

■ *Miyako Inoue*  
STANFORD UNIVERSITY

## What Does Language Remember?: Indexical Inversion and the Naturalized History of Japanese Women

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*This article explores the production of naturalized temporality and its ideological effects by focusing on the semiotic process of indexical order. Linguistic practice is linked with the exercise of power not only by constructing intersubjective social reality in an ongoing communicative process, but also, and perhaps more powerfully, by constructing an historical narrative that logically unfolds from the (naturalized) indexical order. Drawing on the case of the historical development of “women’s language” in Japanese, the article discusses how an indexical order produces a tacit natural history of Japanese women, which surreptitiously turns gender inequality into nature. [gender and nationalism, Japanese women’s language, indexical inversion, indexical order, gender and language]*

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In our attempt to illuminate the linkages between language and power, the concept of indexical order is key to understanding a semiotic process by which various modes of linguistic practice (re)produce social relations. This article explores the production of naturalized temporality and its ideological effects. Linguistic practice is linked with the exercise of power not only by constructing intersubjective social reality in an ongoing communicative process, but also, and perhaps more powerfully, by constructing an indexical order that produces a historical narrative. In this article, I discuss how indexicality encodes temporal order and how this temporal effect of indexical order in turn underwrites the historical imagination. Here I am referring to a particular mode of indexicality whose semiotic ground entails the effect of a temporal lag between two things that constitute an indexical relation. Like wet streets as an index pointing to the past presence of rain, there is an inevitable time lag between the indexing and the indexed, where the latter must precede the former and thus the indexing is a memory of the indexed. It is a memory in the sense of a culturally and politically constructed past. In the taken-for-granted world, rain comes before wet streets. This temporality encoded in a particular mode of indexicality produces, at an ideological level, a historical narrative, which, in turn, organizes indexical temporality.

In this article, I draw on the case of the historical development of “women’s language” in Japanese to discuss how an indexical order produces a tacit natural history of Japanese women, which surreptitiously turns gender inequality into nature. “Women’s language” refers not so much, and, not only, to concrete speech forms associated with a feminine speech style, but rather to a network of sites, practices, and discourse that produce the metapragmatic knowledge of how women speak (or how

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women should speak). In the case of Japanese women's language, its discourse is historically connected with profound cultural ruptures experienced as a premodern social formation encountered modernity. Bases for imagining "Japan" under a precapitalist and decentralized tributary social formation would not work for imagining—and disciplining—a modern industrial nation-state, which thus led to "memory crisis" (Terdiman 1993) in the emerging Japanese public sphere. As elsewhere in the world, Japan as an industrialized modern nation has produced and rested on a linear narrative of its progress, and this inexorably entails a profound temporal bifurcation between the past and the present, often understood as a contrast between tradition and modernity, and, importantly, between women and men. McClintock thus notes: "The temporal anomaly within nationalism—veering between nostalgia for the past and the impatient, progressive sloughing off of the past—is typically resolved by figuring the contradiction in the representation of *time* as a natural division of *gender*" (1995:358–359). National modernity thus posits women as the embodiment of the nation's past and tradition and men as that of the present and "progress." The temporal rupture underwrites an acute sense of urgency to collect, memorialize, and preserve what is perceived to be "lost," including feminine language. The resolution of Japan's national memory crisis is recurrently sought by mobilizing discourses of "women's language," through which the public mourns the corruption of women's language use and the loss of imagined pristine feminine language.

I compare two moments when the nation's temporal estrangement was articulated and managed through public debate on women's "linguistic corruption": one in the late 19th century in the midst of Japan's industrial capitalist take-off, when modern social, political, and economic institutions were introduced from the West and new forms of sociality for the modern subject were negotiated. The other is the early 1990s, at the height of Japan's late-capitalist phase, when women were mobilized both as a contingent labor force and as sovereign consumers in an unprecedented economic boom, often called the "bubble economy." This political-economic transformation and its attendant reconfiguration of gender relations were translated into cultural terms. On one hand, this period was celebrated as "women's era" (*josei no jidai*), and women's increasing presence in previously male-dominant realms of social life—from beer consumption to corporate managerial positions—was taken to be a sign of significant cultural and social change. At the same time, however, it was perceived as the collapse of the familiar gender roles and as a crisis of social order.

While a century separated the two dramatically different political economic contexts, socioeconomic "progress" was similarly translated women's into linguistic "regress." In both historical moments, the discourse of women's linguistic corruption—deploring young women's language use in the present and imagining the existence of a "pure" uncontaminated feminine speech sometime in the deferred past emerged and proliferated in the context of the heightened sense of cultural loss and discontinuity. And both moments produced a different set of historical narratives that semiotically rationalized and naturalized the indexical—and therefore the temporal—order of "women's language" in its articulation with the larger political-economic context of each historical moment. The discourse of "women's language" thus necessarily entails that of "linguistic corruption." National memory crisis is expressed through and projected onto women's linguistic corruption in the present or the loss of ideal women's language in the present. "Women's language" is thus given its ontological priority and its (imaginary) origin, so as to claim that "there was once a pure women's language," by temporalizing its indexical order in such a way as to uphold the nation's temporal order of capitalist progress. By locating the origin of perfect feminine language in the past, its primordial existence is permanently deferred. The permanent absence of "women's language" in the present is the necessary condition of its ontology.

In this article, I will discuss how the temporal order of women's linguistic corruption underwrites a particular version of Japanese history, a linear and unified narrative of the timeline of the nation's past and present that unfolds on the basis of the logic of

modernity. My focus is on the historical connection between the temporality of the modern nation-state and that of the indexical coding of gender as “women’s language” (or its loss).

### Language Ideology and Temporality

In a more general sense, this article concerns the notion of historicity in and through language, the sense of which is locatable neither in linguistic structural change nor in the social history of language, but in the dialectic between the indexical encoding of temporality in language and the broader political-economic and cultural formation. How and why does (or should) temporality matter to linguistic anthropology, particularly in critically theorizing linguistic ideology? What does it take to envision a mode of linguistic-anthropological analysis that makes the past both culturally meaningful and politically enabling for the present?

