

Acknowledgements

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Abstract

Most speakers and learners of Japanese accept ‘women’s language’ as a naturally-occurring phenomenon, rooted in the speech practices or inherent femininity of its users. However, investigation into the origins of this supposedly-innate language variety contradicts the gradual, organic formation of women’s speech that one might expect. Rather, we see a careful discursive construction of women’s language throughout Japan’s history. This thesis examines the literary texts of the Nara and Heian periods, diaries, letters, and official records of women serving in the imperial court of the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, and women’s conduct manuals in the Edo period to analyze the origins of ‘women’s language,’ the ways in which vernaculars of some women were appropriated and applied to all women, and the ideological currents that reinforced these norms in cultural practice. My analysis found that pre-modern metalinguistic discourses provided a foundation of legitimacy for future discourses surrounding ‘women’s language.’ I examined how changes in women’s social and political standing during the medieval period led to the genesis of court women’s speech, finding that this speech style was diffused through early prototypes of conduct manuals tailored for women. As conduct manuals aimed at women gained prominence in the Edo period, the norms associated with virtuous ‘women’s language’ became inseparable from economic class and social status, and through appropriation of court women’s language conduct manuals were implicit in the erasure of women’s linguistic innovation. In spite of these rigid norms, the numerous examples of women’s subversive and non-standard language use suggest that there were ways for women to bend the rules and that there was, ultimately, more to women’s language than conduct manual discourses would lead us to believe.

Introduction

If you laugh at things that are not funny, if you speak badly of someone because they disagree with you, if you spread rumors, if you speak and laugh about something that should remain unspoken—and if it is heard—you will destroy yourself. The mouth is the genesis of trouble. The tongue is the root of trouble. This is the simple truth.

— *Jokun sho*, 1642

The language in which we speak and write does not belong to us. Every utterance, all discourse, is naturally intertextual in the sense that it draws from voices, styles, information, and references that are beyond the speaker; every act of language relinquishes control to abstract forces. But what happens when these abstract forces are eclipsed by direct, overt manipulation of language practice? This pattern, where specific language varieties are appropriated, repurposed, and enforced, can be observed throughout the recorded history of Japanese women's language. Yet, most speakers and learners of Japanese accept the notion of Japanese 'women's language' as a naturally-

occurring phenomenon, rooted in the actual speech practices or inherent femininity of its users.

Measuring this notion may seem ephemeral. After all, the standards of women's language most commonly manifest as ingrained facets of performance¹ or cultural knowledge. However, contexts in which these norms are canonized can illuminate both the history and myth surrounding the subject—two branches that this paper will follow to the root. Dictionaries provide an especially salient way to concretize 'women's language,' defined under entry titles such as *onna kotoba* or *joseigo*. One of the most respected Japanese-language dictionaries, the *Kōjien*² ('wide garden of words'), gives the following definition:

[*joseigo*]: a speech style particular to women; comprised of specific vocabulary, styles, and pronunciation. It was found in women's avoidance of Chinese words in the Heian period³, and later gained prominence in *nyōbō kotoba*⁴ and *yūjogo*⁵ during and after the

¹ Here, "performance" refers to the social performance of identity through language, as opposed to the Chomskyan "performance" (complemented by "competence") describing the discrepancy between mental grammar and the speech stream.

² Note on conventions: In this paper, I will utilize the Modified Hepburn system for romanization of native Japanese words, which, unlike Junrei and Nihon-shiki systems, marks phonological changes such as the sibilant affrication that occurs in syllables like that of 'tu' to 'tsu'. This system also demarcates long vowels with a macron, as occurs in words like *nyōbō* and *kōjien*.

³ 794 – 1184

⁴ The language of women serving in the imperial court

⁵ The language of women in the pleasure quarters

Muromachi period.⁶ In modern speech, it also occurs in the use of the [polite] prefix *o*, sentence-final particles like *yo* and *wa*, and specific vocabulary and pronunciation.

Kōjien the 7th edition, 2018

This entry highlights two fundamental aspects underlying many of the beliefs and assumptions surrounding women's language. First, by demarcating it as "particular to women," *Kōjien* implies that (a) women are the *only* speakers of women's language and (b) the notion of 'women's language' reflects the way that women actually talk. The definition later substantiates these ideas in real practice through specific features like the polite prefix *o* and particles *yo* and *wa*. Second, the entry posits two specific speech varieties (*nyōbō kotoba* and *yūjogo*) as formative examples of women's language in the past, effectively linking modern women's speech to gendered linguistic differences rooted in tradition and specific to Japanese history (Nakamura 2014).

The acceptance of 'women's language' as a naturally-occurring phenomenon is precisely why it should be studied. Investigation into the origins of this supposedly-innate language variety reveals not the gradual, organic formation that one might expect. Rather, we see a careful construction of women's language derived from the vernaculars of a few small communities of women, carried out through conduct manuals and other

⁶ 1336 – 1573

metalinguistic discourses of Japan's early modern period. This analysis will seek to discover why the vernaculars of *some* women were specifically vulnerable to appropriation and were used to discursively build the linguistic norms that would be prescribed to *all* women; how these norms were actually enforced and situated in cultural practice; how women's language and its enforcement evolved in the tension between official norms and women's agency in the Edo⁷ period; and finally, how some women were able to subvert this mesh of norms and ideologies.

Women's Language in the Literature: Primary Texts

First, I want to turn to conduct manuals, since they served as a preeminent early site for the construction of women's language and are, therefore, at the heart of my analysis. This paper will draw mainly from conduct manuals of the Edo period, but includes a key group of three from the medieval Kamakura and Muromachi periods. This early group, titled *Jokun sho*, which appeared in Ishikawa Matsutarō's⁸ 1973 anthology of conduct manuals, illustrates the change in attitudes that corresponded to transitions from one medieval era to the next. Indeed, it is worth noting that although two of these texts, *menoto no sōshi*

⁷ 1603 – 1867

⁸ Note on conventions: In this paper, names of Japanese authors and other individuals will be written family name first, given name second.

and *mi no katami*, are often cited as coming from drastically different times—the first from the socially-relaxed Kamakura period and the second from the more-tightly constrained Muromachi period—both have near-identical comments on language, focusing on its effects on a woman’s attractiveness. All three of the sources from this volume make sweeping, general suggestions for women’s language use, mostly advising that women speak quietly, ambiguously, or do not speak at all. In contrast, the Edo period manuals hone in on specific lexical behaviors (namely those attributed to Muromachi court women) and reflect more clearly the predominant Confucian ideology of the cultural moment. Yet, despite this adherence to Chinese moral philosophy, both groups of doctrines contain stringent warnings against women’s use of Sino-Japanese forms. The evolution of these conduct manuals suggests that, by the Edo period, cultural and intellectual institutions had sufficient time to process how the developments of the medieval period could be applied to women’s education.

Secondary Texts

Recent scholarly work on gender and language in Japan tends to employ one of three perspectives: sociolinguistic, historical, or discourse-analytical. The first category holds a descriptive lens to modern language use within the contexts of culture, society and

identity (both individual and community). The earliest works on Japanese women's language in this field lay a vital foundation by dispelling the deeply-ingrained notion of women's language as a single, homogeneous variety (Shibamoto-Smith 1985; Ide and McGloin 1990). Upon this basis, other sociolinguists have utilized a wide range of data, from prosodic⁹ to ethnographic, in order to explore the ways in which different axes of identity such as occupation (Abe 2000; Takemaru 2010; Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith 2016), age (Benor et. al 2002; Chie 2011; Szatrowski 2018; Morita 2018), region (Okamoto 2018), sexual orientation (Abe 2004; Abe 2010), and socio-economic status (Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith 2004; Haugh 2018) intersect with gender. Since this approach focuses on the practices of individuals and communities, it can also address the reasons why certain groups form specific vernaculars. For example, Ide's 2003 survey of Japanese women's language postulates that historically, the use of a non-standard dialect contributed three dimensions to women's indexing of social identity by (a) creating a feeling of group solidarity, (b) allowing them to identify as members of a specific group, and finally (c) serving as a means by which to mold themselves into suitable and legitimate group members. Thus, she argues that a definition of 'women's language' should be as

⁹ The patterns of stress and intonation in a given language; In Japanese, the mora is the prosodic unit (where English utilizes the syllable), to which pitch is affixed.

local and specific as possible, dismissing notions that it is something cumulatively formed since antiquity or that it speaks to some quality beyond its actual users.

Work that applies a historical perspective to Japanese ‘women’s language’ often intersects with discourse-analytical work on these topics, because both categories are concerned with the *sources* of ‘women’s language’ and the ways that institutions reinforced ‘women’s language.’ Most of this work identifies multiple sources of vocabulary and style (later to become integrated into the norms of women’s language) that typically start with *nyōbō kotoba* and later shift to Meiji schoolgirl speech (Shibamoto-Smith 1985; Ide 2003; Inoue 2006; Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith 2016), although a few authors begin as early as the Nara (Endō 2006; Nicolae 2014) and Heian periods (Mehl 2001; Nakamura 2014). Investigating how such conventions were disseminated, Inoue (2006) and Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith (2016) acknowledge the existence of norms of women’s language in the Edo period without attributing much staying power to Edo period strategies for creating and maintaining them. Endō (2006) and Nakamura (2014) on the other hand, argue that Edo period conduct manuals were among the earliest and most prolific means of constructing and controlling women’s language, although Endō links

these sources specifically to a campaign to increase the political power of samurai in the Edo period while Nakamura retains a more ambiguous position.

Because these sources provide vague reference (if any) to the political, military, and economic histories that correspond to the language histories that they describe, my work will also examine the broader literature on gender in Japanese history. One critical dimension of women's status can be attributed to their rights to property and inheritance within the feudal system of government that characterized the medieval and early modern periods. Ackroyd (1959) argues that the establishment of a clear gender hierarchy, as connected to women's land-ownership and matrilocality,¹⁰ was a byproduct of struggles for power in the feudal system, while Nagahara (1982) and Liddle and Nakajima (2000) contest that the gender hierarchy was a necessary *precondition for* (rather than a *byproduct of*) feudalism. With the guidance of Confucian doctrine, distinct social classes emerged, influencing the realities of women's status in the medieval and early modern periods. Dimensions of women's work (Tabata 1999; Yokota 1999; Sone 1999), family and household structure (Wakita 1999), and position within the legal system were all closely

¹⁰ Refers to the three types of marriages seen across these periods; the visiting marriage (in which a woman lives separately from her husband and they see one another in their spare time), the matrilocal marriage (in which a husband is submerged in his wife's family lineage), and the patrilocal marriage (in which a wife is submerged in her husband's family lineage).

linked with class dynamics. Corbett's 2018 monograph employs the unique lens of tea culture and its practice to illuminate how the intersecting forces of class, the *iemoto*¹¹ system, education, politics, and ideology affected women's lives and cultural practices throughout Japan's history.

The body of discourse-analytical scholarship on Japanese women's language focuses on the myriad ways in which women's language was (and still is) connected to ideological and socio-political power, but scholars in the field argue different reasons and actors responsible for its control. Inoue (2006), as well as Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith (2016) argue that the category of 'Japanese women's language' was created in order to strengthen Japan's development of a national identity and masculine national language in the Meiji period, and was made possible in new ways by the increased availability of printing technology. While these two sources cite governmental institutions as the primary actor in solidifying the construct of women's language, Nakamura (2014) points to prominent intellectuals, novelists, and educators in the Meiji period who aimed to silence women's rebellious language use through appropriation, though she traces the origins of women's language to the Muromachi courtiers and the metalinguistic

¹¹ Literally "family foundation"; refers to the patrilineal generational system of authority in the Japanese traditional arts such as tea ceremony, flower arrangement, and calligraphy.

discourse subsequently built around their vernacular. Work concerned with power and women's language in present-day Japan implicate hegemony in both print (Tanaka 2007; Tanaka 2008; Okamoto 2018) and digital (Nishio, 2012) media. What are the presupposed conditions that allow this kind of control to occur? Authors like Charlebois (2010), Nakamura (2014), and Szatrowski (2018) point to one key precursor necessary to successful language control: the discursive positioning of an idea as 'cultural common sense.' In the conduct manuals and literature examined in this thesis, people were expected to read advice like "women should not speak" as common-sense information—if readers interpreted this sentiment as common sense, the link between power and the discourses surrounding women's language remained effectively concealed.

