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STYLING PERSONAE AT THE MARGINS: LANGUAGE STRATEGIES IN IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE POLITICIANS IN JAPANESE PARLIAMENT

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of language in the identity construction of female politicians in Japan, with a focus on the language they use in the Japanese parliament, in which women are severely under-represented. The study analyses the speech styles of two female politicians: the current Governor of Tokyo, Yuriko Koike, and a member of the House of Councillors, Kiyomi Tsujimoto. The data for the study are drawn from Japanese parliamentary debates in 2015, when both women were members of parliament (Koike belonging to the ruling conservative party; Tsujimoto to an opposition socialist party). The analysis focuses particularly on their use of honorifics and polite language as well as the length of the sentences they produce. It highlights how the speech styles of these politicians act as vital linguistic tools in constructing their very different political identities and public personae in the challenging context in which they work. Through the analysis of their linguistic strategies, the study sheds light on how their distinct speech styles generate varied expressive effects within the Japanese political arena, relate to public perceptions about them, and are intricately intertwined with the historically constructed ideology of 'Japanese women's language' (e.g., Nakamura, 2006).

Keywords: Speech style; Identity; Gender; Politics; Japanese Parliament.

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1 Introduction

This study investigates the role of language in the identity construction of female politicians in Japan, with a focus on the language they use in Japanese parliamentary debates.

Politics in Japan is a highly patriarchal arena. Women's participation rate is among the lowest globally—125th out of 148 countries, according to the 2025 Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum 2025, p. 25). Within the context of the long-standing dominance of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), political discourse in Japan continues to reflect a particularly traditional stance. The

LDP ideology regularly portrays women in politics as no more than the voices of 'mothers', 'wives', 'caretakers of the elderly', and 'members of their local community' (Dalton, 2015, p. 83). In the cut and thrust of parliamentary debate, overtly sexist comments are far from unusual.

Examples include LDP member Hideo Ōnishi telling Japan Innovation Party member Sayuri Uenishi during a House of Representatives General Affairs Committee session on 17th April 2014, "you must give birth to children". Similarly, on 12th July 2019, LDP House of Representatives member Norio Mitsuya commented on fellow politician Yumi Yoshikawa, stating, "What has Yumi Yoshikawa accomplished in these six years? Her biggest achievement was having a child". In 2021, the Japan's ruling party absurdly insisted that they would "invite women 'to look, not talk' at key meetings" (BBC News, 2021). As recently as January 2024, former Prime Minister Taro Aso disparaged the female foreign minister Yoko Kamikawa by commenting "(she) is not that good looking" and referring to her with the derogatory term *obasan* (lit. 'auntie'), used for older women (The Guardian, 2024).

The Japanese parliament is thus a place where women politicians grapple with explicit sexism and struggle as an extreme minority. Furthermore, not only must they contend with their male counterparts, but they also face intense public scrutiny. This scrutiny extends to all aspects of their public personae, from attire to behaviour and speech, reinforcing the markedness of their presence in a parliament where male MPs constitute the clear norm. The focus of this study is on language—not the overtly sexist comments made by male politicians, but the language used by female politicians themselves. Specifically, the study examines key linguistic strategies that female politicians employ to style their language and thereby construct their political personae within the context of the Japanese parliament. Two female politicians were selected for the analysis based on their distinct political orientations, family backgrounds, and public reception as observed on social media.

The investigation highlights two aspects of the language examined that serve as particularly noteworthy features in the identity construction of these female politicians: first, the use of polite and honorific language and second, the length of sentences. Through these aspects, these two women construct distinct public personae. The purpose of this study is not to examine their language as unbounded, free expressions of their identity, uninfluenced by power dynamics. Instead, it aims to analyse how the differing linguistic styles of the two female politicians generate different expressive effects within the Japanese political arena, how their language use relates to the general public's perceptions about them, and, crucially, how their strategies and these public perceptions are intimately connected to the historically constructed ideology of how women should or should not speak, particularly in the public sphere. The study draws on Bucholtz's (2015) definition of 'style': "[S]tyle is a system of sociocultural positioning through modes of semiotic action", she explains, further adding, "style concerns not simply ways of talking but more generally ways of doing things, of engaging in culturally significant activities and

practices of any kind, using a range of stylistic features in both established and innovative ways" (Bucholtz, 2015, p. 32).

2 Literature Review

2.1 Characteristics of Japanese parliamentary style

The Japanese parliament, which is considered a formal setting, naturally exhibits a range of formal linguistic features of the Japanese language, including a high-level lexicon, such as Sino-Japanese forms, technical terms, and honorifics (Ide, 1982, p. 371). A notable feature of Japanese political discourse, particularly in politicians' speech, is the frequent use of extremely elaborate language forms and structures, many of which are uncommon in other discourse contexts (Jarkey, 2019). These include, for example, a wide array of both addressee and referent honorific forms and combinations of multiple honorific forms, including some deemed 'incorrect' combinations (Shibamoto-Smith, 2011).

An important fact to reiterate in discussing the 'parliamentary style' in Japanese is the overwhelming dominance of male politicians in the Japanese parliament. This means that the unmarked 'political style' is and has always been predominantly the one produced by male politicians. Bucholtz and Hall (2004, p. 372) explain, "when one [gender] category is elevated as an unmarked norm, its power is more pervasive because it is masked. By being construed as both powerful and normative, its special status is naturalised and the effort required to achieve this status is rendered invisible – and, when associated with language, inaudible". How female politicians align with or subvert gendered language reveals their struggle and their excessive 'labour', be it in the face of their invisible and inaudible status or their marked, hence too conspicuous, presence in the political arena.

