

# LINGUISTIC GENDERING OF NON-TRADITIONAL FEMALE CHARACTERS IN JAPANESE TRANSLATIONS OF AMERICAN SUPERHERO MOVIES

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## Introduction

Japanese, so Miyako Inoue writes in her study *Vicarious Language: Gender and Linguistic Modernity in Japan*, is regarded as unique by many of its native speakers in the fact that specific grammatical markers denote the gender of the speaker (2). She elaborates, “Women’s language also is a national issue, a self-conscious parameter of civil order and social change. Nationwide opinion polls are regularly conducted on whether women’s language is becoming ‘corrupted’ and, if so, how,” stating that even international publications such as the *New York Times* have taken note of differences in the speech of Japanese women over time, as well as compared to men, and to women outside of Japan (2-3). Women’s speech is often associated with politeness, empathy, and nonassertiveness (Inoue 2). This fact often leads to – for a western viewer capable of comprehending Japanese – bizarre decisions regarding the translation of female characters’ lines in American-made television series and movies for a Japanese viewership. Abé Mark Nornes cites one of the more extreme examples in his book *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema*: In the 1987 dystopian science fiction movie

*RoboCop*, the following exchange between a female police officer and her new male colleague occurs just after she has violently subdued a rowdy criminal:

Female: I better drive until you know your way around.

Male: I usually drive when I’m breaking in a new partner. (156)

In the Japanese subtitles, this scene is rendered as follows:

Female: *Watashi ga unten suru wa.* (I will drive.)

Male: *Kimi ni wa makaseraren.* (I can’t leave it to you.) (Nornes 156)

Nornes describes this scene as fundamentally corrupted, i.e. being subjected to a translation which “violently appropriates the source text,” conforming the original to the customs of the target language and culture and thereby domesticating any displayed otherness included in the foreign narrative (155). He, too, mentions the fact that Japanese linguistically marks speaker gender, remarking that translations of fictional narratives in subtitles “dramatize differences through stereotypes of the way men or women *should* speak” (156). In regard to the scene quoted above, Nornes

states that the translator had other options in marking the female officer's utterances, but chose to evacuate the power play on display in the original English version in line with Japanese conventions (156-7). However, as this is the only example of potentially inappropriate gendering Nornes mentions in a book which was published in 2007, a number of questions present themselves:

1. The movie referenced by Nornes was released 21 years prior to his book's publication. Is this strict gendering still present in more recent film releases, particularly in those in which female characters occupy roles not associated with traditionally feminine behavior?

2. If the prevalence of imposed gendered language remains unchanged, what are the underlying reasons?

3. Nornes focuses almost exclusively on subtitling techniques in his study. Is there a discernible difference in the introduction of gendered language between subtitles and dubs?

In this paper, I seek to address the above questions by providing a short historical overview of the development of women's language and its perception by contemporary Japanese native speakers. I will also point out differences between its application in the translation of fictional narratives and its actual prevalence in daily language use. The following part will analyze the speech patterns of female characters in three American action movies released within the last fifteen years, all of which are part of the superhero subgenre: *Hellboy* (Columbia TriStar, 2004), *Kick-Ass* (Lionsgate, 2010), And *Marvel's The Avengers* (Marvel Studios, 2012). This analysis will consider

the prevalence of female speech markers, as well as the deliberate absence of patterns regarded as "male," in both the Japanese subtitles and the dub track. Furthermore, it will take into account differences in the demeanors and backgrounds of the female characters whose utterances are examined, as "feminine" speech features may be more fitting for some of them than for others. Finally, it will consider the environment in which female speech occurs. The conclusion will feature a few ideas on how to expand this short study, which is, by and large, a mere preliminary effort.

According to Inoue's study referenced above, the linguistic features of contemporary feminine speech did not come into being until the late nineteenth century (25). She identifies them as having been based on Meiji period "schoolgirl speech," also called *teyo-dawa kotoba* in accordance with its distinctive utterance end markers (25, 37). Male intellectuals commented on this phenomenon in Japanese print media from approximately 1887 through World War I, considering it "strange" and "unpleasant" to the ear (37). Interestingly, the original purpose of indexing the features of this "schoolgirl speech" was to contain it; in fact, in one of the earliest essays on the topic, published as "Vogue Speech" in the women's magazine *Kijo no tomo*, Ozaki Koyo, one of the most widely-known Meiji period writers, exhorted educators and parents to curb young women's use of these linguistic features by relating them to seediness and low class (Inoue 57-8). Inoue points out the *genbun'itchi* movement (i.e. the movement to modernize written language by taking western naturalist novels as example) as a primary originator of the shift from

uncouth, “rough” schoolgirl speech to women’s speech (83). Concerned with developing a literary style which depicted active speech in a life-like manner, rather than in the formal literary register of Japanese employed until that point, the depiction of *teyo-dawa kotoba* in works of writers affiliated with this effort led to its dissemination beyond its originators, for example in the narrative *Sanshiro* (1909) by Natsume Sōseki, published at the culmination of the *genbun’itchi* movement (Inoue 91). Interestingly, Inoue points out that the *teyo-dawa* speech depicted in both critical essays and, later, in fictional narratives is in itself reified through repeated citation, rather than a true-to-life depiction of the speaking style of the average Meiji era schoolgirl (72-3). The attribution of “softness” to contemporary women’s speech markers is, in fact, an effect of their designation as such, rather than an inherent feature which made them suitable for this qualitative association; by deracinating these linguistic features from their “rough” origins in an overarching national narrative which claims that it has always existed, it is left bereft of historicity (Inoue 77). Be that as it may, the proliferation of women’s speech markers in literature and magazines, in conjunction with knowledge of their origins fading in the public mind, eventually led to their transformation into “the salient sociolinguistic markers of the ideal urban middle-class housewife” (Inoue 164).