Theoretical Sources

The importance of recognizing women's language as an ideological construct serves as a common thread in work on gender and language beyond Japan. In the earliest studies of gender and language, we see three emergent approaches: the deficient model, the dominance model, and the difference model. The deficient model describes the work of Robin Lakoff (1975), who argues that women's language simultaneously reflected and preserved their subordinate position within the social schema. The dominance model,

proposed by Zimmerman and West (1975) and Fishman (1983), utilizes conversation analysis to argue that men dominate women in a variety of everyday speech scenarios, either through interruption, disengagement, or lack of response. With the difference model, Maltz and Borker (1982) assert that women and men abide by entirely different sets of rules for speech, acquired through gender-based socialization in childhood. However, all three of these models encountered the same fatal issue—they assume the homogeneity of women's speech practices. As mirrored in the earlier paragraph on Japanese sociolinguistics, the research shows that there is significant diversity within women's linguistic practices, which are in constant contextual flux, based on occupation (Nichols 1983), women's social networks (Thomas 1988), social aspiration (Holmquist 1985), and membership within a subculture or group (Eckert 1989). If women's speech is so vastly heterogenous and context-dependent, any linguistic difference based solely in gender ultimately becomes meaningless.

The assumption that a speaker's gender preexists their language is embedded within this problem. Before making any of her own linguistic choices, a woman is presupposed to inherently possess female gender and use language according to her gender. In this essentialist framework, gender is seen as one's primary attribute—it is

something one belongs to or possesses—and any observed gender differences in language can be accounted for by the speaker's status as a woman. By contrast, post-structural feminism has characterized gender as an accomplishment performed by an individual, rather than an “essential” attribute (Butler 1990). This development reverses the connection between gender and language, allowing gender to become the result of practice (one speaks in a certain way in order to perform an identity), rather than its cause (one's identity naturally gives rise to how one speaks). Additionally, gender in this framework represents just one tenet of identity, which intersects with others (age, ethnicity, status, et cetera).

This development has led to three important shifts in the study of gender and language. First, the construction of gender identity through the language practices of individuals (as opposed to the mere discovery of gender differences in language) becomes the primary research objective. Second, conceptualizing gender as a result constructed through practice not only fundamentally changes the relationship between gender and linguistic practice, but also yields greater significance to the speaker's agency. In this schema, women are repositioned as speakers who have the power to create and perform a repertoire of identities, rather than as victims relegated to silence. Third, there has been

an increase in scholarship focused on subversive language practices that exist in opposition to or in spite of existing hierarchies. Yet, these counter-normative performances are often fleeting, unable to leave marks on the prevailing social order—or at least the extant records thereof.

Revealing how and why these practices are cast as marginal requires the researcher to look outside of the locality of the language practice itself and into the ideological frameworks at institutional and societal tiers. At the ideological level, the belief of naturally-feminine speech styles serves the dual purpose of positioning other styles as deviant and exceptional to women's language. For Japanese female speakers, the most suitable ways of speaking are those considered polite and indirect. Characteristics like these, which now occupy a space of moral weight, guide speakers in their own practice, as well as in their judgement of other speakers' performance—and those who fail to adhere are socially sanctioned. In this sense, speakers are not really free to use language subversively and cannot be considered agents in their practice. In order to see clearly the constraints that exist upon any community of speakers, it is necessary to first examine the beliefs and norms surrounding language, as situated in society.

The idea of “symbolic domination” (Gal 1995) connects these constraints to an understanding of how they gain meaning and operate on such a vast scale. Gal argues that categories like ‘women’s language’ are culturally (discursively) constructed and derive power by virtue of the “symbolic opposition” between two binary points (1995). Cameron (1997) also asserts that the construct of ‘women’s language’ cannot meaningfully be attributed to their social identity, but must be seen as an “ideological-symbolic” category capable of mimicking identity. In the same vein, Milroy and Milroy (1985), highlight the importance of distinguishing between “abstract norms” and “actual usage.” Japanese linguists have also extensively applied a language-ideology framework to Japanese national language (Komori 2000), ‘standard’ Japanese (Lee 1996; Yasuda, 1997; Osa 1998) and honorifics (Yamashita 2001).

Many scholars have argued the importance of viewing linguistic notions as ideological concepts that are formed outside of the practice of those individuals presumed to use them. However, none of these studies propose a concrete means of reforming our notion of women’s language, nor a framework through which to critically examine the processes that built this notion.

History through Women, Women's Words through Hegemony

The study of women's language through history and culture provides a crucial opportunity to reconcile the distance between the loudest voices—those of institutions and rulers—and quieter ones—those of women themselves. Bridging this gap requires a way to classify the forces involved in constructing both women's language and its link to female identity, while acknowledging the realities of women's heterogeneous linguistic practice. My analysis will utilize the historical-discourse analysis framework to parse into three parts the components involved in the control of women's language, as well as the respective points in history that correspond to each part.

The first chapter will be concerned with knowledge—in particular, knowledge of the indexical relationship between speech style and a particular feminine identity, which began to manifest in the Kamakura¹² and Muromachi periods, most notably with the advent of *nyōbō kotoba*, an occupationally-specific argot invented by women serving in the imperial court. In this chapter, I argue that the earliest instances of gender-based language differentiation align with Japan's earliest extant texts, and that the seemingly

¹² 1180-1333

“primordial” nature of these texts provides a foundation of legitimacy for future discourses surrounding ‘women’s language.’ In a brief survey of attitudes around women’s speech and writing in the Heian period, I explore how the behaviors and knowledge associated with ‘women’s language’ became gradually more specific through the writings of female authors like Murasaki Shikibu and Sei Shōnagon, and how these behaviors gained long-term stability. Finally, I analyze how changes in women’s social and political standing during the medieval period led to the genesis of *nyōbō kotoba*, and how this speech style was diffused through early prototypes of conduct manuals tailored for women.

The second chapter centers around norms, which give the object of preferred feminine speech both its ubiquity and its power. I argue that the construction of these norms gained traction in the Edo period and found a particularly salient medium in the conduct manuals characteristic of popular education at the time. This chapter introduces the importance of Neo-Confucian rhetoric and scholarship in establishing social order in a newly-unified Japan and discusses the intersections between economic class, social status, and gender within the schema of linguistic norms of the period. I later focus on the types of rhetorical strategies that conduct manuals employed to control women’s

language and emphasize the consequences of non-normative linguistic behavior. Among these strategies, I argue that the vocabulary of *nyōbō kotoba* was co-opted by authors of conduct manuals in order to bolster ideas of upper-class superiority (as well as imperial sovereignty) and emphasize women's domestic roles.

Finally, the control of women's language requires values that correspond to the norms and provide them with self-enforcing legitimacy and longevity. My third chapter will discuss how these values have evolved and how women (and men) perceived them, while using their own value systems to guide their language. In aiming to frame a holistic and realistic view of women's linguistic practices, I consider the dynamic between women's written language and their actual speech, acknowledging the ways that these modalities of language diverge and intersect. Finally, this chapter analyzes a range of examples of women's subversive and non-standard speech, from regional dialects to political manifestos, as evidence that there were ways for women to bend the rules and that there was, ultimately, more to women's language than conduct manual discourses would lead us to believe. Perhaps we will finally listen to the quieter voices.

Chapter I: Knowledge

<i>koto kotonaru mono</i>	<i>Different Ways of Speaking</i>
<i>hōshi no kotoba,</i>	A priest's language.
<i>otoko omina no kotoba.</i>	The speech of men and women.
<i>gesu no kotoba ni wa</i>	The common people always tend to
<i>kanarazu moji amashitari.</i>	add extra syllables to their words.

Sei Shōnagon in *The Pillow Book*, 1017

Competence, in the Chomskyan sense, refers to what you *know* when you know a language; the structures that underlie the surface of meaning. Though we exercise this competence in every communicative moment, we may not ever acknowledge it because we do not *choose* this kind of competence. It is acquired. However, a new dimension of competence arises when we consider the parts of language we *do* choose, for one reason or another. Our language comprises “the most vivid and crucial key to identity” (Baldwin, 1979) and our words have tangible social consequences, revealing both the private and

public facets of the self. So what do women *know* when they know ‘women’s language’? What pieces signify feminine identity? What abstract “texts” do they draw upon to find these pieces, and how does she know where to find them? Considering the early history of Japanese ‘women’s language’ leads us to further questions: how long has the notion of ‘women’s language’ existed and how did its constituents evolve throughout the course of pre-modern Japan? What political and social changes guided these transitions? How did authors like Murasaki Shikibu and Sei Shōnagon interact with and locate themselves within attitudes about women’s language use? How did such attitudes intersect with economic class and social status? How did the highly specific *nyōbō kotoba* eventually become common knowledge? This chapter will focus on locating the pieces that later built ‘women’s language’ in Japan, examining the ancient language of Japan’s creation myths, the female-authored classical literature of the Heian period, and the unique linguistic innovations of medieval court women.

I. The Beginning of Heaven and Earth: Women’s language in the Nara period

In the beginning, there were words. Words to bring the world and humanity into existence. Words to bring Japan into existence. The myths of Japan’s genesis link creation to the words of deities. By virtue of language—the proto-creative act—the material world

came into being. Like these primordial words brought our realm from the void, discourse forms new conceptual matter and social power from an abstract subject. Reciprocally, this discursive principle allows for the self-perpetuating quality of myths like those found in the *Kojiki* (*Records of Ancient Matters*), Japan's oldest extant chronicle. The early chapters depict the creation of the Japanese islands, a task assigned to the god Izanagi no Mikoto and the goddess Izanami no Mikoto. Though both are perfectly capable of completing the task, their first attempt goes awry and results in grotesque and shameful offspring, nothing like the shining islands they had envisioned. The text provides a specific reason for the failure of their courtship ritual. At the sight of the god Izanagi, the goddess spoke first, saying "*ana-ni-yashi e wotoko wo*" ('What a fair and lovely man!') in order to begin the courtship. The simple fact of a woman speaking before a man was enough to nullify the creative act, leaving the gods to "descend back again and fix [their] words" if they wished to reproduce successfully. The rite starts again, the god Izanagi speaks first and the goddess responds to him. They successfully give birth to Japan's islands.

It is significant here that the only discernible difference between the utterances of the god and goddess were not those of speech style but of speaking order. Proponents of the primordialist theory of women's language (Saeki 1936; Hamada 1946) and even

feminist authors like Jugaku Akiko (1999) use this early behavior¹³ to argue that women's speech differed from men's since the very beginning of time—that women's language is a part of the natural order. However, this singular behavior, consisting of hierarchy in turn-taking, is not sufficient evidence of a pattern in the speech of all women. In addition, observing that the goddess Izanami *ever* spoke first may indicate a possibility for alternating dominance between husband and wife (Endō 2006), and that this alternation was something to be navigated continuously through mistakes and successes. Rather, this moment in Japan's creation myth should be considered the first discourse to position idea of “good” and “bad” women's language with direct consequences attached.

Though these myths and classical texts may seem like relics of the past, they were eventually appropriated as points of pride for the nativist *kokugaku* rhetoric and scholarship in the Edo period. Consequently, even though they do not provide a concrete basis for gender differentiation in actual speech practice, they came to encompass something ideologically significant, as stories representing (to many) the native “purity”

¹³ Supplemented by a few sporadic differences between male and female pronoun use in some of Japan's major early classical works, like the *Manyōshū* ('*Ten Thousand Leaves*'). My analysis of these texts finds no significant evidence for differences in the orthography, morphology, or syntax of women's writing compared to men's. However, I argue that works like the *Manyōshū* cannot be considered as a complete form of evidence (for either view) because the modalities of *tanka* and *chōka* poetry are inherently limited by their standardized poetic forms and typical subject matter, and thus do not provide much insight into actual language differences between men and women.

and values of the Japanese people. Thus, even the issue of linguistic dominance in turn-taking that appears between Izanagi and Izanami in the *Kojiki* may have influenced the ideas and behavior of individuals due to its aggregate normative weight.

II. Inscribing Femininity: Women's Language in the Heian period

From the Nara to the Heian period, we see a great number of literary contributions from women, as poets or editors in Japan's early canonical poetry anthologies. The number of female authors in these anthologies (*Manyōshu*, *Kokinshū*, *Shin zoku kokinshū*, and *Kinyōshu*) ranges from 20 to 30 percent of total authorship (Endō 2006), in addition to the women involved (often in primary roles) in compiling and producing these anthologies (Gotō 1986). In the Nara and early Heian period, women's styles and genres did not differ greatly from men's — both composed *tanka*, *chōka*, and *waka* poetry.¹⁴ However, women's genres began to branch off distinctly from men's. As men established control over outward-facing genres (scholarship and official “diaries” (*kanbun-nikki*) that served as records of aristocratic life), women's literary work was supposedly cornered into “private” genres like diary-memoirs (*nikki*) and ‘tales’ (*monogatari*) that were originally circulated within

¹⁴ Styles of classical poetry composed in a specified form, using Japanese script (as opposed to *kanshi*, which was written in Classical Chinese).

communities of court women. Some works by women also employed gender-differentiated styles, such as “anecdotal” and “rambling” (*zuihitsu*) styles. However, it is worth noting that although both tale and diary-memoir genres were eventually predominated by women and consequently characterized as “frivolous” by some, both had traceable masculine origins. The tale genre was derived from earlier Chinese tales, and the diary-memoir genre adapted from the seminal *Tosa nikki*, which was written circa 935 by a male courtier from the perspective of a female persona, using feminine literary and graphical style (Sarra 1999). Though arguably, works in the diary-memoir genre were not intended to be as widely-circulated as tales were, to categorize the genre as strictly “private” does not acknowledge the fact that these works were purposefully distributed and read by more intimate audiences (friends or family) and may have unintentionally spread to wider audiences as well.