In addition to the challenges of navigating a particular male-dominated environment, Japanese women politicians also confront the broader and enduring societal ideologies that dictate how women should or should not speak. The next section discusses the historically constructed ideology of Japanese women's language.

2.2 Japanese women's language

One of the most prominent social values in the process of the modernisation of Japan is *danjo no yakuwari buntan*, the 'male/female role distinction'. This value has deep roots in the Meiji period (1868–1912), when the government encouraged a gender-based distinction between productive and reproductive work to support rapid modernisation and industrialisation (Inoue, 2006; Ishii & Jarkey, 2002). In the context of the country's capitalist development during this period, the concept of 'modern Japanese women' was established as a social category carrying new cultural meanings relevant to its relationship with the nation-state (Nakamura, 2006). Especially important was the promotion of the ideology of *ryōsai-kembo* 'good wife and wise mother', with its messages about the virtues of ideal womanliness, which

included efficient household management and motherhood (Ishii & Jarkey, 2002; Jarkey, 2015).

During the Meiji period, Japanese women's language itself was ideologically constructed as a distinct category, contrasting with the standardised 'national language' (Inoue, 2006; Nakamura, 2006, 2014). Indirect, non-assertive, and full of honorific forms, it was part of the 'good manners' of women who served not only their fathers and husbands, but also the nation-state. From a popular and highly influential women's magazine issued in the Taisho period (1912–1926), which inspired women to 'style' their language (Jarkey, 2015), to a vast volume of women's manner books in contemporary Japan (Nakamura, 2010), the styling of women's language has been hankered after, even by women themselves.

Doubtless, the label 'Japanese women's language' has never fully reflected the ways women speak, and this is even more true today. As S. Okamoto (1995, p. 317) puts it, in contemporary Japan, "women strategically use particular speech styles to communicate desired pragmatic meanings and the images of self." The very fact that certain expressions are used strategically speaks to the presence of an underlying ideology about language. For instance, the tactic of adopting what is perceived as a *feminine way of speaking* to appeal to others, at least in public, is deeply intertwined with the ideology surrounding women's language. Additionally, while individual women may opt to select their own linguistic expressions, this does not shield their language from being evaluated. Even in contemporary Japan, parents may discipline young girls not to speak like boys (Nakamura, 2014b, p. 380). Those who seek to distance themselves from the womanly way of speaking, especially those in the public sphere, tend to receive harsh criticism; critics associate it with a lack of integrity and even claim their upbringing to be unsuitable for a public figure, regardless of the content of their speech. Women politicians in Japan thus face the dual challenge of establishing themselves as equals alongside their male counterparts while also navigating the additional burden of managing their language. This places them in a paradoxical position where, on the one hand, they need to demonstrate authority and assertiveness as the nation's most powerful leaders, while on the other hand, they are expected to speak in a 'decent' manner as women, which is often tied to less assertive and more submissive language patterns.

2.3 Honorifics in Japanese

Before introducing the two target politicians and their speech styles, this section briefly discusses honorifics in Japanese, as both the parliamentary style and women's language are associated with this linguistic feature. Compared to European T/V systems, Japanese is one of the languages in the world that has highly complex honorifics; it is particularly rich in predicate honorifics, which involve not only verbal suppletion but also the productive use of prefixes and suffixes. Multiple layers of honorific morphemes can be used together in one predicate. The discussion in this study is limited to predicate honorifics, and the following categorisation of predicate

honorifics is based on the previous studies, primarily by Ide (1982) and Jarkey (2021). Predicate honorifics can be divided into four types, as follows:

The first is the addressee honorifics, known as *teineigo* or 'polite language', which express politeness directly towards the addressee, independent of the nature of the referents in the proposition. Addressee honorifics are the most frequently employed predicate honorifics in modern Japanese. They are highly productive, formed by adding the suffix *-mas-u* to the verb stem, e.g., *tabe-mas-u* (eat-AHON-NPST) 'to eat' and polite copula *des-u* to noun phrases or adjectival nouns, e.g., *ame des-u* (rain COP-NPST) '(it's) rainy'. The copula *des-u* has a 'super-polite' variant *degozaimas-u*, the use of which is limited to particularly formal situations, high-end service industries, or conventionalised expressions, such as *arigatō gozaimas-u* 'thank you (POL-NPST)'.

The second is subject honorifics, *sonkeigo* 'respect language', which typically index the speaker's deference to the subject referent. There are both productive and suppletive forms. The former is produced by attaching a circumfix, *o-…-ni.nar-u*, to an infinitive stem of a verb. For example, *kak-u* (write-NPST) can be changed into *o-kak-i-ni-nar-u* (HON-write-INFIN-RESP-NPST). Another productive form is to attach the suffix, *-(r)are-ru* to the verb root, as in *kak-are-ru* (write-RESP-NPST). Suppletive subject honorific verbs include *nasar-u* 'to do', *meshiagar-u* 'to eat, drink', and *osshar-u* 'to say', which replace the entire verbs, *sur-u* 'to do', *tabe-ru* 'to eat'/*nom-u* 'to drink', and *i-u* 'to say', respectively.

The third is humble language Type I, *kenjōgo I*, commonly called 'object honorifics' in English (e.g., Ide, 1982). This type is used to show the speaker's humility concerning his or her own actions (or those of an in-group member) towards another referent (usually a direct or indirect object referent) to whom respect is directed. This type also has productive forms utilising a circumfix, with the initial honorific prefix *o-* and the suffix *-sur-u* (e.g., turning *kak-u* 'to write' into *o-kak-i-sur-u*) and suppletive forms, including *mōshiage-ru* 'to speak to', *zonjiage-ru* 'to think about, know', and *ukaga-u* 'to inquire, implore, visit', among others.

