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An Exploration of Gender-specific Language in Japanese Popular Culture

Gender Stereotypes in Japanese Dating-simulation Games

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Abstract

Traditional ideas of gender identities are affected by everything around us, while continuously being changed and reinforced by society. We are constantly surrounded by ideas of male and female in media and in everyday life. The effect of this is something that can be observed even in our use of language.

Gendered language in Japanese is very evident, with certain elements exclusively or more commonly used by either male or female speakers. This is something that has been historically constituted and is still used to some extent today.

This study explores the actuality of the usage of gendered language within romantically charged video games called “dating-simulation games”. The makers of these games strive to achieve ideal characters of both genders, “perfect partners” to suit the taste of Japanese people.

The findings of this study indicate that gendered language is used to a great extent in Japanese dating-simulation games, showing that traditional ideas of male and female are indeed enforced by this media. Yet there are some signs of change in the gendered language and the reality of its usage in today’s popular culture, showing that the change in society might even be changing the use in fiction.

Keywords: Video games; Dating sims; Language and gender; Japanese; Role language

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1 Introduction

Practically everywhere in the world people have always had an image of femininity and masculinity. There are unwritten rules of how women and men should act in society and towards each other, as well as how one should speak to be seen as a proper member of one's sex. However it may have changed over the years, slowly evaporating during the struggles for equality, it still affects our viewpoint even today. The line between the genders still exists, however thin or blurred.

The traditional vision of the ideal man or woman is similar wherever you go. Look at the perfect Japanese woman, the idea of *Yamato Nadeshiko* (大和撫子), or the “Japanese lovable girl”. She is the image of femininity, by being docile, humble and a proper lady. Or one could look at the perfect Japanese man, being a reliable gentleman, the one taking charge and taking care of others. These are of course only images, ideas of an ideal character that does not necessarily exist in real life. But the truth is that this traditional picture of a “proper man” or a “proper woman”, putting physical appearances aside, is something most people have probably heard before. Although it may have changed to some extent, it still exists to the point that the stereotype is known by most, regardless of whether it is real or not.

The interesting thing about the traditional gender stereotypes in Japan is that they are not limited to behaviour, but also include language. Not only to the point that women should perhaps speak more appropriately or calmly than men, but down to specific personal pronouns or sentence endings. Only from reading a line from a book or a play in Japanese one can determine the gender of the speaker without a description or a name. This is because of something called role language (役割語 - *yakuwarigo*). Satoshi Kinsui first devised the idea of role language in year 2000¹. Role language is primarily used in fiction and can tell you a great deal about a character only from reading one sentence. Gender, age, social status and more can all be determined because of stereotypical language elements drawn from real life and exaggerated in fiction, ultimately creating what is known as role language. Yet if one puts their focus on ideals and stereotypes within genders, something that can easily change with the trends, the question remains if male and female language still keeps within the same frames they used to in Japan.

Take a second look at the ideals mentioned before. For example there is the reliable, manly warrior. Is he still the ideal today? Looking at today's popular Japanese idol groups, or “Johnny's”, would this fit into the traditional image of masculinity? Or one could look at the styles of speech created in later days by young girls, for example *gyarugo* (ギャル語), or “gal-go”, with endless amounts of slang the older generations would probably never understand. Would this way of speaking really fit the shy and proper Yamato Nadeshiko? Ideals as well as language are things that change, and perhaps the traditional gender stereotypes might have changed somewhat within the Japanese language as well.

¹Kinsui, Satoshi. (2000) “Yakuwarigo kenkyū e no sasoi.”

1.1 Dating simulation Games

If one wants to investigate today's ideals in Japan, a good idea would be to explore Japanese popular culture. For example, Japan has one of the largest game industries in the world. So why not take a closer look at a type of game that specifically aims to give people a chance to date their ideal man or woman?

Popular Japanese game companies have since the 1980's been producing a genre of games called *ren'ai shimiyurēshon gēmu* (恋愛シミュレーションゲーム), or "Love Simulation Games", that have in English started being called dating sims (Dating-simulation Games). While there are a great deal of innocent, romance-based ones, a large amount fall into the category of *eroge*(エロゲ), or erotic games.

As Taylor writes in her study about dating sims², these games are like portals to an idealized world, where the player can live out their fantasies. They give the player a chance to escape from reality, existing in numerous different sub-genres to suit each and every want and need of the consumer.

Sub-genres aside, dating sims can generally be split into two larger categories, namely *bishōjo gēmu* (美少女ゲーム) which literally means "beautiful girl games", or *otome gēmu* (乙女ゲーム) which can be translated to "maiden games". Bishōjo games are targeted towards men, and in these the player tries to win the hearts of the female characters in the games. The counterpart otome games target women, and in these the player instead works to get affectionate with the male characters in the games. There are also *BL* (Boy's Love) games, which focus on homosexual relationships between men, but interestingly enough are mostly targeted towards women. And although seemingly more rare, games focusing on homosexual relationships between women also exist.

The most common and popular style of dating sims is one where the gameplay(e.g. how the game plays out) allows you to boost your character's skill parameters by studying, doing sports or improving your appearance, all the while asking other characters out on dates and choosing the correct dialogue-options to increase their affection. There are also the ones called visual novels (ビジュアルノベル), which stray a bit from the usual gaming-format by only allowing the player to make occasional choices throughout the game that lead to different scenes and eventually different endings.

But the thing all of these games have in common is that they all focus on having characters that as many people as possible will find appealing. To be exact, they are all aiming to create a game with characters that are the ideal partners to the Japanese population. This is something that will most likely not be limited to only appearance and personality, but also the way they speak.

Although these are only games, not portraying reality, media and entertainment does reflect society and ideals to a certain point. Thus the examination of speech elements within popular culture is bound to show interesting results.

²Taylor, E. (2007). *Dating simulation Games: Leisure and Gaming of Japanese Youth Culture*, p.205

1.2 Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this study is to find out how masculine and feminine language is used in different Japanese dating sims, no matter what the target group is. The research questions for this study are:

1. How is male and female language represented in otome and bishōjo games?
2. From a language-perspective in Japanese dating sims, what might today's ideals look like in Japan?

1.3 Method

By focusing on the dialogues in two different dating sims for the handheld gaming console Nintendo DS, this study will examine and analyse the different male and female characters' use of role language. The focus will be on one otome game and one bishōjo game, along with an investigation of what might differ depending on the target group.

The otome game used in this analysis is called *Tokimeki Memorial: Girls Side Love Plus 3rd Story*, while the bishōjo game is called *Love Plus +*. The reason for choosing these two is because they were both developed for the same gaming console and have a similar style of gameplay, the most popular kind where the player improves their character's parameters while trying to win the other characters' affection. They were also both released in the same year (2010) by the same company (Konami). Another, and more important reason, is that they are both part of two of the most famous and successful series of dating sims in Japan.

The analysis will focus on the speech patterns of at least three dateable characters from each game, as well as possibly examining the speech patterns of the protagonist depending on whether or not it will contribute to the study.

The characters from *Love Plus* are Nene Anegasaki who is one year older than the main character, Rinko Kobayakawa who is one year younger and Manaka Takane who is the same age. The ones from *Tokimeki Memorial* follow the same pattern. To represent the same age groups there is Kouichi Sakurai, who is in the same year as the main character, Tamao Konno who is one year older and Junpei Niina who is one year younger. This matches with the characters in the otome game while allowing the study to further investigate eventual speech-differences depending on age.

In the study there will be an analysis of at least five sets of dialogue of unspecified length and content with each character. Starting off with looking at the dialogue that occurs when the main character meets the other characters for the first time, followed by the dialogues happening as their relationships deepen will allow a deeper understanding of the first impression from the main character, the way the characters interact and speak in the beginning, as well as how it may change further on in the game. Choosing dialogues that occur in as similar situations as possible (e.g. date, walking home from school etc.) with each character will allow an overview of the use of gender-specific language or lack thereof depending on time and place.

Within gender-specific language, this study will look at a series of different categories. There will be emphasis on elements such as personal pronouns, sentence-final forms, interjections and politeness, as well as the eventual usage of slang and abbreviations. Looking at these may give a chance of finding out what style of speech might be more commonly used by each gender within the games.

As there are specific pronouns used by male speakers and others generally used by female speakers, this will be one of the main focuses. Another will be on sentence final forms, since there are certain gendered elements such as sentence-final particles (SFPs) used at the end of a sentence for relying emotional nuances. The final two components of slang and politeness are based on the theory that female speakers use more formal language, while in turn slang may be more commonly used by male speakers.

1.3.1 Limitation

Although the fact remains that these two games do not represent all dating sims on the market, a lack of time and resources prevents me from playing through and analysing all of them. However, I do believe that the two I chose will contribute with enough material to help with this study as well as further research within the subject.

As for the choice of characters, this has been formatted around Love Plus since it only has three dateable characters. Although there are more characters available in Tokimeki Memorial, choosing more from one would disrupt the balance of the sources and examples used. Of course, these six characters do not represent all, but I do believe that they will provide sufficient data for the present study.

Another limitation of this study is that full dialogues will not be presented. Parts of the dialogues that do not give any important information and are not relevant to the research will be removed to avoid unnecessary repetition.

1.3.2 Format

As for the format of the examples used in the present study, the original dialogue lines in Japanese taken from the game will be presented along with a transcription into roman letters and a simple English translation. The English translations will mostly be focused on keeping the meaning and will thus not be literal translations. The system used for transcription will be modified Hepburn Romanization.

The dialogues presented in the study will be referred to by their indicated numberings placed in brackets before their titles (Dialogue 1A, 1B, 1C etc.) while more specific examples will be referred to by their numbers placed in brackets preceding the specified line (Example 1, 2, 3 etc.). The gender-related elements (or other components) within these example-sentences will be underlined and explained in the text below.

The lines spoken by the characters will be marked with their designated letters (A, B, C etc.), whereas lines spoken by the main character will be marked with a capitalized P (Protagonist). The characters will also be referred to by the same letters in the text (Character A, B, C etc.). All lines that are selectable options available for the player will be marked with circled numbers and referred to as such. In the case where numerous choices are displayed, the one selected to achieve the subsequent dialogue will be displayed in bold fonts.

Comments about the dialogue regarding translation or content will be marked with one or more asterisks (*) and explained in a footnote at the end of the page.

A) Kouichi Sakurai(桜井 琥一) (Example)

(A0) Walking home

Dialogue (A0) is an example of the script as character A asks the protagonist to walk home together after school.

(1)P: 「あ、コウくん。いま帰り？」*

[a, kou-kun. ima kaeri ?]

Ah, Kou! Going home?

(2)A: 「まあ、そんなとこだ。来いよ、帰るんだろ？」

[mā, sonna toko da. koi yo, kaerun daro ?]

Well, that's how it is. Come on. You're leaving too, right?

Example (2) shows A using the male tag-question *darou* (here shown without the long vowel). After this the player gets the following three choices:

① 「うん、一緒に帰ろう」

[un, issho ni kaerou .]

Sure, let's walk home together.

② 「じゃあ、お茶して帰ろうよ」

[jā, ocha shite kaerou yo .]

Alright, then let's go and have tea while we're at it.

③ 「ごめんね、今日は用事あるから」

[gomen ne, kyō wa yōji aru kara .]

I'm sorry, I have plans today.

Choosing reply ③ leads to the response shown below. (Etc...)

1.4 Theory

Putting focus on the language, this study will examine the two games with a gender perspective. By analysing the language of the characters, the focus will be on whether or not they use any of the traditionally preferred role language for men and women.

Although few studies have been made specifically on the male and female language within dating sims, there are various interesting gender studies within the Japanese language that may prove useful in the present study. Two such examples are Momoko Nakamura's "Dynamic Model of Gender and Language Studies"³ and Katsue Akiba Reynolds' "Female Speakers of Japanese in Transition"⁴, which hold the frameworks used in the present study.

³ Nakamura, M. (2002). *The Dynamic Model of Language and Gender Studies*

⁴ Reynolds, K. A. (1990). *Female Speakers of Japanese in Transition*

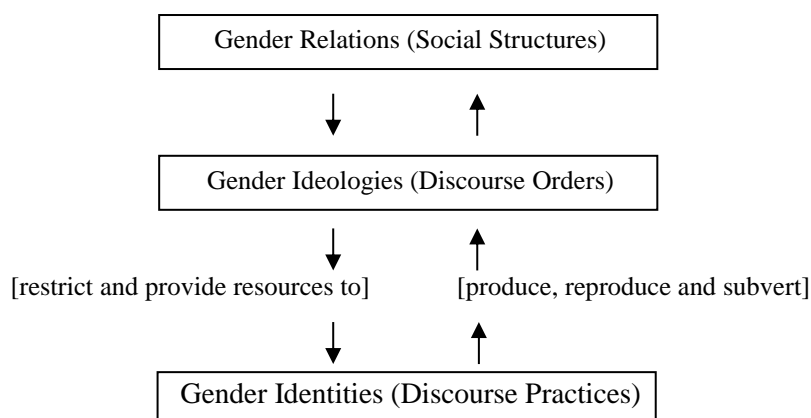
* (Example) (Translation note) Kou-kun(コウくん) is a nickname for the character. As there is no proper translation for *kun* (honorific usually used for males of the same age or younger) I will not be using it in the translations.

By the use of Momoko Nakamura’s Dynamic Model of Gender and Language Studies, there will be a further examination of the role language within the games and how it may be affected by the gender-associated social structures in the Japanese society. This while also making use of the diagram of male and female language from Katsue Akiba Reynolds’ study “Female Speakers of Japanese in Transition” to look at the level of masculinity or femininity of the speech patterns used. The analysis will also deal with whether or not the characters keep within their designated safety zone (female, male or unisex), or if there are those breaking free from their respective gender-categories.

1.4.1 The Dynamic Model of Gender and Language Studies

Momoko Nakamura’s Dynamic Model of Gender and Language Studies⁵ introduces three factors related to gender and language; Gender Relations (Social Structures), Gender Ideologies (Discourse Orders) and Gender Identities (Discourse Practices). See figure below.

Figure 1: The Dynamic Model of Gender and Language Studies



Nakamura describes gender relations, or "social structures", as the different power-structures in society. These are related to gender ideologies, or "discourse orders", which are different gender-related categories that have been historically constituted and structured by previous speech practices, and gender identities, or "discourse practices", which are a variety of gender-related identities within a language that continuously change and reconstruct.

In this model, the three factors continuously control, fuel and alter each other, so the gender stereotypes within language are always present. Thus the model shows a theory on why gender stereotypes and gendered language exists, as well as why they have not yet completely evaporated.

This model has proven useful in other studies within the subject on male and female language in Japanese, including Nakamura’s own study on gender and language within Japanese fashion magazines⁶, and I believe it will thus be helpful in the present study as well.