The fact and scope of the readership for these so-called “private genres” becomes important when we consider that these works came to represent an idealized femininity characterized by the traits of their authors or heroines. Scholars like Sarra (1999) and Wallace (2005) argue that female authors of the time were aware of the power of their works to construct certain ideas of gender and navigated these representations carefully

in order to place themselves and their work within femininity. The evidence for this proposed meta-discursive awareness is somewhat inconsistent in a few cases and I am apprehensive to refer firmly to the intentions of these relatively elusive Heian women. However, regardless of intentionality, the fact is that the writings of Heian court women *did* shape and reflect past and present understanding of femininity, and their reach extends to the sphere of language.

Indeed, the literary prowess and prolificacy that women held in these periods did not necessarily translate to freedom in education or language use. In *Tale of Genji*,¹⁵ Murasaki Shikibu describes Prince Genji's education, noting that he began learning and reciting classical Chinese poetry at age seven and was beloved for his talents in this realm. However, her account of the education provided to the daughter of the Minister of the Left (an esteemed political official and Genji's guardian) shows that even girls in the positions of highest social standing were discouraged from learning Chinese poetry and composition, as her father urges her to study calligraphy, music, and short *waka* poems instead.

¹⁵ A massive and culturally significant narrative work written from 1003 - 1008; often touted as the world's oldest novel.

Later in the chronicle, the scene “Comparisons on a Rainy Night” depicts several young men reflecting on their romantic histories, when one mentions his affair with a scholar’s daughter. Despite his fond memories of their encounter, he recalls with disgust her use of Chinese vocabulary¹⁶—*fubyō* (‘malady’), *gokunechi* (‘fever’), *sōyaku* (‘steeped potion’), *fukusu* (‘imbibe’), and *taimen* (‘meet’)—to describe things that all have more “feminine-sounding” Japanese monikers. The young officer continues: “Worst of all are those [women] who scribble *kanji*¹⁷ so quickly that they occupy a good half of letters where they are most out of place [...] What a bore [...] if only she had mastered a few of the feminine arts” (36). This encounter, in particular, makes clear that Murasaki’s male counterparts held particular ire for women who chose to use Chinese forms in either their written or spoken dialogue.

A closer look into Murasaki’s personal reflections on language—such as those found in her diary and her narrative voice in *Tale of Genji*—shows that she affixed these

¹⁶ Note on the Japanese orthographic system: Before the Nara and Heian periods, there was no native Japanese script. The Chinese written system was adopted in the 3rd or 4th century (Endō 2006) and all Japanese writing took the form of classical Chinese. Eventually, a hybrid system evolved to account for the obvious discrepancies between Chinese orthography and the Japanese language. This phonetic system, first titled *Manyōgana* (after the *Manyōshū*) and later hiragana, came to be used alongside the existing classical Chinese system. The two alphabets filled two separate niches: classical Chinese was used to write official documents, scholarly works, historical records, and Buddhist scriptures, while *hiragana* was used to write certain types of poetry, prose, and diaries.

¹⁷ Chinese characters

attitudes to her own participation in the literary and scholarly world, expressing shame about her use of *kanji* and *kanbun* despite her remarkable talents. For example, a passage from her diary reads:

When my brother, Secretary at the Ministry of Ceremonial, was a young boy learning the Chinese classics, I was in the habit of listening to him and I became unusually proficient at understanding those passages which he found too difficult to grasp and memorize. Father, a most learned man, was always regretting the fact: 'Just my luck!' he would say. 'What a pity she was not born a man!' But then I gradually realized that people were saying 'It's bad enough when a man flaunts his learning; she will come to no good.' And ever since then I have avoided writing even the simplest character.

(Murasaki 1008 [1976], 139)

Similarly, in a volume titled "The Maiden" in *Tale of Genji*, Murasaki narrates about a poetry reading and how the poems themselves were crafted in accordance with a variety of rules, styles, and intentions. This moment marks Murasaki's breadth of knowledge about the conventions of classical Chinese poetry, while also showing restraint and brevity. However, after her description she apologizes to the reader, explaining that "it would not be seemly for a woman to speak in such detail of these scholarly happenings, and I shall say no more" (363). These kinds of remarks appear intermittently throughout *Tale of*

Genji and are indicative not only of exterior attitudes about women's knowledge of Chinese poetry and use of Sino-Japanese words, but of women's internalization of these attitudes.

These examples, viewed in isolation, cannot sufficiently identify the cultural ideas that motivated this apprehension toward women's participation in Sinicized literature and language. Female-authored sources like *Tale of Genji* and Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book* reference other delinquent language behaviors that faced similar reproach, and may provide some supplementary insight into why certain gender-based language differences were proliferated.

In the 29th volume of *Tale of Genji*, a character named the Lady of Ōmi is introduced as the illegitimate child of a court official and a woman of low social standing. Her low-born status, however, is primarily given away by her language, which Murasaki describes as a "problem": shrill, inappropriately fast, and much too emphatic. Only in contrast to this "problem" do we ever get a clear example of "good" women's language, which can be seen in Murasaki's successive response to the Lady of Ōmi's speech:

"A quiet, colorless voice can give a certain distinction to otherwise ordinary remarks.

An impromptu poem, for example, if spoken musically, with an air at beginning and end as of something unsaid, can seem to convey worlds of meaning [...]"

(Murasaki 1008 [1976], 521)

Though the above quote implies that it is favorable for a woman's speech to be well-composed and layered with meaning, there is a fine line between acceptable, feminine eloquence and another kind of eloquence that Murasaki scorns for being "very well reasoned" earlier in the novel (36). Sei Shōnagon, one of Murasaki's literary contemporaries, mirrors this sentiment in her shock and embarrassment upon hearing how other Heian court ladies engaged in free debate with their male counterparts (1960). Sei places the additional, related constraint of brevity on proper women's language, situated nonchalantly within a list:

<i>mijikakute ari nubeki mono</i>	<i>Things That Should Be Short</i>
<i>tomi no mono yufu ito.</i>	Thread, when one wants to sew something in a hurry.
<i>gesu onna no kami.</i>	The hair of a woman of the lower classes.
<i>hito no onna no koe.</i>	The speech of a woman.
<i>tōdai.</i>	A lamp stand.

(1002 [1960])

Both Murasaki and Sei, despite representing two very different literary strategies, find ways to project gendered language ideologies. The behaviors they describe would have placed a (court) woman's linguistic practice decidedly within the categories of "good" (quiet, concise, ambiguous, and not too expressive) or "bad" (loud, verbose, reasoned, and

emotional). Assessing the extent to which these language attitudes reflected those of the general population requires that we acknowledge the connection between class and participation in the literary world. The extant records of this period come from a privileged literary class that had ties to courtly life—either as servants, attendants, concubines, aristocrats, or political officials—and cannot be considered representative of the majority of Japanese individuals at the time. However, as gendered language ideologies took root in the upper echelons of society, their crystallization within fundamental literary works, associated with icons of classical femininity, provided a platform upon which they could be constructed and diffused later in history.

III. Spontaneous Materiality: (Court) Women's language in Medieval Japan

The transition into the medieval Kamakura¹⁸ period from the Heian “golden age” beckoned significant changes for women in various sectors of society. Linked to the rise of feudalism that characterized this era, the metamorphosis of institutions like the household system (*ie-seido*), the matrilocality system, and the land ownership system held consequences for a sensitive gender hierarchy (Laffin 2013). Though Buddhist and Confucian doctrines had already been integrated into Japan's moral and philosophical

¹⁸ 1185 – 1333

fabric by the sixth century (Paramore 2016), both orthodoxies allowed some wiggle room for Heian women in arenas of political capacity (Liddle & Nakajima 2000), literary prestige,¹⁹ and sexual freedom.²⁰ In the Kamakura period following the Genpei War,²¹ however, the increasing tension between the imperial court and the *bakufu*²² left women in a precarious position, particularly because of compromise in their property and inheritance rights that allowed men in the warrior class to appropriate their wives' inheritances and consolidate land, which correlated with power (Tonomura 1999). As women in the aristocratic and military classes bore the disproportionate burden of this subjugation in comparison to their counterparts in town and rural areas, which were less regulated at the time (Liddle & Nakajima 2000), these women had to strategize to retain their positions in the court.

Two results of this new social dynamic are of particular interest to the present study. First, women in the court had to work with increased efficacy and handle a wide variety of situations. According to Laffin, this translated to an impressive communicative dexterity among ladies-in-waiting since they had to serve as intermediaries between

¹⁹ Exemplified in works like *Tale of Genji* and the *Pillow Book*

²⁰ Demonstrated in the anonymously-authored *Tale of Ochikibu*, for example

²¹ 1180 – 1185; resulted from a conflict for power between the Minamoto and Taira clans

²² Military government headed by the shogunate; literally “tent government”

parties from a variety of backgrounds (2013), which I argue was an important factor in the genesis of *nyōbō kotoba*. Second, the heightened competition *between* court women to ascend the court hierarchy and ensure patronage for a continued livelihood may have fueled the genre of instructional texts that this analysis will follow through the Edo period.

What we know about the court women themselves comes from an amalgamation of sources, including the records that court women kept describing the minutia of the court, their petitions and decrees (*nyōbō hōsho*), their personal diary-memoirs, their letters, and their “public” literary works (like poetry and prose). Although there are gaps in these sources, the documents allow us to infer a great deal about not only the lives of these women, but also their language, which had flourished by the Muromachi period.²³ The most extensive “housekeeping” record of the imperial palace, titled *Oyudono no ue no nikki*, differed from prior court women’s accounts—it is starkly de-stylized, written in a manner that could be described as more administrative than reflective, but is unique in that it reveals the emergent lexicon particular to this community of women. This language variety, which would only later be termed *nyōbō kotoba*, is characterized by a utilitarian set of words that refer to domestic items such as food, kitchen utensils, clothing, and

²³ 1336 – 1573

bodily functions—that is to say, the words of everyday life. However, despite the mundane quality of the vocabulary itself, the court women applied a variety of innovative linguistic processes to transform words from standard Japanese until virtually unrecognizable.

Table 1. Summary of transformative processes of nyōbo kotoba

Category of transformation	Standard Japanese	Nyōbo kotoba
First syllable + <i>moji</i>	<i>tako</i> ('octopus') <i>hazukashii koto</i> ('embarrassment') <i>kangyō</i> ('return of imperial family')	<i>tamoji</i> <i>hamoji</i> <i>kumoji</i>
Affixation of <i>o</i>	<i>miso</i> ('bean paste') <i>yu</i> ('hot water')	<i>omushi</i> <i>oyu</i>
Descriptive adjective + <i>mono</i>	<i>sōmen</i> ('rice noodle') <i>nira</i> ('chive')	<i>hosomono</i> (lit., 'thin thing') <i>kusamono</i> (lit., 'smelly thing')
Reduplication ²⁴	<i>yowashi</i> ('weak') <i>chikashi</i> ('high') <i>osoreru</i> ('to be wary')	<i>yowayowashi</i> <i>chikajika to</i> ('shortly') <i>osoruosoru</i> ('cautiously')
Truncation ²⁵	<i>manjū</i> ('bun') <i>miyage</i> ('gift')	<i>man</i> <i>(o)miya</i>
Invention of entirely new vocabulary / Repurposing existing vocabulary	<i>gekke</i> ('menses') <i>sake</i> ('wine') <i>byōki</i> ('illness')	<i>sashiai</i> , <i>fujōnomono</i> , <i>omake</i> <i>kukon</i> <i>kuwanraku</i> , <i>omōmō</i> , <i>owara tsurai</i>

Examining the variety of processes involved in *nyōbō kotoba* begs the question of why court women chose to invent new ways to reference the world around them. Ide,

²⁴ A process of word formation that creates meaning through repetition of all or part of a word

²⁵ A process that "clips" the end or beginning of a word or morpheme

among other scholars of the Japanese language, proposes the theory that court women used *nyōbō kotoba* as a secret language to protect sensitive information about the emperor and other nobility, as imperial power waned in response to the military government (2003). However, this theory seems unlikely given that the vast majority of the court women's "secret" lexicon was used to reference food, beverage, and clothing, which appear unrelated to the imperial family's sensitive political or financial information. Second, as Jugaku (1999) points out, *nyōbō kotoba* served as a point of pride associated with the class and authority of court women, and thus would not have served a defensive function. I argue that the purpose of *nyōbō kotoba* would have been twofold. First, based on the utilitarian quality²⁶ of the words that comprise the vernacular, *nyōbō kotoba* may have been a necessary occupational code, allowing court women to efficiently discuss aspects of their work in the "elegant" (i.e. indirect) manner required by their profession. Laffin mentions the increased need for court women to be communicatively versatile given the elevated stress and competition involved in the profession (2013), so it is entirely possible that *nyōbō kotoba* would have occupied part of a complex web of communicative strategies.

