Male and Female Speech in Japanese and Korean: a Comparative study

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I. Introduction

Differences in the speech of males and females probably exist in every language. They can occur at any level of language organization: e.g. lexical (as when a Thai man says pŏm and a Thai woman says dichan for '1st person singular', grammatical (as when Polish men and women use differing verb suffixes), pragmatic (as when American men at a party use vulgar words with more frequency than women at the same party), etc. They can be of an exclusive nature or be tendencies. An example of the former is the cited Thai case: a Thai man could conceivably refer to himself with the word dichan, and a Thai woman could concievably refer to herself with the term pŏm; but this would never happen under "normal" circumstances. An example of the latter (tendency, i.e. non-exclusive) is the example of the American party. Although the scenario outlined above is common, there are certainly parties in which women use valgarities more frequently than men, and this causes no identity crisis to either party (no pun intended).

lexical and other speech differences are often cited in the linguistic literature about Japanese and Korean. Japanese is a language in which the differences in male and female speech have long been recongnized and to which more attention has been devoted to than to male/female speech differences in languages in which they are less obvious. At least part of the difference is consciously learned and practiced by native speakers (native speakers of Japanese are usually quite aware that differences in male/female speech occur-indeed, some speakers quite consciously cultivate them). Korean, a language which is sociolinguistically similiar (and, as some would have it, genetically related to) Japanese, also displays some male/female speech differences. These, however, are more subtle than at least the more obvious of the Japanese differences (native speakers of Korean that I've talked to, with the exceptions of students of lingusitics, generally claim that there are no differences in male/female Korean.) Those who have studied Japanese often mention the abscence of such differences in Korean vis-a-vis Japanese).

The following paper will attempt to examine purported differences in the usage of lexical items by male and female speakers of the Japanese and Korean languages.

II. Hypothesis

Any native speaker of Japanese is well aware that there are differences in the speech of males and females when speaking Japanese. Furthermore, the usage of appropriate forms by each gender is quite strictly adhered to in many cases. There are lexical items in Japanese that are used <u>exclusively</u> by one gender or the other.

Native speakers of Korean that I had spoken to before undertaking the research that lead to this paper claimed that there were no differences between the speech of the two genders in Korean. The linguistic literature on the subject, however, makes the claim that there are such differences.

I would therefore like to test the claim that differences in lexical usage exist between the two genders in both Japanese and Korean, but that some of these differences are obligatory in Japanese but generally only tendencies in Korean, Obligatory does not necessarily mean that one or the other genders cannot use a term, but that one or the other gender cannot use it under "normal" circumstances (i. e. without calling his/her genderal/social role into question in the mind of his/her speech partner or calling attention to his/her usage of the item). Tendency means that one or the other gender uses a form with more frequency than the other , but its usage by the other gender would not necessarily be conspicuous.

III. Methodology

In order to test my hypothesis, I first needed to develop a body of sentences which are identified in the literature as being male or female speech. Then, I needed to randomly test the validity of those presumptions. Afterwards, I needed to see whether the correlations between specific sentences and gender of the speaker were on the one hand high enough (in the case of Japanese) to warrant the claim that they are obligatory, but on the other hand (in Korean) at an appropriate level to confirm the existence (but not obligatory usage) of gender related lexical differences in that language.

There are claims in the linguistic literature concerning differences in male/female speech in both Japanese and Korean. I have chosen two articles, one for Japanese (Reynolds 1985) and one for Korean (Bak

n.d.), which discuss male/female speech differences   in
the two languages, respectively. Both articles contain
sample sentences for which it is claimed that a male or
female   speaker   (one,   but   not   either)   would   have
generated the sentence. While it is not the purpose of
this paper to analyze the reasons for the differencs,
interested readers are encouraged to read the articles
for more information on that topic.
     After selecting the articles, I chose sentences
from each which exemplified general speech differences
of various kinds. I did not include differences in
sentence intonation (which   was claimed as a common
difference in both languages), because the test that I
was devising was written, and intonation is not
discernible in the orthography. Reading the items to
the informant in order to ask about the gender of the
speaker who generated the sentence would be problematic
too, since the informant would undoubtedly be biased
twords the gender of the person who read the items.
     In addition to using sentences for which
linguistic predictions had been made in the two
articles, I selected sentences which were "neutral" By
neutral   I do not mean that they are necessarily
neutral in terms of the male/female differences,   but
that they were not chosen specifically because they
exemplify such differences. For both languages, I chose
sentences form   modern   literary works   which reflect
the spoken language. For Japanese, I took sentences
from Onna to Otoko noKomori   Uta by Otiai Keiko. For
Korean, I took sentences from Kiqye   Toshi by Cho Se-
hui. An English translation of the later work is City
of   Machines   (Pihl 1990). The Primary purpose for
including these "neutral forms" was not to test the
responses of the informants   concerning them, but
rather to dilute the effect of the other forms and make
the real purpose of the test less obvious.
     The sentences from both the articles and the
literary works were randomly mixed (they appeared in
differing order for each informant). Each informant was
presented with a list of names as potential speakers of
the sentences, and asked to create a situation in which
the sentence could have been generated by that person.
Creating situations was intended to be a psychological
distraction to the real purpose of the interview. Since
the names on both lists are quite distinctly male or
female, the gender of the person that the informant had
in mind as having generated a given sentence could be
inferred by the gender of the name chosen, and
therefore did not need to be asked directly. After
giving the test, the subject was asked to write F
or M (for "male" and "female" respectively) next to

