Gender in Japanese Youth Language

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The current study discusses the gender aspect of Japanese Youth Language (abbreviated as "YL") and focuses on real-life data. Previous literature has investigated gender in YL from various aspects including the differences of personality and characteristic between genders (Tanimitsu, 2006), the vicissitudes of gender differences in YL (Yonegawa, 1998), particular words that exhibited gender differences (Yonegawa, 1998), and how male and female university students used YL differently as well as the reasons accounting for such differences (e.g., Akiyama, Uesugi, & Suzuki, 1991; Kim & So, 2014). At the meantime, YL usage can be considered as using a variant to construct certain persona or identities, the issue of which was extensively discussed in terms of phonological variants (e.g., Gratton, 2016; Podesva, 2011a), contours (Podesva, 2011b), and phonation types (Podesva, 2007), to name a few. The influence of phonological variants on listeners' perceptions particularly shed light on the current study, including the examination of *-ing*/*-in'* variants (Campbell-Kibler, 2007, 2008), released /t/ used by U.S. politicians (Podesva, Reynolds, Callier, & Baptiste, 2015), and fronted /s/ among Copenhagen youth (Pharao, Maegaard, Møller, & Kristiansen, 2014). The current study is inspired by these studies on perceptions and explores how YL usage is perceived from a hearer's point of view, especially how speakers' gender influences hearers' perception on YL usage.

Deriving from a larger project, this presentation reports quantitative data collected from an online survey and omits discussion on other data sources. In total, 113 online surveys (male = 54, female = 59) asking a native speaker of Japanese to evaluate a speaker after listening to a short conversation were collected. Sampling service provided by Qualtrics was requested to ensure a population as unbiased as possible. The distribution of age is detailed in Table 1. There were 16 conversations (4 YL words × 2 YL/non-YL options × 2 genders), and each participant randomly listened to only one conversation. All conversations were recorded by a female undergraduate student and a male graduate student. After the conversation, participants were asked to rate their perception on the speaker's age, femininity/masculinity, education level, and twenty more items on personalities (see list attached) using a 1-6 Likert scale. The experimental design of controlling speakers' gender and usage/non-usage of YL words aims at eliminating other factors that might influence hearers' perception. Sample conversations of one YL word can be found in Table 2.

Regarding whether listeners' perception would differ based on speaker's gender providing a YL utterance, two items appeared statistically significant—interestingness and intelligence. That is, a female user is perceived more intelligent (female = 3.50, male = 2.71, p = .04) and more interesting (female = 3.36, male = 2.52, p = .01) when she uses a YL. Intriguingly, analysis on non-YL utterances revealed a difference in leadership (female = 2.60, male = 3.31, p = .01), with no other significant differences. In other words, when both genders are conducting the same conversation using unmarked expressions, people tend to rate male speakers as possessing more leadership capability. Considering that a short conversation discussing casual topics can barely be related to leadership capability, we can interpret this result as a rating under the influence of gender stereotypes irrelevant of contexts provided by the conversation. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that leadership was the only category that instantiated such view, and that no other categories showed a difference.

Regarding listeners' perception on speakers depending on usage/non-usage of YL, for female speakers the only difference is observed in competitiveness (YL = 3.57, non-YL = 2.84, p = .04).

This can be interpreted as female speakers using YL were considered more competitive. Equally interestingly, no other categories demonstrated a statistical difference, suggesting that in general, people's perception on female speakers does not differ based on YL usage, echoing the point that women are considered more active in creating and using new expressions, and thus people are used to their YL usage. In contrast, for male speakers, YL usage tends to be more marked and is perceive more negatively. As summarized in Table 3, male YL users were considered childish (perceived age), less masculine, less handsome, less serious, less interesting, less intelligent, and with less leadership capability. Reversely, being rated negatively may attribute to why males use YL less frequently in real-life conversations, in return reinforcing the stereotype that YL words are reserved for female speakers.

The current research provides an updated view on how YL/non-YL users of different genders are perceived by the general public. As demographic information on rater's gender and age were also collected, further analysis may explore how rater's gender influence his/her perception on speakers of each gender, as well as on their YL/non-YL usage. As only two native speakers in their twenties recorded all conversations for this study, possible research direction also includes how the age of YL users affects people's perceptions.

List of personalities: "popularity" "likelihood to be welcomed" "sociability" "capability of communication" "fondness of fashion" "degree of handsomeness/beauty" "seriousness" "interestingness" "intelligence" "loveliness" "determination" "self-disclosure" "leadership" "competitiveness" "activeness" "empathy" "positivity" "preemptive-ness" "outgoingness" "self-centeredness"

Table 1 Age distribution of questionnaire respondents

Age	18-22	23-25	26-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-60	>60
Count	5	10	12	25	17	21	7	6	8	2

Table 2 Sample conversations

Word	YL?	Gender	Japanese	English translation
草不可避 (*kusafukahi*)	YL	F	F:今日の番組、<u>草不可避</u>ね。 M:そうそう！	F: Today's TV show is so <u>interesting</u>! M: That's right!
	non-YL	F	F:今日の番組、<u>面白くて笑っちゃう</u>よね！ M:そうそう！	F: Today's TV show is so <u>interesting</u>! M: That's right!
	YL	M	M:今日の番組、<u>草不可避</u>ね。 F:そうそう！	M: Today's TV show is so <u>interesting</u>! F: That's right!
	non-YL	M	M:今日の番組、<u>面白くて笑っちゃう</u>よね！ F:そうそう！	M: Today's TV show is so <u>interesting</u>! F: That's right!

Table 3 Perception differences - Male

Item	Mean (using YL)	Mean (using non-YL)	*P* Value
perceived age	10.76	15.03	.040
perceived masculinity	19.76	27.00	.031
handsomeness	2.59	3.31	.036
seriousness	2.71	3.55	.042
interestingness	2.53	3.17	.033
intelligence	2.71	3.48	.013
leadership	2.41	3.31	.009

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