²⁶ Most of the duties described in the public diary records of court women (*Oyudono no ue no nikki*) relate to food, beverage, bathing, cleaning, and clothing, corresponding directly to the lexicon of *nyōbō kotoba*.

Secondly, the use of a sociolect²⁷ may also indicate a desire for solidarity and group identity within a tightly-knit community of women with similar lived experiences. As James Baldwin reminds us, “people evolve a language in order to describe and thus control their circumstances, or in order not to be submerged by a reality that they cannot articulate” (1979). In the court environment, women were stretched between two seemingly-contradictory poles of empowerment and subjugation, where they could hold some amount of political authority but were more largely confined and commanded for the sake of men’s political gain (Tonomura, 1999). For these women, language may have been a unifying force in reclaiming control.

How then, did this language variety, which was fundamentally rooted in the life and practices of one specific group of women, come to represent the idea of *all* women’s language? Court women’s language would have naturally disseminated, to some extent, through their marriage to men in the warrior class, their proximity to male courtiers, their multilateral communication with a variety of officials, and their occasional taking of the tonsure—choosing to abandon courtly pursuits and live in a Buddhist nunnery. However, this does not account for its eventual extension into the language awareness and language

²⁷ Denotes a dialect used by a specific socioeconomic class or community

use of many common people across classes by the late Muromachi and early Edo periods, to such a degree that terms from *nyōbō kotoba* surfaced in dictionaries compiled by the Portuguese Jesuits in Japan (Doi, et al. 2013). The answer lies in the conduct manual, which connected *nyōbō kotoba* to audiences outside the imperial court. The remainder of the chapter will examine this genre's medieval roots.

Although women's disciplinary handbooks had already been introduced to Japan through China before the Kamakura period (Nakamura 2014), the first conduct manual intended specifically for Japanese women did not crop up until the mid-thirteenth century, and did so in an unlikely format. In 1264, Abutsu-ni,²⁸ a successful poet, scholar, and court woman (later to become a nun), wrote a letter to her daughter, detailing the challenges of attending court as well as the skills and qualities necessary to ascend its hierarchy (Laffin, 2013). The letter itself is meticulous, presenting a lifetime's worth of practical advice on how to cultivate the facets of courtly behavior. In this manual, language is presented as both powerful and dangerous, something to be mastered. For example, Abutsu-ni warns her daughter of the dangers of gossip, guiding her to "say not a word" when other court women are whispering secrets, lest she make herself a victim

²⁸ Also known as Ankamon-in no Shijō, Ankamon-in Emon no Suke, or Nun of Hokurin

of scorn. This may seem like a simple abstention; however, scholars like Sakai (1997) and Laffin (2013) note that gossip was an important genre of speech for Japanese court women and certainly served as a bridge to success for some. In another section of the letter, Abutsu-ni attempts to steer her daughter away from the open expression of her opinions or emotions:

Regardless of the good or bad things that happen in your life, do not say that you are happy, or let it be known that you think something is good or bad. When it comes to matters of your mind, your life, and others, speak ambiguously, without revealing your emotions. Keep everything within your mind. It is bad to speak carelessly.

Abutsu-ni (1264)

Evidently, Heian period language ideals of ambiguous, conservative speech remained intact within the court environment. Similarly, the letter admonishes against Sinicized Japanese, warning that “women should not be too apt to use Chinese characters, although it might be troublesome not to know them, since they are used in titles of poems and songs.” Abutsu-ni’s advice echoes the Heian era rhetoric almost exactly, despite coming from very different circumstances. Yet, when we consider the literary repertoire required of medieval court women, the link is clear, since a successful lady-in-waiting

knew works like the *Tale of Genji* cover to cover (Laffin 2013). As a result, the letter enshrines past and present ideologies within the package of idealized classical femininity.

Abutsu-ni later penned an extended version of the instructional letter,²⁹ which her peers circulated among the court and prepared their own handwritten copies, further expanding its audience. A few centuries later, in the Muromachi period, the work was adapted into its popular form as *Tale of Two Nursemaids* (*menoto no sōshi*). This iteration differed significantly from earlier versions of the letter, delivering Abutsu-ni's knowledge in the form of satire and comedy (Reider 2012). Although the *Tale of Two Nursemaids* was a humorous text, its authors still managed to embed the prescriptions for women's language within the narrative:

A handsome mouth looks grotesque when [a woman is] laughing freely, displaying to all the hole of the throat, widening of the tongue, and dripping saliva from each side of the mouth. Conversely, any ugly mouth will look sweet if words are spoken in a small voice and the smile discreet...

Akiya 1992

²⁹ Titled *niwa no oshie*, or 'Household Teachings'

The text utilizes established rhetorical strategies, quarantining women from using Chinese forms and “rough speech,” but with the added dimension of a woman’s physical attractiveness acting as the direct result of her language.

Tale of Two Nursemaids quickly rose to popularity within the provinces until its information reached ubiquity among women in the wealthy warrior and merchant classes by the Edo period (Laffin 2013). However, with developments in printing technology, this conduct manual grew more accessible to commoners in all classes and remained in print until the 1930s (Reider 2012). As a result, the knowledge of court women—written in their words—became the knowledge of the towns and countrysides.

IV. Conclusion

Surveying the early history of Japanese ‘women’s language’ reveals that discourses depicting scrutinized versions of women’s speech have existed as long as Japan’s oldest extant texts. Because gendered language differentiation appears so early on (and in creation myths nonetheless), the idea that certain language behaviors were innate to feminine nature took root. In the Heian period, the work of women writers like Murasaki Shikibu mapped femininity onto a set of concrete practices, manifest in a soft-spoken ambiguity and the avoidance of Sino-Japanese words. It is evident that women not only

acknowledged attitudes about women's speech but internalized them, situating the behaviors connected to "good women's speech" within the femininity of what would become an idealized past. Following the Heian period, shifts in women's social standing resulted in changes in the professional demands placed on court women, which may have been a driving factor in the creation of *nyōbō kotoba*. Considering the strong nativist currents of the Edo period, it is not difficult to fathom how instructional texts authored by and for women in the imperial court became the standard of etiquette for all women. Court women were closely associated with the Japanese imperial lineage as they produced its heirs, so their work was easily co-opted in a rhetorical climate that drew from the imperial heritage to form Japanese national identity. In addition, court women's comportment manuals evoke the classical femininity of the Heian era, which held strong sentimental and patriotic undertones. Because this knowledge was encased in the occupational language of court women, *nyōbō kotoba* became inseparable from its associations with social status and virtuous femininity. We will explore how this knowledge came to eclipse norms of women's language through Edo period conduct manuals in the next chapter.

Chapter II: Norms

A woman's virtue comprises solitude and unhurried elegance. Speech is not one of her strengths. The more she speaks, the more she makes mistakes. [...] If a woman speaks few words, her inner self will be cultivated and enlightened.

— “Prudent Speech” from *The Four Books for Women*

As discussed in the previous chapter, the knowledge—the raw material—that was used to form a cohesive, normative ‘women’s language’ was derived from a variety of specific language behaviors spanning from the Nara period to the Muromachi period. Storytellers, court women, scholars, courtesans, poets, and authors provided the pieces that would eventually converge to build the Edo period idea of ‘women’s language.’ Each of these styles, vernaculars, and behaviors connected to some form of ideology in their original historical contexts. However, they existed discretely and could be linked to their progenitors (e.g. *nyōbō kotoba* was associated with court women—not all women—prior to the early modern period). While pre-modern language attitudes had undeniable roots

in ideas of female inferiority and classism, these ideologies were limited in reach given the stark divide in literacy between elites and the majority. Though the ideas themselves circulated and reflected a gendered hierarchy, ancient and medieval Japan saw neither the political initiatives nor the practical circumstances (efficient printing technology, widespread literacy) necessary to implement a cohesive construct of ‘women’s language.’ This chapter will examine how metalinguistic discourses about women’s language evolved in congruence with conduct manuals throughout the Edo period; how the development of urban centers affected the dissemination of those discourses; how the literacy-building purpose of early conduct manuals influenced the way their messages were received; the multiplicity of discursive strategies that conduct manuals employed; and the reasons why conduct manuals appropriated *nyōbō kotoba* in lieu of other variants of women’s language.

The unification of the country following the *sengoku* (‘Warring States’) period³⁰ brought major economic and social reorganization, along with a new state structure: a formal system of land-ruling (*kokuda*) by the shogun as head of state. Under Tokugawa rule, the Japanese social hierarchy was organized into four rigidly-defined classes—

³⁰ Mid-15th century - 1600

warrior (*shi*), farming peasant (*nō*), artisan (*kō*), and merchant (*shō*)—with very little formal allowance for upward mobility. In addition, the household (*ie*) became the primary social unit for all classes.³¹ This system both confined women and placed upon them some responsibility for the success of the household enterprise, which entailed a degree of freedom. With these clearly-defined roles came concrete obligations, which in many cases, required women to be literate.

In the warrior class, women faced greater levels of restriction than their peasant and commoner counterparts. For instance, any land that a warrior-class woman owned was appropriated to strengthen the patriarchal family into which she married. Additionally, women in the warrior class would be subject to harsh punishment for acting out of turn³² and needed documentation from the *bakufu* in order to travel outside of her hometown³³ (Nagano 1982). On the other hand, peasants and urban commoners were not burdened such with the gendered stigmatization that afflicted women in the warrior

³¹ Although historians like John Hall describe additional levels of “containers” – households (*ie*) of samurai or nobles, villages (*mura*) of peasants, city wards (*chō*) of townsmen, and sects (*shū*) of buddhist clergy (1974).

³² For example, warrior women who committed adultery was subject to death, which her own husband was obligated to execute (Liddle & Nakajima 2000).

³³ As a result of shogunal anxiety about uprisings, what is known as the *onna tegata* (‘women’s note’) system was implemented.

class—these women could engage in paid work, travel, and attend school with little scrutiny (Walthall 1991, Kuroda 1993).

The household system, which included not only family members but servants and employees related to the family enterprise, led to an overall rise in the level of economic security for the average peasant or commoner³⁴ (Shivley 1991). The country's expeditious economic growth saw the rise of three major cities: Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka. Leaps in industry, population size, and wealth in these cities spurred a need for literacy among residents, which in turn contributed to the expansion of the publishing industry, originating in the intellectually-diverse ecosystem of Kyoto.

Prior to the *Pax Tokugawa*, there existed neither the necessity nor the resources for a system of formal education even within the warrior class, but the myriad developments that occurred throughout the Edo period created a climate in which intellectual prowess replaced military strength in the warrior class and educational resources became readily available to a greater number of ordinary people. However, this broad educational reform served the military government's newfound need to "maintain discipline in an age when

³⁴ Though the household system was also the main organizing unit for the warrior class, samurai households were limited in terms of economic advancement due to their fixed stipends of rice, which did not increase in price at the same rate as other goods did.

feudal relationships were no longer cemented by personal loyalties formed on the battlefield” (Shivley 1991) and to fortify the idea that all subjects, regardless of class, had a moral obligation to fulfill his or her social role for the good of society. Within this ideological schema, women faced additional constraints above the all-purpose principles set out in men’s educational materials, and ‘women’s language’ became an integral component of this gendered moral behavior. Here, language is both the articulator of ideology and the very object in which ideology is embedded.³⁵ In this chapter, I argue that the ideologies vested in the discourses surrounding ‘women’s language’ gained normative strength through their naturalization in Edo period conduct manuals. In contrast with language ideals of eras past, only in the Edo period did the norms of ‘women’s language’ achieve the status of common sense, allowing the underlying hegemony to remain concealed.

I. Confucianism and Women’s Education

From the 17th to late 18th centuries, Neo-Confucian ideologies of female subordination and confinement within the family infiltrated the privileged classes as the Tokugawa family sought to solidify the social order and samurai increasingly pursued study of the

³⁵ A relationship first described in Norman Fairclough’s framework for critical discourse analysis (1989)

Chinese classics. Though it is widely assumed that the general status of women was dismal as a result of this doctrine, attitudes about women's education, literacy, and language varied widely (Tocco 2003). Throughout the Edo period, a number of Neo-Confucian philosophers composed works on the importance of educating women, focusing on the role of parents in performing this important duty. Historians frequently point to scholars such as Kaibara Ekken³⁶ and Matsudaira Sadanobu³⁷ to indicate the subjugated condition of all women at the time. However, both of these philosophers occupied more complicated positions than are immediately evident from examining their most-cited works.