each name to indicate the gender of the person whose name was chosen as the speaker of each particular sentence. It is important to note that the informant himself/herself determined the gender of the names. In most cases I could have done this myself, but there are some names in both languages that could be ambiguous in respect to gender. In such cases it would adversely affect the results of the stydy if I had made the determination; and in some cases I might not even notice the possibility of a given name to represent persons of either gender. In the last analysis,it is the gender conception of the informant that is important, not my own. Since the informants were asked to make the determinations after having completed the writing of the names, they were not influenced by knowing the purpose of the study as they participated in the interview. Since they were asked to note the genders shortly after completing the first phase of the interview, the context in which they wrote the names was fresh in their minds and one would expect them not to be easily confused by gender-ambiguous names, if such should have occured. In most of the interviews, informants were provided with lists of names in Japanese or Korean which they could use if they could not think of names themselves, but they were allowed to use other names of their own choice or repeat previously used names.

In the results tables below, the total number of informants responding to each sentence is presented together with the number of those informants responding with male and female names and the percentages of the total that those responses represent. The variationin the total namber of responses for some sentences is due to the fact that some interviews had to be cut short leaving some items not responded to.

IV. <u>Results</u>

Of the twenty items taken from Reynolds (1985) and purported to have definite gender bias in usage, sixteen were confirmed by 100% of the informants to be used by male or female speakers only, as predicted by Reynolds. Three items showed no singnificant variation from the predicted correlation with gender. Item (S) was noted in Reynolds as a form being available to speakers of either gender, and this was confirmed by results showing 50% for each gender (See Fig. 1).

Fig.1: Rating percentages for the Japanese Data
(Reynolds):

	Totals:	Male:	Female:
A	7	7(100%)	0(0%)
B	8	7(88%)	1(13%)
C	8	8(100%)	0(0%)
D	8	0(0%)	8(100%)
E	8	0(0%)	8(100%)
F	7	6(86%)	1(14%)
G	8	0(0%)	8(100%)
H	9	9(100%)	0(0%)
I	8	8(100%)	0(0%)
J	8	0(0%)	8(100%)
K	8	0(0%)	8(100%)
L	8	0(0%)	8(100%)
M	8	8(100%)	0(0%)
N	8	7(88%)	1(13%)
O	8	8(100%)	0(0%)
P	8	8(100%)	0(0%)
Q	8	0(0%)	8(100%)
R	8	8(100%)	0(0%)
S	8	4(50%)	4(50%)
T	8	0(0%)	8(100%)

The sentences taken from Otiai were selected
randomly, and not for their being restricted to one
gender. Therefore, we would expect correlation with
gender of the projected speaker only in certain cases
(i.e.,those with gender correlation). This is, indeed,
the case, with correlations as high as 0:100 % and as
low as 28:72% . Although it is beyond the purpose of
the present paper to examine the causes, it is
interesting to note that two items (Z and DD) had 100%
gender: sentence correlations amoung the informants.
All of the items are more highly correlated than one
would expect from a random sample, and there are no
items that nearly approach a 50:50% correspondence
(see Fig. 2).

Fig.2: Rating percentages for the Japanese Data (Otial):

	Totals:	Male:	Female:
U	5	1(20%)	4(80%)
V	7	2(29%)	5(72%)
W	8	1(13%)	7(88%)
X	8	7(88%)	1(13%)
Y	8	6(75%)	2(25%)

	Totals:	Male:	Female:
Z	8	0(0%)	8(100%)
AA	7	1(14%)	6(86%)
BB	8	8(100%)	0(0%)
CC	8	1(13%)	7(88%)
DD	8	0(0%)	8(100%)

The Korean data was elicited and analyzed in the same manner as the Japanese. The sentences were taken from Bak(n.d.)and Cho(1977). The former is a study of female speech in Korean , and the latter is a modern short story.