The fourth is humble language Type II, *kenjōgo II* or *teichōgo* 'courteous forms'. Similar to the third type—object honorifics—courteous forms typically express the humility of the subject referent. However, they differ from object honorifics in that, while they portray the subject's actions humbly, they do not imply interaction with a respected entity, thereby lacking a referential target for deference. There are no productive forms for this type; all are suppletive forms, including *itas-u* 'to do' and *mōs-u* 'to say'.

It is relevant to mention that subject honorifics, object honorifics, and courteous forms can, and often are, accompanied by addressee honorifics. For example, to *o-kak-i-ni-nar-u* (HON-write-INFIN-RESP-NPST), addressee honorific *-mas-u* can be added as in *o-kak-i-ni-nar-i-mas-u* (HON-write-INFIN-RESP-INFIN-AHON-NPST).

These different types of Japanese honorifics offer a degree of flexibility and creativity, allowing for a wide range of combinations. As will be demonstrated in Section 4, it is possible to incorporate various morphological elements to enhance

not only politeness and formality features of sentences but, notably, also their length. Sometimes, the speaker's attempt to use multiple forms in one predicate may even result in the 'incorrect' combination of honorifics being used.

It is widely known that honorifics function to show deference, typically from someone of lower to higher social status, thereby acknowledging the relative social status between the speaker and the addressee. Honorifics can also indicate distance, not necessarily denoting a vertical relationship but often reflecting horizontal relations, such as in-group and out-group distinctions. However, a particularly important aspect emphasised in this study is the self-presentational motive of one's use of honorifics—that is, how the use (or non-use) of honorifics can convey information about the speakers themselves. "The correct and elaborate use of honorific forms is itself an indication of one's good education, one's good upbringing, and one's good 'demeanour' in Goffman's terms (1956)" (Jarkey, 2015, p. 193). As Agha (2007, p. 302) notes, respectful speech often reflects positively on the speaker's own respectability. On the flip side, minimising the use of honorifics may suggest an attitude of disinterest in or defiance against social hierarchy, class distinctions, and decorum. As will be discussed in the following sections, two female politicians, Yuriko Koike and Kiyomi Tsujimoto, show distinct styles in their use of honorifics. As shall be seen, each of these very different styles says something very particular about each of these very different speakers.

2.4 Background of two political women

2.4.1 Yuriko Koike

On 31st July 2016, after twenty-four years in national politics, Koike was elected Governor of Tokyo, becoming the first woman to lead Japan's capital. Throughout her political career, she has been described in numerous ways. These descriptions encompass her many attributes, but often particularly showcase her ability to discuss tough and provocative topics while maintaining a *soft* and *feminine* demeanour, as seen in media headlines such as "dressed as a woman but a hawkish man" (BBC News, 2016).

Koike continues to portray herself as someone who operates in the hard spheres of business and politics. Her previous professions include working as an Arabic interpreter and business news anchor. After entering national politics, she held numerous *hard* roles, such as Vice-Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications, Vice-Minister for Economic Planning, Minister of State for Okinawa and Northern Territories Affairs, and Defence Minister. Moreover, though in less explicit ways, she also presents herself as having a *soft* and *feminine* character. Fashion journalists describe her attire choices as well-planned strategies, such as wearing a structured jacket while softening the impact with a coloured scarf and skirt (Gunchi, 2017). In 2020, a widely read women's magazine surveyed 1,800 women aged 30 to 90 throughout Japan, asking who their favourite governor was. Koike won second place. Respondents described her as *miryokuteki* 'attractive', *shitashimiyasui*

noni ōra ga kōkyū '(has a) friendly but classy aura', and *ochitsuita shaberikata* 'a calm way of speaking' (Shūkan Josei Prime, 2020). This survey took place a year after Koike was re-elected for her second term as Tokyo Governor, securing over 3.6 million votes. In 2024, the aforementioned magazine polled 1,000 respondents about whom they would like to see as prime minister among women politicians in Japan. Koike won second in the readers' choices (Shūkan Josei Prime, 2024).

It is abundantly clear that Koike is acutely aware of the advantages of highlighting her claimed wealthy background and international education, traits that earn her admiration from many as a high-class female politician. However, these attributes are perceived by some as manipulative self-promotion. Various books and articles about Koike, such as those by Ishii (2020), discuss how she has carefully crafted her public image in her ascent to become Tokyo Governor and judge her for being overly strategic. Her ambition is also viewed ambivalently. While male politicians are naturally expected to aspire to become prime ministerial candidates as they gain experience and popularity, the situation appears different for Koike. Despite being ranked second in the *Shūkan Josei Prime* (2024) poll on preferred prime ministerial candidates, when rumours of her potential return to the national government and candidacy for prime minister surfaced, she was criticised for being too ambitious. It appears that the public believes that the best way for her to maintain her popularity is by remaining in a reasonably powerful position, where her style may be most effective as an elegant woman.

2.4.2 Tsujimoto Kiyomi

The biography on Tsujimoto Kiyomi's official website outlines her upbringing in Osaka. Coming from a family that was not wealthy, Tsujimoto could not attend the cram schools that many of her peers did. This situation compelled her to study intensely using the resources available to her, even memorising all the content of her school textbooks on her own. Her dedication led her to excel academically and gain admission to one of Japan's top universities. While at university, she actively engaged in NGO activities. Alongside fellow students and pacifist activists, Tsujimoto co-founded Peace Boat, a Japan-based NGO that navigates the global seas to promote peace, human rights, and sustainability. This organisation also facilitates dialogue and cultural exchanges among young participants. Her visibility in the media through these endeavours eventually caught the attention of the then-leader of the Socialist Party, the first female party leader in the history of Japanese politics, who invited her to run for office.