Among these works, *The Great Learning for Women* (*Onna daigaku*) receives the most visibility (and perhaps the most vilification) from scholars today, but has been revealed as a misattribution; Kaibara is credited with writing the infamous text, but the actual author of *The Great Learning* remains unknown (Matsutarō 1977). In *Methods for Teaching Women* (*Joshi o oshieru hō*) Kaibara advocates specifically for the education of girls as different from the education of boys because “girls are always inside the home” and cannot learn from the world around them ([1710] 1911) and wrote many of his works in vernacular

³⁶ 1630 - 1714

³⁷ 1758 - 1829; a Counselor of the Tokugawa Shogunate

Japanese to ensure their accessibility to common people, women, and children, who would not have been familiar with Sino-Japanese prose style (*kanbun*) that characterized Neo-Confucian scholarship (Tocco 2003).

However, egalitarianism did not necessarily translate to equal teaching. Beyond the practical differentiation in male and female education based on the spaces each were allowed to occupy, women's instruction was separated from men's in other ways. According to Kaibara (and Neo-Confucian ideology in general), a properly cultivated woman must possess four essential qualities:³⁸ feminine virtue (*futoku*), feminine speech (*fugen*), feminine appearance (*fuyo*), and feminine skills (*fuko*). On 'feminine speech,' Kaibara writes:

Rough words, undignified speech, putting on airs, complaining about one's hatred of others, being proud of one's self, laughing slanderously at others, and acting superior to others are all hideously detestable. Do not speak untruths, choose your words, do not speak slanderously of others, speak when necessary, and do not speak otherwise.

Methods for Teaching Women (Joshi o oshieru hō) 1710; in *Yūhōdō bunko* 1911, 395

³⁸ Part of the 'Three obediences and four virtues', the three obediences being a girl's obedience to her parents while young, a wife's obedience to her husband while married, and a mother's obedience to her children in old age.

In this definition, ‘feminine speech’ is prescribed in the negative—unlike other instructional manuals, the text does not suggest using a certain vocabulary (such as *nyōbō kotoba*) or applying an air of elegance, but rather, reminds women to maintain a constant awareness of what they should *not* be: rough, undignified, slanderous, ungrateful, proud, or overly verbose. Later in the text, Kaibara explains the repercussions that would face women who failed to adhere to standards of ‘feminine speech’ as defined by Neo-Confucian philosophy:

The seven grounds for divorce state that if one’s wife speaks too much, she can be divorced. If a wife is a chatterbox and speaks in a vulgar manner, her parents, siblings, and relatives will quarrel with each other, and the family will be torn apart. As is written in the old texts, if women speak like men it will cause disorder in the family. Generally, family strife originates with women, and it is the words that come out of women’s mouths that cause the trouble.

Methods for Teaching Women (Joshi o oshieru hō) 1710; in *Yūhōdō bunko* 1911, 396

It is worth noting here that a woman’s delinquent language use manifests consequences on the familial unit rather than on her own person, perhaps to emphasize that without the hierarchical household structure, the Edo period woman was left without

a purpose to uphold. Kaibara's teachings reveal an interesting new dynamic that arose in the Edo period: with the increased political and military stability that accompanied the Tokugawa rise to power, as well as the reinforced social order attributed to the prominence of Neo-Confucian philosophy, women enjoyed new protections as subjects of the Tokugawa state (rather than as property) and as daughters and wives who occupied important roles in the household (*ie*) hierarchy, despite seeming confined by these roles (Stanley 2012). Kaibara's comments on women's literacy reflect this shift and contrast with Kamakura and Muromachi ideals of women's language, highlighting the importance of understanding Chinese characters in combination with the native *kana* syllabaries (Nakamura 2014). However, Kaibara presents a caveat—women should be literate and understand written Chinese, but only to fulfill their duty of learning Confucian texts like “the [women's] precepts and analects, and Kao Daija's *Jokai*” so they will be better able to grasp “the way of filial obedience and chastity.” ([1710] in *Yūhōdō bunko* 1911) Opposite of their male counterparts, girls were first instructed in Japanese *kana* and only then given instruction on Chinese once they had developed the ability to read simple texts (Endō 2006). We can infer that most women were encouraged to learn Chinese characters

primarily in order to absorb Confucian thought, rather than to engage in any productive scholarship of their own.

In the excerpt above, Kaibara warns readers that “[...] if women speak like men it will cause disorder in the family [...]” ([1710] 1911), asserting an additional binary—not only is “good women’s language” positioned against “bad women’s language,” it also acts as supplement to “men’s language.” This discursive strategy became increasingly common in women’s conduct manuals of the Edo period, perhaps out of proximity to Confucian teaching that was deemed “traditional.” However, these texts never define the “men’s language” they implored women to avoid. How, then, were female readers supposed to interpret and apply this instruction? If “men’s language” is not described in relation to any concrete vocabularies or behaviors, were women meant to assume that it was just another way to represent the antithesis of “good women’s language,” castigated earlier in the text as “rough words, undignified speech, putting on airs, complaining about one’s hatred of others, being proud of one’s self, [and] laughing slanderously at others”? ([1710] 1911) This is likely partially the case. However, when we consider the striking lack

of language instruction for men³⁹ in comparison to the abundant instruction given to women, a simpler definition arises: ‘women’s language’ is that which requires external control, while “men’s language” is the natural “subject,” allowed to evade such control.

Though this manual instructing women on *how to instruct other women* gives the women’s precepts and analects as examples of moral texts (and they were), an analysis of the printed versions of these guides suggests that moral instruction was not their sole—or even primary—purpose. The precepts and analects comprise two of the *Four Books for Women* (*Onna shisho*), which were adapted from Chinese Confucian texts spanning from the Han Dynasty⁴⁰ all the way to the late Ming Dynasty⁴¹ (Zhang 1987), and were among the earliest examples of instructional texts for women distributed in the Edo period. The published versions are presented in Sino-Japanese (*kanbun*) accompanied by the appropriate phonetic Japanese readings (*furigana*) for the included Chinese characters. Historians like Ishikawa Ken, Ishikawa Matsutarō, and Martha Tocco argue that these texts would have primarily served to teach women how to read, and that any moral instruction they gleaned would have been considered a subsidiary benefit (1960, 1973,

³⁹ In her study of Edo conduct manuals, Endō finds that the only language instruction for men was a primer on specific words used by the shogunate and the warrior class, presented more for edification than as a proper way of speaking (2006).

⁴⁰ 206 BCE - 220 AD

⁴¹ 1368-1644

2003). Other conduct manuals of the period may have also served as textbooks to bolster women's basic literacy and calligraphy skills, and would have thus been more educational in purpose than philosophical. Though historians have taken Neo-Confucian conduct books and their Edo period derivatives (which we will discuss in the following section) to indicate women's subjugation, that cannot be entirely the case given their basic goal of creating a more literate society. However, since they acted as general examples for women's written and vernacular Japanese, in addition to their instruction on proper feminine speech, the wide variety of Edo period conduct manuals had a profoundly dominating effect on the discourse surrounding women's language.

II. Women's Language and the Development of Popular Education

As Japanese publishers continued to propagate Neo-Confucian moral guides like the *Four Books for Women*, their interpretations strayed from the originals to better suit Japanese women, who inhabited very different social realities than the original Chinese audience. Crucially, newer renditions of conduct manuals were increasingly Japan-specific not only in language—most were written with Japanese *kana* phonetic guides rather than in *kanbun* prose—but in content and aesthetic form. The model that presented Chinese Han and Ming dynasties as morally ideal was replaced by romanticized (and imagined)

representations of Heian period court life, which began to obscure the original ethical content (Kornicki 2015). Japanese Neo-Confucian guides like *The Great Learning for Women* reflect this shift, focusing more on the household institution—and a woman’s obligations to contribute to its economic success—than on the traditionally-Confucian paternal hierarchy. With subsequent publications⁴² certain manuals received layers of additional information that were unrelated to the moral messages of the original work—practical instruction on how to fold one’s clothes or style one’s hair began to occupy space at the beginnings, ends, and upper margins of the main text (Sugano 2006). In congruence with the manuals as physical objects, discourses about integral values—including “feminine speech” (*fugen*)—evolved to suit the climate in which virtue was increasingly seen as a commodity.

In the *genroku* golden age,⁴³ an abundance of conduct manuals for women were published and widely circulated among urban commoners (*chōnin*), who grew more refined (and thus, discerning) in accordance with their wealth. Though numerous, the gendered instructional texts made possible by this “golden age” can be broadly classified

⁴² *The Great Learning for Women* alone was modified and re-published 54 times since its original publication in 1716

⁴³ Formally 1688-1704, although it may be more broadly defined as the period centered on Tokugawa Tsunayoshi’s rule from 1680-1709.

into four groups that were most salient: *Onna chōhōki*⁴⁴ ('Record of Accumulated Treasures for Women'), *Onna jitsugo kyō*⁴⁵ ('Practical Language Lessons for Women'), *Onna daigaku*⁴⁶ ('The Great Learning for Women'), and *Onna imagawa*⁴⁷ ('Imagawa Family's Manners for Women'). Each of these volumes differed from Medieval conduct manuals and original Confucian texts for women: they integrated a variety of illustrations on each spread and were composed in large block letters with phonetic readings that would have allowed women to copy their contents as a form of calligraphy practice.⁴⁸ However, these texts continued to rely on the Confucian notion of *fugen* to matter-of-factly position 'women's language' within proper feminine conduct. *Onna imagawa* keeps the original discourse most carefully intact, albeit in simpler language than the original

Four Books for Women:

There are four behaviors for women.... The second of which (*fugen*) is women's language.

Women should not talk too much, should be selective with their words, should not say

⁴⁴ First published 1692

⁴⁵ First published 1695

⁴⁶ First published 1716

⁴⁷ First published 1737

⁴⁸ And indeed, many of the extant copies of these texts are labeled with the names of the women who used them for this purpose (Kornicki 2015).

things that should not be said, should say only things that should be said, and should say nothing unnecessary [...]

Onna imagawa ('*Imagawa Family's Manners for Women*') 1737; in Ishikawa 1973, 199

Despite the irony that a text prescribing parsimony reiterates the same sentence in five different ways, *Onna imagawa* was highly regarded, with Hokusai's illustrations gracing its pages in early 19th-century editions. Many of these sources remained preoccupied with preventing women's dangerous speech by emphasizing the repercussions:

A woman has seven leaves, her seven bad deeds.... A woman who speaks too much will cause breaks between relatives and cause family problems, so she should leave⁴⁹. [...A woman] should stop herself from speaking. Do not speak badly of others. Do not tell lies. And when you hear someone gossiping, practice restraint; do not join in. Bad-mouthing others will bring trouble to the family.

Onna daigaku ('*The Great Learning for Women*') 1716; in Ishikawa 1973, 307-309

While others placed value not only the amount and content of a woman's speech, but the volume at which she speaks:

⁴⁹ Meaning that a woman's talkativeness is grounds for divorce.

A talkative woman is without elegance—like a flattering whore. Do not allow your words to be heard beyond the threshold. Be cautious, even when you think you are being quiet. When you do speak, speak quietly. Do not allow your lips to open.

Onna jitsugo kyō ('Practical Language Lessons for Women') 1695; in Ishikawa 1973, 251-252

Clearly, the distribution of these texts not only stemmed from men's anxieties about what literate women were reading, but capitalized on women's anxieties about their own conduct.

Another important development in conduct manuals during the Edo period was the positive component of their language instruction. Didactic texts in this era emphasized elegance (*hin*) not only as a function of a woman's verbal restraint (*tsutsushimi*), but of her mastery in applying feminine vocabulary, which was appropriated directly from Medieval court women's *nyōbō kotoba*. *Nyōbō kotoba* first appears under the generalized terms 'women's language' (*jochū kotoba*) and "(feminine) Japanese language" (*yamato kotoba*) in the 1689 *Fujin yashinaigusa* ('Book for Women's Education') (Nakamura 2014) and was quickly adopted as a component of major conduct manuals like *Onna chōhōki*, which instructs women to "add *o-* and *-moji* to every word to soften it." In addition to this rule, which could theoretically be applied to "every word" (though excessive and

contextually inappropriate), *Onna chōhōki* provides more concrete examples of words adapted from the speech of court women:

Say *osanai* instead of *kodomo* ('child'), *omutsukaru* instead of *naku* ('to cry'), *oshizumari* instead of *neru* ('to sleep'), and *o-gushi sumasu* instead of *kami arau* ('to wash one's hair').

Feminine Japanese Language (*yamato kotoba*) to describe types of cloth, foods,

vegetables, fish, and equipment: Say *uchimaki* instead of *kome* ('rice'), *mushi* instead of *miso* ('fermented soybean paste'), *kukon* instead of *sake* ('rice wine'), *man* instead of *manjū* ('steamed bun'), *kachin* instead of *mochi* ('cake made from pounded rice'), *ishi-ishi* instead of *dango* ('rice ball'), *o-kabe* instead of *tōfu* ('tofu'), *o-den* instead of *dengaku* ('miso-covered tofu'), and *kinako* instead of *mame-no-ko* ('soybean flour').