As the quotation directly above implies, feminine speech as it emerged in the first half of the twentieth century does not only fulfill the function of marking gender, but denotes a very specific segment of the female population, including class and regional considerations. Inoue, who did

not grow up in the urban environment of the Kantō area, relates in the introduction to her study that she initially experienced women’s speech as the language of commodities and even *whiteness*, as she was primarily exposed to it via the consumption of television broadcasts, including Japanese dubbed versions of foreign films (7-8). Considering its origins, its proliferation in this manner is not difficult to explain: As a linguistic norm which emerged relatively recently, women’s language “requires a normalizing discipline deployed by a range of cultural agents (writers, teachers, scholars - and, of course, reflexive, norm-conscious readers, speakers, and listeners) to institute and maintain it as a norm [...]” (Inoue 164). Inoue relates that the use of these linguistic markers after their establishment in the public consciousness enabled those living in rural areas, away from the centers of power, to “participate in the imagined national (speech) community. The dissemination of women’s language, for these women, had little to do with gender and everything to do with class and region, as these elements became punctuated within the nationalist and capitalist project,” as was the case for her (103).

Passive consumption of this normed gendered language is not the only way in which it is maintained and perpetuated; Inoue identifies the “mourning” for its loss as one of the more active mechanisms, stating that:

Mourning the death of women’s language is a way to maintain and normalize the ontology of women’s language in its purest form by pointing out its absence in the present and its presence in the past, insisting that today’s ‘corrupted’ language use by women is a

historical consequence of women's continuously and collectively failing to preserve a unique Japanese cultural trait. (165)

She subsequently cites the results of polls conducted by the NHK in 1986 and by the *Kokugo Shingikai* ("National Language Council," the body regulating orthodox Japanese language usage) in 1995, in which two thirds (1986) and a little less than half of all respondents (1995) responded that they preferred a gendered difference in language use (186, 199).

Rika Saito goes so far as to argue in her dissertation, *Building and maintaining women's speech: Covert language policy and gender construction in Japan*, that the *Kokugo Shingikai* pursued a "covert language policy" in neglecting to directly address women's language as a speech feature for the longest time while simultaneously regulating *kotoba no midare* (language disorder), particularly as employed by young women (232, 234). Saito points out that the Japanese feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s, likewise, did not address women's speech or sexist language in general, and its next wave in the 80s and 90s failed to reach a conclusion as to the former's reform (231). She states that, while gender lines in various aspects of life became blurred, women's speech does not seem to parallel this development (231). Like Inoue, Saito also observes that "[l]anguage norms, such as a belief that women and men use language differently, particularly in their daily speech, are so entrenched that many speakers consider gendered language to exist naturally," i.e. that the origins of linguistic gender differentiation do not exist in the consciousness of the general public (267).

At this point, it should also be mentioned that, due to female speech existing at the intersection of gender, class, regionality, and even race by way of screen translation, female Japanese native speakers sometimes consider its use empowering in spite of its nonassertive, "gentle" conceptualization. Inoue not only cites sociolinguistic studies from the 80s and 90s rejecting Western-style feminist interpretations of it, e.g. Ide and McGloin (1990), but also mentions a concrete example in the form of Sawada-san, an officer worker at MJL, who began utilizing feminine speech in order to shed her Tōhoku accent, perceived as rural and "backwards," after migrating to Tokyo to attend university there (195, 269). Furthermore, Yuka Matsugu's article "The power of femininity: Can Japanese gender variation signify contradictory social meanings?" asserts that utilization of "super-feminine" gender markers, i.e. active markers such as sentence-final *wa* with rising intonation or *kashira*, which are never used by men, do not only encode gender, but also maturity, and can signify stronger assertion when employed in the presence of younger interlocutors (198, 204).

Obviously, use of gendered language in contemporary spoken Japanese is inspired by a number of factors, and more complex than it might initially appear to an outside observer. However, does its prevalence in the media correspond to its everyday use? Obviously, this is not the case in rural areas, as Inoue's personal account and her interview with Sawada-san illustrate, but what about women's language's supposed epicenter, i.e. the urban Kantō area? It turns out that even there, actual use is not as common as media depictions would suggest. Saito

cites a 1998 study conducted by Satake Kuniko, in which the latter found the following:

[B]oth female and male college students did not seem to use different gendered forms very much in their daily life; however, her study indicates that the students tended to draw a distinctive line between women's and men's ways of speech. They reiterated stereotypes of "gentle, polite and graceful" women's speech and "rough, outrageous, and vulgar" men's speech. (272)

Likewise, Rinko Shibuya states in her dissertation *A synchronic and diachronic study on sex exclusive differences in the modern Japanese language*, that, other than in the fictional narratives of various types she analyzed,

[I]t was hard to find evidence that gendered lexemes and morphemes are commonly used in actuality. The use of the sentence final particle *wa* by Tokyo dialect speaking women was strikingly few. There are little sex differences with other sex exclusive particles such as the sentence final particle *zo* and *ze*. Both men and women tend to avoid using rough particles in a normal context. Almost all tokens of 'male' particles were in joking or quoted expressions. (128-9)

Shibuya also points out a potential reason for the proliferation of gendered language even in translated foreign works: "When a female character's lines are translated into 'male speech', the audience regards the character as 'markedly defeminized' and conversely, male

characters who speak 'female speech' are immediately regarded as 'homosexual' unless their utterances are jokes" (77-8). She considers the strict gendering in fictional narratives as symbolizing "the socially accepted ways of language practice" (130). This is in line with the polls cited by Inoue, as well as Saito's observations, and indicates that women's speech remains in the public consciousness by way of a self-perpetuating mechanism: Fiction models it for consumers, who accept it as standard and demand it to be present in subsequent works, as well.

