *Anna ii   de − zutai   shi-tei-te*
       such great ?   physique do-ASP-CONJ
       'With such a good physique'

Excerpt (3), which is the continuation of excerpt 1, shows how the student describes the male students. In line 1, the student uses *minna* 'everybody' again, showing that they are wearing *gakuran*, a type of school uniform, worn by male students who belong to their university's sports team, only on special occasions. In addition, on line 2, the student says *ii zutai,* meaning 'good physique,' which is normally used for only males, as a descriptor of the reference *minna*. Therefore, it is noticeable that the student refers to *minna* discussing the male students, and excludes female students including herself. The fact that she has been referring to *minna* 'everybody' for only males suggests that she had established in her mind the characters involved in the non-normative behavior as male students. Therefore, it shows her binary between the males who are involved in the non-normative behavior and females who are not.

In addition to the exclusive reference *minna,* S's negative stance toward the male students and T's affiliation with that reinforce the binary. In excerpt (4), the student describes the name of the circle as "curious or strange" in line 1, which shows her negative stance. And T, in line 2, agrees with it by using *ikanimo*, meaning 'Yes, indeed,' which emphasizes the degree of the previous adjective (Ikegami et al., 2011) *ayashii,* which means 'strange' in English. In example (5), in line 1, the student tells the teacher that the students were wearing a school uniform, which is also non-normative, and then the teacher agrees with it by saying 'that is another surprising point, isn't it?.'

(4) 1. S: __ *Chotto ayashii namae na-n-desu-kedo*
           little strange name   COP-NOM-COP-CONJ
           '(It) is a curious/strange name though'

2. T: *ikanimo-jya-nai   -desu-ka*
      indeed-COP-NEG-COP-Q
      'Yes indeed.'

(5) 1. S: ___ *Kiteru-n-desu-yo*
          wear-NOM-COP-FP
        '(they were) wearing (school uniform)'
    2. T: *Nomikai chu   mo*
        gathering middle also
        'Even while the gathering?'
    3. S: Hai
        yes
        'Yes'
    4. T: *Sore mo bikkuri   -jya -nai   desu-ka*
        that too surprising-COP-NEG COP-Q
        'That is another surprising point, isn't it?'

As seen, the reference *minna* and affiliation contributes to the discursive identity as shown in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3:
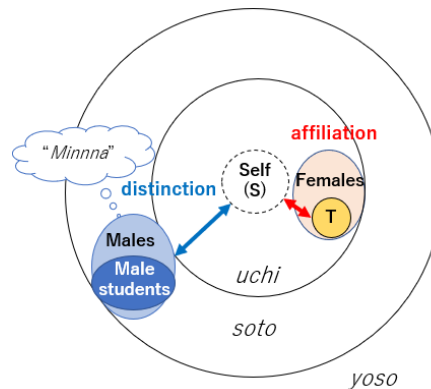
4.2. A conversation between the same female student and her friend

In a conversation between the same female student (S1) and her friend (S2), S1 talks about the same topic in a different way, in which her (S1) identity shift is seen in relation to S2 and the male students' positions. A significant difference from the earlier conversation with the teacher is that she shows her involvement in the non-normative behavior by the use of overt first-person pronoun.

(6) 1. *Konaida <C> to sa   atashi nomikai it-te   kita jyan*
       last time <C> with PT I   gathering go-CONJ come right
       'Last time I went to the gathering with <C>, you know'
     2. *Antokini-ne, nanka*
        that time-FP well
        'At that time, well'

3. *Nomikai-ga   owa￢, ichijikai-ga   owat-ta ato-ni*
   gathering-NOM (finish) first   -NOM finish-PST after-LOC
   'After the first gathering was over'

4. *___Enjin kun-de*
    circle make-CONJ
    '(we?) made a circle'
5. *Mata mata, rei no gotoku*
   again again as usual
   'again as usual'
6. *Kou*, {laugh} __ *kata kun   -de*
   Like   shoulder construct-CONJ
   '(we?) put (our) arms around each other's shoulders. '
(4 lines omitted)
11. *__Utat-ta -n -desu-yo* {laugh}
    sing-PST-NOM-COP-FP
    '(we?) sang '
12. *<C>-no kouka   toka -wo*
            <C>-GEN school hymns and so on-ACC
    '<C>'s school songs and so on'