⁵ Nakamura, M. (2002). *The Dynamic Model*

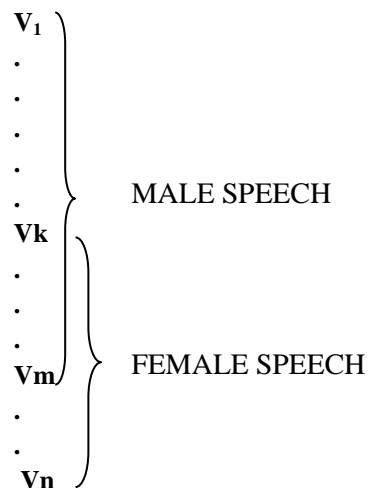
⁶ Nakamura, M. (2004). "Let's dress a little girlishly!" or "Conquer short pants!" *Constructing gendered communities in fashion magazines for young people*

1.4.2 Female Speakers of Japanese in Transition

Katsue Akiba Reynolds' study examines the transition of women's language-use in Japan, arguing that the historically constituted idea of women as the inferior sex is the result of today's feminine language within Japanese, and that the use of feminine language in turn fuels this view while keeping women in their traditional roles⁷. This is similar to Nakamura's theory about how the history, society and the language all fuel each other with gender-stereotypical views.

Reynolds further argues that rather than just categorizing the characteristics of masculine and feminine speech in Japanese as just "male speech" and "female speech", there are more stylistic variations of speech to keep in mind. To further explain this, Reynolds introduces a diagram that can be used to closer investigate the level of male and female speech. See figure⁸ below.

Figure 2: Female and Male Speech



According to this diagram, where V_1 is the most masculine or assertive/forceful and V_n represents the more feminine or polite counterpart, the distribution between male and female speech shows that men have a slightly wider range to choose from. Depending on situation, men are supposed to choose a style closer to the assertive side, while women should choose one closer to the opposite end. Furthermore, Reynolds argues that stepping into the overlapping area (V_k - V_m) is a higher risk for female speakers, while doing this as a woman may also be seen as blunt or impolite. This makes the option of speaking styles much narrower for women.

By using this diagram, I believe there is a chance to look more closely at the different styles of female and male speech in dating sims, whilst analysing whether or not women may have more similar ways to speak when compared to men.

⁷ Reynolds, K. A. (1990). *Female Speakers*, p.141

⁸ Reynolds, K. A. (1990). *Female Speakers*, p.134

2 Previous Studies

While I was unable to find any previous research on gender language within dating simulation games, there have been an increasing amount of studies within console and computer games. Digital gaming has been studied both for its potential negative and positive effects on children and young adults. Although some researchers argue that playing violent video games may lead to aggressive behaviour (Anderson and Bushman 2001; Bensley and Van Eenwyk 2001), others claim that there may be a chance of video games increasing ones learning ability (Cassell and Ryokai 2001; Pillay 2003). What they all have in common is the recurring theme that console or computer games might in some way affect the people who play them.

There are also recent studies further examining the gender roles displayed in the games, as well as how the gaming industry focuses on marketing towards male audiences despite the fact that an increasing amount of women also play console and computer games (Bryce and Rutter 2002). As the majority of gamers are indeed male, the market will keep concentrating on men and undermining women. This means that the majority of playable characters will be male, female characters will be considerably sexualized, or that the female non-playable characters (NPCs) will play the role of the “damsel in distress”. These are all factors that will not disappear easily. Although there are games specifically aimed towards females, the fact remains that these games keep using themes stereotypically regarded as “girly”. While these problems regarding gender roles and sexism within games are being noticed, changing it seems to be a difficult task. For instance, Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins argue in their study “Chess For Girls?: Feminism and Computer Games”⁹ that the issue lies with how “both sides, ultimately, start from the assumption that computer games are boys’ own games”¹⁰. This can be referred back to Nakamura’s model, showing how the social structure change peoples’ mind-set, ultimately creating media that further push the idea that each gender is supposed to act a certain way. Thus it is already programmed into our culture that video games are for boys and this is how the games are supposed to be.

The previously mentioned study by Taylor examines the portrayal of the characters in dating sims, mainly focusing on bishōjo games. She describes the female dateable characters of the games as *shōjo* “girls”, not referring to age but rather to how they are mostly portrayed as “inexperienced, cute, or emotional”¹¹. This further shows the use of the stereotypical female character as being weaker and sexualized. As dating sims aim to create an attraction to the characters in the game, the ultimate goal being conquest of said characters, the gender roles may in fact be more strongly represented.

Once again looking to Nakamura’s model, along with the theory that console and computer games may have a subconscious effect on people, the reason for studying gender roles and gendered language in different media is clear. Knowledge and understanding of the existing factors that may be affecting peoples’ views on society, consequently leading to the upholding of gender roles and stereotypes is the first step towards change.

⁹ Cassell, J and Jenkins, H. (1998). *Chess For Girls?: Feminism and Computer Games*

¹⁰ Cassell, J and Jenkins, H. (1998). *Chess For Girls?*, p. 26

¹¹ Taylor, E. (2007). *Dating simulation Games*, p. 201

3 Gendered Language

When conducting a language analysis, it is important to establish where the focus will be and what to look for. This study will examine gendered language within role language, thus looking at female and male language elements. So what is gendered language? What elements should be brought to attention?

Taking earlier studies of gendered language into account while also adding my own interpretation, there are a series of categories this study will be looking closer at. There are several speech patterns that can be defined as male or female. The most obvious would be the different gendered personal pronouns, followed by the higher use of polite and correct language by female speakers. But gendered language goes further than this with sentence-final particles, certain grammatical elements, tag-questions and more. This next section will introduce the different gendered elements the analysis will be putting emphasis on.

3.1 Personal pronouns

3.1.1 First-person pronouns

As mentioned earlier, Japanese language contains gender-specific pronouns for both first-person and second-person use. The following table from Shibamoto's study on gender language in Japanese romance fiction¹² shows the different first-person pronouns along with their level of politeness. As Shibamoto mentions in her study, the formal *watakushi* and *watashi* are shared by both male and female speakers. However, the contextual usage of *watashi* differs depending on gender, where it is less formal for women than it is for men. The one corresponding in formality to the female *watashi* would instead be the male *boku*, while in turn the masculine informal *ore* corresponds with the feminine *atashi*. This is demonstrated in the table below.

*Table 1: First-person pronominal forms*¹³

	Context			
	Formal		Informal	
Women	<i>watakushi</i> (<i>atakushi</i>)	<i>watashi</i>	<i>watashi</i>	<i>atashi</i> (<i>atai</i>)
Men	<i>watakushi</i> (<i>jibun</i>)	<i>watashi</i> (<i>washi</i>)	<i>boku</i>	<i>ore</i>

By looking at the table above it appears as though there are in fact fewer options for female speakers. Altogether there are five different first-person pronouns for women and six for men.

¹² Shibamoto Smith, J. (2004). *Language and Gender in the (Hetero) Romance*.

¹³ Shibamoto Smith, J. (2004). *Language and Gender*, p.120

However, the male pronouns *jibun* and *washi* are more specified within role language in terms of age (etc.) and can thus be excluded from this study.

Another one that will not be included is the informal female pronoun *atai*. It was originally a vulgar pronoun used by women in working-class Tokyo and female workers in the red light district which is rarely used in Japan today.

Lastly, *watakushi/atakushi* is only used in extremely formal situations and the High School settings in the games give no context and thus no opportunity for their use. If one compares this table to the results of the dialogues from the different games and the reality of the usage of pronouns, these two can consequently be omitted from the study as well.

Looking only at the first-person pronouns used by young people in today's Japan in standard everyday situations, the ones left would be *watashi* (F/M), *atashi* (F), *boku* (M) and *ore* (M). This would leave three options for male speakers, while there are two options for female speakers. However, as the characters are all close in age there is no need for the male characters to use the (for male speakers) more formal *watashi*. Therefore the ones I will look for in the two games are the ones corresponding in formality for male and female speakers (in accordance with table 1). These are *boku/ore* for men and *watashi/atashi* for women.

3.2.2 Second-person pronouns

Next are the second-person pronouns. The following table from the earlier mentioned study by Shibamoto shows the different second-person pronouns and their level of formality. However, the most preferred way to speak would be to avoid using second-person pronouns overall.

*Table 2: Second-person pronominal forms*¹⁴

	Context			
	Formal			Informal
Women	<i>anata</i>			<i>anta</i>
Men	<i>anata</i>	<i>kimi</i>		<i>omae</i> <i>kisama</i> <i>temee</i>

As seen in the table above, male and female speakers share the formal *anata* as well as its less formal equivalent *anta*. Yet just as how it is with the first-person pronoun *watashi* the context usage of *anta* differs depending on gender. According to table 2, the difference in formality of the word *anta* differs significantly, as it is in between the very formal *anata* and the mid-formal *kimi* when used by men but corresponds with the prominently informal masculine *omae* when used by women.

This table also shows a great disadvantage to women in terms of options concerning speech. While male speakers have six different second-person pronouns to choose from, female speakers only have two.

¹⁴ Shibamoto Smith, J. (2004). *Language and Gender*, p.121

3.2 Gendered sentence-elements

Among the components within masculine and feminine speech in the Japanese language are also the different sentence-final particles, certain grammatical forms and other language elements (such as tag-questions, phonological forms etc.).

Several studies strive to categorize which ones of these are female and male, and the information for the following table (3) is drawn from a study by Shigeeko Okamoto¹⁵, with a few revisions and updates from Shibamoto's research on gendered structures in Japanese¹⁶. Okamoto categorizes these different finalizing forms in three larger groups; masculine, feminine and neutral.

Table 3: Masculine/Feminine forms (Excerpted and adapted from Okamoto (1992) and Shibamoto (2003))

Masculine	Neutral	Feminine
<i>darou</i>	<i>yone</i> <i>kana</i>	<i>deshou</i> <i>kashira</i>
<i>yo</i>	<i>janai</i>	<i>nano (+yo/ne)</i>
<i>zo</i>	<i>jan</i>	<i>no (+yo/ne)</i>
<i>ze</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>wa (+yo/ne)</i>
<i>da (+yo/ne/na)</i>	<i>sa</i>	∅OP (+yo) “the zero-rule”
VOL + <i>ka</i>	<i>na</i>	
IMP (+ <i>yo</i>)		
<i>oi/ai</i> → <i>ē</i>		

As the table implies, the SFP's *yo*, *zo* and *ze* are categorized as masculine, along with the tag-question *darou* and the plain form copula *da*. There is also the well-used exchange of the sounds *oi* and *ai* with the phonological *ē* as seen monopolized by the male speakers in the otome game. Another factor mentioned as masculine is the volitional form of a verb along with the question-particle *ka*. The last factor in the group is the use of a verb in its imperative form (with or without the particle *yo*), used exclusively by the male characters in this study.

The ones labelled as gender-neutral are the tag-questions *yone* and *kana*, along with the negative auxiliary *janai* in search for agreement and its slightly reduced counterpart *jan*. The SFP's presented as neutral are *ne*, *na* and *sa*. Though these are considered gender neutral, the casual copula *da* is still considered masculine. Therefore, a woman using these together may be regarded slightly blunt or rude. Furthermore, some studies (Shibamoto's included) show that *na* may be more commonly used by male speakers.

The feminine tag-questions are *deshou* (also used by males in formal situations) and *kashira*, the latter not used by any of the characters in this study. Next are the particles *nano*, *no* and *wa* in their different combinations. The last in the list of feminine components is something Shibamoto refers to as the zero-rule, where a female speaker removes the copula, often adding a following SFP such as *yo*.

¹⁵ Okamoto, S. (1995). "Tasteless" Japanese: Less "Feminine" Speech among Young Japanese Women.

¹⁶ Shibamoto Smith, J. (2003). *Gendered structures in Japanese*

3.3 Other elements

3.3.1 Abbreviations and slang

A type of speech very common in Japanese, especially for young people, is the usage of slang. Something that is particularly used is abbreviations, commonly by vowel devoicing.

Vowel devoicing happens frequently in Japan, most commonly in words where there is a high vowel between voiceless consonants.

A study on vowel devoicing by Terumi Imai¹⁷ suggests that this devoicing phenomenon happens due to the overlap of the glottal gestures. As the glottis must be closed for a vowel to be voiced, the preceding consonant and the following consonant result in the glottis staying closed. This is because repeating the opening and closing of the glottis requires greater effort than just keeping it closed.

Imai's study focuses specifically on vowel devoicing within gender groups. The research shows how younger females tend to devoice fewer vowels than younger males. Imai further argues how this implies that this devoicing is non-standard language, as young male speakers seem to prefer non-standard language while female speakers prefer standard speech¹⁸. Thus there will also be some focus on this in the analysis, determining whether or not the female character use vowel devoicing etc. less often than male characters.

Along with this will be the usage of slang. This includes both further abbreviations and other elements such as changing sounds and adding emphasis.

3.3.2 Politeness and honorifics

A recurring point in studies regarding male and female language is how the level of politeness is said to be overall higher for female speakers. While female speakers have been argued to speak more formally than male speakers, there are also studies arguing that the usage of the honorific prefixes *o-* and *go-* may be more commonly used by women as well. For example, a man might say *tomodachi* (友達) "friend", while a woman might add the honorific prefix *o-* to make her speech more formal, ultimately changing it to *o-tomodachi* (お友達).

Along with honorifics the study will also look at the usage of formal language (*desu-* and *masu-* form) and whether or not this is more or less used in accordance with gender.

3.3.3 Interjections

There are also some interjections said to be male or female. The most known ones would be the feminine interjections *ara* and *mā*, yet there are also others said to be more or less gender-specific. The interjection *ō* for example, is said to be a masculine element.

The study will be looking closer at the usage or exclusion of these, also searching for other interjections while analysing whether or not they might have a connection with gender.

¹⁷ Imai, T. (2010). *An Emerging Gender Difference in Japanese Vowel Devoicing*

¹⁸ Imai, T. (2010). *An Emerging Gender Difference*, p.185

4 Analysis

4.1 The Otome game

4.1.1 Background and outline

Tokimeki Memorial is a popular series of dating sims made by Konami. The first game was released for the PC in 1994. It started out as a male-oriented bishōjo game and the first otome game in this series was not released until 2002 for the handheld gaming console Nintendo DS. The third game in the female-oriented series is called Tokimeki Memorial Girl's Side: 3rd Story¹⁹, which is the one featured in the present study.

The gameplay focuses on dating, scheduling and building up skill parameters. It also features a skinship-function, allowing the player to build up their relationship with their male partner by touching them, along with several different mini-games that include pillow-fights, sports-games and making valentines chocolate. Among the characters there are also two female ones who function as helpers, giving information and inviting the heroine to double-dates to help her get closer to the male characters.

The game plays out over the course of three years (High School) and the goal is for the player to build up their favourite male character's affection by boosting the parameters, going on dates, choosing the correct dialogues and dressing in the right clothing. As the game comes to an end, the player gets a confession-scene from the male character with the highest affection. Depending on which route the player chooses, the story as well as the ending will also change. If the player decides to focus on their friendship with the female friends, there are separate endings for that as well.