Shibuya succinctly outlines the features of gendered speech on page 55 of her dissertation as follows:

### **Sex Exclusive Lexemes and Morphemes**

- 1. Sentence final particles such as *zo*, *ze*, (Male), and *wa* with a rising intonation (Female)
- 2. Certain referential pronouns such as *ore*, *boku*, *omae*, *kimi*, (Male), and *atashi* (Female)

### **Sex Exclusive Sentence Patterns**

- 1. Imperatives: Direct commands with the verb in imperative form (Male) (e.g., *kaere!* 'Go away!', *damare!* 'Shut up!')
- 2. Negative imperatives: Direct commands with the verb in the plain form followed by the sentence final particle *na* (Male) (e.g., *sawaru na!* 'Don't touch!', *warauna!* 'Don't laugh!')
- 3. Declaratives: Sentences ending with *da* (Male) (e.g., *kono iro wa iya da*. 'I don't like this color') [the feminine equivalent is

deletion or replacement with declarative extended predicate “(na no)”]

- 4. Interrogative sentence: The verb or adjective in the plain form (or a noun) followed by the question marker particle *ka*. (Henceforth ‘blunt question’) (Male) (e.g., *taberu ka?* ‘Do you want to eat?’, *honto ka?* ‘Is that true?’)

The above feature breakdown will be utilized in my own analysis outlined in the following parts.

As stated above, I decided to analyze direct-style utterances by female characters in translated American superhero movies. I chose this particular genre as it features women who could not be further in character from the “good wife and wise mother” (*ryōsai kenbo*) gender-essentialist ideology included in the Meiji civil code, which Inoue identifies as being part of the topic complex to which gendered speech also belongs (28). Instead of being defined by their attachment to men and their skills in the domestic sphere, these female characters occupy the roles of paramilitary officers, spies, assassins, and vigilantes; they were often trained for these tasks from childhood, and are shown doing away with their opponents without hesitation, much like the female police officer in *RoboCop* Nornes cited. In the spirit of providing a complete picture, I also included female supporting characters with a more conventionally feminine personality profile for comparison. My criteria for data selection were as follows: The female character had to have more than five direct-style conversational turns over the course of the movie (with one conversational turn being defined as

speech uninterrupted by another character, regardless of overall length). I noted down all conversational turns uttered by women in direct style over the course of the examined movies, including those by incidental female speaking roles not included in the character selection criteria outlined above, in order to provide holistic numbers useful for comparison of the works themselves alongside the more character-specific data points.

The quantitative analysis includes the following gendered language markers: 1. Use of sentence-final *wa*; 2. Use of imperfective declarative (*na*) *no*, i.e. an extended predicate construction that avoids the copula *da*, which is considered a male-exclusive sentence pattern due to its definite nuance; 3. Use of lexemes, morphemes, and sentence patterns identified as male-exclusive (i.e. the aforementioned imperfective *da* in declaratives and imperatives). An accompanying qualitative assessment will take Shibuya’s other outlined gendered speech patterns (i.e. pronoun usage and the form of direct-style interrogatives) into account, and describe the overall linguistic environment present in the movie (e.g. utterance forms by male characters, politeness structures, as well as other potentially relevant factors). The goal of this analysis is to come to a conclusion as to what factors, if any, govern differences in gendered language use between the three analyzed movies, and provide a starting point for more comprehensive study in the future.

The following three movies, released theatrically between 2004 and 2012, were taken into consideration:

1. *Hellboy* (2004). According to the *Internet Movie Database*, this movie

premiered in the USA on March 30, 2004, and was shown in Japanese theatres from October 1, 2004 on. It was based on a series of comic books by Mike Mignola published by Dark Horse Comics, in which the demon-like eponymous protagonist, who arrived from a hellish parallel dimension as an infant and was raised by humans, investigates supernatural phenomena in the employ of a secret government department (“Hellboy [IMDb]”). *Box Office Mojo* lists its production budget as \$66 million, and its worldwide gross as \$99,318,987.

2. *Kick-Ass* (2010). Released on March 12, 2010 in the USA and on December 18, 2010 in Japan, this is the only film out of the three analyzed which has been rated R/R15+ due to brutal violence, pervasive language, and drug use by minors, among other things (“Kick-Ass [IMDb]”). This movie is based on a comic by Mark Millar and John Romita jr. published by Marvel’s Icon branch, which was created in 2004 and deals exclusively in creator-owned properties (“Icon”). The story takes a deconstructivist approach to superhero mythology by depicting comic book fans assuming superhero identities, notably without possessing any powers, and, in some cases, even lacking combat training (“Kick-Ass”). *Box Office Mojo* lists its production budget as \$30 million, and its worldwide gross as \$96,188,903.