Built on fundamental premises in linguistic anthropology, including the multifunctionality of language, the complexity of linguistic mediation, and the critique of the ethnocentric privileging of referentiality (e.g., Briggs 1986; Duranti and Goodwin 1992; Hymes 1974; Silverstein 1979, 1981), recent studies of linguistic ideology show us, among many things, the way in which language is linked up with social power.<sup>1</sup> These linkages are foregrounded by various scholars’ attempts to integrate linguistic (symbolic) analysis and political economy (Friedrich 1989; Gal 1989; Irvine 1989), as well as by the materialist view of language via Bakhtin/Voloshinov. Their insights can be best captured by Williams’ formulation of cultural materialism, which similarly attempted to locate language somewhere between idealism and orthodox materialism and noted that “the process of articulation is necessarily also a *material* process, and that the sign itself becomes part of a (socially created) physical and material world” (1977:38).

What is less appreciated, however, is that such insights accumulated over the years have also brought us to a “historic turn,” a renewed attention to and theorization of the history, historicity, and temporality of language and of linguistic practice as well as linguistic change. The historical dimension has been reinserted into linguistic and semiotic analysis by the insistence that language is part and parcel of the material world, the historically dynamic world, in which real human actors live. In fact, one of the venues through which Voloshinov critiques Saussurean formal linguistics, particularly its dismissal of the utterance (*parole*), is the notion of history. For Voloshinov, the utterance, or “living speech,” is the essential unit of linguistic analysis. It is creative, generative, and always exceeds systematization. The only way to systematize living language is to treat it as ready-made by cutting it off from its history. Thus, Voloshinov maintains that “formal, systematic thought about language is incompatible with living, historical understanding of language. From the system’s point of view, history always seems merely a series of accidental transgressions” (1973:78).

Let me briefly return to Saussure and his conception of the historicity of language, and contrast it with that of Bakhtin/Voloshinov.

It is well known that the diachronic dimension of language is secondary for Saussure’s scientific account of language. He insists:

The first thing that strikes us when we study the facts of language is that their succession in time does not exist insofar as the speaker is concerned. He is confronted with a state. That is why the linguist who wishes to understand a state must discard all knowledge of everything that produced it and ignore diachrony. He can enter the mind of speakers only by completely suppressing the past. [1959:81]

According to Saussure, language as a system (*langue*) is structurally immutable. Elements of it might undergo certain mutations over the years, but it will not affect the system itself. So, for example, in French, *pas* (‘step’) and *pas* (‘not’) once shared the same origin, but that historical fact has no bearing whatsoever upon modern French, for contemporary French speakers can function fully as competent speakers

without any knowledge of the history of the language (Saussure 1959:107). Thus language has no memory, and the speaker is never a knower of the past (see also Jameson 1972). It is only the linguist who can stand outside of history and view supratemporal and supraindividual change. Saussure thus notes, "The system is a complex mechanism that can be grasped only through reflection; the very ones who use it daily are ignorant of it. We can conceive of a change only through the intervention of specialists, grammarians, logicians, etc." (1959:73).

But the separation between synchronic and diachronic is highly problematic, not so much because of Saussure's relative negligence of the diachronic, but because of the positing of the abstract binary itself. The synchronic-diachronic binary strips the past of its explanatory power of causality, of its structuring effect on the present. Furthermore, far from being "ignorant" of history, people actively produce a past in the act of speaking itself. If we see temporality as simply a succession of structural mutations, we foreclose the possibility of multiple temporalities and historical narratives. Saussure's uninterrupted linear history presupposes only one space or only one homogeneous speech community. It flattens both the materiality and the heterogeneity of the speech community.

Saussure's historicity denies the constitutive role of social actors and institutions reflexively interpreting, evaluating, and making sense of the history of language. In his discussion of etymology, Saussure (1959:174) in fact explicitly belittles "folk etymology"—or native speakers' reflexive attempts to theorize the historical connections between one word and another—saying that such conjecture is corrupted and erroneous. Analogy, which seemingly resembles folk etymology, in contrast, is rational and systematic and is "a universal fact" that "belongs to the normal functioning of language" (Saussure 1959:176). It governs the interpretation of history in accordance with a definite rule. Analogy is based on *forgetfulness*: "analogy takes nothing from the substance of the signs that it replaces, and analogy always implies the forgetting of the older forms . . . . The old form must even be forgotten before the rival can appear" (Saussure 1959:176). Again, speakers are allowed to produce their own history only by following pregiven rules and systematic diversification. In contrast with analogy, Saussure says that folk etymology is based on *remembrance*, "simply an interpretation of the older form; remembrance of the older form though muddled, is the starting point of the deformation that it underwent" (1959:175). In other words, Saussure resists the idea of speakers themselves writing and rewriting the history of the language; that would interfere with the otherwise "natural" or suprahuman course of linguistic change. It is precisely this intrusion of history into the synchronic state that Saussure denounced. Voloshinov sees the connection between Saussure's cutting off *parole* (or what Voloshinov would call "living speech") and history from the object of study. In other words, there is a parallel between Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, and synchrony and diachrony, in which *parole*, dismissed as random and irrational, belongs to "history" because formal linguistics "regards history as an irrational force distorting the logical purity of the language system" (Voloshinov 1973:61).

Taking Voloshinov seriously allows us to bring into linguistic anthropology a particular version of historical materialism, which insists that human beings are both historical products and, simultaneously, historical agents, and that their language does not belong to individual psychology but to the real social world in which they live. History both constitutes and is constituted by materially situated actors, and this explains where things come from and how things came to be what they are and, of course, where things are going. Voloshinov's historical materialism acknowledges human agency and its active role in history—people making their own history, even if not just as they please. It is people who make history, not some kind of transcendental supraorganic entity as is assumed by Saussure in the concept of *langue*. History is made by human beings acting on a material environment and reproducing the material and social conditions of their lives. In this model, people's (class) consciousness—their reflexivity and ability to situate themselves in the larger social formation—is a central variable in historical transformation. At the same time, "living speech" brings to the

present the history of human linguistic activities. As many linguistic anthropologists have recently discussed, the restoration to linguistic and semiotic analysis of actors' own evaluation, interpretation, representation, and mediation of language has been a defining theoretical tenet in the study of linguistic ideology (Bauman and Briggs 2003; Kroskrity 2000; Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity 1998; Silverstein 1981, 1985; Woolard and Schieffelin 1994).