The game starts with creating a character by choosing a name, birthday, blood type and even a room. Depending on what blood type and room the player chooses the initial stats of the character changes, and the birthday changes the zodiac sign, along with the in-game horoscope that is used later on.

After finishing the character, who I decided to name Rin Yamada (山田リン), the first scene starts. It shows the heroine having an inner monologue, letting the player know that she has just moved back to the town she grew up in, Habataki City (はばたき市). Walking around the area and eventually getting lost leads her to meeting the first dateable character in the game, but this is not one of the characters chosen to be analysed in this study.

After the boy helps the main character to find her way home the story jumps forward into a dream-sequence about her childhood, introducing two childhood friends she knew long before she moved away from Habataki City.

¹⁹ Official website: http://www.konami.jp/gs/game/Girls_Side/3rd_Story/

4.1.2 Characters and language-use

A) Kouichi Sakurai (桜井 琥一)

(A1) First meeting

The meeting with the first subject happens right after the protagonist wakes up from her dream. Realizing that she is starting High School that same day, she gets ready and runs out the door excitedly. Yet the main character's inner monologue is suddenly cut off by a thud, and it seems as though she has accidentally walked straight into character A.

(1)A: 「危ねえな、おい。」
[abunē na, oi .]
Hey, watch out.

Example (1) starts off with the strongly masculine speech pattern of changing the word *abunai* “dangerous” into *abunē*. This phonological form is possible with both the sounds *ai* and *oi*. Furthermore, A also uses the particle *na* (more commonly referred to as *nā*, with a long vowel), which is traditionally defined as “an exclamatory sentential particle which is used in informal male speech”²⁰. However, despite this it is frequently used by young women today²¹. Placed at the end of a sentence it is used as an SFP to indicate emotion or emphasis. Although the adding of the exclamation *oi* “hey” at the end is not particularly defined as gender-specific, it does make the speaker seem slightly rougher and manlier.

(2)P: 「ご、ごめんなさい……」
[go, gomennasai ……]
So-sorry…

(3)P: 「すみません、あの、わたし、学校に行かないと……」
[sumimasen, ano, watashi, gakkō ni ikanai to ……]
Excuse me, umm, I need to go to school…

Examples (2) and (3) show the heroine's response. Note the excessive use of pauses and the stuttering indicating fright. There is also the use of the interjection *ano* “umm; err” in example (3), showing insecurity and hesitation. Furthermore, the same example demonstrates the protagonist's use of the personal pronoun *watashi* (in this case stylized in hiragana instead of the kanji 私). This is used by females, or by males in formal situations.

In the end the character also uses the conditional form of the verb *iku* “to go” by adding *-nai to*. By doing this the heroine implies that she needs to leave, but does not quite tell it straight out, making it a very polite and roundabout attempt to get away.

²⁰ Makino, S and Tsutsui, M. (2012). *A dictionary of intermediate Japanese grammar*, p. 193

²¹ Makino, S and Tsutsui, M. (2012). *A dictionary*, p. 195

- (4)A: 「見ろ、ビビってんじゃねーか。」
 [miro, bibitten janē ka .]
 See, she' s scared.
- (5)A: 「どうすんだよ？」
 [dō sun dayo ?]
 What are you gonna' do?

In example (4) A responds, using the verb *miru* "to see" in its plain imperative form *miro*, defined as a highly masculine style of speech. After this is the reappearance of the character using the phonological form *ē*, changing the negation *janai* into *janē*. Example (4) also has the first appearance of a style of speech that will be recurring later, namely the one where the speaker contracts their words and shortens their speech. A uses the verb *bibiru* "to be frightened" and makes it a continuous action by adding the form *-teiru*, but instead of properly saying the full *bibitteirun* he shortens it to *bibitten*. The same thing happens in example (5) with *dousun* instead of *dousurun*, where he uses a shortened version of the verb *suru* "to do". The *n* placed at the end of these two expressions is an abbreviated version of the particle *no*.

Another thing to note is the character's use of *dayo*. The use of the auxiliary verb *da* (*desu* in its plain form) in its different forms and combinations (*dane*, *dana*, *dayo*, *dayone*) is traditionally said to be a male form of speech. The usage of the SFP *yo* to indicate emphasis, certainty (etc.) is also something seen as a slightly more assertive and masculine type of speech. However, lately this has been detected as a speech pattern used by females as well.

After his last statement in example (5), clearly directed to someone off-screen, the boy who helped the main character as she got lost the night before shows up and officially enters the conversation. They later reveal that they are the brothers from her childhood, earlier introduced in her dream. The one I will be focusing on is the older brother, as he seems to be the character using the most masculine language. I have chosen to leave out the rest of this dialogue as the focus turns more to the younger brother, thus not contributing enough to this analysis.

(A2)Walking Home

Randomly occurring events in school allows the player to get closer to the characters. The choices available when catching sight of a character on their way home from school are to ask if they want to go home together, to ask if they want to go to a café or to not call them out and go home alone.

- ① 一緒に帰ると誘う
 [issho ni kaeru to sasou]
 Ask to go home together
- ② 喫茶店に寄ろうと誘う
 [kissaten ni yorou to sasou]
 Ask to stop by a café
- ③ ひとりで帰る
 [hitori de kaeru]
 Go home alone

The player also gets the chance to change the way they address the character during these events (first name *-kun*, last name *-san*, nicknames etc.), but as it is still early in the game I will stick to the standard ones. Choosing to ask character A to walk home together (option ①) leads to the subsequent dialogue.

(1)A: 「おう、オマエか。」
[ō, omae ka .]
Oh, it' s you.

In this example, A starts with the exclamatory interjection *ō*, indicating surprise. This is more often used by male speakers, as a female user would more likely use the corresponding interjection *a* (あっ, あ). After this, the character also addresses the heroine as *omae*, a pronoun that used to be honorific language, but now indicates familiar language used when speaking to an equal or inferior person. This can be seen as rude used in the wrong situations as it may seem degrading. In this example it is written in katakana instead of with kanji (お前), a way of writing which is commonly used to put emphasis on words within manga and other media.

(2)P: 「よかったら、一緒に帰らない？」
[yokattara, issho ni kaeranai ?]
Would you like to walk home together?

The outcome is as shown in example (2). The main character uses familiar language with the standard short form as the person she is talking to is a childhood friend of the same age. Next is one of the random conversations that occasionally happen if the character agrees to the invitation.

(3)A: 「おい、教会の伝説、仕入れてきたぞ。」
[oi, kyōkai no densetsu, shiirete kita zo .]
Hey, I have new information about the Church' s legend.

(4)A: 「秘密結社だ。」
[himitsukessha da .]
It' s a secret society.

In the above sentence is another use of the previously mentioned exclamation *oi*. Example (3) also demonstrates the usage of the SFP *zo*, a male language element used to add force or indicate command. In example (4) he ends with a plain *da*. As mentioned before it is traditionally seen as a more rough and masculine way of speaking and in some cases said to be a male SFP.

While not amused by the strange subject, the heroine listens while the other keeps explaining how the stained glass window is a secret code.

(5)A: 「おお、それを中世から秘密結社が守ってやがんだ。」
[ō, sore wo chūsei kara himitsu kessha ga mamotte yagan da .]
Yeah, a secret society from the Middle Ages is protecting it.

(6)A: 「バレたら、世界の終りらしいぞ。」
[bare tara, sekai no owari rashii zo.]

If it leaks out, it' ll supposedly be the end of the world.

In example (5) A starts with the agreeing expression *o* “yeah; yes” (in this case stylised with a long vowel as *ō*). This is mostly used by male speakers. This example also has the first appearance of the auxiliary verb *yagaru*, a vulgar type of speech to indicate the user’s feeling of scorn or towards the verb (e.g. action) it is attached to. This is also shortened into *yagan* instead of *yagarun*, ended with a plain *da*. Furthermore, there is another appearance by the masculine SFP *zo* in example (6).

Next, A responds strongly to the heroine’s lack of reaction.

(7)A: 「おい。なんか気のねえ返事だな。」
[oi. nanka ki no nē henji dana.]

Hey. That answer is like you don’ t even care.

(8)A: 「いいか、秘密結社だぞ？ 世界の終りだぞ？」

[iika, himitsukessha da zo? sekai no owari da zo ?]

Listen, it’ s a secret society! The end of the world!

Example (7) shows another instance of the exclamatory *oi*, followed by the use of *nē* instead of *nai*. This sentence is ended with the plain copula *da* along with the SFP *na*, which as stated earlier is traditionally part of a masculine speech pattern according to various studies. In example (8) are two more instances of the plain copula *da* and the earlier mentioned SFP *zo*.

(A3)Date

Dialogue (A3) consists of a series of lines that appear during a date with character A, going shopping at the mall.

(1)P: 「あつ、絃一くん。遅刻だよ？」
[a, kouichi-kun. chikoku dayo ?]

Ah, Kouichi. You’ re late.

Example (1) shows the heroine’s reaction to the male character being late. First is the previously mentioned exclamatory interjection *a*, keeping within the female safety zone. Next is *dayo*, in this instance used by a female character. This backs up the previously cited arguments about this component recently becoming gender-neutral.

(2)A: 「教師みてえなこと言うな。行くぞ。」
[kyōshi mitē na koto iuna. iku zo.]

Don’ t say things that make you sound like a teacher. Let’ s go.

(3)A: 「おう……悪かねえぞ？」

[ō… … warukanē zo ?]

Oh… not bad.

In example (2) is an instance of the previously mentioned male pattern of changing the sound *ai* into the phonological *ē*, in this case changing the word *mitai* “seem” into *mitē*. After this is the negative imperative form of the verb *iu* “to say”, making it *iuna*, and at the end of the same example A once again uses the masculine SFP *zo*. This is followed by another use of the interjection *ō*, the use of *nē* in place of *nai* and a second use of *zo* in example (3).

Although I was unable to find any official information on why the character says *warukanē* instead of the standard *warukunē*, I asked five native Japanese people (3 males, 2 females, age 20 to 25) I met during my studies abroad in Osaka if they knew what this is. Nobody had a clue as to why this pattern was used or its origin, but they all agreed that it sounded rougher and manlier, also throwing in the comment *yankii ppoi* (ヤンキーっぽい) “gangster-like”. One speculation as to the origin of the expression is that it may be a shortening of “*waruku wa nē*” into *warukanē*.

- (4)A: 「あ。いや、そのカッコ…… なんでもねえ、気にすんな！」
 [a. iya, sono kakko… … nandemonē, ki ni sunna !]
 Ah. No, that outfit… nothing, never mind!

Example (4) gives another demonstration of the use of the phonological *nē*, along with a shortened version of the imperative negative form of *suru*, changing it from *suruna* to *sunna*.

- (5)A: 「お…… それ、どうだ？シブいじゃねえか。」
 [o… … sore, dō da? shibui janē ka .]
 Ah… how about that? Isn’ t it tasteful?

In example (5) is once again a use of the interjection *o*, followed by the plain form *da*. Next is also another use of the phonological negation *janē* instead of its usual form *janai*. At this point, the player gets to choose a reply.

- ① 「本当だ、買っちゃおかな！」
 [hontō da, kacchao kana !]
 You’ re right, maybe I should buy it!
 ② 「そうかなあ……」
 [sō kanā… …]
 I don’ t know…
 ③ 「似合いません！」
 [niaimasen !]
 It wouldn’ t suit me!

The different examples show instances of both the plain form *da*, said to be moderately masculine, along with the SFP *kana* (in this case with a long vowel). This functions as an indicator of a monologue question or for showing uncertainty.

The following is A’s response to choice ①.

(6)A: 「おお、そうしろ。わかってんな、オマエ。」
[ō, sō shiro. wakatten na, omae .]
Yeah, go for it. You get it, don' t you?

Example (6) demonstrates another use of the interjection *ō*, yet this time it implies agreement. Then there is the imperative form of *suru*, turning it into *shiro*, followed by the shortening of *-teiru*, turning *wakatteiru na* into *wakatten na*. At the end the character once again refers to the heroine as *omae*.

(7)A: 「今日みたいなのはよ、悪かねえぞ。」
[kyō mitai na no ha yo, warukanē zo .]
Today wasn' t too bad.

In this category's last example (7) there is another use of the SFP *yo*, in this case in the middle of a sentence used to get the listeners attention or catch ones breath. After this is another phonological *nē*, making it the same as the previously discussed use of the saying *warukanē*. This is once again ended with the masculine SFP *zo*.

(A4)After School

As the heroine gets closer to a male character, he will occasionally ask her to walk home together. When this happens the player once again gets three choices: to accept, ask to go and have tea or to decline saying they already have plans.

②P: 「じゃあ、お茶して帰ろうよ」
[jā, ocha shite kaerou yo .]

Alright, then let' s go and have tea while we' re at it.

Choice ② shows the usage of the said to be masculine SFP *yo*, in this case used by the female protagonist. If the player chooses this, they end up at a coffee shop and get to choose from a variety of topics to talk about. In the following example, I chose to make small talk about food.

(1)P: 「好きな食べ物ってなに？」
[suki na tabemono tte nani ?]
What kind of food do you like?

The heroine sticks to using unisex familiar language as shown in example (1). There is nothing particularly feminine or masculine about her speech pattern, only a plain gender-neutral question.

(2)A: 「好きな食いもんって言ったら、牛肉だな。」
[suki na kuimon tte ittara, gyūniku dana .]
If we' re talking about food I like, it has to be beef.

(3)A: 「好きだな。牛肉食ってりや間違いねえ。」
[suki dana. gyūniku kutterya machigainē .]
I like it. There' s no doubt you' re eating beef.*

Example (2) shows A using the slightly more vulgar verb *kuu* “to eat” instead of its neutral counterpart *taberu* with the same meaning. This is followed by the shortened version of *mono* “thing”, namely *mon*. The sentence ends with another usage of the SFP *dana*.

Example (3) starts with the usage of the plain copula *da* with the SFP *na*. After this is another use of the verb *kuu*, abbreviated together with *-teiru* and then shortened even further, finalized with another use of *nē*. I expect the full sentence changed into standard Japanese to be something along the lines of “*gyūniku o tabeteiru no wa machigainai*”. The meaning is the same, but the actual line in the game is made masculine as well as being significantly shortened. The reduction is made both by removing particles and abbreviating words by only mimicking the original sounds, giving it a slightly slurred, rougher impression.

(A5)Another Date

The conversations and commands during dates change as the heroine gets closer to the male character. There is more skinship (e.g. touching the character), along with special conversations happening when you choose a certain reply. (A5) consists of some examples of lines from one of these dates with A.

(1)A: 「よっしゃ、連続パーフェクトっ！今月のハイスコアだ、コラ！」
[yossha, renzoku pāfekuto! kongetsu no haisukoa da, kora!]
Alright, a consecutive perfect score! It' s this month' s highscore!