Onna chōhōki ('Record of Accumulated Treasures for Women') 1692; in Namura 1993, 27-39

Though *Onna chōhōki* was the most widely-consumed manual to prescribe *nyōbō kotoba* as a viable way to accentuate a speaker's feminine manners, it was not alone—according to Namura (1993), there were 18 (or more) different didactic texts, from conduct manuals to letter-writing guides, that listed anywhere from 30 to 300 different lexical entries borrowed from *nyōbō kotoba*. This phenomenon, which separated the occupational language of court women from its all-important context, carried a number of implications. The vocabulary of *nyōbō kotoba* within conduct manual discourse is restricted to include

only terms related to domestic life and child-rearing, suggesting that, even though women were encouraged to be literate and participate in self-cultivation, the utility of their knowledge was to be confined within household walls. It also reflects a dynamic in which male educators decided that women needed to be told how to speak, which positions women's natural, heterogeneous speech as the abject⁵⁰ to "standard" women's speech. In this schema, the role of this abject is to provide a stage to the "standard" subject. Women's actual speech defines the domain of normative 'women's language' and gives this category both meaning and legitimacy through its position—normative 'women's language' is defined both by what it is and what it is not. By adopting a narrow definition of the behaviors entailed by 'women's language' or "good women's language," there is no room for the huge variety of language behaviors representative of the way women in Japan actually spoke. Finally, the power-laden relationship between educator (the knowledge-holder) and student (the dependent recipient of knowledge) allowed the domination entailed by gendered norms to remain opaque. Conduct manual discourses transformed 'women's language' into a ubiquitous category, untouchable and separate

⁵⁰ Defined by Judith Butler as "those who are neither named nor prohibited in the economy of the law" (1993).

from women's actual linguistic practice, and its socio-political drivers were obscured from public sight.

Though these discourses and their corresponding ideologies were widely distributed, it is important to note that the evidence of their readership cannot provide a full picture of how they were consumed, how much of the material women internalized, and the factors that motivated women to interact with the texts. Women's conduct manuals do provide a valuable insight into how scholars, authors, and publishers perceived women's literacy and the philosophical lessons to which they should be exposed. However, when we consider the vast body of popular literature that would have been available to Edo-period women, it is impossible to assume that women were only (or even mostly) reading women's conduct manuals. Even within the realm of didactic texts, women could have also read works intended for men and absorbed moral lessons that were not so heavily gendered.

III. Conclusion

The present analysis of women's educational materials reveals the way in which norms of feminine speech were discursively constructed, specifically in conduct manuals. Despite the relative amount of freedom (and education) that Edo-period women enjoyed in

comparison to their medieval counterparts, there existed a tension between these freedoms and the norms to which women were pressured to adhere. The conduct manuals examined in this chapter utilized a variety of rhetorical strategies to build a cohesive idea of ‘women’s language,’ defined in terms of how “virtuous” women should use language, how they *should not* use language, how much to say, when to remain silent, which specific vocabularies to use, and which to avoid. These prescriptions were fortified by explanations of the social consequences—from generalized shame to divorce to tearing one’s family apart entirely—that would result if a woman should choose to act outside of these norms. In addition, the appropriation of *nyōbō kotoba* suggests how ideas of proper feminine speech were intertwined with socioeconomic factors, acted to associate norms with more concrete language behavior, and placed primacy on women’s domestic roles, in line with the Neo-Confucian conception of the household’s centrality. In the next chapter, we will examine the inevitable complement to the norms of feminine speech. Beneath the rigid and institutional lay the nebulous and undefined—women breaking rules, women defining their own values, and women’s words from women’s mouths.

Chapter III. Values

[Japan] is the beautiful and magnificent august country superior to all other countries, so people's hearts and actions, as well as the words they speak, are straightforward and elegant.

— Motoori Norinaga, 1763

She used the words of the palace: “*shōmei*” for oil lamp and “*o-hoso*” for sardine... Every one of her mannerisms were elegant and she called *miso* paste “*sasajin*.” Even the children of the house began to imitate her speech and their own language improved. Her husband felt ashamed of his speech, spending his days without saying much.

— *Seken musume katagi*, 1716

Undeniably, the norms of feminine speech prescribed in conduct manuals did not exist in isolation. Though conduct manual discourses strategically positioned the entity of ‘women’s language’ as common sense, the speech behaviors that characterized this definition of ‘women’s language’ existed in a matrix of intersecting, and—at times—contradictory values. The category ‘women’s language’ established both meaning and

power through careful association not only with femininity, but with morality, virtue, and traditions that were considered uniquely Japanese. This chapter will investigate how commoners (male and female) located *nyōbō kotoba* within their own value systems; how women's writing both diverged from and intermingled with women's spoken language; how women interpreted conduct manuals and their lessons on language; how they actually spoke and wrote, in spite of the prevalence of normative 'women's language'; and finally, what women who broke the rules of feminine speech can tell us about why other women chose to adhere to them.

As Neo-Confucian and *kokugaku* nativist schools of thought grappled with notions of moral behavior that pertained to the overarching social order and the burgeoning Japanese national identity, both had stake in the way that women spoke and wrote. As noted in the previous chapter, the Neo-Confucian scholarly tradition emphasized study of Confucian classics as a central tenet of education for both men and women. Consequently, women needed to expand their working vocabularies of Chinese forms, which would have affected such women's linguistic practices. Once able to comprehend the contents of Neo-Confucian texts, women could cultivate their behavior according to lessons that placed norms of feminine speech within a moral schema. For *kokugaku*

scholars, women's knowledge and use of Chinese or Sino-Japanese forms was a great source of dismay, as *kokugaku* rhetoric was centered in the notion of native Japanese "purity" and its most tangible manifestations were in the Japanese language. In this line of thinking, models for "good" women's language could be found in antiquity—the Nara and Heian period language ideals described in the first chapter of this work. Those concerned with preserving the character of an innate Japanese "essence" also turned to *nyōbō kotoba* as a source for a women's language that reflected the national identity and traditional past.

Yet, between these two poles, we can uncover the vast, heterogeneous, and sometimes mystifying tapestry of values and practices associated with women's speech. Like most Edo-period social constructs, 'women's language' was prescribed and performed across two separate planes—*omote* ('surface') and *uchi* ('inside'). In *Performing the Great Peace*, Luke Roberts describes the relationship between these two realms in relation to Tokugawa politics, noting the discrepancy between the "ritual framework" of authority (what was officially recorded) and the behaviors that were actually tolerated (but kept covert) (2012). This liminal space is occupied by women who excelled at Chinese beyond the level deemed appropriately feminine, female *kokugaku* pupils who lamented

that knowledge of *kanji* was withheld from them, men speaking *nyōbō kotoba*, women writing political manifestos—in short, the real practices and attitudes that were allowed to dwell beneath the surface of the singular, idealized ‘women’s language.’

I. Peering into Palace Windows: Popular Representations of *Nyōbō Kotoba*

Following the initial dissemination of court women’s speech through the “letters” of Abutsu-ni and the interactions between courtiers and those outside the court, society struggled to place *nyōbō kotoba* within a defined norm. As the vernacular spread to ordinary people, it acquired monikers like *gosho kotoba* (‘palace speech’), *yashiki kotoba* (‘mansion speech’), *jochū kotoba* (‘women’s speech’), *moji kotoba* (‘*moji* speech’), *asobase kotoba* (‘idle speech’) and *yamato kotoba* (‘Japanese speech’) (Endō 2006)—that is to say, it was referred to as anything other than *nyōbō kotoba*, which would have traced it to its specific origin. Although two referents, *jochū kotoba* (‘women’s speech’) and *yamato kotoba* (‘Japanese speech’), link the use of *nyōbō kotoba* to femininity, the majority of these terms refer to social class (e.g. ‘palace speech’ or ‘mansion speech’) and some are purely descriptive (e.g. ‘*moji* speech’). Most importantly, these new, more general terms now presented court women’s speech as something that could potentially belong to anyone.

However, in the early stages of its expansion into public use, *nyōbō kotoba* maintained status as a variety associated with those occupying the upper echelons of society. This attitude is evident in the work of novelists and authors of the time, who utilize *nyōbō kotoba* in order to emphasize difference and distance in status. For example, Shikitei Sanba's comic novel, *Ukiyōburo* ('Baths of the Floating World') (1809-1812) depicts a scene in which three young female friends are having a conversation in the bath. Two of these characters, O-hatsu and O-same, have served in samurai mansions and are well-acquainted with the use of *nyōbō kotoba*. The third character, O-musu is a self-described "tomboy" who consistently makes blunders in her attempts to use the vernacular, conflating "*o-sha-moji*" ('rice scoop' in *nyōbō kotoba*) with "*o-sha-beri*" ('chatty'). O-hatsu corrects her, adding "if you go and work in a mansion, everything is spoken in *yamato kotoba* ('Japanese speech', i.e. *nyōbō kotoba*), and you, too, will be elegant..." (Shikitei 1913 [1802-1812], 226). Later in the novel, two servants, O-maru and O-kabe, lament their obligatory use of *nyōbō kotoba* when working in a *samurai* mansion:

O-maru: What a foolish custom! In the mansion, they say this and that while making up ridiculous words like *o-gushi* ('hair'). The words of *asobase kotoba* ('idle speech') are useless. Say it simply, "hair." I hate those words. Because I have no choice as a servant,

I say *o-maesama* ('you'), *o-jibutsu-sama* ('Buddha'), *sayō* ('yes'), and *shikaraba* ('then'). But in a poor family, they are unnecessary. [...]

O-kabe: It's more than I can handle. When I serve in mansion, I have to say *anata* ('you'), *dō asobase* ('do this'), and *kō asobase* ('do that'). I really do hate it.

Shikitei 1802-1812, in Shirane 2002

Though the vocabulary of *nyōbō kotoba* was a crucial element of the standard Edo period definition of 'women's language,' women are shown rejecting this notion as late as the 19th century. The servant women's situational use of *nyōbō kotoba* reveals that the language variety marks a shift in both register (formal vs. informal) and physical space (the mansion vs. the town), and these women bridged the distance between the binary. Though the subjects of the stories are women, they are acutely aware that 'women's language' does not belong to them by virtue of womanhood alone. In addition, these excerpts are valuable not only in that they allow a glimpse into how *nyōbō kotoba* was perceived (and even detested) by some women lower in the social hierarchy, but they depict the possible linguistic diversity of townswomen, as Shikitei took great care to denote the different regional dialects in the novels (1802-1812).

It is worth noting, however, that despite the humorous nature of works like *Ukiyōburo*, they may have also served didactic purposes. Shikitei asserts that texts like

Onna daigaku were like “bitter medicine” to women, who instead preferred to engage with novels and short stories (Shirane 2002). He explains further in the opening commentary of *Ukiyōburo*:

As the saying goes, if watching others is a remedy for mending your own ways, then this book will no doubt provide a shortcut to true moral learning. Even young people who ignore criticism are willing to consider teachings if they’re humorously presented, and they remember them naturally.

Shikitei 1802-1812, in Shirane 2002

Shikitei’s representation of women refusing to speak *nyōbō kotoba* is thus complicated by the possibility that the scene was intended to serve as a negative example. However, even if Shikitei places *nyōbō kotoba* within a value system, his choice to convey women’s dissenting opinions in the dialogue can be considered strong evidence that such opinions existed and were shared rather than concealed.

Further evidence that *nyōbō kotoba* in practice was associated with high social class rather than femininity can be found in men’s use of this vocabulary. Powerful figures like Toyotomi Hideyoshi borrowed from *nyōbō kotoba* in personal letters (Nakamura 2014), while novels and plays often included men’s dialogue peppered with the vernacular, as in

the following excerpt from the short *kyōgen* play *ohiyashi* (‘water’ [lit. ‘cool thing’] in *nyōbō kotoba*):

Master: Go over there and bring (*musube* [lit. ‘wrap’]) me some water (*ohiyashi*).

Servant: What is it that you mean to say?

Master: I just said that you must go and bring (*musube*) me some water (*ohiyashi*) from that waterfall over there.

Servant: Oh, you mean you want me to to bring some water from that waterfall?

Master: Yes indeed.

Servant: If you want water, then plainly say: “bring some water.” To say “bring (*musube*) some water (*ohiyashi*)”... (laugh)

Master: That’s because you don’t know anything. The elegant ladies-in-waiting say “bring (*musube*) some water (*ohiyashi*).” They would never say something like “bring some water.” You should learn to say it that way from now on.

Servant: It may be that all the elegant ladies and young gentlemen say “bring (*musube*) some water (*ohiyashi*)”... But to hear it from your big mouth... (laugh)

Kenny 1986

As this excerpt shows, the view of *nyōbō kotoba* as a language variety for those of high socioeconomic status is naturally accompanied by connotations of elegance for both “ladies and young gentlemen.” Despite the master’s assumed wealth—

which should make him a viable speaker of *nyōbō kotoba*—he does not possess the refinement necessary to use its vocabulary.