3. *The Avengers* (2012), also known as *Marvel’s The Avengers*, was released on May 4, 2012 in the USA, and on August 14, 2012 in Japan (“Avengers”). By far the most high-profile one of the three movies, it showcased the formation of a superhero team consisting of a number of Marvel characters long established in their respective own comic series, who also had appeared in their own eponymous movies

prior to that point; this team defends Earth against an alien invasion (“Avengers”). *Box Office Mojo* lists its production budget as \$220 million, and its worldwide gross as \$1,518,594,910; it was the highest-grossing movie of 2012, and is the third-highest grossing movie of all time.

In the following section, I will first introduce the female characters matching the selection criteria I outlined above, utilizing their lines uttered in the movies to provide characterization. As this study focuses exclusively on their presentation in the respective movie properties, further background information given in the comics will not be included. I will then provide quantitative and qualitative analyses of their utterances.

*Hellboy* features two named female characters with more than five turns of direct-style dialogue, one of whom receives top billing on the movie poster as the deuteragonist of the narrative, and utters the majority of analyzed lines. Liz Sherman is an on-again, off-again member of the BPRD (“Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense,” the secret government organization with which the title character is also affiliated); she states at time index 57:44 that she has quit the Bureau 13 times so far upon a new affiliate inviting her back. Her background is summarized in an interview video playing between time indices 52:00 and 55:00, in which she relates that her pyrokinetic powers are directly connected to her emotions, and that, in her case, “exploding with anger” is not just an expression. Shortly before this scene, she tells Hellboy, who has been romantically interested in her since before the start of the movie and visits the mental hospital where she voluntarily stays, that she is finally

learning to control her ability (time index 47:45). At the end of the movie, she and the protagonist become a couple.

The second female character featuring in *Hellboy* is Ilsa Hauptstein, a high-ranking German SS officer who was involved in the experiment which originally summoned the title character to Earth. She is romantically affiliated with Grigori Rasputin, the primary antagonist, as becomes clear from her first utterance at time index 4:23, in which she swears that she will always be by his side. She is in charge whenever Rasputin is not present, as her frequent commands to other characters (for example at time index 44:48) indicate. Please see the Table 1a-b below for the quantitative analysis of the movie's 52 lines which were uttered by women in direct style, the lowest count of the three movies observed.

Notably, Liz, in line with her characterization being more feminine than Ilsa's, displays a higher ratio of feminine gender markers than the latter, and conversely features fewer "male" markers according to Shibuya's classification mentioned above. Interestingly, Liz's uses of *wa* barely overlap in sub and dub, as one would expect in at least the seven cases in which she utters the feminine sentence particle in the dub; it only occurs synchronously in three instances. Ilsa's dubbed speech, meanwhile, is almost completely devoid of feminine markers, but in turn features an unmitigated imperative, which is replaced by a gerund form in the sub. Liz's plain copulae occur in the video providing background on her ability, in which she is presumably asked to explain it. In this context, it makes sense for her to be more definitive, particularly in the context at hand: She states that she hates the words which have been used to

describe her, finishing her utterances with *iya da* ("I hate it"). The sub chooses to use *suki ja nai* ("I don't like it"). The latter is closer to the original English utterance, but does not fit with the lip movements of the first instance; the second time, she is not on screen, but the dub translator presumably chose to mirror her prior statement, as it is the shortest and most direct way to express the sentiment. The third utterance, *da naa*, occurs after she is convinced to return to the BPRD and expresses that it is a good feeling to be outside; interestingly, it is mirrored in the subs almost exactly, only that the conversational turn instead ends in *da wa*.

As for Ilsa, her only instance of a feminine marker (i.e. declarative *no*) in the dub occurs when she explains her and Rasputin's plans to Hellboy after capturing him and his entire group and threatening to sacrifice an unconscious Liz if he does not comply. All of her instances of feminine utterance endings in the subtitles also occur in this scene, likely because five of her ten overall conversational turns occur in this setting. *Wa* seems to occur in her subtitles primarily with declarations which do not necessitate an explanatory nuance.

Both dub track and subtitles largely avoid "male" speech markers used by women; direct style questions featuring question marker *ka* are completely absent; questions are either indicated with *no* with rising intonation, or are intonation-marked only. While Ilsa gets to use one direct imperative in the dub, two other instances in which she utters direct orders are mitigated by using a suffix-less verbal stem, once with affixed *bikago* prefix (*Mō doki!* in the dub at time index 44:09, with the subtitle resorting to *Doite!*; *O-damari!* in the subs at time index 1:51:20, while she says *Yokei na koto!* in the dub).

Notably, Liz uses gerunds in her order for one of her companions to hit her in the face in order to trigger her powers at time index 1:48:08, in spite of everyone in the room being in acute danger of perishing within the next few seconds if she does not succeed.

Overall, it looks as if, in the case of *Hellboy*, the sub is more corrupt than the dub track, as it adheres more rigidly to gendered speech conventions: 1. Other than in the dub, no forms deviating from the norms laid out by Shibuya occur; and 2. Ilsa, a very forceful character who could safely be described as “mannish” in demeanor, features feminine speech markers in the subtitles, albeit at a much lower ratio than Liz. Nevertheless, the marker-to-line ratios in dub track and subtitles, when compared to the overall baseline, indicate that these two characters are differentiated in their respective linguistic gender expression.