The above statement by A contains two interesting points, namely the adding of a small *tsu* for emphasis, the use of a plain *da* making his speech slightly rougher, along with the interjection *kora* which is in this case used for getting attention from the listener. This statement also triggers a few options for the player to choose from.

④P: 「琉夏くんよりすごい？」
[ruka-kun yori sugoi ?]
Better than Luka?*

Usually there are only three options to choose from, but as a fourth appears it means that this will trigger a special conversation instead of the normal, shorter replies. Aiming for one of the special dialogues, I will be choosing the last option.

(2)A: 「あ？いや、アイツのベストには……だめだ、10点足りねえ。」
[a? iya, aitsu no besuto ni ha…… dame da, 10 ten tarinē .]
Huh? No, compared to his best score… no good, I' m still 10 points short.

*(Taken out of context) Said referring to how A prefers eating beef rare.

**Luka is his brother

(3) 「俺の応援してくれんのか？」

[ore no ouen shite kuren noka ?]

Will you root for me?

(4) 「見てろ。今日中に、ルカのベスト、ブチ抜いてやる。」

[mitero. kyoujūni, Ruka no besuto, buchi nuite yarū .]

Just watch. Before today is over, I' m gonna' beat Luka' s highscore!

As shown in example (2), A is using the third person pronoun *aitsu*, a familiar and quite masculine way to refer to someone. In this case he uses it to refer to his brother. At the end of the sentence is also another display of using *nē* instead of *nai*. Example (3) displays the use of the masculine personal pronoun *ore*.

This is followed by the verb *kureru* “to give” with the particle *noka* which is used to question or endorse the preceding statement. This is ultimately shortened into *kurennoka* instead of *kurerunoka*.

In example (4) A uses the imperative form while also shortening what would probably normally be *mitemiro*, into *mitero*. The form *-temiru* is used to tell someone to try something.

At the end of the next sentence the character uses the vulgar verb *yarū* “to give”, usually only monopolized by men when used in this fashion.

After this, the male character sometimes asks if the protagonist has time to stay longer after the date. Accepting this invitation may lead to an occasional mini-game, allowing the player to boost the male character's affection by touching the hearts popping up on his face and body. If one does this without stopping before the mini-game ends, the male character gets angry and scolds the heroine. The following is a line from such a conversation.

(5)A: 「オマエな……やめろって言ってんだろーうが？」

[omae na..... yamero tte itten darou ga ?]

You... didn' t I tell you to cut it out?

In example (5) there is another instance of *omae*, along with the imperative form of *yameru* “to stop; to quit”, followed by the masculine tag-question *darou*.

Overall, this character uses a great deal of masculine language and slang, along with vulgar speech-patterns making him seem more dangerous.

B) Tamao Konno (紺野玉緒)

(B1)First meeting

The heroine will not meet the second subject until she reaches a certain amount of points in her intelligence. After the player makes the heroine study and boosts her intelligence stats, a school event is triggered where the main character carries printouts to the staff room. She is having trouble opening the door as her hands are full, but is pleasantly surprised by a kind stranger who helps her open the door. An inner monologue tells the player the protagonist has the feeling she has seen this person before.

(1)B: 「プリント、持とうか。」

[purinto, motou ka .]

Should I carry the prints for you?

(2)B: 「どこに届けばいいのかな。」

[doko ni todokereba ii no kana .]

Where should I bring them, I wonder.

In example (1) B asks the heroine if he should carry the prints for her using *motou*, the volitional form of *motsu* "to carry", followed by the question-particle *ka*. The combination of the volitional plain form and *ka* is generally seen as masculine.

In example (2) he ends his last statement with the SFP *kana* (sometimes with a long vowel as *kanā*). In this usage, *kana* functions as an indicator of a monologue question and cannot be used as a straightforward question aimed at another person. However, it can be used as a roundabout way to ask about something. This is used by both men and women, but the lack of a straightforward question is something that might be viewed as slightly less assertive.

After some polite objections, the main character allows B to carry the prints. Just as he is about to leave, the heroine remembers who he is, stopping him before he walks away.

(3)P: 「あの、生徒会長ですよね？」

[ano, seito kaichō desu yone ?]

Umm, you' re the student council president, right?

(4)P: 「入学式で挨拶してた……」

[nyūgakushiki de aisatsu shiteta ……]

The one greeting us during the entrance ceremony…

In examples (3) and (4) the female character is still keeping within the unisex safety zone, seeking agreement from the listener in example (3) by using the tag question *yone*. This is generally defined as gender-neutral. There is also another example of shortened speech in example (4), where the main character uses the continual form *-teiru*, yet says *shiteta* instead of *shiteita*. This is a style of spoken Japanese that most young people use these days and is not enough to break free from the safety zone. Also, example (3) displays how the main character is using *desu*, showing that she is using polite language. The question is whether or not the politeness continues even when their relationship deepens.

(5)B: 「はは、覚えててくれたんだ。嬉しいな。」

[haha, oboetete kuretanda. ureshii na .]

Haha, you remembered. I' m glad.

(6)B: 「いかにも、僕が生徒会長の紺野緒玉です。」

[ikanimo, boku ga seito kaichō no konno tamao desu .]

Indeed, I' m the student council president, Tamao Konno.

As shown in example (5) this male character also shortens his speech as he uses the verb *oboeru* "remember" together with *-teiru*. Instead of *oboeteite* he uses *oboetete*, but just like

the earlier use of this type of abbreviation by our female character, it is still within the unisex category. He also ends with the plain copula *da*. However, in this case it is used after the particle *n* (originally *no*), a more unisex expression used for indicating expectation or reason. In the next sentence is an example of the earlier mentioned sentential particle *na* (or *nā*).

In example (6) is his first use of a personal pronoun, *boku*. Although it is a male personal pronoun, this is the one seen as slightly more humble and dignified, and also more commonly used either by children or older men. There are also instances where *boku* has started being used by modern day young women, though it is seen as tomboyish.

Another thing to note about this dialogue is how he in example (6) changes to using the polite form *desu* as he introduces himself. After this the protagonist politely introduces herself as well, followed by a last reply from B.

(7)B: 「山田さん。一年後輩になるのかな。」
[yamada-san. ichinen kouhai ni naru no kana .]
Ms. Yamada. Might you be one year younger, I wonder.

As seen in example (7) B still calls the main character by her last name, properly adding *-san* as one is supposed to do with acquaintances. He also once again uses *kana*, making this another roundabout question. So far, the president seems to be quite a polite, more serious character using slightly more unisex speech-patterns and less masculine speech.

After this, he is called over by other students and the main character is impressed how he took the time to help her even though he is so busy himself.

(B2)Walking Home

The following examples are from asking the character to walk home together. Once again, there are the same three choices as shown in dialogue (A2). The following shows the response as the main character calls B out.

(1)B: 「ああ、君か。」
[ā, kimi ka .]
Oh, it' s you.

The first example shows the interjection *ā* indicating surprise and also demonstrates his use of pronouns as he calls the heroine *kimi*. This is a second person pronominal form most commonly used by males to address younger females.

(2)P: 「よかったら一緒に帰りませんか？」
[yokattara issho ni kaerimasen ka ?]
Would you like to walk home together?

Although the choices are the same, the way the dialogue plays out is different. As shown in example (2) the heroine uses polite speech as she speaks to this character. After the male character accepts, the story of the church is brought up again.

- (3)B: 「そうだ、君、敷地内にある教会の伝説を知ってる？」
 [souda, kimi, shikichinai ni aru kyokai no densetsu o shitteru ?]
 Right, do you know the legend of the church on the school premises?
- (4)B: 「壁に煉瓦が使われている部分があるだろ？」
 [kabe ni renga ga tsukawareteiru bubun ga aru darou ?]
 There' s a bit of the wall that' s made of bricks, right?
- (5)B: 「あれの一つが、鍵になってるらしいんだ。」
 [are no hitotsu ga, kagi ni natteru rashiinda .]
 I heard that one of those becomes a key.

In example (3) he once again addresses the heroine as *kimi*, followed by another shortening of *-teiru* while using the verb *shiru* “to know”. Thus B ultimately changes *shitteiru* to *shitteru* . As seen in example (4) he uses the masculine tag-question *darou* (without a long vowel in this instance). In example (5) is another occurrence of the shortening of *-teiru*, and the sentence ending with a plain form *da*, again used after the particle *n*.

(B3)Date

Next is an example of a dialogue with character B during a date. As they are not yet close, the character shows up late.

- (1)B: 「ごめん。まったよな。」
 [gomen, matta yo na .]
 Sorry, you waited right?

In example (1), B once again uses the sentential particles *na* and *yo*, explained earlier in the analysis. In this case *na* is used for seeking agreement.

- (2)P: 「大丈夫です。わたしも着いたばかりですから。」
 [daijoubu desu. watashi mo tsuita bakari desu kara .]
 It' s alright. I just got here myself.

Example (2) shows the protagonist using formal speech, as well as calling herself by the female (or male formal) personal pronoun *watashi*.

- (3)B: 「君、たまにはこんな服もいいんじゃないかな。」
 [kimi, tama ni wa konna fuku mo iin janai kana .]
 Wouldn' t this type of clothing be nice every once in a while?

In the example above, the male character once again calls the heroine *kimi*, along with using the unisex SFP *kana*, making his speech less assertive. At this point the player gets to choose replies, similar to the ones shown earlier.

- ① 「本当ですか？ 買っちゃおかな！」
 [hontō desu ka? kacchao kana !]
 Really? Maybe I should buy it!
- ② 「そうかなあ……」
 [sō kanā… …]
 I don' t know…
- ③ 「似合いません！」
 [niaimasen !]
 It wouldn' t suit me!

The options differ slightly from those in the same situation with character A in dialogue (A3), by being more polite and using *desu* in option ③. Choosing ② in this situation leads to the following reaction.

(4)B: 「……まさか本気で考えてないよな？ 冗談だからね？」
 […… masaka honki de kangaetenai yo na? joudan dakara ne ?]
 You' re not really considering it, right? It was a joke, you know?

In the example above is another instance of the previously occurring particles *yo* and *na*. This is followed by the gender-neutral SFP *ne*.

(B4)After school

Next is another instance of the male character calling the protagonist out after school. At this point, the player gets the same three choices as showed earlier in dialogue (A4). Selecting choice ② makes the following line appear.

(1)P: 「喫茶店に寄りませんか？」
 [kissaten ni yorimasen ka ?]
 How about stopping by a café?

As shown in example (1) the protagonist keeps using formal language when speaking to this character. After they get to the coffee shop, the player once again gets to choose from a series of questions to ask the character. In the following example, I chose to ask B about his future dream. He replies that used to want to become the prime minister.

(2)B: 「子供がパイロットとかサッカー選手とかいうのと同じだ。」
 [kodomo ga pairotto toka sakkā senshuu toka iu no to onaji da .]
 It' s the same as a kid saying they want to become a pilot or a soccer player.

(3)B: 「あの頃の僕は何を考えてたんだらう。」
 [ano koro no boku ha nani o kangaetetan darou .]
 I wonder what I was thinking at that time.

(4)B: 「ある意味怖いもの知らずだったんだなあ。」
 [aru imi kowai mono shirazu dattan da nā .]
 I didn' t really know about the scary stuff, huh?

In example (2) the character ends his sentence with a plain *da*. As mentioned before it is defined as a slightly more masculine way of speaking. Example (3) shows B again using the male pronoun *boku* and the masculine tag-question *darou*. He also abbreviates *-teiru* (in this case in past tense as *-teita*), changing *kangaeteitan* into *kangaetetan*. In example (4) he once again uses the plain copula *da*, along with the earlier used SFP *nā*.

(B5)Another date

Next is an example of one of the dates happening after the characters get closer, giving the player some more options than before.

(1)B: 「エアホッケーだ。やってみようか。」
 [eahokkē da. yatte miyou ka .]
 It' s air-hockey. Should we try it?

In example (1) B once again ends his sentence with a plain *da*, followed by the combination of volitional form together with the question particle *ka* that was mentioned before in dialogue (B1).

④P: 「手加減して欲しいな な ♡」
 [tekagen shite hoshii na ♡]
 I' d like you to go easy on me ♡

Choosing option ④, which also shows the female protagonist's usage of the SFP *na*, leads to the next reply.

(2)B: 「僕だってそんなに甘やかしてばかりじゃないぞ？」
 [boku datte sonna ni amayakashite bakari janai zo ?]
 Aren' t I already always spoiling you?

Example (2) shows another use of *boku*, and also demonstrates B's first use of the masculine SFP *zo*. Up until this point, B has not been using many masculine speech elements. The following dialogue is one that happens from too much skinship.

(3)B: 「言い方を変えるよ。僕の今の気持ちは分かってる？」
 [iikata o kaeru yo. boku no ima no kimochi wa wakatteru?]
 I' ll change my wording. Do you understand my current feelings?
 (4)B: 「言ったよね。僕は強くない。だから、いつ壊れるか分らない。」
 [itta yone. boku wa tsuyokunai. dakara, itsu kowareru ka wakaranai.]
 I told you, right? I' m not strong. So I don' t know when I' ll break.

In example (3) B abbreviates *-teiru* once again, while also showing another example of *boku*. Furthermore, there is the particle *yo* used after the plain dictionary form of a verb, said to be a masculine speech-element. Example (6) demonstrates the use of *yone*, described earlier in dialogue (B1), along with another occurrence of the personal pronoun *boku*.

This character has been quite polite and humble, mostly speaking in quite a gender-neutral manner. However, as seen in some of the examples, he has occasionally used a few masculine speech elements.

C) Junpei Niina (新名旬平)

(C1) First meeting

The third character requires a certain amount of charm and fashion sense, and after boosting these stats the player can trigger the event by going shopping alone. On her way home, the main character is stopped by a slightly flashy-looking boy. She ignores his small-talk, politely telling him that she is in a hurry and refusing his offer to buy her something to drink.

- (1)C: 「はばたきミックスジュース、知ってるだろ？」
[habataki mikkusu jūsu, shitteru daro ?]
You know about Habataki Mixed Juice, right?

In example (1) C first shortens *-teiru*, as seen in several other examples. He then uses the masculine tag-question *darou* "right" (here without a long vowel), used for seeking agreement from the listener.

- (2)P: 「知りません。」
[shirimasen .]
I don't know it.

Example (2) shows the main character continuing to use polite speech, coldly brushing him off. An interesting point that is not language-related is the heroine's reaction to being picked up. Without the player being able to choose, she rejects him straight away like a proper lady.

- (3)C: 「マジで？ すんげー話題になってんだよ、売り切れ続出って。」
[maji de? sungē wadai ni natten dayo, urikire zokushutsu tte .]
Seriously? It's really becoming a *big* topic; I heard it keeps getting sold out.