Tsujimoto presents as *futsuu no hito* 'an ordinary person', and positions herself as a conduit for citizens' genuine voices in parliament. She eschews luxury, opposing the norm of politicians frequenting high-class restaurants or donning formal dress, even at the most formal events. Tsujimoto's official website features a brief cartoon biography which includes an incident when she was appointed as Deputy Minister of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport. The appointment ceremony, held at the Imperial Palace, saw her avoiding a formal long dress in favour of attire

akin to smart casual. She had previously publicly criticised Japan's Emperor System, though she later moderated her criticisms to avoid public backlash.

Tsujimoto clearly harbours a disdain for class and hierarchy, which she views as perpetuating inequality. Her political career is portrayed not as a pursuit of personal fame, but as a commitment to serving the populace and fostering an egalitarian society.

Although Tsujimoto enjoys popularity among leftists—a key factor in her election as a Member of Parliament—her communication style has encountered significant criticism on social media. These critiques emanate not only from the right but also from the general public. She is often criticised for her manner of public speaking, described as *urusai* 'noisy' and *kodomotachi ni totte kyōikujō yokunai* 'educationally unsuitable for children' to such an extent that parents would prefer their children not to witness it (Chiebukuro, 1 February 2022).

3 Data and Methodology

The data for this study were extracted from the *Kokkai Kaigiroku Kensaku Shisutemu* 'Minutes of the Japanese Diet Retrieval System'. Concerns may arise regarding the use of parliamentary debate transcripts as spontaneous spoken data. Two points are particularly important to address: First, in the parliament, speakers often refer to prewritten scripts or notes during their speeches, and at times, they may simply read specific written materials. However, they also rephrase, insert, and add interactive spoken features. Especially during the dynamic process of debate, they engage in impromptu discourse without the aid of written cues, providing a rich array of components suitable for examination as oral interaction. Second, the recording process of parliamentary debates involves specific steps that can influence the data. According to Matsuda (2008, pp. 15-29), although some spoken features such as fillers, grammatical errors, swear words, and certain interactive particles are often omitted in the official records, significant aspects of spoken language are preserved. Notably, these include stylistic features, such as the use and avoidance of honorifics, and even 'incorrect' combinations of honorifics are recorded as spoken (Shibamoto-Smith, 2011, p. 3717). Furthermore, for two complete committee meetings video recordings of parliamentary debates—available online via the House of Representatives Internet TV—were cross-referenced with the official minutes.[1] This comparison confirmed that stylistic features are recorded verbatim, suggesting that this consistency likely extends to other meetings as well.

The analysis draws on six committee meetings of the House of Representatives held during the 185th (2013) and 189th (2015) National Diet sessions, a time when both Koike and Tsujimoto were members of the national

1 The House of Representatives Internet TV, https://www.shugiintv.go.jp/jp/index.php (accessed 15 July 2019).

parliament.[2] Koike was affiliated with the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), whereas Tsujimoto was a member of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). The data analysis identifies two linguistic features that serve as particularly noteworthy indices of the identity construction of Koike and Tsujimoto: first, the use or non-use of honorifics and second, sentence length. These two aspects are closely, though by no means exclusively, related.

4 Findings

4.1 The use or non-use of honorifics

The use of honorifics in the parliamentary language of Koike and Tsujimoto could hardly be more different. While Koike is adept at employing many layers of ornate, respectful and humble honorifics, and frequently includes the super-polite copula *degozaimas-u* in her addressee-honorific repertoire, Tsujimoto's speech is straightforward and almost unadorned. When Tsujimoto does use honorific forms at all, she uses a single form only and her addressee honorifics are confined simply to the *-mas-u* suffix on verbs and the polite copula *des-u*.

Koike's multiple and multi-layered honorific forms can be seen in Example (1).

(1) *sakihodo* ***mōshiage-ta*** *…* *satō* *ken* *moto*
just.then HUMI-PST Sato Ken former
bōeijimujikan=to
administrative.vice-minister.for.defense=COM
o-ai=o-itash-i-mas-i-te*…,*
HON-meet=ACC-HUMII-INFIN-AHON-INFIN-GER
'(I) **most humbly had a meeting (with)** the former administrative vice-minister for defence, Ken Sato, … , which **I humbly mentioned** a short time ago…'
(House of Representatives, Special Committee on National Security, 28 October 2013)

In Example (1), Koike states that she met the administrative vice-minister. To convey this simple fact, Koike not only conjugates the verb *au* 'meet', which refers to her own actions, into the humble Type I form *o-ai-sur-u* (HON-meet-HUMI-NPST), but also treats the verb infinitive form *ai* as if it were a regular noun. This treatment enables her a creative modification: adding the accusative case marker *=o* after *a-i*. She also enhances her humility by replacing the humble Type I suffix *sur-u* with the

2 The six meetings analysed are as follows: The 185th National Diet, House of Representatives, Special Committee on National Security, No. 2, 28 October 2013; the 189th National Diet, House of Representatives, Budget Committee, No. 6, 19 February 2015; and the 189th National Diet, House of Representatives, Special Committee on Legislation for the Peace and Security of Japan and the International Community, Nos. 16, 18, 19, and 22, July 2015.

humble Type II suppletive verb *itas-u* and, as appropriate in this context, completes her sentence with an addressee honorific. This process is demonstrated as follows.

(2) 'meet'

a-u	meet-NPST
ai-mas-u	meet-AHON-NPST
o-ai-sh-i-mas-u	HON-meet-HUMI-INFIN-AHON-NPST
o-ai-itash-i-mas-u	HON-meet-HUMII-INFIN-AHON-NPST
o-ai=o-itash-i-mas-u	HON-meet=ACC-HUMII-INFIN-AHON-NPST

Another example, (3) below, is also for Koike simply to state the fact that the prime minister visited an island.