By allowing the possibility of multiple representations and interpretations of language, which derive from multiple subject positions made possible by real material context as well as the contestations over these arrangements, the concept of linguistic ideology has critiqued the treatment of language as a transhistorical unity and has opened up a way to look at language as the lived experience of and local response to power in historically specific contexts, a process saturated with politics and struggle. It has shifted our focus on language from an ahistorical sense of "community," "culture," or "worldview" to the material context, where language and the social categories and knowledge that language produces (such as "gender," "class," and "race") come into being, unfold, develop, and are transformed—in the face of capitalism and colonialism, for example. To put it differently, any critical analysis of language, as in the study of linguistic ideology, inevitably entails its historicity. Including the contributions in this issue, some studies allow us to appreciate how language encodes multiple and nonlinear temporalities with political and social ramifications, how a particular view of the past is contested and negotiated through the debate about linguistic temporality understood as continuity and authenticity. Others show how the hegemonic historical narrative of language is possible at the cost of erasing other histories and linguistic experiences, and how that process is linked with social power. The plurality of social time and space thus disrupts the linear uninterrupted historical narrative of language that prevails in orthodox knowledge and thus denaturalizes it by bringing people's everyday metapragmatic activities and their own linguistic theorizing into our analysis. Language, in other words, is essentially unstable both across space and across time, a fact which Saussure was painfully aware of. That is why he had to artificially insulate the synchronic from the diachronic.

### Language Ideology and Indexical Inversion

How then does culturally and politically constructed temporality come to be encoded in and through language, and how does it get anchored in the microsemiotic process? To put it differently, how does history get semiotically mediated, and thus ideologized, in the dialectic interaction among language structure, language use, linguistic ideology, in the materially grounded context?

The issue under discussion in this article has to do with a particular semiotic process, which I call *indexical inversion*, and its ideological effect in creating a certain temporal order in complicity with that of the nation-state. As I discuss, this process can be best explained by Silverstein's (1996, 1998) explication of the dialectic condition of indexical order and Irvine and Gal's (2000) concept of iconization. "Women's language" as a linguistic ideology operates in a way that inverts the indexing and the indexed and provides a metapragmatic narrative to normalize the inversion and what it entails.

In the late 19th century, Japanese intellectuals and educators deplored schoolgirls' moral corruption and their language use as "vulgar." The concerned commentators identified such "vulgar" speech forms as emblematic of schoolgirls and their moral corruption, and they called such speech "schoolgirl speech" or "*teyo-dawa* speech," because of the impression that schoolgirls frequently used verb-ending forms such as *teyo* and *dawa*. Speech forms such as *teyo* and *dawa* were then accorded certain indexical values, such as vulgarity and commonness. So the formulaic metapragmatic statement goes: "Schoolgirls are morally corrupt because they use vulgar speech"; or one can flip it and say, "Schoolgirls use vulgar speech because they are morally corrupt." Either way, moral corruption is linked to vulgar speech. The problem in such statements is that what was identified as "vulgar speech," and the concrete forms associated with

it, had no presupposed context, or ontological ground. Instead, historical evidence shows that it was the metapragmatic comments on *teyo-dawa* speech that normalized and manufactured the foundational (presupposed) value of vulgarity, which then entailed the indexical value of schoolgirls and their moral corruption (Inoue 2003).

"Inversion" is a spatial metaphor that appears in Marx's early writings on political economy to describe how ideology generally works. Marx notes, "If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life process" (1978:154). Deploying the analogy of an optical device, the camera obscura, Marx points out that ideology represents reality upside down, and presents the illusion as autonomous and natural reality. What we experience as reality is thus its inverted image. Ideology defined as such could be interpreted as being posited in contrast to a baseline truth and reality, yet Marx's optical (and iconic) metaphor effectively suggests the impossibility of unmediated access to the world.

Silverstein's (1996, 1998) discussion of the dialectic nature of indexical order effectively accounts for the concrete way in which ideology (and thereby indexical inversion) engages and thus rationalizes the semiotic process. Indexical order is a representational scheme that accords the sign a certain indexical value. The order is organized by the process in which the foundational or presupposed indexical value (the first order of indexicality) entails the "creative" value (the second order of indexicality) as the result of some kind of ideological intervention of the first order (Silverstein 1996:266).

The relationship between the first order and the second is, however, "not simply linear . . . like a temporal 'before' and 'after' to an indexical event," but "a complex and mediated one" (Silverstein 1996:268). What mediates here is a metapragmatic discourse produced in and informed by the broader political-economic and social context of the material world. If the relationship between the first order and the second looks linear and evolutionary, it is precisely because of the ideological function of the metapragmatic discourse that naturalizes the linear temporal order between the first and the second as such. The implication of Silverstein's formulation of indexical order for the ideological construction of temporality in and through language is that indexicality is historically contingent. It can also be multiple, with competing values of indexicality. While structurally grounded, the presupposed indexical takes on meanings as it interacts with the material world, which is itself in a historical process of becoming.

Furthermore, as Silverstein's (1996, 2003) analysis of classic sociolinguistic theory has critically demonstrated, the first order itself, far from being ontologically given, is an ideological construct, always already intervened in by social discourse of some sort, be it scientism or bourgeois commonsense (see also Gal and Irvine 1995). Because of the dialectic nature of indexicality, Silverstein thus notes, "There is no possible *absolutely* preideological—that is, *zero-order*, social semiotic—neither a purely 'sense'-driven denotational system for the referential-and-predicational expressions of any language nor a totalizing system of noncontextual and purely 'symbolic' values for any culture" (1998:129).

In the somewhat different terrain of the semiotic relationship between ideology and language, Barthes (1974) makes a parallel observation. For Barthes, the semiotic relationship in question is that between denotation and connotation, in which the denotation of a particular sign is presumed to be anchored in the "real" world and thus to be faithful (literal) to it, and connotation is an effect of some ideological intervention. Barthes, however, argues that it is the denotation—the first order of the signification—that is in fact fundamentally ideological and thus inverted: "Denotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the last of the connotations (the one which seems both to establish and to close the reading), the superior myth by which the text pretends to return to the nature of language, to language as nature" (Barthes 1974:9). Denotation is presumed to be at

the ultimate equation and collapse between reality and representation, in which what is represented is what is real with no hidden meaning behind it. This is an ideological closure that normalizes whatever is presumed to be the denotation of the sign. The denotational function of the sign thus conceals the ideological process by claiming universality and objectivity (Baudrillard 1988:80–90).