- (4)C: 「それがさ、そこの自販機だけに入ってんの。超限定。だからー」
[sore ga sa, soko no jihanki dake ni haitten no. chō gentei. dakara--]
It's only being sold in that vending machine over there. Super-limited. So-

In example (3) is the use of *maji* (written in katakana for emphasis), an abbreviation of *majime* "serious". This is not particularly used by male speakers, but is a slang generally used by young people. Then he uses the word *sungē*, originally the word *sugoi* "amazing", or in this instance used to indicate that something is "to a great extent" (It's becoming a topic to a great extent -> It's really becoming a big topic). This word also demonstrates that the same way one can change *nai* into *nē*, it is also possible to change the *oi* of *sugoi* into the same phonological *ē*, turning it into *sugē* (ultimately adding an *n* for emphasis). Next is another instance of shortening in example (3), the speaker changing *natteirun* to *natten*, and another example with *haitteiruno* in example (4) being shortened into *haittenno*. There is also another example of the usage of *dayo* in example (3). Example (4) also shows the particle *sa*, and

although there are arguments on this being mainly a masculine component it is generally considered gender-neutral. There is also the use of the SFP *no* for emphasis, interestingly enough said to be a feminine speech-pattern, but in this case used by a male speaker.

After this there is an element mentioned in one of Nakamura's articles, namely the choice of wording as he says *chō gentei* in example (4). He puts together *chō* "super; ultra" with *gentei* "limit; restriction", which makes it a type of assertive word-choice. Nakamura found in her analysis of fashion magazines that this type of wording was more commonly used in magazines targeted towards young men²².

As the dialogue is cut off by the heroine pretending to catch a glimpse of a friend and successfully running away, she will not meet this character again until her second year. The main character sees someone she recognizes at the day of the entrance ceremony for new students, and it turns out to be the same flashy-looking guy from the year before. They are both shocked to find out that they go to the same school.

(5)C: 「そりゃこっちのセリフ……」

[sorya kocchi no serifu ……]

That' s my line… *

(6)C: 「え、てか、なんだよこれ。」

[e, teka, nandayo kore .]

Uh, I mean, what' s up with this?

(7) 「なんでアンタここにいんの? ドッキリ?」

[nande anta koko ni inno? dokkiri ?]

Why are you here? Candid camera? **

There are a lot of abbreviations in this dialogue. It starts off with *sorya* in example (5), a shortened version of *sore wa*, followed by *-teka* instead of *-tte iu ka* in example (6) and another usage of *inno* instead of *iruno* in example (7). There is also C saying *nandayo* in example (6), once again showing the usage of the earlier mentioned *dayo*. Along with this is the use of *anta* in example (7), a more familiar version of the polite second-person pronominal form *anata*. Note how there is a usage of the particle *no* as well. However, when used as an SFP in a question it is a gender-neutral expression used by both male and female speakers.

(8)C: 「だよな。あーもーワケわかんねえ！」

[dayona. ā mō wake wakannē !]

Yeah, that' s true. Ah, seriously, I don' t get this!

(9)C: 「入学初日になんだよ、このサプライズは……」

[nyūgaku shonichi ni nandayo, kono sapuraizu wa ……]

What' s with this kind of surprise on the first day of school…

²² Nakamura, M. (2004). "Let's dress a little girlishly!"

*(Line taken out of context.) Said after the heroine expresses her surprise of them going to the same school.

***(Translation note) 「ドッキリ」 means "shocked", but can also be a shortening of 「どっきりカメラ」 "candid camera".

(10)C: 「……ちょっと待て。アンタ何年？」
 [chotto mate. anta nannen ?]
 … Wait a minute. What year are you in?

In example (8), there is another appearance of the argued masculine *dayo*, combined with *na*, and in example (9) is another word abbreviation with the verb *wakaru* “to understand” in its negative form. But instead of *wakaranai*, the character shortens it to *wakannai*, also adding the use of *nē* instead of *nai*, ultimately turning it into *wakannē*. This is followed by another use of *nandayo* (as seen in example 6) in example (9).

In example (10), C uses the imperative form of *matsu* “to wait”, and after this he once again calls the heroine *anta*. As the main character replies that she is a second year student, the boy is surprised and seemingly disappointed at the fact that she is one year older. Then the bell rings and after they briefly introduce themselves the scene ends.

(C2)Walking Home

As the heroine bumps into character C, the same choices appear as in the previous two from the same situation. Choosing answer ① as usual leads to the following dialogue.

(1)C: 「んー、いいよ。今日はなんも用事ないし。」
 [n, iiyo. kyō ha nanmo yōji nai shi .]
 Hmm, okay. I don’ t have any plans today anyway.

In example (1) C once again abbreviates his speech, in this case changing *nanimo* “nothing”, into *nanmo*. Next up is another conversation about the church, this time that there supposedly is a huge underground plant underneath it.

(2)C: 「そう。アンドロイドの教師を大量生産しようとしてたらしいぜ？」
 [sou. Andoroido no kyōshi o tairyō seisan shiyō to shiteta rashii ze ?]
 That’ s right. I heard that they were mass producing android-teachers.

(3)C: 「なんなんだろうなー、あれ。」
 [nannandarou nā, are .]
 I wonder what’ s up with that.

Example (2) shows the use of *ze*, another masculine SFP either used for adding force or indicating command. This is similar to *zo*, but is usually regarded as slightly less masculine. In example (3) he once again uses the masculine tag-question *darou*, together with an additional use of *nā*.

(C3)Date

The following is a conversation from a date with character C, once again starting with him being late. The heroine is slightly disappointed.

- (1)C: 「そんな顔も可愛いぜ、先輩。」
 [sonna kao mo kawaii ze, senpai.]
 That face is cute too, (senpai).*
- (2)C: 「今日のコーディネート、超良くね？」
 [kyō no kōdinēto, chō yokune ?]
 Isn' t your outfit really nice today?

In the above example (1), C once again uses the masculine SFP *ze*. In example (2) he uses *nē* instead of *nai* (in this case without the long vowel).

- (3)C: 「なあ、これ……どう？試してみねえ？」
 [nā, kore…… dou? tameshite minē ?]
 Hey … how about this? Why don' t you try it on?

Example (3) starts out with *nā* “hey”, the earlier mentioned interjection used to get attention from the listener. Although it is not defined as a male speech-element it is usually used by males instead of the interjection *nē* (ねえ) with the same function and meaning.

Once again the player gets the same options shown in dialogue (A3). Choosing option ③, consequently not agreeing with his statement, leads to the continuation below.

- (4)C: 「オレもそう思います！ゴメン、冗談でした！」
 [ore mo sou omoimasu! gomen, joudan deshita !]
 I think so too! Sorry, it was a joke!

The preceding example shows another instance of character C using the masculine personal pronoun *ore*. However, with this character it is written in katakana instead of the kanji(俺). As mentioned in the analysis of example (1) in dialogue (C1), the use of katakana with non-katakana words is usually for emphasis. The character also uses polite language in this example with *masu* and *deshita*.

- (5)C: 「なんかすげデート！って気分味わえた。アンタどうだった？」
 [nanka sugge deeto! tte kibun ajiwaeta. anta dou datta ?]
 Today really felt like a date! How about you?

Example (5) displays the character using *sugoi*, yet this time pronouncing it shorter for emphasis and again ending it with *e* instead of *oi*. He also calls the heroine *anta* again.

(C4)After school

The following dialogue happens as character C calls the protagonist out on their way home from school.

*(Translation note) Senpai (先輩) is used to refer to someone in a year above themselves in school, alternatively someone with more experience(in the workplace etc.). I will not be translating this, as there is no proper equivalent in English.

(1)C: 「なんも用事ないんだったら途中までどう？」

[nanmo yōji nain dattara tochuu made dou?]

If you don' t have any plans, how about going home together?

Example (1) shows C shortening his speech once again, changing *nanimo* into *nanmo*. At this point the player gets three options, as shown in previous examples. Again choosing option ② makes them end up at a coffee shop, making more small talk. This time I chose to ask about C's taste in TV-programs, and he replies that he watches a lot of drama and variety shows. The dialogue goes on as follows:

(2)C: 「アンタもいろいろ見たほうがいいよ。ホント。」

[anta mo iroiro mita hou ga ii yo. honto .]

You should watch more as well. Honestly.

Example (2) gives yet another instance of the character calling the protagonist *anta*, followed by the SFP *yo*. When the heroine then asks what exactly is important to watch, it triggers the following response.

(3)C: 「そりゃいろいろんなお姉……」

[sorya ironna one……]

Well, that would be various wo… *

Example (3) shows another example of C shortening *sore wa* "that is" to *sorya*.

(C5)Another date

Dialogue (C5) displays another example from a date with character C. The following conversation takes place in a cave by the beach, starting with the male character mentioning getting trapped in the cave. This statement leads to a series of options, once again giving a special fourth reply leading to a different conversation.

① 「わあ、神秘的」

[wā, shinpiteki]

Wow, mysterious

② 「キレイすぎて怪しい感じ？」

[kirei sugite ayashii kanji ?]

You mean because it' s so beautiful it' s suspicious?

③ 「わたしがあなたを守ります！」

[watashi ga anata o mamorimasu !]

I' ll protect you!

*(Translation note) This is a joke where he starts talking about women (お姉さん – *onēsan* “woman; lady; sister”), but abruptly stops and changes his mind.

④ 「そんなのありえないね！」
[sonna no arienai ne !]
That' s impossible!

Option ③ shows the first instance of the female protagonist having the chance of using a second person pronoun, in this case being the polite *anata*.

Choosing the special option ④, which also shows an instance of the SFP *ne*, leads to C talking about how it truly could happen. This leads to him going further with the conversation by mentioning a mutated, monstrous sea cucumber, leaving the heroine on the verge of crying.

(2)C: 「ゴメンで！ あーホラ、帰ろうぜ、帰ってホラ、ジュース飲も！」
[gomen te! ā hora, kaerou ze, kaette hora, juusu nomu !]

I' m sorry! Ah come on, let' s go! Let' s go back and drink juice!

(3)C: 「よし、お兄ちゃん買いに行つてやる。だから泣くなよ？」*

[yoshi, oniichan kai ni itte yar. dakara naku na yo ?]

All right, mister is going to buy you some juice. So don' t cry, okay?

In example (2) is another example of character C using the male SFP *ze*, along with the use of the verb *naku* “to cry” in its negative imperative form in example (3), followed by the SFP *yo*. Example (3) also shows C using *yar* “to give”, a slightly vulgar verb. This is usually used by male speakers, and is seen as impolite and rough.

The following line is another example taken from one of the dialogues happening when the heroine uses too much skinship.

(4)C: 「アンタとオレの距離がマジでこれ以上縮まったらどうなんのか」
[anta to ore no kyori ga majide kore ijō chidjimattara dō nan no ka]
What will happen if the distance between us becomes any smaller?

Example (4) shows another usage of the second-person pronoun *anta*, followed by the first-person pronoun *ore* (here stylized in katakana). Also, by the end of the sentence he also shortens *naru* “to become”, into *nan*.

This character has been using quite a lot of masculine and familiar language, along with an array of slang and abbreviations. Although he is younger than the protagonist, he barely shows any instances of polite language, with the one exception during the time he apologizes for making a joke about clothing that would suit her.

*(Translation note) *Oniichan* (お兄ちゃん) means “brother”, but can also be used to refer to a young adult male. Therefore I decided to translate it to “mister”, as there is no equivalent in English in this case.

4.2 The Bishōjo game

4.2.1 Background and outline

The dating sim series Love Plus was developed and published by Konami. The first game was released in 2009 for the handheld gaming console Nintendo DS. The game featured in the present study is called Love Plus+²³, a remake of the original with some added content.

Similar to Tokimeki Memorial the gameplay focuses on scheduling and building up parameters. However, the goal is to get one of the three female characters to confess their love within 100 days. If one fails to do this, the player will get a so-called “bad end”. But if the player succeeds, the female character becomes their girlfriend in the game, allowing them to go on dates and interact in several different ways. There is also a function where the player can send text-messages to the girls and receive replies from them.

The game starts with creating a character by choosing a name, birthday and blood type. The player also gets to choose where they originally come from along with something called a handle name (HN), which seems to be used as a profile name for exchanging data. I chose to name the character Ryū Tanaka (田中リュウ) and set his birthplace to Osaka.

The first scene starts out with an inner monologue by the main character, letting the player know that he has just moved to a town called Towano City (とわの市). He walks around town, giving the player an overview of the area. As he returns home, the player also gets to choose what kind of room they want to stay in. The choices are a simple student-like room, a fashionable grown-up room or a calm Japanese-style room. As the character enters his new room, the player interestingly enough also gets to choose his own monologue answer.

① 「今日からここが俺の部屋だ！」

[kyō kara koko ga ore no heya da !]

This is my room from now on!

② 「今日からここが僕の部屋だな」

[kyō kara koko ga boku no heya da na]

So, this will be my room from now on, huh.

As seen in the choices above, the meaning is basically the same, but the style is slightly different. The main differences are the personal pronouns and the sentence endings. In choice ① the character calls himself *ore*, ending his sentence only with *da* and an exclamation mark, while in choice ② he uses *boku* and ends his sentence with the SFP *na*, slightly softening his speech. Depending on which one the player chooses, the way the main character refers to himself throughout the rest of the game also changes.

After this, the character realizes that he needs to go to and properly finish the transfer-procedures for his new school, followed by applying to a part-time job at a family restaurant. He is unexpectedly asked to go there right away, leading to his meeting with the first dateable character.

²³ Official website: http://www.konami.jp/products/loveplus_plus/

4.2.2 Characters and language-use

D) Nene Anegasaki (姉ヶ崎 寧々)

(D1) First meeting

As the hero enters his workplace and changes into his uniform, he meets the first female character, who is a very beautiful and grown-up woman according to his inner monologue.

(1)D: 「あなたが新しく入った人？」
[anata ga atarashiku haitta hito ?]
You' re the new employee?

Example (1) shows the usage of the second-person pronoun *anata*, the most polite way to refer to “you”. Although this may be used by both male and female speakers, it is more commonly used by women. She introduces herself as Nene Anegasaki, another person working in the store.

(2)D: 「あなたの指導係だけど、敬語は無しよ？」
[anata no shidou gakari dakedo, keigo wa nashi yo ?]
I' m the one in charge of you, but don' t speak formally, ok?

In example (2) the female character uses the SFP *yo*. If *yo* is used together with a copula such as *da* (e.g. “*keigo wa nashi da yo*”), it is seen as a male speech-element, but when used in this fashion with the copula removed it is classified as feminine speech.

After this, the main character is surprised to find out that she is a High School student from the same school, only one year above him. After he responds to her joking attitude in a serious manner, the following lines appear.

(3)D: 「もう……本気にしないの。」
[mou…… honki ni shinai no .]
Geez, don' t be so serious.
(4)D: 「でも、歳に近い人の敬語がイヤなのは本当よ？」
[demo, toshi no chikai hito no keigo ga iya nano ha hontou yo ?]
But it' s true that I don' t like people close to my age speaking formally.

Example (3) demonstrates the usage of the female SFP *no*, indicating emotional emphasis. After this, character D again shows the female sentence-ending pattern of removing the copula and adding the SFP *yo* for emphasis.