(3) *Kinō=mo* *sōri=ga* *ōshima=no* *hō=ni*
Yesterday=also prime.ministeer=NOM Ōshima=GEN direction=LOC
irasshat-te-or-are-mas-u *keredomo,*
go.RESP-GER-BE.HUMII-RESP-AHON-NPST although
'The Prime Minister was **respectfully and honourably** visiting Ōshima yesterday...'
(House of Representatives, Special Committee on National Security, 28 October 2013)

Here, the use of *irasshat-te-or-are-mas-u* (go.RESP-GER-BE.HUMII-RESP-AHON-NPST) signals deference to the subject referent as well as to the addressee in multiple ways. Firstly, deference to the subject, the prime minister, is shown through the respectful subject honorific *irasshar-u* 'go.RESP' and the respect morpheme *-are-*; secondly, deference towards the addressee is directly expressed through the addressee honorific suffix *-mas-u*. Interestingly, the addition of the auxiliary *-te-or-u* 'be.HUMII V-ing', a humble honorific Type II form, to the action of the respectful referent, is regarded as an inappropriate combination (Agency for Cultural Affairs 2007). However, Koike uses this combination in (3) to show her demeanour, expressing her own humility, thereby providing a further, indirect indication of deference to her addressees. In fact, this type of combination has been increasingly found in formal settings, including parliamentary speech (Jarkey 2021). It appears that Koike's speech style does not simply align with the parliamentary style; more than that, she particularly excels at sentence-elongation techniques, incorporating multiple layers of both productive and suppletive honorific forms.

In addition to her use of multi-layered honorific forms, Koike also crafts a classy tone through her frequent use of the super-polite copula variant *de gozaimas-u*. This form commonly evokes a sense of slightly old-fashioned high-class hospitality, as found in the best hotels and department stores, associated with a five-star environment. For instance, high-grade department store staff might announce the store's closing time as *Heiten jikan wa 7-ji de gozaimas-u* 'The closing time is 7 o'clock'. Koike typically begins her speeches in parliament with this form as follows.

(4) *Koike* *Yuriko* ***degozaimas-u.***

Koike Yuriko COP.SUPERPOL-NPST
'I **am** Yuriko Koike.'
(House of Representatives, Special Committee on National Security, 28 October 2013)

Koike continues her speech with frequent uses of *degozaimas-u* throughout her turn, as shown in (5).

(5) *Sate, konkai=no hitojichi jiken* ***degozaimas-u***
by.the.way this.time=GEN hostage incident COP.SUPERPOL-NPST
keredomo, arujeria=de=no jiken=ga hasseishi-ta ori,
though, Algeria=LOC=GEN incident=NOM occur-PST when
chōdo sōri=wa hanoi=ni go-shucchō-dat-ta
just prime.minister=TOP Hanoi=DES HON-business.trip-COP-PST
to iu koto ***degozaimas-u.***
QUOT say matter COP.SUPERPOL-NPST
Soshite, konkai=mo chūtōhōmon-chū=no dekigoto
then this.time=also Middle.East.visit-during=GEN event
degozaimash-i-ta *keredomo.* […] *Arujeria=no inamenasu=no*
COP.SUPERPOL-INF-PST though Algeria=GEN InAménas=GEN
jiken=no toki, … taihen ōkina hisan-na jiken
incident=GEN time very big tragic-COP.MOD incident
degozaimash-i-ta.
COP.SUPERPOL-INF-PST
'By the way, **regarding** the hostage crisis this time, (I heard that) it **was** when the Algeria crisis happened, (you), Prime Minister, were on a business trip. This time, again, (it) **was** the incident that occurred during (your) visit to the Middle East. The time of the In Amenas incident in Algeria, […] (it) **was** a very tragic incident.'
(House of Representatives, Budget Committee, 19 February 2015)

Koike's eloquent use of this extensive array of honorific forms creates a stark contrast to Tsujimoto's far more plain manner of speaking. In the data for this study, there were no instances at all of Tsujimoto using the super-polite variant of the copula, *degozaimas-u.* Tsujimoto starts her speeches as follows.

(6) *Tsujimoto Kiyomi* ***des-u.***
Tsujimoto Kiyomi COP.POL-NPST
'I**'m** Kiyomi Tsujimoto.'
(House of Representatives, Special Committee on Legislation for the Peace and Security of Japan and the International Community, July 2015)

Her speech goes on with the use of the simple polite copula *des-u* as in (7), throughout.

(7) *Mō hitotsu=no fuan=wa tero=no mondai* ***des-u.***
another one=GEN worry=TOP terrorism=GEN issue COP.POL-NPST

2003 nen, kore=wa iraku sensō ***des-u.*** *Ima=wa, 2014*
2003 year this=TOP Iraq war COP.POL-NPST now=TOP 2014
nen=no dēta ***des-u*** *ga, 16,818 ken na*
year=GEN COP.POL-NPST but 16,818 count COP.MOD
n ***des-u.***
NMLZ COP.POL-NPST
'One more worry **is** about terrorism. In 2003, this **is** the Iraq war. Currently, the data **is** about 2014, and **is** 16,818 incidents.'
(House of Representatives, Special Committee on Legislation for the Peace and Security of Japan and the International Community, 8 July 2015)

Tsujimoto does use some other types of honorifics, but she certainly does not opt for layering one predicate with multiple forms. As seen below, while she uses the referent honorific *osshar-u* 'to say' in (8) and the *-rare-ru* form in (9) to refer to the prime minister's actions, her use of these forms remains at a minimum in any one sentence.