*Kick-Ass*, like *Hellboy*, features two named characters fitting the outlined analysis criteria, with one of them being a top-billed deuteragonist. Hit-Girl, real name Mindy Macready, is a prepubescent girl; her first scene in the movie features her father shooting her with a large-caliber gun in a vacant lot, training her to take the impact while outfitted with a bulletproof vest (time index 12:05). Her character is further established in the following scene taking place at a diner, where she first plays at being a regular little girl who wants a “doggie” (*wan-chan*) and a Bratz doll for her upcoming birthday, only to make fun of her father for believing her act and stating that she actually wants butterfly knives (time index 13:36). She displays knowledge of a variety of weapons (time index 21:54) and, in her guise as Hit-Girl, is both extremely

ruthless in killing her opponents, and foul-mouthed enough to be censored in her subtitles (one example of censorship with circles instead of the implied characters can be found at time index 39:00).

The second female character, Katie Deauxma, is a student of the same high school as the eponymous protagonist, Kick-Ass/Dave Lizewski, who has the locker next to his own (shown in the first ten minutes of the movie, and again from time index 25:34, at which point she first exchanges words with the main character). She initiates the conversation with Dave by talking to him about comics, expressing relatively stereotypical likes and dislikes in her preferences – she enjoys *shōjo manga* and *Scott Pilgrim*, an American comic about a male primary character suddenly drawn into a world of magical realism in which he has to fight his girlfriend’s “evil exes” (time index 34:08). She volunteers at a drug clinic/needle exchange (34:32) and lets Dave help her in applying bronzer after an implied visit to the tanning studio after mistakenly believing he is gay (47:36). Once he finally disabuses her of that notion, they become a couple (1:11:57). This movie features 84 conversational turns in direct style by female characters; the quantitative breakdown can be found in the Table 2a-b below.

It is immediately apparent that Mindy/Hit-Girl does not feature a single instance of sentence-final *wa* in either dub track or subtitles. This decision by the respective translators could be based in a number of factors: 1. As the Matsugu article cited above outlines, *wa* is a marker not only broadcasting femininity, but *mature* femininity. Shibuya agrees with this assessment by providing an analysis from the opposite direction: She identifies

use of “boyish” speech in a commercial by a young wife towards her husband as deliberate cuteness and coquettish behavior, indexing herself as younger than she appears (46). Both of these observations indicate that, as Hit-Girl is a prepubescent child, her using *wa* would be unfitting. 2. Considering Hit-Girl’s explicit rudeness and callous attitude, a marker which is often described as denoting “gentleness” would be inappropriate. 3. On a more background-based note, the movie showcases her and her father’s “origin” story in a comic-like sequence, stating that her mother died shortly after her birth, she spent the first years of her life with a former male colleague of her father while the latter sat in jail, and after his release, father and daughter mostly isolated themselves from the outside world when not engaged in their vigilantism. As a result, no female model would have been available for her to acquire these features.

That is not to say that her utterances are completely devoid of feminine-indexed markers; Hit-Girl utilizes *atashi* to refer to herself (e.g. at time index 12:05) and the disrespectful, but fundamentally female, abbreviated second-person pronoun *anta* to refer to Dave (e.g. at 41:28). Furthermore, even though the occurrence ratio is low when compared to Liz in *Hellboy*, she employs declarative *no* in place of an extended predicate construction featuring an imperfective copula, and deletes copulae at a high rate in places where they could facultatively be inserted – in 58 conversational turns, only three instances of plain imperfective copulae occur in the dub; the subtitles avoid them altogether. For imperative purposes, she exclusively employs verbal stem/*ren’yōkei* + *na*, with the suffix representing a rude shortening of honorific

imperative *nasai*; while this structure is fundamentally male in terms of genderized speech patterns, and perhaps overly familiar when used with people one is not close to (as for example pointed out in *Japanese: A Comprehensive Grammar* on page 494), it is less blunt than the straightforward imperative form, i.e. *godan* verbal root + *-e* or *ichidan* verbal root + *-ro*.

Katie, meanwhile, shows a more conventional gender patterning in her utterance endings, even though her ratios are likewise all lower than Liz’s in *Hellboy*. Notably, she displays more markers in the dub track than in the subs. Her only instance of utilizing a male-indexed feature occurs at time index 1:15:42; in this scene, she is on the phone with Dave after having found out that he is not only not gay, but the person behind the mask of Kick-Ass. She has learned that, despite his promise to her, he has not yet given up on his superhero identity, and tells him, *Shinpai da*. Here, the definiteness of the copula not only fits the situation, it may have also been occasioned by lip movement requirements, as the subtitle at this juncture omits it, instead stating, *Anata ga shinpai*.

Overall, both dub track and subtitles share two features with those present in *Hellboy*: 1. Direct style interrogatives featuring *ka* are completely avoided by female characters; questions are marked by rising intonation, sometimes in conjunction with *no*, and 2. Straight-up imperatives are absent; even Hit-Girl, who has no compunction addressing her grown male opponents with *kusare o-chinko-domo* (sub)/*kusobakayarou-domo* (dub) (time index 39:00) always mitigates her orders by utilizing a form which shortens what was originally an honorific. Both of

these characters have a higher occurrence ratio of *wa* and declarative *no* than the overall baseline; this is due to the fact that incidental female characters such as the antagonist's wife and Katie's best friend barely contribute to the overall count in their shared seven lines. In this case, the dub track translation seems to be the more corrupt one at first glance, although it must be noted that a) overall incidence of gender markers is very low in both subtitles and dub of this movie, and b) Hit-Girl's overt instances of female sentence patterns (exclusively declarative *no* in place of copulae) in the dub are counterbalanced by the exact same amount of male utterance endings. Once again, a difference in linguistic gendering depending on the character is clearly visible in the marker to line ratios.