Such a collapse of the indexing and the indexed as a function of ideology resonates with yet another of Marx's ideas about ideological inversion, discussed through the concept of commodity fetishism. Marx explains that commodities are produced by concrete human labor and therefore might be thought to represent the labor put into them, as well as the social conditions of that labor. Once commodities enter into circulation *as commodities*, however, they acquire exchange value, and the relation between commodities comes to replace the social relations of labor—as if commodities were autonomous social beings that had value in themselves and among themselves. The relationship between things and human beings is thus inverted, as if things have social relations, and human labor is a mere thing—in fact, a commodity.<sup>2</sup>

The semiotic process of such a fetishized relationship between the indexed and the indexing is best accounted for by Irvine and Gal's theoretical model of iconization. Iconization is a semiotic process by which "a linguistic feature is iconically linked with a particular social image as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group's inherent nature or essence" (2000:37). As Marx talks about commodities acquiring an "enigmatic" character once they are produced as commodities, the linguistic sign, which is arbitrary and nonmotivated by itself, appears as if it had some kind of inherent and inevitable essential quality. As a result, its historical referent—the actual sign production process—gets lost, and the distinction between the indexing and the indexed collapses. Instead, the linguistic sign itself offers *social* explanations and claims ontological priority. By virtue of the ideologically construed similarity (or exchange value, in the case of commodity fetishism), the iconized sign replaces what it originally indexes and inverts the relationship between the indexing and the indexed, to the extent that they construct the inverted causal relationship.

Silverstein's (1996, 1998) dialectics of indexicality and Irvine and Gal's (2000) iconization offer us concrete strategies for undoing and denaturalizing the politically and culturally normalized indexical order (and thereby language ideology). The strategies entail examining the historical formation of the metapragmatic discourse that organizes an indexical order and in particular historicizing that which pretends to be the foundational signification. Moreover, when the second-order indexicality pretends to be of the first order, or a linguistic feature comes to be fetishized, indexical inversion also entails an order of temporality, which is aligned with the working of a particular regime of power. In the next section, I discuss the case in point.

### **The Metapragmatic Discourse of Women's Linguistic Corruption: The Semiotics of "Unpleasant to the Ears"**

#### **1880s–1910s**

In the late 1880s, Japanese magazines and newspapers became saturated with social commentaries on schoolgirls' language use. Writers commonly claimed that schoolgirls had recently been uttering "strange" verbal sounds that were described as "unpleasant to the ear" (*mimizawarina*), which to their ears sounded nothing but vulgar. The commentators, who were mostly male intellectuals of various affiliations, located such "unpleasant" verbal sounds at the end of the schoolgirls' utterances, or *kotoba-jiri* ('the tail or the bottom of the utterance'), recognized them as formally segmentable units, and cited them as *teyo*, *noyo*, *dawa*, and others. This speech came to be scornfully called "*teyo-dawa* speech" and, synonymously, "schoolgirl speech" (*jogakusei kotoba*). Ironically enough, many of the actual speech forms identified as "schoolgirl speech" are associated today with "women's language" or the "feminine" speech style, invoking the image of the generic urban middle-class woman. Doubly ironic, as I discuss

shortly, is that the publics of contemporary Japan now deplore the “loss” of such feminine speech as though it had existed before.

This presupposition depends on what existed means. It would be futile to pose an empirical mode of questioning here as to whether schoolgirls actually spoke the way the intellectuals claimed. Equally futile would be to attempt to “hear” the real historical voices of schoolgirls in *teyo-dawa* speech. *Teyo-dawa* speech was an effect of reported speech by those who had access to the print media, citing, grafting, displacing, and re-citing “how schoolgirls speak.” It was in the process of circulation and consumption of reported speech that the materiality of *teyo-dawa* speech came into being. Even if we suppose that a group of real historical schoolgirls did speak the way the intellectuals claimed, their bodies are not the origin of *teyo-dawa* speech. Even for those who actually uttered speech forms associated with such speech, it could be claimed as their own only by the process of citation (Butler 1993; Derrida 1997). The question remains as to why the voice of schoolgirls came to be so culturally significant, significant enough for intellectuals to talk about it the public sphere of the print media. For particular speech forms to be objectified and glossed as such, there had to be a process of cultural and social mediation. What we need to ask is how this mediation took place and under what historical conditions.

In the late 19th century, *jogakusei* (‘schoolgirls’) referred to a tiny segment of the school-aged female population, the daughters of the elite, who could afford to go to secondary schools (after mandatory primary school education), at a time when children were a crucial part of the labor force and would commonly barely finish primary education.<sup>3</sup> The introduction of Western Enlightenment ideas prompted the government to establish girls’ secondary education. These high schools for girls, including normal high schools to train school teachers and private schools for extended education for girls, were novel modern institutions, part of the modernization initiatives of the government.

Apart from the real girls demographically identified as schoolgirls, schoolgirls had a significant cultural presence, as an ambivalent sign of Japan’s modernization and its temporal rupture between the past and the present. Their images were the object of visual consumption, created and circulated in the form of paintings, postcards, and illustrations in magazines, as icons of Japan’s new modern scene. Though in a smaller and limited way compared to their male counterparts, schoolgirls had access to knowledge previously monopolized by boys and men, including foreign languages, classical Chinese literature, and newly introduced Western knowledge such as mathematics, science, and Western literature. The figure of schoolgirls holding or reading books was a familiar visual representation.

“Publicness” also marked the social category of the schoolgirl in that she was the object of the distanced national gaze as an ambivalent sign of modernizing Japan. Schoolgirls’ visual and verbal images were disseminated and circulated everywhere from postcards to print advertisement. Mediated by images, schoolgirls amount to what Debord (1973) calls “spectacle,” the inversion of reality and its image that dominates social life in capitalist society. Located in the modern capitalist society, spectacle meant specifically that of commodities and commodification, and the aesthetics that surfaced through them. Images (essentially of capital) no longer represent or derive from the reality of the social world; rather they are the reality. The distinction between appearance and substance collapses. Debord thus declares, “The spectacle in general, as the concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the non-living” (1973:2).