(8) *Pīkeiō da toka iroiro* ***osshat-ta*** *keredomo,*
PKO COP.NPST and.so.on various say.RESP-PST but
zembu īwake da to omoi-mas-u.
all excuse COP.NPST Q think-AHON-NPST
'(You) **honourably said** PKO and so on, but (I) think (these) are all excuses.'
(House of Representatives, Special Committee on Legislation for the Peace and Security of Japan and the International Community, 10 July 2015)

(9) *Sōri=wa kafesuta to iu no=o*
prime.ministeer= TOP café.sta QUOT say NMLZ=ACC
*hajime-****rare****-mash-i-ta.*
start-RESP-AHON-INFIN-PST
'The Prime Minister **honourably started** what is called Café Sta.'
(House of Representatives, Special Committee on Legislation for the Peace and Security of Japan and the International Community, 15 July 2015)

Even when Tsujimoto uses referent honorifics, she maintains just a single form per predicate, avoiding unnecessarily long or overly embellished sentences.

Thus far, I have discussed the differences between Koike and Tsujimoto in their use of honorifics. This is naturally reflected in the length of each sentence in their speeches, which is further examined in the next section.

4.2 Sentence length

The previous section demonstrated that, while Koike employs elaborate and multi-layered honorifics within a single predicate and across a single sentence, Tsujimoto's

use of these forms is simple and sparse. Not surprisingly, the sentence lengths of Koike and Tsujimoto are markedly different. The data analysis shows that the average number of characters per sentence is 68 for Koike and 41 for Tsujimoto (Table 1).

Table 1. Sentence length of Koike and Tsujimoto

	Koike	Tsujimoto
Characters	19725	19081
Sentences	290	463
Characters per sentence	68	41

In addition to the elongation provided by her use of honorifics, Koike also incorporates numerous conjunctions. This approach results in the linking of multiple clauses within a single sentence. Observe the following example (10): it is a long sentence, so the gloss is not provided.

(10) *Saki no honkaigi de sōri ga sudeni gotōben nasatteita to omoun desu* ***keredomo,*** *kaku jōhōkikan ni sōri mizukara ga mata kobetsu ni renraku sarete jōhō o agerarerun desu ka to ittara, sōiukoto mo ariuru to iu fūni ohenji sareteita yōni omoun desu* ***keredomo,*** *kono atari no kobetsu no jōhō teikyō nitsuite donoyōna seiri, donoyōna nagare o* ***kangaeteorareru no ka****, fukuchōkan,* ***onegaishimasu****.*
‘(I) think that the Prime Minister has already respectfully answered this question at the last plenary session, **but** when (I) asked (him) ‘Do (you, Mr Prime Minister), honourably contact each intelligence agency individually and honourably raise information?’, (I) think (he) honourably replied that such a thing could happen, **but**, please, Deputy Commissioner, (I would like to know what you) think about what sort of organisation and flow of information **(you) respectfully have in mind** regarding the provision of individual information in this sort of area, **if you would be so kind**?
(House of Representatives, Special Committee on National Security, 28 October 2013)

In (10), Koike employs the conjunction *-keredomo* in her speech, making her utterances seem almost unending. This strategy also serves to avoid ending sentences in a straightforward, declarative form. In Japanese, ending a sentence with a declarative form by itself carries pragmatic significance, creating an assertive tone (Ijima, 2014). To avoid this directness, speakers often opt for less assertive forms. Instead of simple declarative sentences, they may use conjunctions like *-keredomo* and *-shi* or the gerund form *-te,* letting the sentence seem to continue regardless of any lack of logical connection between the clauses. This strategy reduces the force of the clause-final verb, thus sounding more indirect and more polite (e.g., Saegusa, 2007). It can be said that this is one of the negative politeness strategies Japanese speakers often use to ‘mitigate an FTA’ (Brown & Levinson, 1987) when giving or asking for information. Additionally, Koike also avoids posing direct questions in other ways. In (10), instead of using a straightforward question form *kangae-te-or-*

arere-masu-ka '(what) do (you) think?', she opts for a more indirect expression: *kangae-te-or-arer-u-no-ka, ..., o-negai-shi-mas-u* '(I would like to know what you) think, ..., if you would be so kind'.

Again, this style is strikingly different from Tsujimoto's preference for short sentences, sometimes extremely short. Tsujimoto employs simple, direct statements and poses questions in a straightforward way, without using any FTA mitigation devices. Her directness is particularly noticeable in examples such as (11), where she is unrelentingly pressing the Prime Minister to respond to her question.

(11) *Sōri,* *kore=o* *mi-ta* *koto.wa.ari-mas-u* *ka.*
prime.minister this=ACC see-PST HAVE.DONE.AHON.NPST Q
'Prime Minister, have (you) seen this?'
Dō *des-u* *ka.*
how COP.POL-NPST Q
'Have you?'
Dōzo.
please
'Go ahead (and answer).'
Mi-ta *koto.ga.aru* *ka* *nai* *ka* *de* *ii* *des-u.*
see-PST HAVE.DONE Q NEG Q with fine COP.POL-NPST
'It's fine (just to say you) have or haven't.'
Mi-ni-itt-a *hō.ga.ī* *des-u* *yo.*
see-to-go-PST HAD.BETTER COP.POL-NPST SFP
'(You) should go and have a look.'
Nani=o *minna=ga* *saken-de-ir-u* *no* *ka.*
what=ACC everyone=NOM call.for-GER-BE-NPST NMLZ Q
'(To see) what they are calling for.'
(House of Representatives, Special Committee on Legislation for the Peace and Security of Japan and the International Community, 15 July 2015)

Tsujimoto's short and simple sentences, as well as the way she concludes each one in a direct, declarative or interrogative manner, show her stance of getting straight to the point without adornment. This may reflect her belief that parliamentary language should be clear and accessible to ordinary people. By avoiding heavy, ornate expressions that differ significantly from ordinary speech, she comes across as aligning herself with the everyday people she represents.