A survey of men's interpretations of *nyōbō kotoba* in various forms of literature reveals that the conflation of *nyōbō kotoba* with a generalized sense of elegance and perhaps regional variation remained prevalent throughout the Edo period. Saikaku Ihara's *Life of a Sensuous Woman* (1686) contains a wealth of generalizations about women (and their language habits), particularly in a story depicting a *daimyō*'s search for the woman who will produce a male heir for the household. His councillors reflect on possible sources for a proper woman, dismissing those in the eastern provinces due to their "honest and straightforward" way of conducting themselves. The conversation shifts to noblewomen in Kyoto:

I've never heard of any women more attractive than those in Kyoto. For one thing, Kyoto women have a beautiful way of speaking. It's not something they study. They pick it up naturally living in the capital where women have talked that way for centuries.

Saikaku 1686, in Shirane 2002

In this passage, it is notable that language is the only distinct feature the narrator chooses in order to convey the beauty of women in the imperial capital. The dialogue of

these Kyoto women later in the text confirms that the centuries-old speech style that Saikaku describes is in fact a derivative of *nyōbō kotoba*. This is the closest any work of popular literature used in this study comes to tracing *nyōbō kotoba* to its origins. However, the councillors identifying this speech style are higher in the social hierarchy than characters in previous novels (servant women and merchant-class men) and likely more familiar with the actual source and history of *nyōbō kotoba*, where those lower in status groups (and detached from the government's inner workings) mapped *nyōbō kotoba* onto general notions of elegance and wealth. To commoners, it was the variety of "those above," not necessarily limited to women.

Following its transformation into a widespread social phenomenon, popular interpretations of court women's language reveal the social axes that determined the general public's use of and attitudes toward the language variety. Although women received explicit instruction on the vocabulary of *nyōbō kotoba*, both men and women are shown attempting to utilize these words with varying levels of success. Though the merchant in *Ohiyashi* is of considerable wealth, there is a distance between his knowledge and that of members of the warrior class (especially those in high-ranking households). Regardless of gender, commoners in these fictional works associate *nyōbō kotoba* either

with the spatial domains of higher classes ('mansion speech') or with broader notions of elegance. While didactic texts meant to lead women to believe that they could don an air of refinement by using the language of the upper class, women's outright rejection of 'mansion speech' suggests that they did not attribute the same values to this speech style as were presented to them in moral guidebooks.

II. The Spoken Text: Realms of Women's Literacy

While the goal of this chapter is to gain insight on Edo women's actual language practices and the language attitudes of the general public, which diverged from the discourses presented in conduct manuals, it is crucial to note the discrepancy between real, spoken dialogue and the texts used in this analysis. Consequently, it is impossible to make holistic or concrete judgements on how women spoke based on their written interfaces. From a sociolinguistic perspective, spoken language is primary to written language and represents a significantly different stratum of linguistic performance, comparatively. However, we must acknowledge the existence (and importance) of the exchange between spoken and written modalities, as well as the great deal that women's writing can tell us about the discursive realms that women were able to occupy. An excerpt from the work of merchant and amateur Neo-Confucian scholar Nakamura Tekisai reveals quite nicely

the conceived close relationship between a woman's written language, spoken language, and the moral value of her conduct.

Women must determine the most important points of feminine conduct and be sure to learn them well. Even if a woman does not hone any skills aside from cooking and appropriate conduct, it is acceptable. An outstanding knowledge of poems and books is unnecessary. However, since *kana* allows her to express the heart of her words and her habits, it is important for a woman to learn reading and writing (*yomikaki*) to some degree and keep these skills in her heart. A woman who is unaccustomed to reading *kana* will always have awkward speech, with many accents and errors that make her language painful to listen to [...] We know writing as the "heart stroke" because letters reveal the state of one's heart. Therefore, when a woman has an upright heart, the shape of her letters will naturally be beautiful.

Nakamura (1661) in Nakae and Yamazumi (1976), 196

Although written and spoken language required separate competencies, the two realms were considered to be linked—a woman's ability to read and write would be reflected in her verbal interactions with others, and her speech style would doubtless influence her writings. In addition, the mere *form* of both her speech and her writing was seen as a direct measure of the literate woman's virtue. Nakamura's text places the shape of a woman's handwriting—not the content of her writing—as a window into her morality.

This opinion is hardly surprising when we consider that much of women's written production in the Edo period either served an aesthetic purpose (calligraphy) or took the form of aestheticized *waka* poetry, although I will discuss notable exceptions in the subsequent section of this chapter.

Nakamura also refers to women's writing as *kana*, and later distinguishes explicitly between *mana* as "men's characters" (*otokomoji*) and *kana* as "women's characters" (*onnamoji*), reflecting the 17th century climate of women's writing. However, the latter half of the Edo period saw an important shift in women's literacy. Where proficiency in *kana* was expected of the increasing number of literate women, beginning in the early-to-mid 18th century, *kanji* literacy became a requirement. Historians attribute this transition not only to the growing number of educational opportunities for women and the overall rise in female literacy rates, but also to the types of books that women were expected to consume, namely those containing a wider array of Confucian concepts (Doi 2011). However, within this generalization lies a spectrum of variation that depended on the responsibilities, educational style, geographic location, and social standing of individual women. Like speech style, writing style was stratified based on class, with noblewomen

writing in a highly stylized *kakichirashi* style, while literate female commoners wrote in a more direct, practical manner suited to their roles and obligations within the household.

As Kornicki mentions in his survey of women's education in the Early Modern period, women's writing was distributed within very different genre boundaries than men's writing was—the majority of women wrote *waka* or *haikai* poetry, while only 3.6% of catalogued women writers published prose (ranging from memoirs to scholarly texts to *monogatari*) or Chinese poetry (2010). *Waka* and *haikai* poetry were considered appropriate genres for both women and men, and because of their standardized formats do not provide much insight into women's speech. Therefore, we will look to the small minority of texts that present the variety of women's distinctive voices.

III. The Quieter Voices: Women's Subversive Discourse and Dialogue

The small fraction of Edo-period women who gained notoriety for writing prose implies not only that relatively few women composed works in those genres, but also that these women did not expect their prose to be published (Kornicki, 2010)—and indeed, the texts considered in this section were all (originally) unpublished. Though the pool of women's extant prose writing is limited, what these works reveal is of considerable significance to our conception of women's heterogenous linguistic and literary practices.

Among these prose authors, Tadano Makuzu stands out for her prolific scholarly pursuits, as well as the sheer amount that is known about her life. Her father was a physician who served a high-ranking samurai family, which translated to a range of educational opportunities for Makuzu. However, she was barred from learning Chinese due to her father's belief that it was detrimental for women to be *too* learned, and her moral education was carried out by the daughter of a *kokugaku* scholar, Kada no Tamiko (Gramlich-Oka 2001). Her lack of exposure to Chinese rhetoric manifests in her writing, which incorporates a variety of colloquialisms and a rambling style that is evocative of everyday language (Kado 1998). *Hitori kangae* ('*Solitary Thoughts*') exemplifies Makuzu's highly individualistic writing style and nods to some of her unorthodox beliefs.

Following a series of personal tragedies, including succession disputes, financial hardship, and the death of her younger brother, Makuzu produced *Hitori kangae* (at the age of 55) out of frustrations about her gender and its role in determining her ill-fate. On the surface, Makuzu's attitudes about women's language appear to rehash orthodox discourses, such as those circulated in conduct manuals. In the beginning of her musings in *Hitori kangae* she presents the view that "[...] a woman should keep everything in her heart, say little, and be modest." (1818 Trans. Goodwin, et al. 2001) While this may seem

to represent Makuzu's internalization of the norms of women's language, we must acknowledge that the very nature of *Hitori kangae* contradicts this interpretation. Makuzu's commentary falls within an inaccessible (unfeminine) genre that very few—if any—other women at the time were able to infiltrate, and this format lends itself to her free, verbose expression of opinion. In addition, the primary purpose of the statement on women's speech was likely intended as a preface for Makuzu's criticism of how male playwrights depicted women's language. Makuzu found male-authored women's dialogue unrealistic, taking issue with the pattern that “whether these [theatrical] characters are princesses or daughters raised with the utmost care, they inevitably go beyond the norms for women [...]” (1818 Trans. Goodwin, et al. 2001) When taken along with Chikamatsu Monzaemon's⁵¹ own acknowledgement of this phenomenon, Makuzu's interpretation appears to be justified:

The words of *jōruri* [puppet theatre] depict reality as it is, but being a form of art it also contains elements that are not found in real life. Specifically, female characters often say things a real woman would not say, but such instances are examples of art. Since they speak openly of things that a real woman would not talk about, the character's true feelings are revealed. Thus, when a playwright models a female

⁵¹ 1653-1725, a dramatist in *jōruri* puppet theatre and *kabuki*

character on the feelings of a real woman and conceals such things, her deepest thoughts will not be revealed, and contrary to his hopes, the play will not be entertaining. It follows that when one watches a play without paying attention to the artistry, one will probably criticize it on the grounds that the female characters say many discomfiting things that are inappropriate for a woman to say. However, such instances should be regarded as art.

Chikamatsu [1738]⁵² in Shirane 2002, 349

Evidently, common people understood that there were ways that women were supposed to speak, ways that women actually spoke, and ways of reimagining women's speech that were possible within an audience's suspension of disbelief. Though she takes a conservative stance on how women's language should be performed, Makuzu names not only the components of "good" women's language (brevity, ambiguity, and modesty) but explicitly acknowledges the "norms for women." Just as she is able to address the object of language from the outside, Makuzu appears to be aware of the discursive function of conduct manuals, dissenting that "traditional teachings for women are wrong in trying to suppress young women's preference for the up-to-date." (1818 Trans. Goodwin, et al.

⁵² A collection of Chikamatsu's thoughts verbatim, published by Hozumi Ikan a few years after Chikamatsu's death.

2001) This sentiment is likely linked to her own resentment about gendered limitations to her education, as she expresses that she “deeply regretted” her forced isolation from the worlds of Chinese literacy and language.

Although the course of her early life was heavily determined by the men around her, particularly her father, Makuzu was able to find her own voice in works like *Hitori kangae*, and was not afraid to vocalize her opinions on matters as controversial (and conventionally unfeminine) as gambling, domestic politics, and foreign economics. Yet, it was only after she accepted her restrictions in upward mobility and her inability to perform femininity in the traditional filial sense that she was able to write freely in this manner. This acceptance is reflected in *Hitori kangae*—Makuzu ultimately creates discourses that distance her from normative society, instead resolving herself as an outsider.

The prose of Arakida Rei serves as a similarly pertinent example of the variation in women’s written voices. Though she produced a formidable literary corpus, this analysis will examine Arakida’s best-known work, *Ayashi no Yogatari* (*Strange Tales of the Town*). In this piece, Arakida utilizes a distinctive style that draws from a span of literary traditions—*Ayashi no Yogatari* most closely adheres to a pseudo-classical style

reminiscent of *Genji*, embedded with poetry, but also incorporates elements from a wide variety of Chinese genres (Sakaki 2010). Gendered genre divides also reflected the long-standing social belief that women's domain was interior and men's domain was exterior, so women's writing should reveal the internal state. When we consider this expectation, Arakida's language is striking precisely because of its refusal to refer to the self at all, instead shifting focus to the strange and sublime exterior. This voice, as Sakaki argues, cast Arakida as a distant, linguistically-gender-neutral figure. However, this ambiguity may have cost her the literary reputation she deserved—even Yosano Akiko, a known proponent of Arakida's writing, criticized the work for being too exterior (Sakaki 2010). The cultural masculinity that stemmed from her dexterity in the Chinese language and her ambiguous relationship to gender in her written expression ultimately resulted in her alienation from the community of other women writers. Like Tadano Makuzu, Arakida Rei found herself outside of the roles and voices available to women.

Examining women's prose in the Edo period also reveals a number of the nonstandard variants of Japanese that women used outside of major cities. Though this portion of the analysis has focused on women's literary voices, the majority of literate women in the country received education in order to play a productive role in family

enterprise rather than to engage in scholarship. The archives of a weaving family in Kiryū⁵³ provide a wealth of information about the life, education, and language of the family's only daughter, Nishitani Saku. Because she held responsibility in managing the family business from an early age and she carried out a written correspondence with her father, who lived briefly in Kyoto, the gradual development of Saku's written language is preserved in significant detail. Like most girls who were taught to read and write, Saku's early literacy training was conducted through a *terakoya* school, using several of the women's comportment manuals mentioned in the previous chapter. However, her written language does not reflect the idealized 'women's language' that the manuals sought to teach. In her record-keeping, Saku maintained a gender-neutral style (which could be referred to as a masculine style, given that men's "standard" language was the register used in official records) and her letters to her father are filled with colloquialisms and markers of regional dialect (Yabuta 2010), which was typically a characteristic of spoken language rather than written. For rural women and girls who engaged in writing for practical purposes, this example suggests that they were not concerned with the myriad conventions of standard 'women's language,' nor were they expected to be.