Since spectacle is all about sheer surface devoid of substance, it has no interiority to signify. Thus, the significance of the schoolgirl as a cultural category lies in its semi-otic quality, which works as an empty signifier mobilized to index the shifting social and historical condition of Japan’s modernity and modernization. Regardless of the actual historical actors demographically identified as schoolgirls, the schoolgirl is a sign in the sense of Lévi-Strauss (1969) analyzed kinship systems as the exchange of women and goods: A woman is brought into radical equation with goods, and her



value (or meaning) cannot be determined by herself but only by her exchange value relative to the exchanged goods (see also Rubin 1975). The figure of women is semi-otically present yet materially and historically absent in the discourse of modernity. This condition is perhaps best captured by postcolonial studies of the “third-world woman” caught between imperialism and patriarchy. As Spivak put it, “The figure of woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttering which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization” (1988:306).

Furthermore, the schoolgirl was an ambivalent sign. On one hand, she was the index of progress, the inevitable temporal sense of modernity, yet, on the other hand, she was a sign of transgression, for her publicness potentially blurred the class boundary between her as a respectable middle-class woman and the “public” or commercial women such as prostitutes or women in the pleasure quarters. Her accessibility to modern knowledge through secondary education also disrupted the gender boundary, since it is men who are the modernizers and the proprietors of knowledge for progress and modernization. The schoolgirl as a “modern” agent is an ambivalent sign of Japan’s modernity precisely because she upsets the ideal gender-modernity alignment. Woman as a sign thus signified social order in crisis. And social order in crisis meant the male subject in crisis. This situation is not unique to Japan’s modernization process. In fact, as various feminist scholars (Petro 1989; Walkowitz 1992, Wilson 1991) have pointed out, the development of cities in 19th- and early 20th-century Europe similarly entailed the symbolic alignment of gender and modernity, in which elite male anxiety over rapid sociocultural change was shifted onto the site of transgressive female figures such as prostitutes, kleptomaniacs, hysterics, and madwomen. Policing women’s sexuality and social space was both materially and symbolically part and parcel of the development of the modern city in Europe. Unlike in Europe, however, it was not only the sight of women but also and more importantly their acoustic presence, that became the signifier of male crisis at the turn of the century in Japan’s modernizing scene. And it had to be the schoolgirl’s voice, not that of the peasant girls or the factory girls, for, like commodity display, the schoolgirl as a cultural category was a spectacle, whose visibility paradoxically concealed the history and sociality of those who occupied that category and whose emptiness enabled itself to be inscribable.

By the middle Meiji period (the mid-to-late 1880s), the overzealous appropriation of Western Enlightenment thinking and institutions met with a nativist backlash. The Sino-Japan war (1894–95) gave rise to nationalism, and nationalists reinvented “traditional” Japanese ethos and institutions, including the emperorship and Confucianism. The emergence of schoolgirls’ speech as a problem coincided with this rise of militant nationalism, when the political climate took a reactionary turn against a perceived rapid Westernization/modernization, and the state officials and intellectuals attempted to promote a vision of Japan as modern yet distinct from the West.

How then did the male intellectuals hear and cite the schoolgirl and thereby construct the metapragmatic category of schoolgirl speech?<sup>4</sup> The schoolgirl’s speech was represented typically not through what she said, but through how she said it. Those speech forms identified by commentators as vulgar are verb-ending forms, a nonreferential part of speech with no semantic properties. She spoke language referentially to mean something, but her will to language was ignored and stripped of referential capacity. Instead, the male intellectuals reduced the schoolgirl’s speech to the nonreferential and the nonsemantic and represented her speech simply in terms of how she sounded. The problem arises as to how the intellectuals rationalized schoolgirls’ speech as vulgar. Verb-ending forms such as *teyo* and *dawa* are nonreferential and context-dependent, with neither any established semantic nor etymological origin. Such forms must rely exclusively on metapragmatic discourse for an explanation and rationalization of what they mean. In other words, there was no established prior discourse as to the indexical value of these verb-ending forms. When there is no such existing indexical order, how does the nonreferential form acquire indexical

meaning? The foundational (first) order of indexicality, the pragmatic effect of vulgarity in schoolgirls' speech, had to be discursively created by metapragmatic narratives. These narratives retroactively manufactured the speech context and simulated this temporal effect to invert and thus to normalize the indexical relationship and its temporal order, as if the manufactured context had always already preceded the given speech form. The form inevitably points to what Barthes (1982) calls the "myth," the foundational order that never was.

Commentaries on schoolgirls' speech typically included an origin narrative as to where the vulgar speech came from and how schoolgirls acquired it. For example, one author writes, "In the last five or six years even those girls in the girls' high school have acquired such speech, and it has even reached the society of noblewomen . . . . The strange speech that schoolgirls use today was formerly used by the daughters of the low-class samurai [*gokenin*] in the Aoyama area before the Meiji Restoration . . . . Thoughtful ladies must not let a beautiful jewel become damaged or a polished mirror become clouded by using such language" (Ozaki 1994:4–5). Others point to specific locations, including "the seedy section of Ushigome" or "low-class" neighborhoods in the city of Tokyo. A column article in the newspaper *Yomiuri Shinbun* (1905) explains that the opening of girls' high schools to the daughters of the lower classes resulted in a polluting influence on the daughters of the upper class and their speech behavior. Another article blames female domestic servants as the source of bad influence (Jokan 1892:66–67). Others also commonly claim the "pleasure quarters" in the city of Tokyo, and *geishas* of various sorts, including prostitutes and apprentices, as the original source of *teyo-dawa* speech. Many also point to the *geishas* married to men of status during the time of social upheaval of the Meiji Restoration, when it was not considered shameful to have a *geisha* as a wife. This, they explain, was how, the vulgar speech of the "seedy" section of town spread among upper-class women. Commentators also pointed to the regional peripheries and claimed that women from the countryside contributed to the spread of *teyo-dawa* speech by misconstruing it as the noble language of the upper class and emulating it. The Japanese racial periphery and contact zone, particularly with Westerners, was also noted as a concrete place where such vulgar speech was born. The nationalist conflation of language, race, and the nation duly aligns linguistic vulgarity with racial impurity and hence with the potential contamination of the racial purity of the Japanese. Shimoda Utako, one of a handful of female nationalist educators who rehearsed and propagated the male discourse of schoolgirl speech in women's magazines, observed:

I don't know if it is true or not, but from what people say, I hear that such speech [*teyo-dawa* speech] initially started at the time of the opening of the port of Yokohama. As we know, prior to the Meiji Restoration, Yokohama used to be a remote countryside. To top it off, it looks like it used to be a small fishing village with immoral and rough-natured traits. But after Meiji, with the opening of the port of Yokohama,<sup>5</sup> people gathered from around Japan and from abroad. There was tremendous confusion about language, and, in addition, illiterate lower-class people used slipshod chopped-up language to foreigners. This is the situation, people say, where such speech [*teyo-dawa* speech] started to be used among ladies. [Shimoda 1906:21]

These diverse claims of the historical origin of schoolgirl speech illustrate the inverted ideological process in which the foundational indexical ground was discursively articulated—imagined—by the secondary indexical order that asserts that schoolgirls' speech is vulgar. The commentaries have one thing in common: they all point to some kind of periphery and to the blurring of the boundary between that periphery and the center, be it class-based, regional, or racial. More than anything else, the origin narratives of *teyo-dawa* speech convey the sense of threat and anxiety on the part of the elite intellectuals over the changing social landscape of the country through modernizing forces, not from their familiar center but from the bottom and the margin of society.

While the vulgarity of *teyo-dawa* speech was rationalized through its indexical (and metonymic) relations with an imagined original that was contaminated by speaking bodies such as the *geisha*, class or regional others, or impure racial contact with Westerners, vulgarity is also commonly identified in the lack of honorifics in the schoolgirl's speech. This presumed lack or absence of honorifics translates into behavioral attributes such as sloppiness, laziness, or imprudence, which are then claimed as the evidence of schoolgirls' moral corruption and degeneration. The commentators also claimed phonological contraction as iconic evidence of the schoolgirl's laziness. For example, Tanahashi Junko, another prominent female nationalist educator, explained that such contraction was caused by speaking too fast: "Speech with a rising intonation, or speaking with the ending contracted like bouncing, gives people an unpleasant impression. Speech would sound more feminine and refined if one speaks gently with the ending slightly falling" (1911:54). Another commentator (Jokan 1906:2) translated the vulgarity of *teyo-dawa* speech into bodily posture, claiming that *teyo-dawa* speech was "sloppy" because it was the language that is produced by the slovenly posture of lying down as opposed to sitting upright.

Thus, iconization, as in the case of the claimed omission of honorifics and phonological contraction, is another attempt to establish the foundational order of *teyo-dawa* speech: sloppiness is no longer represented through the actual behavior of schoolgirls but through the speech forms that allegedly index them, as if they inhered in some intrinsic quality of sloppiness. The imaginary origin—discovered in speech forms themselves in the form of fetish—thus is the consequence of iconization; the fetishized signs collapse the original cause-effect relationship and invert the original temporal order.

Another rationalization of the vulgarity of schoolgirls' speech concerns the violation of the traditional gender-genre nexus. An essential part of the discourse of schoolgirls' linguistic corruption was their presumed use of Chinese-origin words and English words. The commentators viscerally responded to schoolgirls' use of such words with the phrase, *kikigurushii* ('unpleasant to the ear').<sup>6</sup> In fact, the common strategy of caricaturing schoolgirls as the illegitimate agents of modernization was to represent them through direct reported speech with mixed use of Chinese-origin words, English words, and verb-ending forms such as *teyo* and *dawa*. Chinese-origin words had been traditionally used for texts in commerce, law, and administration, and thus had been associated exclusively with the elite male writing style. The women of this class were expected to use traditional Japanese writing, limited to penning letters, diaries, and epistles. With the establishment of women's high schools, women for the first time had legitimate access to Chinese-origin words as part of their school curriculum. But commentators urged schoolgirls to use expressions of Japanese origin (as opposed to Chinese), which were considered to be naturally feminine, because, as they explained tautologically, they sounded more elegant and soft.

English words embodied new, Western knowledge of modernity and modernization. As many scholars have pointed out, modern temporality is a paradoxical and inverted one. For the "modern" to mean "progress," it simultaneously invents the past as the reservoir of an unsullied tradition. The reactionary nationalism in the middle of Meiji is a case in point. Moreover, such modern temporality is inherently gendered in that men are the modernizing agents and women are the custodians of the tradition that modernity invented. It is then *gender difference* that manages the temporality of national modernity.<sup>7</sup> Modernity's inverted temporality is thus naturalized by the symbolic alignment of femaleness and tradition. It is in this sense that schoolgirls' presumed use of English words was "unpleasant to the ear" because it disrupted the male modern temporality, which positions men and not women as the agents of progress.<sup>8</sup>

Social crisis is indexical crisis. Male intellectuals were deeply disturbed by the familiar social, cultural, class, and gender boundaries becoming blurred, transgressed, and nullified. Their familiar indexical order—and social order—seemed no longer to work. They heard the loss of the primordial social order of the pre-Meiji/premodern,

and the anticipated chaos and crisis of social change. Furthermore, the change they heard may well have been felt as an “other” modernity, a change led not by “him,” but by “her,” a change that would not come from the male elite but from the low class, the seedy sections, the rural regions, the racial contact zone, and, most uncannily, from women. It was not so much how actual schoolgirls spoke that ideologically motivated a set of speech forms, attitudes, and behavior to constitute the discrete metapragmatic category of *teyo-dawa* speech (and to signify the schoolgirl) and organized its indexical order. Rather, what regimented the schoolgirls’ voice into *teyo-dawa* speech was a collective sense of temporal rupture between the past and the present that the male elite experienced at the turn of the century over the collapse of their familiar social and moral order and over the particular temporality that modernity names as “progress.” The indexical order of schoolgirl speech was thus mediated by, and in turn mediated, not so much *her* but *his* temporal experience of Japanese modernity and modernization.