Furthermore, as shown in (12), Tsujimoto adds force to her sentence endings in many instances by using the *n-des-u* form. This expression is typically used to provide explanations and judgements (Masuoka, 2001) but is also used to attempt to make the other party understand the facts (Wakō, 2011), thereby conveying an assertive tone and functioning to insist on the speaker's viewpoint strongly. Contrary to Koike, who employs a conversational tactic to mitigate an FTA, Tsujimoto uses this highly forceful expression in its unmodified form. Moreover, Tsujimoto also adds the sentence-final particle *yo* to this expression, as in *n-desu yo*. The sentence-final particle *yo* indicates that the speaker believes the information conveyed is

known to them but not to the listener, similar to the English phrase 'I'm telling you'; thus functioning to convey the speaker's "attitude of enhancing their position as a deliverer of the utterance and making sure that the hearer carefully listens to it" (Ogi, 2017, p. 127). This addition makes her utterances even more forceful and direct.

(12) *Kōhō.shien=wa* *nihon=wa* *yat-ta* *koto.nai*
logistic.support=TOP Japan=TOP do-PST NEVER.DONE
n-des-u ***yo.*** *Yat-ta* *koto.nai* *ue.ni,*
NMLZ-COP.POL-NPST SFP do-PST NEVER.DONE in.addition.to
hi-sentōchiiki=o *hazus-ō.to.shi-te-ir-u*
non-combat.zone=ACC exclude-try.to-GER-BE-NPST
n-des-u ***yo.*** *Sore=ga* *ima=no* *jittai* *na*
NMLZ-COP.POL-NPST SFP that=NOM now=GEN reality COP.MOD
n-des-u ***yo.***
NMLZ-COP.POL-NPST SFP
'Japan has never conducted a rear support. In addition to the fact that we've never done it, it's trying to exclude a non-combat zone. That's the current reality'.
(House of Representatives, Special Committee on Legislation for the Peace and Security of Japan and the International Community, 1 July 2015)

Additionally, when the *n-des-u* form is used in an interrogative sentence as *n-des-u-ka*, this direct questioning format comes across as strongly demanding, as if insisting on an explanation from the listener. Tsujimoto frequently uses this questioning format in short, straightforward sentences, often repeating them for emphasis, as seen in (13) below.

(13) *Dō* *yat-te* *mamor-u* ***n-des-u*** ***ka.***
How do-GER protect-NPST NMLZ-COP.POL-NPST Q
'How do (you) protect (them)?'
Kono *hōritsu=o* *seiritsu.s-ase-tara* *tero=ga* *her-u*
this bill=ACC pass-CAUS-COND terrorism=NOM decrease
n-des-u ***ka.***
NMLZ-COP.POL-NPST Q
'If (you) make this bill passed, will the terrorism be reduced?'
Takoku=ni *jieitai=ga* *kōhō.shien=ni*
other.contry=DES self.defence.force=NOM logistic.support=DAT
it-ta *toki=ni,* *misairu* *nado=de* *kōgeki=o*
go-PST time= DAT missiles and.so.on=INST attack=ACC
uke-tara *nihon=wa* *dō* *sur-u* ***n-des-u*** ***ka.***
get-COND Japan=TOP how do-NPST NMLZ-COP.POL-NPST Q
'If the Self-Defence Force went to support other countries and was attacked by missiles, what would Japan do?'
Dō *sur-u* ***n-des-u*** ***ka,*** *kore=wa.*
how do-NPST NMLZ-COP.POL-NPST Q this=TOP
'What would (you) do, (with) this?'
Dō *sur-u* ***n-des-u*** ***ka,*** *daijin.*

how do-NPST NMLZ-COP.POL-NPST Q this=TOP
'What would (you) do, Minister?'
(House of Representatives, Special Committee on Legislation for the Peace and Security of Japan and the International Community, 1 July 2015)

Example (13) shows Tsujimoto cornering the addressee, with an unrelenting sequence of simple, short questions, reinforced by the use of *-n-desu-ka* and its repetition. This style not only reflects her preference for a direct approach but also, and most importantly, demonstrates her place as a member of the opposition that demands clear answers from the ruling party. Tsujimoto's style embodies the language of her life as a leftist fighter who is not beholden to the ruling power. One could not imagine a style more different from that of Koike, who majestically holds the floor with her highly adorned and elongated style, as one who is born to rule.

5 Discussion

In Section 4, I analysed key aspects of the speech styles of two female politicians, Yuriko Koike and Kiyomi Tsujimoto, as observed in the Japanese parliament. In earlier sections, I provided a brief introduction to their biographical backgrounds, political stances, the non-linguistic aspects of their self-presentation, and the public perceptions of them. I also described broader issues, including the position of women in Japanese politics and a historical overview of ideologies concerning Japanese women's language in the public sphere. How might all these issues—concerning the women themselves and their reception by the Japanese public, as well as the contemporary and historical context in which they speak—relate to their parliamentary speech styles?

As we have seen, Koike's speech style is clearly characterised by her strong preference for the elaborate use of honorifics and polite ways of speaking. She uses multiple layers of different honorific forms in one predicate and regularly employs the super-polite variant of the copula *degozaimas-u*. She also avoids the effect of a direct assertion associated with ending sentences in a declarative form, opting instead to extend them with conjunctions as an FTA-mitigating device. As explained in Section 2, the intricate use of honorifics sheds light on recognising the relationship (whether vertical or horizontal) between the speaker, referent, and addressee; it also tells about speakers themselves as those who demonstrate good demeanour. Koike's speech style exhibits her sophisticated awareness of the social intricacies involved in communication and self-presentation involving honorifics and polite language. Importantly, Koike's non-assertive and gentle manner of speaking, filled with honorifics, also evokes the ongoing legacy of the ideology of Japanese women's language. This tradition-oriented style appears to be entirely consistent with her membership in the LDP, the long-standing ruling party well known for its particularly conservative views.