⁵³ A silk-producing region in Gunma prefecture

Finally, women's travel diaries present an interesting corpus for understanding women's language, as these texts were often personal yet intertextual, playful yet practical. These diaries typically integrated various forms of poetry within a memoir (*nikki*) matrix, a style well-suited to spontaneity of life on the road. Though women's use of poetry in travel diaries has been dismissed as formulaic by many historians, Anne Walthall presents an intriguing counterpoint on the strategic linguistic use of poetry interspersed with prose, hypothesizing that "poetry makes a performative break with everyday speech. In doing so, it makes room for voices otherwise marginalized" (1999, 221). For women who felt pressure to perform 'women's language,' poetry may have served as a more lenient expression and extension of the self. In addition, the use of certain forms of poetry acted as a nod to the language of Heian period women writers, who would have represented female agency to Edo-period diarists (Nenzi 2008). Nenzi also brings attention to women's subversive use of language in travel diaries, naming Hara Saihin as a notable example. In her diaries, Saihin utilized not only a broad range of *kanji*, but wrote entire sections in *kanbun*,⁵⁴ which was typically reserved for men. As was often the fate of women who devoted themselves to scholarly pursuits, Saihin never married and was seen as somewhat

⁵⁴ Compositions using only Chinese characters

of a tomboy by her friends and acquaintances (2008). Yet, Saihin was untroubled, writing that she “intended to go [her] own way as a person, rather than as a woman.” (Maeda 1977, 226) Evidently, even women who appeared unconcerned with following gendered standards of written language still interacted with such norms and had to make the conscious choice to explore the margins.

When faced with the depth and variety of Edo-period women’s language preserved in text, it becomes necessary to consider the ways in which women’s language was actually confined—if some women were free to break rules, what weight did the prescribed ‘women’s language’ hold? Why didn’t all women choose unconfined speech? In examining the lives of the women who defied such norms, it is clear that the social repercussions described in conduct manuals had been discursively spoken into existence. Although figures like Akirada Rei and Hara Saihin achieved certain degrees of intellectual and artistic success, in remaining unmarried and thus unfilial, they failed their duties as women in the eyes of society. In Yonemoto’s words, speech served as the primary “aural index” of a woman’s self-cultivation (2016), and popular discourses reveal that there were real consequences resulting from the way a woman conducted herself in speech. From the commentary in “Books of the Floating World” to the distribution of

conduct manuals to young brides, there is significant evidence that a woman's language affected her basic marriageability, and further, the quality of her prospects. Women's language and writing abilities influenced their employment opportunities,⁵⁵ directly or indirectly, and thus determined their capacity for upward mobility in Edo society (Liddle & Nakajima 2000). Precisely because there was value attached to the way they spoke, 'women's language' remained women's burden.

IV. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to locate 'women's language' within a complex and often confounding network of values. As was typical of the Edo period, the reality of people's practice was separate from the norms constructed in official documents. In the shadow of the outward-facing *omote* realm, we find commoners discussing the value-laden *nyōbō kotoba*, using it in irreverent ways that contradict its categorization as 'feminine language,' and altogether shirking the pressure to include it in their linguistic repertoires. Transitioning into the semblance of women's own discourses and dialogues, this chapter engaged with the connection between women's written language and their spoken

⁵⁵ For example, novels like Saikaku's *Books of the Floating World* contain dialogue in which women's language acts as a factor in her employment: "Her appearance is good, and she knows how to act and speak. Everything about her is in order. I'm sure my employer will like her." (in Shirane 2002)

language, concluding that while writing cannot provide a complete and precise picture of how women actually spoke, the diversity of styles found in women's extant prose writing allows the researcher to make some inferences about women's linguistic practices. Further examination into these prose works reveals women using language in ways that diverged significantly from the 'women's language' prescribed in conduct manuals. Through unconventional use of genre, style, regional dialect, colloquialism, writing system (e.g. "native" *kana* vs. Sino-Japanese *kanbun*), and even strategic blows against women's oppression in the educational sphere, women prioritized their own values and were able to navigate their own relationships with gender. However, the fact that most of these women would have been considered "failures" in a filial sense suggests that, for many women (especially those of high social class), the ideological implications of using non-conventional speech may have outweighed the benefits, keeping them chained to the normative constraints of 'women's language.'

Epilogue + Conclusion

She was outgoing by nature and raised to believe that pretty words were a useful tool; she tended to speak openly and freely. She did not believe, even now that she was married, that there was anything wrong with speaking her mind if she had nothing to hide.

—Kitada Usurai, 1897

On October 12, 1883, just 15 years after the end of the Edo period, Kishida Toshiko⁵⁶ was arrested for “political speech” without a permit. The speech that caused this stir was none other than *Hakoiri musume*, or ‘Daughters in Boxes,’ a title based on a saying that was popular in the *Kansai*⁵⁷ region at the time. Though she was tried and jailed based on a metaphorical interpretation of *Hakoiri musume*—a reading in which Japanese citizens were daughters, certain laws were boxes, and the Japanese government was the controlling parental figure—her speech and her occupation as a female public speaker

⁵⁶ 1863-1901

⁵⁷ The central southern region of Japan’s main island

reveal a great deal about the transitioning fate of ‘women’s language’ and women’s education that accompanied Meiji period developments. Kishida references the use of conduct manuals like *Onna daigaku* and *Onna shōgaku* as a type of box that constrained young women, although she adds that this type of box is “more cultivated” than other ways that parents chose to confine their daughters. In addition, she draws attention to the insufficiency of texts like the *Four Confucian Books* (*Onna shisho*) in providing a comprehensive education to girls. Within such boxes, Kishida explains that “[women] may have hands and feet and a voice—but all to no avail, because their freedom is restricted. Unable to move, their hands and feet are useless. Unable to speak, their voice has no purpose.” (1883, in Copeland 2006, 63) Evidently, even after the Edo period, the legacy of *Onna daigaku* and other Neo-Confucian didactic texts continued, and these books remained a ubiquitous component of women’s education. However, in referencing conduct manuals and their relationship to silenced women, Kishida demonstrates that there existed an awareness of how these texts operated to subordinate women and their free expression.

The success of Kishida and other women as public speakers points to another interesting shift in dynamic from the Edo to the Meiji period. Although Kishida used

language in a way that would have likely held severe social consequences according to Edo period norms, her speeches were generally well-attended (*Hakoiri musume* saw roughly 500 people in attendance) and Meiji period media outlets had difficulty placing her language in either tidy category of “good” or “bad,” in contrast to earlier metalinguistic discourses. Some newspapers cast her speech as graceful and honest, “[embodying] emotions coming from the heart” (*Jiyū shinbun* 1883), indicating that her language was within the realm of acceptability for the time. Sources that criticized her language primarily took issue with her use of Chinese vocabulary and her “elevated diction” (*Kumamoto shinbun* 1882), as well as her “habit of throwing out her words and moving about [in a manner] not suitable for a woman” (Kurita 1882, in Sugano 2010). However, the reason these media discourses contested Kishida’s use of scholarly Chinese terminology was not because it was improper for women to do so (as it was in the Edo period and prior), but rather because it might have obscured her audiences from fully understanding her message (Sugano 2010). It becomes clear that Meiji women’s speech, while not as confined as it was in the past, remained the object of commentary and occupied a rather precarious position in society’s view.

Comparing Kishida's political and academic discourses to those of Edo women like Tadano Makuzu suggests a shift in the relationship between women's speech and the Japanese state. While Kishida faced frequent brushes with the police for even referencing the government allegorically in her public addresses, Tadano Makuzu wrote explicitly about Japan's political shortcomings and foreign affairs without receiving much backlash, let alone from institutional authorities. This is likely due, in part, to differences in audience between Edo and Meiji female thinkers—as noted in Chapter III, much of Edo women's work was not widely circulated. However, as Meiji Japan attempted to establish a new (and outward-facing) identity as a cohesive nation-state and women's roles changed with the burgeoning idea of the female citizen, it is possible that political authorities felt there was more at stake in response to women's subversive speech acts. That is to say, though ideas, attitudes, and practices surrounding 'women's language' changed in ways that seem to suggest more freedom, women's actual speech was considered dangerous and thus continued garner speculation. All the while, conventional notions of 'women's language'—reaching as far into the past as Heian period ideals—became emblematic of a romanticized traditional past (Endō 2006).

A similar tension persists today. Hirakawa Hiroko's 2011 essay examines a best-selling conduct manual for the modern woman, titled *The Dignity of the Woman*. This guide, like many of the present day, acknowledges that while "moral standards" and conceptions of femininity have certainly changed, women should not use this as an excuse to "act rough, use vulgar language, and bully the weak." (Bando, in Hirakawa 2008, 141) The table of contents evokes prescriptions of the women's Four Virtues in Edo period Neo-Confucian guides: in addition to categories like "Manners and Dignity" and "Dignified Ways to Dress," *The Dignity of the Woman* replaces the Confucian *fugen* ('feminine speech') with "Dignified Language and Speech." While these guides have adapted in specificity to suit the challenges that face women today, they continue in footsteps of past conduct manuals, connecting success to a limited set of behaviors, including standardized 'women's language.'

As in the Edo period, these standards are not merely aspirational. Rather, they translate to tangible social repercussions, as a woman's speech continues to be evaluated as a meter for her femininity and thus, her value. Though there are countless examples of recent public retaliation to women's "unfeminine" speech, Nakamura (2014) describes a

particularly striking response to Murata Renhō's⁵⁸ 2009 debates over the national budget, where Uchida Yūya⁵⁹ was angered enough to attend the budget screening just to protest “her rude way of speaking,” and only felt empathy for her in a few particular instances in which “[her speech] was feminine.” (*Asahi shinbun* 2009, in Nakamura 2014). Even for women whose careers entail debate, certain types of speech are seen to be outside the boundaries of acceptable performative femininity. As has been the case throughout history, the stakes are higher for some women (i.e. women of high socioeconomic class) than others. However, in anticipation of criticism, women from all walks of life must continuously make decisions in their linguistic behavior in order to maintain different versions of the outward-facing self.

Ultimately, it was these two manifestations of women's language—in modern-day conduct manuals and in criticisms of women's speech in popular media—that first piqued my interest in the subject. When studying abroad in Japan, I found myself in bookstores with walls lined with titles like *Language to Make You Loveable* and *Elegant Women's Speech* and, as a result, began to look further into this phenomenon. I found that the young women around me were defying the norms of women's language I had come to expect

⁵⁸ (1967 – present) A female politician and member of the House of Councillors

⁵⁹ (1939 – 2019) A musician known for his participation in psychedelic acts like Flower Travellin' Band

based on primers in Japanese textbooks, and even more so upon looking into women's conduct manuals, which eventually led me to the distant past. While this analysis has covered matters within a broad historical scope, it has mostly left me pondering more mysteries. Future scholarship on the topic of Japanese 'women's language' could take a number of avenues—following the norms of 'women's language' through a closer reading of Japanese law and politics (throughout history or within a specific time period) would yield interesting results, as would conducting a more systematic, comparative analysis of women's didactic texts, many of which have yet to be digitized. Future work could also examine texts written by a broader range of premodern and early modern women who used non-standard regional dialects of Japanese. Additionally, an analysis of the relationship between literacy and speech—informed by the fact that conduct manuals used moral lessons to teach women calligraphy—might benefit from applying philosophical theories of the body as a component of women's language education, especially since calligraphy was a highly physical art form.

From my own small scratch to the surface of a huge and complex social phenomenon, I have concluded that as long as there have been texts in Japan, discursive constructions of 'women's language' have accompanied them. Though such discourses have evolved

markedly over time, both men and women have acknowledged, and thus affirmed, their presence; however, it was ultimately those at the top of the paternal hierarchy who positioned women's speech as the object of control. As conduct manuals aimed at women gained prominence in the Edo period, the norms associated with virtuous 'women's language' became inseparable from economic class and social status. By appropriating the language of women in the imperial court, conduct manuals were implicit in the erasure of women's linguistic innovation, in spite of the highly specified purpose *nyōbō kotoba* served in court women's professional lives and in their collective solidarity. Similarly, discourses about how women should speak acted to place other forms of women's non-standard language use as the abject of virtuous 'women's language' in order to secure legitimacy. While the knowledge and norms inherent to the Edo period conception of 'women's language' remained relatively stagnant, these pieces were manipulated into a number of value systems in order to suit the agendas of rhetorical currents like Neo-Confucianism and *kokugaku* nativism. If all of these conclusions seem daunting and quite depressing, it is because they are—normative 'women's language' has remained a tool for the oppression of women throughout Japan's history. However, as the third chapter discussed, there were undoubtedly women, like Akirada Rei and Hara

Saihin, who chose to construct and inhabit their own linguistic realities in spite of the social consequences. It is for the sake of these women—and the countless others before and after them—that I have composed this thesis. Only through the genesis of new, critical discourses in which women engage with existing ones can we hope to chip away at the long history of language as a site for women's subordination.

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