(D2) After school activities

Choosing one of the three after school activities will trigger different events. The following is from the part time job, where the protagonist makes a mistake by spilling food/drinks (unclear which) as he is serving customers. After saving him, D also cheers him up by giving him a pep talk.

(1)D: 「もう……これくらいで落ち込まないの。」

[mou…… korekurai de ochikomanai no .]

Geez... Don't get depressed over something like this.

(2)D: 「ふふ。 あなたはまだ新人なんだから、いっぱいミスしていいのよ。」

[fufu, anata wa mada shinjin dakara, ippai misu shite ii noyo .]

(Giggle) You're still new so it's alright if you make lots of mistakes.

(3) 「でも、そこから学ばないとダメよ？」

[demo, sorekara narabanai to dame yo ?]

But it's no good if you don't learn from them.

In example (1), the female character uses the feminine SFP *no*. Example (2) starts with the sound *fufu*, which is the sound of a feminine giggle. This is followed by another instance of the personal pronoun *anata*, ended with the female SFP *no* along with *yo*. In example (3) she once again ends her sentence with the feminine speech-pattern of a removed copula along with the SFP *yo*.

(D3)Walking home

Similar to Tokimeki Memorial, the protagonist gets a few choices as he spots one of the female characters on their way home from school.

① 一緒に帰ろうと誘う

[issho ni kaerou to sasou]

Ask her to go home together

② 一人で帰る

[hitori de kaeru]

Go home alone

In the beginning she will reject the invitation, but as the protagonist gets closer to the character she will start walking home with him. Let us look at the following conversation.

(1)P: 「今帰り？一緒に帰ろうよ。」

[ima kaeri? issho ni kaerou yo .]

Leaving? Let's go together.

In example (1), the protagonist uses the SFP *yo*, said to be a male speech-element when used after a verb in its plain form. In this case, he uses it after the plain volitional form.

(2)D: 「ふふ、いいわよ？」

[fufu, ii wayo ?]

(Giggle) Alright.

(3)D: 「どこか寄っていくのも、いいかもね？」

[dokoka yotteiku no mo, ii kamo ne ?]

It might be nice to stop somewhere on the way too, right?

First is the giggle used again in example (2), along with the feminine emphatic SFP *wa* together with *yo* monopolized by female speakers. There is also the use of the particle *ne*,

used to seek agreement from the listener. As mentioned before, although this is a gender-neutral way of speaking, it is in some cases said that *ne* is more used by female speakers, whereas it is frequently switched out with *na* by male speakers.

(D4)Confession

As the player gets the female character to fall for him, there is a confession-scene followed by the actual dating. The character calls him out, saying that she wants to talk after work. He goes to meet her, asking why they could not talk at the workplace. After she explains that she wanted to talk to him alone and after they reminisce about their first meeting, the confession starts.

- (1)D: 「あのね、私、好きな人がいたの……」
 [anone, watashi, suki na hiro ga ita no .]
 You know, I had a person I liked.
- (2)D: 「私はその人に支えられるだけなのがイヤで、」
 [watashi wa sono hito ni sasaerareru dake nano ga iya de ,]
 I didn' t like always being supported by that person,
- (3)D: 「自分も大人になろうってがんばったの。」
 [jibun mo otona ni narou tte ganbatta no .]
 So I was working hard to become an adult as well.
- (4)D: 「つまり……好きなの。」
 [tsumari…… suki nano .]
 In other words… I like you.
- (5)D: 「私の……カレシになってほしいな……」
 [watashi no kareshi ni natte hoshii na .]
 I want you to become my boyfriend.

Example (1) starts with the female interjection *anone*. Example (1) and (2) both demonstrate the female (or male polite) personal pronoun *watashi*, whereas example (1) and (3) both show more uses of the female SFP *no*. In (2) is also the use of *nano*, a feminine assertive expression rarely used by male speakers. In example (4) she uses the female SFP *nano*. This is followed by the SFP *na* and the personal pronoun *watashi* in example (5).

This last statement triggers two choices, either to accept or reject the confession.

- ① 「僕も好きだ」
 [boku mo suki da]
 I like you too
- ② 「ごめん……」
 [gomen……]
 I' m sorry…

Option ① shows an instance of *da*, the plain form of the auxiliary verb *desu* argued to be a male speech-element when used in this fashion.

(D5)Date

After accepting the confession, the actual dating begins. Next up is a conversation from one of the dates, which takes place when going shopping.

(1)D: 「こっちのと併せると可愛いよね。」
[kocchi no to awaseru to kawaii yone .]
If you put it together with this it' ll be cute, right?

In example (1) she uses the tag-question *yone* mentioned earlier in the study, used to seek agreement from the listener. As mentioned before, this is generally defined as a gender-neutral expression.

(2)D: 「ダメだよ、そういうの。」
[dame dayo, sou iu no .]
That' s not good.
(3)D: 「あ、これもいいな。はい、着替えて。」
[a, kore mo ii na. hai, kigaete .]
Ah, this is good too. Here, go and change clothes.

Example (2) demonstrates the use of the argued male expression *dayo*, again used by a female character. In example (3) is once again an instance of the SFP *na*. As mentioned before, this was originally a male SFP that is lately becoming unisex.

Looking at these five different examples, the character uses quite a lot of feminine language overall, whilst also keeping within the unisex and female safety zones. As she is older than the protagonist, her image is quite refined and mature.

E) Rinko Kobayakawa (小早川凜子)

(E1) First meeting

The protagonist meets the next female character by changing his schedule to library committee work. He is sent off to work in the school library and finds a cute girl reading on a bench outside. He asks her if she has seen the library committee member called Kobayakawa.

(1)E: 「アンタなんて、見たことないけど。」
[anta nante, mita koto nai kedo .]
I haven' t seen you before though.

Example (1) demonstrates this character's first use of a personal pronoun; slightly rudely calling the one year older person she just met *anta*. Although this is classified as being the informal second-person pronoun mostly used by female speakers, it is used by male speakers as well.

(2)P: 「だよな。よそから編入してきてさ、今日が初日なんだよ。」
[dayona. yoso kara henyuu shite kite sa, kyō kara shonichi dayo .]
Right. I moved here from another place, and this is my first day.

In example (2) the protagonist uses the SFP *dayo* twice, once together with the SFP *na* and once on its own. This was mentioned in the analysis of the previous game as being argued a male speech element. He also uses the gender-neutral particle *sa*.

(3)E: 「聞いてないけど。」

[kiitenai kedo .]

I never asked.

(4)E: 「委員やめるなら、先生に言っとく。」

[iin yameru nara, sensei ni ittoku .]

If you're quitting committee work, I'll tell the teacher for you.

The female character's response in example (3) shows yet another instance of shortening *-teiru*, turning *kiiteinai* into *kiitenai*. As mentioned earlier, this is a gender-neutral way of speaking. In example (4), character E is using the expression *-teoku*, indicating doing something in advance. However, instead of saying the full *itteoku*, she shortens it to *ittoku*.

(E2)After school activities

Scheduling to go and work in the library after school leads to some special events and conversation with this character. The following are examples taken from one of those instances.

(1)P: 「あのさ……もうちょっと楽しく出来ないか？」

[ano sa…… mou chotto tanoshiku dekinai ka ?]

Hey… Can't you be a bit livelier?

In example (1) the main character uses the particle *sa* again, and ultimately ends his question with the question-particle *ka*, seeming slightly more forceful when used with short form instead of polite language.

(2)E: 「出来ないね。」

[dekinai ne .]

I can't.

(3)E: 「つーか、アタシは本読んでれば楽しいし。」

[tsuuka, atashi wa hon yondereba tanoshii shi .]

Besides, I have my fun reading books.

Example (3) shows character E first using the SFP *ne*. She then uses the slang *tsuuka* instead of *tteiuka* “besides”, and after this we see her first use of a personal pronoun, *atashi*. This is a strictly female informal pronoun.

(E3)Walking home

Again the player gets the chance to ask the female character whether or not she would like to walk home together, getting the same choices as in dialogue (D3). Again choosing answer ① in this instance leads to the following dialogue.

(1)P: 「オッス、一緒に帰ろう？」

[ossu, issho ni kaerou ?]

Yo, wanna' walk home together?

In this case the line said by the main character is slightly different than the one seen earlier. He starts with *ossu*, a greeting described as usually being used between close male friends. The following line shows the character being rejected.

(2)E: 「今日はパス。用事あるもん。」
[kyō wa pasu. yōji aru mon .]
I' ll pass today. Since I have plans.

In the above statement, the female character uses the particle *mon*, indicating reason or excuse. This is generally defined as a feminine SFP, but has been shown to be a particle used by both male and female speakers according to a study by Janet Shibamoto Smith²⁴.

(E4)Confession

As the character's affection for the protagonist grows, she eventually calls him out to meet her on the rooftop. Previous scenes have let the player know that this character usually goes to the rooftop to cry. This has the protagonist running up the stairs in a hurry to comfort her.

(1)E: 「大丈夫……リンコは泣いてないよ？」
[daijoubu…… rinko wa naitenai yo ?]
It' s okay… Rinko isn' t crying.

In example (1), E refers to herself in third person, using her own name Rinko instead of a personal pronoun. This is a style of role language usually used by young children. This is accompanied by another shortening of *-teiru*, along with the particle *yo* at the end of the sentence. However, as this part does not require the removal of any copula, it is not used in the same way as the feminine SFP *yo*.

(2)E: 「一緒にさ、夕焼け見ようと思っただけだよ。」
[issho ni sa, yuuyake miyou to omotta dake dayo .]
I just thought we could watch the sunset together.

Example (2) shows another instance of the previously mentioned SFP *dayo*.

(3)E: 「いつもの顔。年上ぶってさ……へんなの。」
[itsumo no kao. toshiue futte sa…… hen nano .]
You' re always making that face. Acting like you' re more mature… It' s weird.

In example (3) she uses the female expression *nano*. The dialogue continues with them reminiscing about the day they first met, again leading up to the confession. She tells him that he is completely different from who she fantasized she would fall for, and he asks how she imagined it.

(4)E: 「どうだったかな……」
[dou datta kana .]
I wonder how it was…

²⁴ Shibamoto Smith, J. (2004). *Language and Gender*

(5)E: 「リンコもよく思い出せないよ。」
[rinko mo yoku omoidasenai yo .]
Rinko can' t really remember either.

Example (4) demonstrates another usage of the SFP *kana*, followed by an additional usage of the particle *yo* in example (5). There is also another instance of her referring to herself in third person.

(6)E: 「思い出そうとするとさ、この顔になっちゃうんだもん。」
[omoidasou to suru sa, kono kao nu nacchaun da mon .]
If I try to remember, that face appears.*

In example (6) E once again uses the female expression *mon*. After this the conversation continues with her saying that she likes him and wants him to become her boyfriend, followed by the two options seen earlier in the study.

(E5)Date

Next is dialogue taken from one of the dates after accepting the confession. The following examples are taken from the dialogue during a date with the character in a clothing shop.

(1)E: 「最近さ、お母さんがこういうところによく連れてくるんだよね。」
[saikin sa, okāsan ga kouiu toko ni yoku tsurete kurun da yone .]
Lately my mother has been taking me to these kinds of places.
(2)E: 「娘とこういうところ来るの楽しいとか言っちゃってんの。」
[musume to kouiu toko kuru no tanoshii toka icchatten no .]
She' s saying stuff like how it' s fun to go here with her daughter.

Example (1) shows another female character using the earlier mentioned particle *yone*, in this case together with a plain *da*. Example (2) displays yet another instance of the shortening of *-teiru*, along with the female SFP *no*.

(3)E: 「でもさ、リンコも楽しいんだよね、」
[demo sa, rinko mo tanoshiin da yone,]
But you know, Rinko has fun too,

Example (3) has E once again referring to herself in third person, followed by another use of the plain copula *da* together with *yone*. This character started out as a slightly rude character, but she does not quite step out of the safety zone. There are also quite a few instances of her using feminine speech elements.

*(Taken out of context) Referring to the protagonist.

F) Manaka Takane (高嶺愛花)

(F1) First meeting

To meet the third character, the hero needs to change his schedule, choosing the tennis club command. This leads to the protagonist looking for the teacher in charge of the tennis club since he wants to hand in his application, eventually making him go to the tennis courts.

There, he sees a pretty girl raking the fallen leaves off the court (autumn version). He calls her over, learning that she is a member of the girls' tennis club and a second year student like him. He asks her if she has seen the teacher, and she informs him that he is probably taking a nap on the rooftop.

(1)P: 「わかった、屋上な？」

[wakatta, okujou na ?]

I got it, the rooftop right?

(2)P: 「……屋上って、どっから上がるんだっけ？」

[……okujou tte, dokkara agarun dakke ?]

...How do I get to the roof again?

As demonstrated in example (1) the male protagonist uses the earlier explained SFP *na*, followed by an abbreviation in example (2). Instead of using the full *dokokara* “from where”, he shortens it to *dokkara*.

(3)F: 「ふふ…… じゃあ、案内してあげる。」

[fufu…… jā, annai shite ageru .]

(Giggle)… I’ ll take you there, then.

Example (3) shows F’s response. As mentioned before, the sound *fufu* used in the beginning indicates a giggle, a laughing sound mostly used for female characters.

(4)F: 「コートに枯葉が落ちてると練習のとき危ないから、」

[cooto ni kareha ga ochiteru to renshuu no toki abunai kara,]

Since it’s dangerous to play with dead leaves on the court,

(5)F: 「お節介で掃いてただけなの。」

[osekkai de haiteta dake nano .]

I was just cleaning it on my own.

Both example (4) and (5) have abbreviations of *-teiru*, and in example (5) there is also another instance of the female expression *nano*, indicating assertion.

(F2) After school activities

Choosing to go to the tennis club and practise after school eventually leads to an event where the main character asks F to walk home together, with her accepting the offer. Before this, the character has been difficult to speak with. During the walk back, he asks her why she always walks home alone directly after school.

(1)F: 「校則にも、下校時は速やかに帰宅って書いてあるでしょ？」
[kousoku ni mo, gekou toki ha sumiyaka ni kitaku tte kaite aru desho ?]
School rules say to return home immediately after leaving school, right?

(2)P: 「校則に？へえ……でも、そんなのいちいち守る奴いないだろ！」
[kousoku ni? hē…… demo, sonna no ichiichi mamoru yakkoi nai darō !]
School rules? Huh... But, you don't need to follow every single one!

In example (1) F ends with the tag-question *deshou*, whereas the protagonist uses the corresponding masculine tag-question *darō* in example (2), both speech elements mentioned earlier in the text.

(3)F: 「あの、でも、わたし寄り道とか……」
[ano, demo, watashi yorimichi toka ……]
Umm, but, stopping somewhere on the way is...

Example (3) shows another instance of the character's use of the feminine personal pronoun *watashi*. It also starts with the interjection *ano*, showing insecurity. She also does not quite finish her sentence, only implying that she cannot stop anywhere on the way.