   In the earlier conversation with the teacher, although the student did not say the first-person pronoun *atashi* for showing her involvement in the behavior, in this conversation with another student, she overtly says the first-person pronoun as a subject in line 1, and then she continues the story. Although line 4,6, and 11 have no subject, they are considered as the speaker herself and <C> students, male students, as no other references that can interfere with the topicality are seen after line 1. Therefore, although in the conversation with the teacher, she shows that only male students are involved in the non-normative behavior, in this conversation with another student, she overtly shows her involvement in such a behavior.
   In addition, in Japanese, non-occurrence of the subject for the speaker is unmarked. However, here the speaker means the subject as the <C> students and herself, without mentioning overtly nor saying *minna* 'everyone'. The fact that there is no overt subject for both herself and for the male students, when usually an overt subject would appear for the male students, suggests that the speaker regards the male students as her ingroup.

Figure 4:
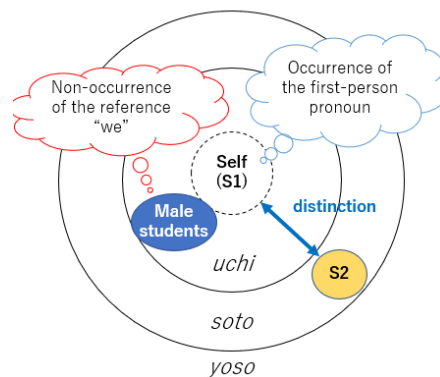
To sum up, as Figure 4 above shows, first, S1 (the speaker of the story) makes a distinction from S2, through the use of overt first-person pronoun, which is marked. Then, she describes herself and the male students without overtly mentioning "I and the male students" nor "we." Because non-occurrence of the subject for the first person is unmarked, non-occurrence of the subject for the speaker and the third person is considered that the speaker regards them as the extension of herself. This suggests that the speaker (S1) positions male students in her ingroup.

(7) 15. *Soreni mata, to __omot-te* {laugh}
     and again-CONJ think-CONJ
     '(I) thought, "Again?"'
  16. *Atashi uta -e -nai -shi, mitaina*
      I sing-can-NEG-CONJ like
     'like, "I can't sing (their school song)!"'
  17. <C> *jya -nai-shi, -to __ omot-te*
     <C> COP-NEG-CONJ -CONJ think-CONJ
     '(I) thought, "(I) am not a student of <C>"'
  (3 lines omitted)
  after all well embarrassing-FP say-CONJ
     'Well it is somehow embarrassing'
  22. *Datte, futsu-no ko ー, koushuu-no menzenn -da-yo*
     because usually-GEN ? public-GEN in front of -COP-FP
     'because it was in public'
  23. *Un de, maa sorya ii -n -da -kedo, sorede*
     yes and well that is good-NOM-COP-CONJ and
     'Well, anyway,'
  24. *<C>-wa -sa, nanka sugoi uta-e -n -jyan, kouka -ga*
     <C>-NOM-PT like very sing-can-NOM-FP school hymn-NOM
     '<C> can sing their school song, can't they?'
  25. *De, sa*, <W>
     And PT <W>
     'but <W>'
  26. *Watashi uta-e-nai-jyan*
     I sing-can-NEG-FP
     'I can't sing (their school song)'

At line 16, she uses the overt first-person pronoun *atashi* for emphasizing that she cannot sing their school hymn, which distances <C> students who can sing. In addition, she uses the school names of the co-ed university in line 17 and women's university at line 26, in order to show her identity in terms of the university affiliation. As S2 is also a student of the women's university, it is considered that S1 is trying to gain a solidarity by grouping themselves as women's university students as opposed to co-ed university's male students.
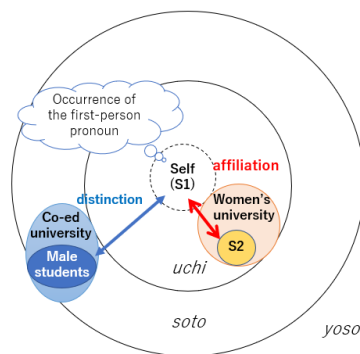
Figure 5:

Figure 5 summarizes S1's identity positioning with S2 and male students as described above. The overt use of the first-person pronoun (in a subject position) functions as distancing herself from the male students. Then, by explicitly referring to herself as a student of a women's university, she positions her identity as a women's university student, just like S2. By doing that, S1 positions S2 in her ingroup and gains the solidarity of university identity. Therefore, their university identity is evoked here for making the binary with the male students.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that gender identity is created by making a binary over the course of an interaction. In the conversation between the female student and the female teacher, the student frames the male students as those involved in non-normative behavior to distance them from females, positioning female students in her ingroup, which includes the teacher. However, in the conversation between the female students, the same student (S1) positions the male students in her ingroup. This action distinguishes her and the male students from another student (S2), which constitutes the outgroup. However, after this action, S1 positions S2 in her ingroup, evoking her gender identity as well as her university identity. Back to the ideologies of the inferiority of women's universities, it is also considered that the university identity appears here to show their superiority in terms of normativity by mocking the co-ed students who have a higher social and academic status in general. Those speaker's ingroup/ outgroup positionings create gender identity in these kinds of Japanese interactions.

References

Bucholtz, M. & Hall, K. (2005). Identity and Interaction: A Sociocultural Linguistic Approach. *Discourse Studies, 7*(4–5). London, Thousand Oaks, CA & New Delhi: SAGE Publications. 585–614.

Clancy, P. M. (1980). Referential Choice in English and Japanese Narrative Discourse. In W. L. Chafe (Ed.), *The Pear Stories: Cognitive, Cultural, and Linguistic Aspects of Narrative Production* (pp. 127-202). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Eckert, P. (2014). The Problem with Binaries: Coding for Gender and Sexuality. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, *8*(11). 529-535.

Goffman, E. (1977). The Arrangement between Sexes. *Theory and Society 4*. 301-332.

Hall, K. (2014). Exceptional Speakers: Contested and Problematized Gender Identities. In S. Ehrlich, M. Meyerhoff, and J. Holmes (Eds.), *The Handbook of Language, Gender, and Sexuality* (2nd ed.) (pp. 220-239). New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Ide, S. (1995). Kokusaika shakai ni okeru gengo to bunka to aidentiti [Language, culture and identity in internationalized society]. *Kokusaika to Nihongo ka* [Globalization and Japanesation]. Tokyo: Monkasho.

Ide, S. (2006). *Wakimae no goyouron* [Pragmatics of *wakimae*]. Tokyo: Taisyukan shoten. 204-229.

Ide, S. (2012). Roots of *Wakimae* Aspect of Japanese Politeness: Modal Expressions and Japanese Sense of Self. In M. Meeuwis & J. Östman, (Eds.), *Pragmaticizing Understanding*. (pp. 121-138). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Ikegami, A., Kaneda, H., Sugisaki, K., Suzuki, T., Nakajima, T., Hayashi, N. and Tobita, Y. (2011). ikanimo. In: Dejitaru daijien [Digital daijien], 3rd ed. Tokyo: Shogakukan.

Markus, H. R. & Kitayama, S. 1991. Culture and Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation. *Psychological Review 2*. 224-253.

Ono, T. and Sandra A. T. (2003). Japanese (*w*)*atashi*/ *ore*/ *boku* 'I': They're not Just Pronouns*. *Cognitive Linguistics 14*(4). 321-347.

Stivers, T. (2008). Stance, alignment, and affiliation during storytelling: When nodding is a token of affiliation. *Research on Language and Social Interaction 41*(1). 31-57.

Glossing

ASP	aspect marker
CONJ	conjunction
COP	copula
FP	final particle
GEN	genitive
NEG	negation
NOM	nominative
PST	past
PT	particle
Q	question marker

University of Colorado, Boulder
Hellems 290 295 UCB Boulder, CO 80309

miyabi.ozawa@colorado.edu