Koike's self-expression through her style of speech is described by readers of women's magazines as demonstrating a 'calm manner of speaking' and a 'classy flavour' (Shūkan Josei Prime, 2020), earning her admiration among these readers. On the other hand, Koike's strategically crafted self-presentation, from her fashion to her language, is not free from criticism. She is described in other social media outlets as *komyuryoku obake,* a 'communication skill monster' (Okamoto, 2021) and *kyoeishin no toriko*, a 'prisoner of vanity' (Ishii, 2020). These highly diverse opinions imply that subtly invoking a soft and elegant style of women's language does, indeed, attract supporters, yet also warns women in powerful positions against appearing overly strategic or excessively concerned with one's image.

Tsujimoto, on the other hand, avoids the elaborate use of honorific expressions and multiple, conjoined clauses, favouring short, straightforward sentences instead. This mode of speech seems to clearly reflect her identity in several ways. Firstly, it speaks to her stance against class privilege and in support of her view that politicians should be seen as ordinary members of the public. In this, Tsujimoto's style deviates markedly from the norm of honorific adornment in parliamentary speeches, highlighting its atypical nature. Secondly, her speech style embodies her challenge to the LDP's long-standing dominance as the ruling party. Her question style is particularly strong and direct in challenging the addressee. Thirdly, as a prominent leftist, she appears as if consciously eschewing the traditional, conservative Japanese women's language style, aligning her speech with her political identity.

However, Tsujimoto's straightforward and strong communication style faces frequent and extremely strong criticism on social media. Many complain that she sounds 'rough' and accusatory. Ironically, Tsujimoto, who strives to speak plainly as one of the 'ordinary' people, has been criticised by those very people. Her speech style has been described as 'bad for children's education,' with some parents claiming reluctance to let their children listen to her (Yahoo Chiebukuro, 2022).

Although not the focus of this paper, it is revealing to compare reactions to the speech styles of male politicians who might be considered counterparts to Koike and Tsujimoto in certain respects. For example, like Koike, the late Abe Shinzō, Japan's longest-serving prime minister, comes from a highly privileged background, was extremely ambitious, and was committed to right-wing nationalism. Like Koike, Abe used a range of strategies, including but by no means restricted to the use of honorifics, to hold the floor in parliament by extending his sentence length (Jarkey & Yonezawa, 2019). Although he was a very divisive figure in terms of his politics, Abe rarely attracted attention specifically for his style of speech, beyond the observation that he tended to sound rather monologic (Sakuta, 2018, p. 31). When it comes to Tsujimoto, a male politician who might be considered her counterpart in terms of both political convictions and speech style is Yamamoto Tarō. Yamamoto is a high-profile socialist MP who grew up in financially constrained circumstances, having lost his father at an early age. Like Tsujimoto, he also uses short sentences, avoids complex honorifics, and employs very assertive questioning techniques. Unlike Tsujimoto, however, Yamamoto is praised in the media for his 'good oratory'

and ‘clear and straightforward self expression’ (Ishihara, 2019). These kinds of disparities highlight how societal gender ideologies may be skewing public perception. The fact that similar speech styles are evaluated so differently based on the speaker’s gender provides evidence that gender ideologies related to language are still very much alive in Japanese society today.

6 Conclusion

This study has examined the role of language in constructing the political identities of female politicians in the Japanese parliament. In this context, in which women are severely under-represented, the unmarked speech style has almost always been based on language produced by men. As pointed out by Bucholtz and Hall (2004), in such a context, the power of the male voice is pervasive precisely because it is simply regarded as normal. For women, whose voices are highly marked in this arena and who must negotiate the additional challenge of long-held ideologies concerning *women’s place* and *women’s language*, the effort required to speak with power is completely invisible.

In this study, the language used in parliament by two female politicians, Yuriko Koike and Kiyomi Tsujimoto, has been analysed. The analysis has highlighted how these politicians’ speech styles—specifically in terms of the use of honorific language and sentence length—serve as linguistic resources in constructing their political identities and public personae while navigating such a challenging context. This analysis not only sheds light on their individual agency in stylistic choices but also on the broader societal ideologies that may influence, and underlie responses to, female politicians’ language styles. The study resonates with Bucholtz’s definition of ‘style’: “[S]tyle is a system of sociocultural positioning through modes of semiotic action,” emphasising that “style concerns not simply ways of talking but more generally ways of doing things, of engaging in culturally significant activities and practices of any kind, using a range of stylistic features in both established and innovative ways” (Bucholtz, 2015, p. 32). The identity expressions of these women through language, navigating through layers of historical, societal, and linguistic expectations, reflect both their struggle and resilience and the creative power of language in the political arena.

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Annex

Abbreviations

ACC	Accusative particle
AHON	Addressee honorific
CAUS	Causative
COM	Comitative
COND	Conditional
COP	Copula
DAT	Dative particle
GEN	Genitive
GER	Gerund
HON	Honorific
HUMI	Humble Type I
HUMII	Humble Type II
INF	Infinitive
INST	Instrumental
LOC	Locative
MOD	Modifier
NEG	Negative
NMLZ	Nominalisation
NOM	Nominative
NPST	Non-past
POL	Polite form
PST	Past
Q	Question/interrogative
QUOT	Quotative
RESP	Respect
SFP	Sentence-final particle
SUPERPOL	Super-polite form
TOP	Topic particle