Finally, *Avengers* features three female characters exceeding five direct style conversational turns in the course of the film, one of them receiving top billing and arguably representing one of the protagonists of this ensemble movie, as she has roughly the same amount of screen time as her male counterparts and is integral to the resolution of the movie's conflict.

Natasha Romanoff, code name Black Widow, is a S.H.I.E.L.D. operative ("Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistics Division;" a paramilitary organization with affiliations with the UN as well as the American government, responding to an international council of regents only depicted in shadows, as shown for example at time index 19:39); in her introductory scene, she is depicted feigning helplessness after having been captured by a Russian black market arms dealer, only to quickly disable her captors after being recalled for another

task (13:50-15:06). She indicates to Bruce Banner during their first meeting that she has been trained as a spy from early childhood (17:01), and gives an account of her background and philosophy to antagonist Loki in a bid to figure out his plans: Prior to her affiliation with S.H.I.E.L.D., she worked as a hired assassin, renowned for her skills and unconcerned about the identity of her employers (1:04:23). Originally a Russian citizen, she states that she did not care who hired her as she was used to regimes changing daily (1:05:03). The only factor which motivates her to act out of personal considerations is her "ledger," i.e. a track record of whom she owes favors; she pretends to only be interested in finding out Clint Barton's/Hawkeye's whereabouts and convincing Loki to release her colleague from his control, as she owes him her life (1:05:13). Although she pretends to be emotionally affected by Loki's subsequent tirade, she immediately disengages to pass on the information she has gained from him as soon as she has goaded him into giving it up, indicating that she may be even more calculating than her prior words to the antagonist already imply (1:06:49).

Pepper Potts is the love interest of Tony Stark/Iron Man; their relationship was established in a previous movie of the Marvel timeline, *Iron Man 2*. In *Avengers*, she is shown in a five-minute segment during which Stark is ultimately recruited into the Avengers Initiative; it is made clear that she has taken part in planning and executing Stark's bid to build a skyscraper run entirely on clean energy (time indices 23:38-25:34). While obviously a capable professional, who manages to convince Stark to consider cooperation with S.H.I.E.L.D. after he

initially intends to refuse (26:08-27:20), she is primarily depicted as the partner of one of the male protagonists here, rather than as a more independent agent like in the *Iron Man* series of films.

Maria Hill, who features in scenes from the very beginning of the movie, is second-in-command aboard the S.H.I.E.L.D. helicarrier, taking charge of it in the absence of Director Nick Fury and answering only to him. As most of her exchanges occur with Fury, she primarily uses distal style speech and therefore has few utterances which factor into this analysis; nevertheless, these six conversational turns are of interest, as they occur primarily between her and the male protagonists, one of whom is not strictly speaking part of the S.H.I.E.L.D. chain of command. *Avengers* is the longest of the three analyzed works, and features the most overall direct-style utterances by female characters. Quantitatively, the occurrence of gendered speech markers is broken down in Table 3a-b.

Like the other two analyzed works, *Avengers* avoids plain style interrogatives with *ka*, as well as the use of plain imperfective copulae or direct imperatives uttered by female speakers. However, aside from these commonalities, the results for this movie are interesting in a number of regards. First of all, Black Widow's *wa* occurrence is slightly higher than baseline in both dub track and subtitles, whereas Pepper Potts, who is shown exclusively in a semi-domestic setting, has a higher occurrence of sentence-final *wa* in the dub track, but one which is lower than Black Widow's and on par with the baseline in the subs. Meanwhile, Black Widow's usage of declarative *no* is well above general occurrence rate, while Pepper's is far lower (and nonexistent in the subtitles).

This would indicate that Black Widow is indexed as *more* feminine than Pepper, although her stated character attributes would contraindicate this. Black Widow's single instance of a "male" marker, which is mitigated by not being used in contemporary spoken Japanese outside of fixed expressions, no less, does not sufficiently counteract the other ratios to explain this discrepancy from previously established expectations based on the results of the movies analyzed above.

In a comparison of all female characters analyzed so far, Black Widow does have a relatively low occurrence ratio of *wa* in the dub: Liz's is 0.175 and Katie's is 0.137, compared to her 0.078; only Ilsa and Hit-Girl have a lower ratio at 0. In the subtitles, she outdoes Katie (0.065 vs. 0.034), but is overshadowed by Ilsa (0.3) and Liz (0.378); Hit-Girl once again presents zero occurrences. On the other hand, her occurrence ratios of declarative *no* are far higher when measured with the other characters; she only uses insignificantly fewer instances of this marker than Katie in the dub (Black Widow 0.237, Katie 0.241), and is otherwise only outdone by Liz. In the subtitles, occurrence of *no* is once again only more prevalent in Liz's lines. Here, too, the comparative data indicates that Black Widow is a more female-indexed character on average than any character but Liz.

Finally, the strongest imperative uttered by Black Widow uttered in the dub track, when the written-style/somewhat archaic *seyo* appears in the subtitles (time index 41:36), consists of verbal stem + *nasai*, a construction the third volume of *Japanese: The spoken language* defines as occurring "most commonly in addressing children, close relatives, subordinates,

subordinates, service personnel, and so forth” (171). The honorific component inherent in *nasaru* seems to indicate that, while such a grammatical construct clearly indicates an order, it just as obviously reads as far above the plain imperative in terms of politeness and “gentleness,” particularly as it is frequently uttered by mothers to their children. However, the scene in which it occurs in *Avengers* does not call for this level of imperative mitigation: Black Widow is piloting a heavily-armed fighter jet, and is telling Loki, the primary antagonist of the narrative, to surrender. One of her fellow Avengers operatives is on the ground providing backup, another is on his way, and she is aware that Loki controls her colleague Barton, whom she seeks to set free. It is not even possible to explain the mitigated imperative by a need to conform to the original lip movements in the dub track, as this line is uttered while an exterior shot of the jet is shown, with Black Widow’s voice being broadcast by speakers.