(4)F: 「じゃあ、寄り道無し。それなら校則違反じゃないよな？」
[jā, yorimichi nashi. sore nara kousoku ihan janai yona ?]
Then straight home. In that case, you aren't violating school rules, right?

(5)F: 「そう、なのかな…… あの、さようなら。」
[sou, nano kana…… ano, sayōnara .]
Is... that the case... Um, goodbye.

In example (4) the protagonist uses the SFPs *yo* and *na*, explained earlier in the study. In example (5) character F uses the female expression *nano*, followed by the interjection *ano*.

(F3)Walking home

Similar to Tokimeki Memorial, the female characters will sometimes call the protagonist out after school once their affection has grown. The following is an example of one of those instances.

(1)F: 「あの、一緒に帰らない？」
[ano, issho ni kaeranai ?]
Um, do you want to go home together?
(2)F: 「寄り道も、その、少しぐらいだったら……」
[yorimichi mo, sono, sukoshi gurai dattara ……]
If it's only for a little, stopping on the way home is also...

Example (1) shows another instance of the interjection *ano*, followed by the similar interjection *sono* in example (2), showing that the character is insecure and hesitant. Also, looking at the whole sentence in example (2), F is speaking in a very roundabout way. She does not say it directly, but hints that it would be alright to stop somewhere on the way.

(F4)Confession

As the affection from character F grows, an event is triggered making the other members of the tennis club tease the female character about her feelings, with the protagonist being confused at the situation. This ultimately ends with F asking to talk to the protagonist alone by the courts where they first met.

(1)P: 「なんなんだよアイツら。な？」
[nan nandayo aitsura. na ?]
What' s their problem. Right?

As shown in example (1), the protagonist uses the earlier mentioned *dayo*. This is followed by the use of the third person pronoun *aitsu*, with an added *ra* at the end used for plural form. This is a quite vulgar wording. He ends with the particle *na* as a tag-question seeking agreement.

(2)F: 「ゴメンなさい、わたしのせいなの……」
[gomennasai, watashi no sei nano ……]
I' m sorry, it' s my fault…
(3)F: 「お友達にね、教えたの……」
[otomodachi ni ne, oshieta no ……]
I told a friend, you see…

In example (2) F uses the feminine personal pronoun *watashi*, followed by the earlier mentioned female SFP *nano*. Example (3) shows another use of the SFP *ne*, mostly defined as a gender neutral particle but in some cases argued to be more used by female speakers. Example (3) is ultimately finalized with the female SFP *no*, seen used in many instances before.

(4)F: 「今日、あなたに告白するつもりって……」
[kyō, anata ni kokuhaku suru tsumori tte ……]
That I was planning on confessing to you today…
(5)F: 「あなたが、好き……」
[anata ga, suki ……]
I like you…

Example (4) and (5) both display yet another instance of the second-person pronoun *anata*. Example (5) also shows the removal of the copula (*desu*, *da*), which would usually be used after *suki* “like”, as this is a na-adjective.

This last statement results in finally triggering the same two options seen in the two earlier confession-dialogues, giving the player the choice to either reject or accept the character's feelings.

(F5)Date

After accepting the confession, the dating starts once again. Just as before, the following dialogue is taken from one of the dates after the confession, also taking place in a clothing store.

(1)P: 「それもいいな。似合いそう。」

[sore mo ii na. niai sou.]

That's nice too. I think it'll suit you.

Example (1) shows the protagonist using the previously discussed particle *na* for emotional emphasis. As discussed earlier, this expression is defined as a masculine speech-element and may thus be slightly more used by male speakers. However, it has been noted as being used by female speakers as well.

(2)F: 「ね、背中押して？」

[ne, senaka oshite ?]

Hey, help me decide. *

Example (2) displays character F using the expression *ne*. While this is defined as a gender-neutral element, there are studies arguing that it may be more used by female speakers, as young male speakers might use *na* in its place.

(3)P: 「僕の好みでいいの？」

[boku no konomi de ii no ?]

Are you fine with something I like?

In example (3) the protagonist still uses *boku*, as that was the choice I selected in the beginning. There is a usage of the particle *no* as well, yet as mentioned earlier it is a gender-neutral expression if used in a question.

(4)F: 「……あなたの好みがいいの。だから、ね？」

[…… anata no konomi ga ii no. dakara, ne ?]

I'd rather have something you like. That's why, okay?

The example above shows F once again calling the protagonist *anata*, followed by the female usage of the SFP *no* to indicate emphasis. There is also another instance of the tag-question *ne* used for seeking agreement from the listener.

Character F has quite a feminine, dignified way of speaking. She also displayed the highest usage of interjections such as *ano* or *sono*, showing insecurity. She is the politest character in the game, and is described as the daughter of a rich family. The type of formal, ladylike speech she uses suits the image of the rich young lady she is portrayed as.

*(Translation note) Lit. "push my back".

5 Comparison and results

5.1 Use of personal pronouns

As seen in the analysis, there was quite a high usage of personal pronouns in the game dialogue. By using the full dialogues the examples were drawn from, there was an opportunity to further research the frequency and popularity of pronouns in the games.

Table 4: Characters' use of first-person pronouns

	Otome game	Times used	Characters	Bishōjo game	Times used	Characters
Formal	<i>boku</i>	11/16(68,7%)	1	<i>watashi</i>	14/26(53.8%)	2
Informal	<i>ore</i>	5/16(31,2%)	2	<i>atashi</i>	1/26(3,8%)	1
(Other)				(illeism)	11/26(42,3%)	1

(Protagonist)	<i>(watashi)</i>	<i>(10)</i>		<i>(boku/ore)</i>	<i>(19)</i>	

One element I found that is not introduced in Shibamoto's study is the use of one's own name in place of a pronoun, thus referring to oneself in third person (illeism), displayed by character E. This is a component within role language for young children, and is also argued to be more commonly used by young girls rather than boys. In a survey by Shozo Kurokawa in 1972²⁵, comparing the speech patterns of ten men and ten women, all of the men answered to have used either *boku* or *ore* in their childhood, while 30% of the women either called themselves by their name or a nickname. It is said that a young female using this type of speech makes her sound cute and childlike. As character E is younger than the protagonist and also has a petite physique, referring to herself in third person enhances these features.

The most commonly used female pronoun in both games was *watashi* (written both as わたし and 私), staying within the polite safety zone. This was used by the protagonist in the otome game and two of the female characters in the bishōjo game (Character D and F). In terms of occurrence and popularity *watashi* was the female pronoun most commonly used in both of the games. The only other female pronoun seen in the examples was *atashi*, used once by character E, as this character had a slightly less formal way of speaking overall.

The most commonly used male pronoun was *boku*, whilst more characters used *ore*. A study by Cindi L. SturtzSreetharan²⁶ showed that *ore* is more commonly used by younger males, while *boku* is more commonly used by older males (being more polite and thus using more refined speech). The only character in the otome game using *boku* was B, displaying the older, slightly more serious character, which was emphasised by his use of softer, slightly more polite language. A study by Satoshi Kinsui²⁷ also mentions that *boku* has commonly started being used by female speakers.

²⁵ Kurokawa, S. (1972). *Japanese Terms of Address: Some Usages of the First and Second Person Pronouns*

²⁶ SturtzSreetharan, C. (2009). *Ore and omae: Japanese men's uses of first- and second-person pronouns*

²⁷ Kinsui, S. (2011). *Gendainihongo no yakuwarigo to hatsuwakuyarakutā*, p.10

While character A referred to himself using *ore* written in kanji (俺), character C's was always written in katakana (オレ). If one would apply the rule of using katakana in non-katakana words for emphasis in this case, character C may be trying to emphasize his manliness. As shown in dialogue (C1), character C seemed to be disappointed by the fact that the protagonist was one year older, and may be compensating for this by acting manlier.

Table 5: Characters' use of second-person pronouns

	Otome game	Times used	Characters	Bishōjo game	Usage	Characters
Formal				<i>anata</i>	11/12(91.6%)	2
/	<i>anta</i>	8/20(40.0%)	1			
/	<i>kimi</i>	9/20(45.0%)	1			
Informal	<i>omae</i>	3/20(15.0%)	1	<i>anta</i>	1/12(8.3%)	1

In the dialogues chosen from the otome game, the male speakers used the informal *omae* (character A), moderately polite *kimi* (character B) and *anta* (character C). There was no usage of the formal *anata*, while the most frequently used was ultimately *kimi*.

In the bishōjo game, D and F both used the polite *anata*, making it the most commonly used second-person pronoun by the female characters. *Anta* was only used once by character E, once again displaying her slightly less formal way of speaking.

Neither of the protagonists showed much use of second-person pronouns, as they only used the name of the characters (last name *-san*, first name *-san*, first name *-kun/-chan* etc.) or the nickname selected by the player. Thus I decided to exclude them from the table.

Both the analysis of the first- and second-person pronouns showed similar results. While two of the dateable characters used the same first-person pronominal form, there was one who used a different way of self-address. However, while two of the female characters (D and F) used the more polite *watashi* and one (E) used the less formal *atashi* (as well as the alternate illeism), two of the male characters (A and C) favoured the informal *ore* and one (B) used the more formal *boku*.

In the case of the second-person pronominal form, the two female characters D and F used the formal *anata* while character E used the less formal *anta*. None of the male characters used the same pronoun, as character A used the very informal and masculine *omae* while character B and C respectively used the more polite, yet still familiar *kimi* and *anta*.

As shown in table 6 below, created from adapting both Reynolds' and Shibamoto's studies, the assertiveness of *watakushi/atakushi*, *watashi/atashi* and *anata* is still within the polite feminine safety zone (a-b). The only female character going outside of this zone is E, by using the impolite *anta* and thus falling into the female danger zone (b-c).

Although a male speaker using any of the pronouns within point (a) and (b) might give a polite or feminine impression if used in informal situations, they do have a significant advantage in the quantity of pronouns acceptable to use overall depending on context and situation (10/12). The only two unacceptable for a man to use are *atakushi* and *atashi*. In contrast women have a very limited amount that is acceptable to use and may seem impolite if going outside of point (a) and (b). This shows that female speakers may in fact have higher expectations in terms of politeness, and thus fewer personal pronouns to choose from.

Table 6: Pronouns and assertiveness

	Non-assertive			Assertive
	(a)-----	(b)-----	(c)-----	(d)
First-person	<i>watakushi</i> (F/M) <i>atakushi</i> (F)	<i>watashi</i> (F/M) <i>atashi</i> (F)	<i>boku</i> (M)	<i>ore</i> (M)
Second-person	<i>anata</i> (F/M)	<i>anta</i> (F/M)	<i>kimi</i> (M)	<i>omae</i> (M) <i>kisama</i> (M) <i>temee</i> (M)

Studies have shown that the most preferred way of speaking by both genders is by omitting the usage of personal pronouns as much as possible. This is done by first-person pronominal forms being excluded and second-person pronominal forms being replaced with title or name and honorific. However, as seen in the present study, only a small amount of text from dating sims showed a relatively high usage of personal pronouns, which is something Shibamoto argues to perhaps be “serving to signal or represent heteronormative attractiveness or mutual attraction”²⁴. Furthermore, the use of personal pronouns such as *anata*, *anta* and *omae* is common among married couples, and may be used in these games to emphasize the romantic relationship between the characters.

5.2 Use of gendered sentence-elements

Table 7: Gendered forms and assertiveness

Non-assertive							Assertive	
(a)-----	(b)-----	(c)-----	(d)-----	(e)				
<i>wa</i>	<i>nano</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>sa</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>yo</i>	<i>da</i>	<i>ze</i>
<i>kashira</i>	<i>deshou</i>	<i>kana</i>	<i>yone</i>	VOL(+ <i>ka</i>)		<i>zo</i>		
☞OP(+ <i>yo</i>)		<i>janai</i>				<i>oi/ai</i> → <i>ē</i>		
		<i>jan</i>				<i>darou</i>		

Taking the different elements examined (also shown in table 3) and putting them on a scale of assertiveness by using the descriptions of strongly/moderately masculine versus strongly/moderately feminine from Okamoto’s study puts the masculine *zo* on the assertive end while the feminine *wa* is on the non-assertive end. However, in contrast with the similarly structured table 6 for the personal pronouns there are now five points (a-e) instead of four. The reason for this is that the elements within point (a) through (b) are strictly feminine while also being on a different scale of assertiveness, thus adding a new category not addressed in the study before; the male danger zone.

While a woman using the assertive end’s (c-e), with (c-d) being the female danger zone, might make her be perceived as rude or manly, a man using the components within the new male danger zone (a-b) might result in him being perceived as extremely feminine.

The points (b) through (c) remain the unisex safety zone. Although one of the components within this area is classified as moderately feminine in Okamoto’s study (*deshou*), this is acceptable for men to use in formal speech and is placed within the unisex category.

²⁸ Shibamoto Smith, J. (2004). *Language and Gender*, p.121

In comparison with the results for the personal pronouns, where female speakers had an obvious disadvantage with very few pronouns to choose from, the gap between the male and female speakers has been slightly equalized in the different gendered sentence-final language forms. Instead of the feminine, non-assertive part having significantly fewer elements to choose from, there is also a group affording female speakers a considerably increased number of speech patterns. Compared to the masculine speakers there are only a small amount of components fewer, as everything within (a) through (c) is acceptable for women to use, while everything within (b) and (e) is acceptable for men to use.

Nonetheless, the fact still remains that these feminine components are still on the non-assertive end of the diagram. While SFP's and other sentence-finalizing elements in Japanese are used to imply emotion and emphasis, thus establishing connection and understanding between the speaker and the target, it may also be used to soften utterances and make one sound more respectful or polite. The components closer to the non-assertive side are the ones used to soften the speech by being less forceful and more formal. This is contrasted by the male speech elements, which are in turn more assertive and less polite. Thus these different sentence-final factors seem to be one of the components contributing to the theory on how Japanese women's speech may be slightly more polite in comparison to the speech-patterns used by Japanese men.

However, using the different elements from table 7, there was another opportunity to further examine the usage of the three groups from Okamoto's study (feminine, masculine and neutral) within the games. Although they are not real life conversations, this may give a slightly updated overview of how the ideal use, and in turn perhaps the current use, of these different gendered language-forms may have changed.

Again using the full dialogues from the examples, table 8 shows the usage-percentage of these three gendered groups within the otome game (character A-C), the bishōjo game (character D-F), as well as for the two protagonists (P). All components shown in table 7, except the female component *kashira*, were used at least once in the dialogues analysed.