### 1980s–1990s

The discourse of women’s linguistic corruption recurs as long as the modern nation-state exists. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, a series of public debates erupted in Japan as to whether women’s language use had been corrupted. At this historical moment, postwar Japanese society had firmly established the modern industrial capitalist ideology of gender, which prescribes women’s primary role as wife and mother and that of men as the breadwinner (see, for example, Ueno and Martinez 1987). Historical amnesia makes it possible for many speech forms identified as schoolgirl speech, once denounced as vulgar, to be reindexicalized as “women’s language,” the salient sociolinguistic makers of the ideal urban middle-class housewife. Women’s language is an emergent norm, and it requires a normalizing discipline deployed by a range of cultural agents (writers, teachers, scholars) to institute and maintain it as a norm even if not as a statistical pattern. Discipline always involves the discursive marginalization of the less-than-normal; discipline presupposes the identification of the “deviant” for purposes of excluding it. In other words, the birth of women’s language was also the birth of the corruption of women’s language.

The common metapragmatic explanation of women’s language teleologically presupposes that a speech form such as *dawa* sounds feminine because it sounds soft and elegant. The foundational ground of its indexicality is thus claimed to be the “natural” gendered human traits of women, such as gentleness. Women’s language is then rationalized as the natural outcome of women’s intrinsic nature: Because women’s nature is such, they prefer, or, are socialized, to use feminine speech. Again, the indexical order is inverted; as I have discussed earlier, speech forms such as *teyo* and *dawa* had no established denotational origin (or they had some speculative dubious origins, to say the least), whose indexical meaning was far from softness and gentleness. It was the gender ideology in postwar Japanese society that naturalized the symbolic association between femaleness and softness, and it was this ideology that retroactively constituted and naturalized the first order of indexicality, that is, the indexical value of speech forms such as *dawa* as “feminine.”<sup>9</sup> Gender is thus temporalized through the symbolic alignment of women with the antiquity of nature and tradition, just as the nation’s temporality is gendered.

This indexical inversion and the erasure of its ideological process owe a great deal to contemporary scholars and intellectuals who have created a national narrative of the history of women’s language by linking all the historically disparate incidents of women’s language up to the present time and presenting these as the essence of Japanese culture and tradition.<sup>10</sup> Claims that women’s language originated in premodern times and was passed down faithfully (traditionally) to the present is thus a technology for rooting the modern nation in the soil and in time immemorial. The nation’s temporality—the uninterrupted past flowing seamlessly into the essence of the

modern nation—is coded in the imaginary continuity of women speaking women’s language.<sup>11</sup>

The public debates about women’s linguistic corruption in the late 1980s and early 1990s took place at the height of Japan’s “bubble” economy: In the face of the high economic growth rate, business expanded and investment of new capital accelerated. This resulted in both an explosion of new consumer goods and services (many targeted toward women), and a labor shortage, which created an urgent demand for the reserve army of female workers (as well as foreign workers), mostly as contingent labor. Partly as a public-relations strategy, and partly as a response to government pressure to comply with the 1985 Equal Employment and Opportunity Law, large companies grabbed media attention by appointing women to managerial positions and implementing programs that promoted women’s status in the workplace. The market also rediscovered women as avid agents of consumption. Through consumption, women were said to be “empowered” by having “equal”—or better, their “own”—access to the previously male-exclusive (as well as class-exclusive) world of upscale commodities, from tobacco and beer to country-club memberships and overseas travel. Both the labor market and the commodity market thus celebrated the time as “women’s era.” With the increasing gain in economic independence, women were also said to be more selective of their future spouses, demanding “three highs”—in height, education, and income. The increasing presence of women in the labor market as well as in the commodity market (through their attendant economic independence) inevitably led to the reconfiguration of the traditional gendered division of labor, and more importantly to a crisis of the moral order that gender difference upholds.

Not so different from a hundred years ago, this minor transformation in women’s role was potentially disruptive of settled gender roles. The public was scandalized that women might “shop around” and study the “features” of potential husbands as one would consider a purchase. Not surprisingly, the terms of moral crisis eventually came to rest on women’s linguistic corruption. Opinion polls and letters to the editor actively constructed a picture of women, particularly young women, speaking roughly, loudly, and vulgarly. Commentators were equally concerned that there would be no gender difference in speech in the near future.<sup>1</sup> Worried parents sought advice on how to discipline a daughter who “speaks like a boy,” or complain that their children’s young female teacher was “speaking like a man.” Significantly, female schoolteachers deploring female students’ voice became louder, marking the loss of women’s gentle voice. In their letters to the editor, concerned male citizens provided eyewitness accounts in the subway, trains, and streets, of young women cursing male passengers who came into physical contact with them when the subway swayed. Corporate managers reported being appalled by the ignorance and inability of young workers—particularly female workers—to use proper honorifics in the workplace.

The corruption of women’s speech was viewed as the result of historical change in the language, a change directly linked in the prevailing view to wider social changes stimulated by modernization. In the late nineteenth century, the source of women’s linguistic contamination—the foundational order of indexicality—was spatially sought, in class and regional peripheries. In the late 20th century, it was sought temporally as the consequence of degeneration from the imagined first-order indexicality, the archaic existence of pristine feminine speech in the past. From the standpoint of this interpretive framework, examples of contemporary women’s speech that do not fit the norm of women’s language are seen not as diversity, but as cases of degradation from a norm that is believed to have been more respected in the past. Thus is synchronic diversity converted into historical corruption—the “tragic” consequence of change in society away from all that is traditional Japanese. Claims for the historical continuity of women’s language and anxiety over the disappearance of gender difference in speech invoke the imagined past in which there was once a pure women’s language, spoken by all or most women, at least in normal circumstances. The concept of corruption from a historic norm thus preserves and valorizes a very concrete

ideal of Japanese women's language even when Japanese women do not speak it. It preserves the idea of fundamental male-female speech difference by storing it in the past. Moreover, it preserves the idea of the immortal essence of Japanese culture by storing it too in the past, because gender difference upholds national historical unity (McClintock 1995:353).

Whether at the threshold of modernity and nationalism or at the late stage of Japan in capitalist modernity, the historically interlocked linkage among gender, language, and national identity necessarily invokes a linear temporality with tradition and progress at both ends. This temporally imaginary is ideologically encoded in the indexical order of women's language through the semiotic process of inversion. This suggests that any ideological critique of gender and language in Japan must be accompanied by a critical genealogy of a national modernity and its historical narrative (see Inoue 2002). Simply demonstrating the empirically diverse ways that contemporary women's speech does not conform to the norm is not enough. Simply demonstrating the diverse media representations of how contemporary women speak is not enough either. The discourse of linguistic corruption can find "deviant" speakers at any historical moment, whenever the society attempts to resolve internal contradictions in the social order and to manage historical crisis. Reaction gives "the deviant" various names and turns them into signs of anomaly. It also presupposes such subjects as voluntary agents of resistance and rebellion, as if the discourse of women's linguistic corruption were simply the consequence of willful subjects deviating. In fact, the discourse of women's linguistic corruption is precisely the condition that makes the representation of such subjects possible.