What factors, then, may be at work in the counterintuitive degree of linguistic gendering this character displays? The only potential answer which comes to mind is the environment in which Black Widow speaks, namely the sheer number of male characters with whom she interacts, and their strong masculine gender-indexing. In *Hellboy*, Liz’s only interlocutor producing extremely male sentence particles such as *zo* and *ze* alongside a number of other “male speech” features is the protagonist; her other BPRD colleagues either produce distal style or almost lack male markers compared to *Hellboy*, and the leader of the bureau, the Professor, functions as a wizened grandfather figure and speaks in archaic

forms. In *Kick-Ass*, only the primary antagonist produces a significant amount of hyper-masculine forms, and the number of named male characters with consistent speaking roles is far lower overall. In both of these movies, other criteria than compensatory usage are therefore likely at work. Meanwhile, *Black Widow* is the only female member of a team of six, and among her five male associates, three (namely Stark/Iron Man, Thor, and Barton) frequently use strongly male-indexed forms. Add the fact that even in the English original, Loki, who also favors highly masculine speech, hurls a gendered insult at her at time index 1:05:40 (which is preserved in differing, but still strongly gendered terms in both subtitles and dub track), and a potential origin of her comparatively high occurrence of female markers becomes apparent: Her femininity is utilized to counterbalance the abundance of “male” utterances, particularly since the female characters with the second- and third-highest utterance count feature in far fewer scenes, and either speak in an environment where fewer men are present (Pepper), or primarily use distal style (Hill).

Maria Hill, when speaking plain style, does not present any overt feminine markers; in fact, she produces an apparent outlier value in the ratios listed above, as she has the highest incidence of “male” markers of any female character analyzed in her dub track. However, it must be pointed out that this number is, in fact, likely not indicative of a conscious gendering effort, but predicated by lip syncing requirements: the sole utterance of *da* in the beginning of the movie (time index 8:10), which produces a high ratio number due to her very low plain style utterance count, occurs in a surprised

inquiry as to the identity of Loki, who had just appeared in the S.H.I.E.L.D. base and is about to leave with Barton and their scientific advisor, and her mouth movements are clearly visible. The subtitles render the line, which is produced as *Dare da?*, as *Sono hito, dare?* Still, the fact that Hill produces this unmarked copula in the place of other potential forms for “Who is that?” (for example a contracted/abbreviated distal version such as *Dare ‘su ka* – the line is uttered very quickly and the scene features a lot of camera movement, so that such a replacement would have been possible without producing a visible mismatch with her lip movements), and that she later answers an inquiry by Stark with an utterance featuring a plain style verbal with no sentence particles in the dub track (time index 54:24), may, in fact, indicate a conscious absence of gendering in her case, although her turn sample is too small to make this call.

As the above analysis shows, the linguistic gendering of female characters not indexed as traditionally feminine in Japanese translations from originally non-gender-marking language sources, which Nornes observed in the subtitles of *RoboCop*, remains a contemporary phenomenon. This is likely due to native speakers’ conceptualized understanding of gendered language observed by Shibuya, in which adult women who communicate in plain style devoid of feminine markers are seen as “defeminized” (130). Nevertheless, it seems that there is a difference in degree of linguistic gendering between the analyzed characters, which may be attributable to the following factors:

1. Translator preference - as no translator names are given in the movie or DVD credits, this possibility cannot be controlled for, although considering the existence of “grammars” for subtitling, and the proposed normativity of gendered language in scripted fictional materials by Saito and Shibuya, this should not be a major reason for the displayed discrepancies. Arguments as to the necessity for feminine speech usage in dub tracks to fit lip movements are also spurious at best, as they even occur when the character’s mouth movements are not visible, and are often uttered so quickly that leaving them out or replacing them with a different marker would not make a discernible difference.

2. Character type – Liz’ powers are based on emotion, while Hit-Girl and Black Widow are trained assassins without special abilities. Additionally, Liz is the only female lead in a relationship developing in the course of the plot (in comparison, Ilsa and Rasputin and Pepper and Stark are already established couples, the other female characters are not depicted in a relationship. Katie is the only female character observed who does not fit the pattern, which might, however, be related to the following point).

3. Character age – Hit-Girl has more leeway to forgo feminine speech as she is still a child (Saito [on pages 44-5] and Shibuya [on page 266] both point out that young girls sometimes exhibit male speech features, going so far as to use *boku* for self-reference, but stop after reaching maturity unless they are deliberately attempting to engage in coquetry. Likewise, Matsugu points to feminine markers indicating *mature* femininity [198]). The same factors might apply to

Katie, who, after all, is also still a high school student.

4. Speaking role gender ratio and overall speech modes present (i.e., female gendering fulfills a compensatory function). As outlined in the above comparative analysis of Black Widow's utterances vis-à-vis those of the other examined characters, her linguistic expression in an environment abundant with strong masculine markers may be more densely feminine-marked in order to provide balance, particularly since she is the only female protagonist in a group of six. Black Widow's character profile seems to be superseded by this compensatory effort.