Table 8: Characters' use of gendered language-forms

	Otome game(A-C)	(P)	Bishōjo game(D-F)	(P)
Masculine	87/114(76.3%)	10/30(33.3%)	8/72(11.1%)	22/52(42.3%)
Neutral	26/114(22.8%)	20/30(66.6%)	46/72(63.8%)	30/52(57.6%)
Feminine	1/114(0.8%)	0/30(0%)	18/72(25.0%)	0/52(0%)

As shown in table 8, the male characters of the otome game used a high amount of masculine speech (76.3%). The majority of the neutral speech-patterns were used by character B, while the majority of the masculine elements were used by characters A and C. There was also one instance of feminine language by character C in dialogue (C1). This was the use of the SFP *no*, defined as “moderately feminine” by Okamoto. However, in Shibamoto's study the same particle is described as being used by both male and female speakers, although more commonly by women.

As for the female protagonist of the otome game, there was zero use of feminine speech elements. The highest usage was of neutral speech, along with some components defined as masculine. Yet this was the usage of the plain form copula *da* and the SFP *yo*, both described

as “moderately masculine” by Okamoto. Though there are studies arguing that these types of sentence-final elements may seem more forceful and assertive, there is also research showing how they are in fact used by female speakers as well, albeit less frequently. For example, Shibamoto’s study shows that the SFP *yo* is used by both genders.

In the bishōjo game, the female characters mostly used neutral language. However, the use of feminine language was significantly higher than in the otome game, where it was only used once. While the use of feminine language was higher than in the other game, it was still relatively low. Furthermore, it did not differ much from the amount of male components. However, as with the female protagonist in the otome game, the female characters in the bishōjo game only used the plain copula *da* and the SFP *yo*. The male protagonist used no female components. Although he did use quite a large amount of male speech elements, these were only *da*, *yo* and the tag-question *darou*. The style he used most was the neutral one.

Looking at these results the female protagonist of the otome game and the male protagonist of the bishōjo game both mostly used neutral speech. This could be to make the protagonists as relatable as possible by not using as many strongly gendered speech-patterns and thus not giving them too strong personalities.

At the same time, the male characters of the otome game used a significantly high amount of male sentence-final forms. Thus the majority of the speech-patterns used by the male characters were either neutral or masculine. In addition, the female characters of the bishōjo game used a number of feminine sentence-final language elements, although not to an extreme extent. Yet the fact still remains that the majority of the elements used by the female characters were either feminine or neutral language.

5.3 Other observations

5.3.1 Abbreviations and slang

While Imai’s study²⁹ is mostly limited to the vowel devoicing in words, what the present study is focused on is slightly different. As seen in the examples of the present study the devoicing factor is not only limited to vowels, but also to consonants. It is not only the vowels or consonants within words either, but also shows several other types of devoicing and abbreviation of whole expressions.

For example, there were several instances of the devoicing of *surun* (*suru* - “to do”) into *sun* *sun*, devoicing the whole syllable *ru*. This was seen in several different examples, mostly in the case when there was a verb followed by the particle *n* (originally the particle *no*, but commonly used in this fashion instead). This type of abbreviation was only seen used by the male characters, mostly A and C. This gives the speech a more slurred, rougher feel, which may be the reason for the lack of this pattern among the female characters.

However, the most common instance seen in the dialogues from the two dating sims was the devoicing of the vowel *i* in the verb suffix *-teiru* used to describe a continuous action. This was used equally by both female and male speakers in the games, and is commonly used

²⁹ Imai, T. (2010). *An Emerging Gender Difference*

in spoken Japanese by young people. Yet the further devoicing and abbreviation was used to a great extent by the male characters, while it was barely used by the female characters at all. Furthermore, it was not used as much by the older, more dignified character B, or by the male protagonist of the bishōjo game.

The characters using the most slang and abbreviations were A and C. There was a high usage of the sounds *oi* and *ai* being changed into the phonological \bar{e} (also included in the study of table 8), showing a great use of masculine slang. These characters were displayed as manlier and more assertive, and thus used more masculine speech overall. This might help confirm the theory on how these types of speech abbreviations may be more used by male speakers, making it a more masculine speech-pattern.

5.3.2 Politeness and Honorifics

Calling someone by name and honorific was used to a similar extent by the dateable characters in both games, changing as the characters grew closer to the protagonist. Thus looking closer at this was not as interesting as the use of polite language overall.

Polite language was most regularly used by the female protagonist of the otome game, while speaking to the older character B. This may be to further emphasize the fact that character B is older, appealing to the women who like older men. In contrast, character C used familiar language with the female protagonist from the start, even after learning of their age difference. Furthermore, character D asks the main character not to use polite language with her despite being older. The interesting thing about this is how it is alright for the younger male to speak informally with the older female, while the younger female protagonist of the otome game uses formal language with the older character B. So even though the polite language mostly has to do with age difference, there are two cases where the younger male is allowed to speak informally to the older female. This further agrees with the theory of how female speakers are required to be more formal than male speakers.

However, character E also used impolite language with the male protagonist despite being younger. While this goes against their characters regarding age, it may be to emphasize other factors. For example, the fact that character C has a complex about being younger seems to be one of the factors contributing to his personality, and consequently his speech. Character E seems to have somewhat of a “tsundere” (ツンデレ) persona. This word is used to describe someone who has a hot and cold personality, usually putting up a cold or rude front and eventually showing shy and cute aspects.

As for honorific prefixes, the adding of the honorific *o* in front of certain words (ex. *o-tomodachi* “friend”) was commonly used by two of the female characters of the bishōjo game, but was not seen included by any of the male characters of the two games, nor by the female protagonist of the otome game. Even though it was used by two female characters, this was either in situations addressing someone other than the protagonist for character D, or used by character F, who has a more refined, ladylike image.

So although the female characters did have a slightly more polite, less manly or assertive way of speaking overall, the difference of politeness in other aspects such as using the formal *desu* or *masu*-form was minimal. Rather than being a gendered trait, in this case it may be to further propagate the idea of closeness in a romantic relationship, as polite language is rarely used between lovers.

5.3.3 Interjections

Politeness and honorifics aside, there is one last component seen addressed in the examples before, namely the use of interjections.

The male characters mostly used interjections such as *nā* or *yo* used to get the listeners attention, or *ō* used for indicating surprise. There were also some instances of *kora*, used to gain attention from the listener or to scold someone.

The female characters used either *nē* for getting attention, *a* for indicating surprise or the interjections *ano* or *sono* used to express insecurity and hesitation.

While some of the male characters occasionally used *nē* as well, the interjections *ano* and *sono* were generally used by the female characters. The interjection *ano* was only used a couple of times by the male protagonist of the bishōjo game, always together with either *sa* or *ne*, making it an expression used for gaining attention rather than showing insecurity.

In conclusion, the male characters did not use interjections showing hesitation and insecurity to the same extent as the female characters.

6 Summary and conclusion

Japan, much as any other place in the world, has a deep history of gender structures in society. The image of women being weak and quiet and of men being strong and reliable has been embedded in society for decades. Years ago, women did not have the same rights as men, and some societies still struggle for this even today. It has affected not only the way of living or acting for the different genders, but also the way of speaking. Men are strong, thus they use more a forceful speech pattern and the word “assertive” has been connected with the word “manly”. Women are weaker, thus they use a more submissive speech pattern, and “polite” or “non-assertive” has been connected to the image of “feminine”. Yet this is something that is being changed by feminist movements, slowly but surely changing stereotypes and rules in both society and in language.

However, the results of this study show that some of these rules are in fact still in use in modern Japan, at least within romantic fiction. The use of gendered language by the characters of the two dating sims differed depending on one important factor; whether the target audience was women or men.

While the use of feminine language was higher for the female characters of the bishōjo game than the female protagonist of the otome game, the male characters of the otome game showed a higher use of masculine language than the male protagonist of the bishōjo game. Although the slight lack of gendered language for the protagonists in comparison to the dateable characters may be to avoid giving them a strong personality, this factor of making the characters relatable might have another side to it as well.

While trying to create a character as relatable as possible to women, the developers of the otome game chose not to use any strongly feminine language whatsoever. In addition, the developers of the bishōjo game chose to generally use standard unisex language for the male protagonist. There was even an option allowing the player to choose which personal pronoun they wanted to use (*ore* or *boku*). The lack of choice for the female player of the otome game,

along with the lack of pronouns to choose from in real life, further strengthens the theory of female speakers having fewer speech-patterns to choose from. However, it does not change the fact that the overall way of speaking for the two protagonists was generally gender-neutral. This shows that the factor of a relatable protagonist includes a low amount of gendered language no matter the target audience, with the exception of pronouns. These still seem to stay within their gender groups, even for the dateable characters.

When it came to pronouns, none of the characters went outside their gender-specific safety zones with their usage of first-person pronominal forms. The male characters all used *boku* or *ore*, staying within their male assertive speech category. The female characters in both games used *watashi* or *atashi*, and the only one going slightly outside the box was character E. However, her usage of illeism is also something considered a female trait. This shows that in terms of first-person pronouns, there were no characters going out of their respective gender categories.

As for second-person pronominal forms, the female characters generally used the formal pronoun *anata*, while the male characters used a selection of less formal pronouns (*anta*, *kimi*, *omae*). Though there was one female character (E) that also used *anta*, the majority of the female characters used politer ways to address the male characters. Although character E's usage of *anta* makes her less polite, it is still considered a feminine personal pronoun and does not make her break out of the unisex zone.

The results taken from the analysis of the present study further show that the majority of the female speakers stayed within the safety zone of the polite pronouns, while the male speakers used a wider variety of less formal ones. Thus it also seems as though the level of politeness may in fact be higher for female speakers. Furthermore, as there were no characters going outside of their respective gender categories in regard of their personal pronoun usage, it shows that traditional male and female stereotypes are in fact slightly enforced in these games as well. At least when it comes to pronouns, the ideal seems to be for the speaker to refer to themselves in the correct way, as well as address the listener properly according to the gender structures in society.

The different sentence-final forms addressed in the analysis showed some interesting results. While there was some use of feminine language by the female characters of the bishōjo-game, it was nowhere near the usage of masculine language by the male characters of the otome game. Furthermore, there was even a use of masculine elements by the female characters, showing that there are some components that may not be strictly masculine anymore. As far as gender-related romantic ideals go, the use of the masculine sentence-final elements *da* or *yo* do not seem to make a difference when it comes to the female characters.

Yet as the female characters did in fact generally use either female or neutral language (with the exception of *da* and *yo*) while the male characters also used a very high amount of male language, it does show that the traditional gender stereotypes exist to some extent in both games. This further validates the theory that male and female language may be used to a higher degree in romance-related content, thus possibly making masculine and feminine speech a factor in heteronormative attraction.

Furthermore, the usage of abbreviations was considerably higher for the male characters. This further confirms the theory on how this type of speech may be more common for male

speakers, making it what Imai calls non-standard speech. It may thus mean it is in fact connected to the image of masculinity.

There was an overall lack of formal speech, probably due to the fact that people in close or romantic relationships will not speak politely with each other. So although feminine speech has shown to be generally more polite and non-assertive compared to male speech, the actual use of formal speech (*desu-*, *masu-* form) was very limited. Thus politeness does not seem to play a part in gender-related ideal speech to the point where females might use *desu-* or *masu-* form more commonly than men, at least not in dating sims.

With the interjections the male characters did not use expressions showing insecurity to the same extent as female characters, showing that this is an unwanted male trait. This builds on the stereotype of the reliable “manly man” that seems to generally be strengthened in the otome game. At the same time, the perhaps slightly weaker “proper lady” is also displayed in the bishōjo game by using interjections of insecurity and hesitation, or in other words weakness. This was with the slight exception of the “tsundere” character E, who would put on a strong, cold front to eventually show some cute weak points.

In these two dating-sims, the ideal partner is presented in quite a stereotypical way both for women and men, shown in the language used. In conclusion, the traditional stereotypes of the “proper woman” being connected with modesty and submission and the “proper man” being connected with strength and dominance are clearly enforced by these two romantic dating-sims to different lengths. This shows that these ideals may still exist to some extent in today’s Japan, at least within romantic fiction. While the otome game targeting women obviously displayed most of the characters as manly, the bishōjo-game targeting males seemed to create characters the male player would want to protect, both in personality and language use. This shows that the ideal man from a woman’s point of view may still be this reliable “manly man” while the ideal woman from a man’s point of view is the sweet “Yamato Nadeshiko”. But there have been examples showing the opposite of the stereotypes as well.

The female characters of the bishōjo-game did not use feminine language to the same extent as expected. The high usage of neutral language may mean a slight change in the proper, ladylike woman still being the ideal. The speech does seem more diverse for the female characters, not all of them using an extreme amount of feminine language. In contrast, as the male characters generally used a significantly higher amount of masculine language than the female characters used feminine language, the “proper male” stereotype may be more strongly represented in these romantically charged games than the “proper female” stereotype. Therefore, while a higher number of female speakers used elements classified as male and barely any male speakers used elements classified as female, the ideal for men seems to have changed less than it has for females.

Language is not a static element. It is constantly shifting with society, removing words or expressions and adding new ones while changing the meaning of some. Words that were once polite become impolite, like the pronouns *omae* or *tamae* (*temē*). Expressions once seen as vulgar such as *teyo* and *dawa* are now seen as proper feminine speech. This is still happening today, and the use of something that used to be seen as masculine or feminine may not be as strictly followed anymore. Some examples of this have already been seen in this study, with several female characters using speech elements defined as masculine. There are

elements indicating a change, like the usage of *da* and *yo* by the female characters, or the one usage of *no* by one of the male characters.

So although stereotypical gender-specific language is used to a great extent in Japanese dating sims, giving the conclusion that the traditional ideals of Japan still exist to some point and are enforced by this media, there are also signs of change. This may be proof of the change of the structures in society, where women today play a much greater part in the social order than they did in the past. This slight change in language use in accordance with the change in society backs up Nakamura's theory. The power-structures in society and the historically constituted ideas on male and female identities within language, as well as the current use of gendered language are linked together, all factors contributing to change.

While the fight for equality in Japan is said to have been a very slow process, it is not non-existent. Women have rights today they did not have a few decades ago, while things like being interested in fashion or makeup is not something seen as exclusively for women anymore. The views on male and female stereotypes have changed, also altering the language usage in the process. Furthermore, the results of the present study show that this change does not only exist in real life, but has also altered the role language used in fiction.

6.1 Suggestions for further research

Although this study has only covered limited ground within the study of gender-specific language in Japan, as well as the study of digital gaming, it opens doors to further research. The present study has merely examined one genre and only two games within said genre. Suggestions for further research include conducting a more in depth study by analysing the language use and other gender specific elements for more games, both within and outside the genre. The representation of gender roles and stereotypes in video games is attracting more attention, but actual research on the subject is still scarce.

Video and computer games provide a wide source of information as a media, as fiction and as a representation of ideas in society. Although it is underrepresented as a research-subject, the fact remains that it is a popular source of entertainment for people of all ages, especially among men. The study of digital gaming is a young subject and there are still further discoveries to be made.

Within every field of study, every source of media is important, as everything is affected by the world around us. As society changes, so does the language. As the usage of a language changes, so might society. This is a change that can be seen anywhere; in reality, in different media and even in small parts of popular culture that might be bypassed in the study of gender and language.

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