The more we look for sociolinguistic diversity among contemporary Japanese women in order to prove that not all Japanese women speak women's language, the more we paradoxically affirm that there is such a thing as women's language. Leaving women's language unproblematized means that the inherent heterogeneity of people's linguistic practice and experience will be contained simply as deviance or (marked) diversity. We must undo the historical narrative made in the present that insists that women used to speak women's language in the past, and recognize the extent to which gender is a historical category indissolubly connected with the formation of the modern nation-state and its unity and identity.

It is also important to recognize that the fetishization of women's voice, be it called "schoolgirl speech," "women's language," or other names, articulates a fundamental way in which the discourse of nationalism is gendered. Women's language as a fetish approximates McClintock's "impassioned object": "The fetish marks a crisis in social meaning as the embodiment of an impossible irresolution. The contradiction is displaced onto and embodied in the fetish object, which is thus destined to recur with compulsive repetition. Hence the apparent power of the fetish to enchant the fetishist. By displacing power onto the fetish, then manipulating the fetish, the individual gains symbolic control over what might otherwise be terrifying ambiguities. For this reason, the fetish can be called an impassioned object" (1995:184). The recurrent nation's memory crisis is thus displaced onto women's language for the (unattainable) symbolic resolution of its ambivalence and contradiction.

### **Conclusion: The Temporality of National Modernity and the Temporality of Women's Language**

I have discussed how the temporality semiotically encoded in the indexical order of women's language is complexly complicit with the temporality of Japan's national modernity. In a more general sense, I have sought to show a dialectic between the temporality produced in microlinguistic processes and the temporality inherent in the logic of larger capitalist political economic processes, and to renew the importance of the analytical concepts of temporality and historicity in linguistic analysis.

Temporalizing gender is part and parcel of Japan's modern nation-state formation. By virtue of an imagined linearity, indexicality has the ideological effect of excluding and silencing other temporalities and other modernities, in the case of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, of those who were nationalized at the nation's margins, including women. In the production and reproduction of the metapragmatic category of women's language (and its corruption), women became abstracted into a sign and thus their lived linguistic histories and their specific experiences of the modern are emptied out; by doing so, the male national history and its social order is restored (if problematically so). Moreover, in both moments examined here—the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the late 20th century—the established indexical order of women's language points to an origin which did not even exist, but was semiotically created through indexical inversion.

What does language remember? Once it is viewed as a semiotic process operative in the real historical world, we can see that it has a selective, or better, creative memory. Historical causality is not only suspended, but is lost and then even inverted. We speak and use language, but it might not remember us.

### Notes

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1. A comprehensive overview of the field of linguistic anthropology is beyond the scope of this article. For recent programmatic survey articles on the status of linguistic anthropology, see Duranti (2003) and Briggs (2002).

2. Marx observes,

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor. [1978:320]

3. In 1890, 31 private and public girls' high schools existed. The number of enrolled students was 3,120, which constituted 0.09 percent of the female school-age population. In 1900, a year after the inauguration of the Directive on Girls' High Schools, there were 52 girls' secondary schools, with 11,984 enrolled students, 0.38 percent of the female school-age population (percentages calculated from Monbushō 1964:595, 607).

4. For the ethnographic details of how Meiji intellectuals heard schoolgirls' speech and how that process constituted them as the listening subjects of Japan's ambivalent experience of modernity, see Inoue (2003).

5. The port of Yokohama opened for free foreign trade in 1859 on the signing of the United States–Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce (Nichibei Shūkō Tūshō Jōyaku) in 1858.

6. Both *kikigurushii* and *mimizawarina* (discussed above) commonly mean 'unpleasant to the ear'. The slight difference in nuance between them is that the former has a more explicit connotation of "moral" unpleasantness.

7. McClintock makes a similar observation in her reference to Britain's nationalism and its relation to gender: "Britain's emerging national narrative gendered time by figuring women (like the colonized and the working class) as inherently atavistic—the conservative repository of the national archaic. Women were not seen as inhabiting history proper but existing, like colonized peoples, in a permanently anterior time within the modern nation" (1995:359).

8. English words were also embraced in some commercially successful young women's magazines of the early twentieth century as an index of "girls' modern." Just like those magazines informed readers of what kind of *obi* ('sash'), hairstyle, or kimono design was in vogue, they also carried a list of "words in vogue" among schoolgirls, many of which were of English origin.

9. The degree to which the first order is ideological (as in the case of "women's language") is pointed out by Baudrillard by way of Barthes's semiotics of denotation and connotation:

For denotation distinguishes itself from other significations (connotated) by its singular function of effacing the traces of the ideological process by restoring its universality and 'objective'

innocence. Far from being the objective term to which connotation is opposed as an ideological term, denotation is thus (since it naturalizes the very process of ideology) *the most ideological term*—ideological to the second degree. [1988:89]

10. Hill's (1998) discussion of the discourse of nostalgia among speakers of Mexicano provides a lucid analysis of the way pastness is imagined and constructed in the present through metapragmatic discourse and its contestations.

11. Claims for an ancient origin and continuity also presuppose one speech community where all women have equal access to women's language, where women are all (middle-class, urban) standard Japanese speakers. Claims for historical continuity and the search for the origin thus result in an exclusionary practice.

12. The loss of femininity is inseparable from the loss of women's language. Such a consensus is often performatively constructed in the public sphere through opinion polls. *Yomiuri Shinbun*, a major nationally circulated newspaper, for example, conducted a public opinion survey in 1995 regarding femininity and masculinity. To the question, "Do you think today's women are losing femininity?" 63.8 percent of the respondents answered affirmatively. And 55.6 percent agreed that the loss of femininity is evidenced by women's bad language use.

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Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology

Stanford University

Stanford, CA 94305

minoue@leland.stanford.edu