Considering that studies on the use of feminine language markers in works translated into Japanese have primarily been considered under the aegis of their disconnect from the way people speak in real life, and that even Shibuya, who has produced one of the most comprehensive studies on the subject, limits her analysis of scripted narratives to general statements of marker prevalence and absence in different forms of fictional works (i.e. movies, novels, etc.), the following steps could be taken to expand this preliminary study in the future:

1. Broadening the analysis to include different genres, and/or movies marketed towards different target demographics – all movies analyzed for this study are part of a highly specific genre, which is targeted towards young males. How would gender-indexing differ in a genre geared towards young women, or middle-aged populations? How would different genres compare in their occurrence of gender markers?
2. Compiling more data extracted from movies in the same genre, under

consideration of character stats such as age, (non)conformity to the “middle-class urban housewife” type at the heart of the definition of women's speech (i.e. marital status, living circumstances, relative income/wealth if discernible, presence or absence of children, depiction of the female character engaging in household chores or nurturing activities/traditionally “male” activities such as front line combat or heavy industrial work, etc.), and the environment in which they speak (i.e. the gender ratio present in the narrative, the number and ratio of male vs. female conversational turns, the relative hierarchical positions of the male and female characters to each other, and the incidence of gendered forms produced by all characters both male and female).

3. Introducing a temporal factor in order to unearth predictive tendencies. Compared to the three movies analyzed above, what gender ratios occur in the *Superman* movies released in the 1980s? This is merely one possible example; of course, this approach could be taken in any one genre.

I would like to close with Rika Saito's prediction on the future of women's speech, which, depending on one's opinion on this complex sociolinguistic phenomenon, can be regarded as either comforting or discouraging:

Indeed, is stereotypical women's speech destined to vanish in the future? It is unlikely. Deviant language use of younger women is targeted for correction, that is modeling the ideal women's speech. Women would produce and reproduce their own language by both conforming to and deviating

from the commonly circulated model of speech. In this sense, women's speech as an imagined model of speech will not disappear and will function to check the actual language use of women. (283)

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Table 1a.

<b>Character (Line count)</b>	<b>Sentence final <i>wa</i> (dub/sub)</b>	<b>Declarative <i>no</i> (dub/sub)</b>	<b>Features defined as “male” used by female characters (dub/sub)</b>
<b>Overall (52)</b>	7/18	14/7	4/0
<b>Liz (40)</b>	7/15	13/5	3/0 ( <i>da</i> x2, <i>da naa</i> x1)
<b>Ilsa (10)</b>	0/3	1/2	1/0 (imperative <i>shiro</i> )

Table 1b: Utterance per line count ratio.

<b>Character</b>	<b><i>wa</i></b>	<b>Declarative <i>no</i></b>	<b>“Male” features</b>
<b>Overall</b>	Dub=0.135/Sub=0.346	Dub=0.269/Sub=0.134	Dub=0.08/Sub=0
<b>Liz</b>	Dub=0.175/Sub=0.375	Dub=0.325/Sub=0.125	Dub=0.075/Sub=0
<b>Ilsa</b>	Dub=0/Sub=0.3	Dub=0.1/Sub=0.2	Dub=0.1/Sub=0

Table 2a.

<b>Character (Line count)</b>	<b>Sentence final <i>wa</i> (dub/sub)</b>	<b>Declarative <i>no</i> (dub/sub)</b>	<b>Features defined as “male” used by female characters (dub/sub)</b>
<b>Overall (84)</b>	4/2	13/5	7/2
<b>Mindy/Hit-Girl (48)</b>	0/0	5/3	5/1 (dub: RY+na imp. x2, “da” x3; sub: RY+na imp.)
<b>Katie (29)</b>	4/1	7/2	1/0 (“da”)

Table 2b: Utterance per line count ratio.

<b>Character</b>	<b><i>wa</i></b>	<b>Declarative <i>no</i></b>	<b>“Male” features</b>
<b>Overall</b>	Dub=0.048/Sub=0.024	Dub=0.155/Sub=0.06	Dub=0.083/Sub=0.024
<b>Mindy/Hit-Girl</b>	Dub=0/Sub=0	Dub=0.104/Sub=0.063	Dub=0.104/Sub=0.021
<b>Katie</b>	Dub=0.138/Sub=0.034	Dub=0.241/Sub=0.069	Dub=0.034/Sub=0

Table 3a.

<b>Character (Line count)</b>	<b>Sentence final <i>wa</i> (dub/sub)</b>	<b>Declarative <i>no</i> (dub/sub)</b>	<b>Features defined as “male” used by female characters (dub/sub)</b>
<b>Overall (102)</b>	8/6	20/8	1/1
<b>Black Widow (76)</b>	6/5	18/8	0/1 (archaic/written style imp. <i>seyo</i> )
<b>Pepper (17)</b>	2/1	2/0	0/0
<b>Hill (6)</b>	0/0	0/0	1/0 ( <i>da</i> )

Table 3b: Utterance per line count ratio.

<b>Character</b>	<b><i>wa</i></b>	<b>Declarative <i>no</i></b>	<b>“Male” features</b>
<b>Overall</b>	Dub=0.078/Sub=0.059	Dub=0.196/Sub=0.078	Dub=0.01/Sub=0.01
<b>Black Widow</b>	Dub=0.079/Sub=0.066	Dub=0.237/Sub=0.105	Dub=0/Sub=0.013
<b>Pepper</b>	Dub=0.118/Sub=0.059	Dub=0.118/Sub=0	Dub=0/Sub=0
<b>Hill</b>	Dub=0/Sub=0	Dub=0/Sub=0	Dub=0.167/Sub=0