It should be noted that sentences 5 amd 7 are identical (a fact not discovered until the elicitions had already begun), and thus figures are combined on the chart.

The results of the Korean data are as follows:

Fig. 3: Rating Percentages for the Korean Data (Bak):

	Totals:	Male:	Female:
1	5	5(100%)	0(0%)
2	6	1(17%)	5(83%)
3	4	0(0%)	4(100%)
4	5	0(0%)	5(100%)
5/7	5	0(0%)	5(100%)
6	4	1(25%)	3(75%)
8	4	0(0%)	4(100%)
9	5	1(20%)	4(80%)
10	5	2(40%)	3(60%)
11	5	0(0%)	5(100%)
12	5	1(20%)	4(80%)
13	5	0(0%)	5(100%)
14	5	0(0%)	5(100%)
15	4	0(0%)	4(100%)
16	5	0(0%)	5(100%)
17	5	0(0%)	5(100%)
18	5	2(40%)	3(60%)
19	5	5(100%)	0(0%)
20	5	3(60%)	2(40%)
21	5	1(20%)	4(80%)
22	5	2(40%)	3(60%)
23	5	3(60%)	2(40%)
24	5	5(100%)	0(0%)

Fig. 4:   Percentage Results for the Korean Data (Cho):

	Totals:	Male:	Female:
25	4	2(50%)	2(50%)
26	4	3(75%)	1(25%)
27	5	2(40%)	3(60%)
28	5	3(60%)	2(40%)
29	5	2(40%)	3(60%)
30	5	3(60%)	2(40%)
31	5	2(40%)	3(60%)
32	5	1(20%)	4(80%)
33	5	2(40%)	3(60%)
34	4	4(100%)	0(0%)
35	5	1(20%)	4(80%)

In contrast to Japanese, the percentages for the distribution of sentences among genders in Korean shows quite a bit of variation. Many of the sentences claimed to be uttered on a gender basis were not so distinctly differentiated by the Korean informants. Many of the items (e.g.,#10,#18, etc.) were distributed at a 2:3 or 3:2 ratio, which is as close as one can come to a 50:50% distribution with 5 informants. Such cases support the hypothesis that many male/female speech differences in Korean are tendencies, but not necessarily stricty adhered to. Thus, calling them "women's speech" or " men's speech" is a more or less subjective affair. The fact that Bak, a native speaker of Korean , felt them to be gender oriented demonstrates that (at least for some speakers), the distinction is real. But the figures cited here indicate that the term "tendency" is more appropriate to Korean than "obligation". Other items (e.g.,#2, #6,etc.) show ratios that indicate a higher tendency than the items cited above. Thirteen of the items (about half of those taken from Bak's paper) showed 100% correlation between the gender of the hypothetical speaker and the utterance itself. This is an indication that obligatory speech differences may exist in Korean as well as Japanese. In items #1 and #2, several informants made unsolicited comments during the interview that the sentence was uttered by a husband to his wife (in the case of #1) or vice versa (in the case of #2), which is precisely what was mentioned by Bak. Thus, one could ask whether the high correlation is actually a gender based distinction or an implied situation in which the gender of the speaker is inherent by virtue of his being the husband and her being the wife. More research will be necessary to determine this.

Items #3,4,5,11,13-17,19 and 24 showed 100% correlations which confirmed Bak's claim that these sentences are exclusively the domains of male/female speech. Item #11 was noted by Bak as being found only in dramas and not in modern colloquial speech, a claim confirmed by several of my informants during the inferviews following data collection.

Both the Japanese data and the Korean data contain sentences which are apparently of obligatory dichotic use between the genders. The correlation in the Japanese data examined, however, is higher than that of Korean. Both languages also have lexical items and/or sentence structures that are employed by male/female speakers on a tendency basis. Probably languages with strict male/female speech differentciations in all levels of language during every speech event on the one hand and languages in which male/female speech differences are non-existent on the other do not exist. But along the continuu that stretches between these two extremes, Japanese and Korean are closer to the former extreme than the latter, and Japanese is closer than Korean. The terms exclusive and tendencies used to describe gender-related speech differences are both useful in describing various phenomena in both languages (and others as well), but the former is the more useful in describing overall differences within Japanese and the latter within Korean.

V. Acknowledgments

VI. Bibliography

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