Toward a Feminist Critical Pedagogy in a Beginning Japanese-as-a-Foreign-Language Class[1]

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1. Introduction

The relationship of the foreign language teacher to the culture(s) of the language s/he is teaching and the related matter of the interface between culture and language instruction has received a growing amount of research attention in recent years, from a number of perspectives. One approach to this relationship in the teaching of Japanese is to treat culture as something relayed to students implicitly through the use of the target language (as addressed recently in this journal: Falsgraf and Majors 1995; Rounds, Falsgraf, and Seya 1997). Besides enabling students to absorb culture implicitly, language teachers may also encourage students to explicitly reflect on the cultural context of the language they are learning, as in approaches coming under the heading "critical pedagogy." Originally developed by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator concerned with first-language literacy, these ideas have been developed for the foreign language (FL) community in the United States by Crawford-Lange (Crawford 1978; Crawford-Lange 1981) and have also been pursued for the second-language teaching of English to immigrants to the US (Auerbach 1992; Auerbach and Wallerstein 1987; cf. Freire 1994; Macedo 1994). Parallel developments for other subject areas and curriculum orientations have occurred as educators with critical perspectives on society (feminists, anti-racist educators, gay and lesbian scholars, critical linguists) have asked themselves the question, "How should I teach and develop curriculum, given my perspective on society?" (Benesch 1998; Ng, Staton, and Scane 1995; Vandrick 1994; Weiler 1991).

Our exploration of critical pedagogy in a Japanese-as-a-foreign-language (JFL) classroom follows from our critical and feminist position on/view of Japanese society. We asked ourselves "How can a teacher of Japanese as a foreign language who is concerned about the position of women in Japan present the Japanese language and culture to learners in such a way

that allows them to think critically about linguistic differences and culturally-derived gender inequities in Japanese society?"[2] In this paper, we first give a brief overview of a critical/feminist position on the Japanese language and society, followed by some background on critical pedagogy. We then describe our attempts to explore the feasibility of some aspects of a critical pedagogy for JFL, which took place in a beginning Japanese class at a large university in the Western area of the United States; and we report tentative findings. The investigation was very small-scale and exploratory, and we present it as an example of teacher research. We hope that it will serve to introduce some of the issues involved in the application of a critical pedagogy to the JFL classroom and deepen understandings of the role of culture in actual classroom instruction.

2. Background

2.1. *Feminist Perspectives and Japanese Language and Culture*

Feminism, for us, involves the position that society is hierarchically structured by gender, that this is unethical, and that it is the product of men and women's conceptions and actions (de Beauvoir 1953; Rosaldo 1974). The projection of specific roles and identities with regard to gender unfairly constrains both men and women, but is particularly oppressive to women, since they are provided with roles that are defined as subordinate to those of men. In addition, the kinds of behaviors that are consistent with the role of "woman" as defined in most societies prevent women from challenging or altering their status. In adopting a feminist perspective on Japan, a non-western society, we recognize the potential dangers associated with "othering" (Mohanty 1988) and essentializing the status and problems faced by women throughout the world under one general, all-encompassing category (Mohanty 1988, Ueno [interview reported in Buckley 1997]). Nonetheless, we think it is necessary to acknowledge and think critically about the pervasiveness of female subordination in Japan, where women have few powers and prerogatives and are virtually excluded from certain prestigious social domains.[3] Although it has been noted that women in Japan do enjoy a certain amount of power within the family (e.g., Ueno [interview reported in Buckley 1997]), research has also recognized that gender inequalities are evident in many of Japan's social institutions, including education (Fujimura-Fanselow 1995; Lebra 1984; McVeigh 1996; Smith 1987), business (Kawashima 1995; Lebra 1984; Roberts 1994; Saso 1990; Smith 1987; Ueno 1997), politics (Iwao 1993; Kubo and Gelb 1994), law (Smith 1987), and the media (Endo 1993; Suzuki 1995; Tanaka 1993).[4] As many students of Japanese society and the Japanese language have noted, language is implicated in the construction and maintenance of gender inequalities (e.g., Endo 1993; Ohara 1999; Nakamura 1995; Reynolds 1985, 1990, 1993, 2000a, 2000b; Tanaka 1993).[5]

2.2. *Japanese Language and Gender*

Claiming differences in the syntax, morphology, phonology, lexicon, and levels of politeness used by Japanese men and women, much previous research has advanced the view that there exists in Japanese a separate men's and women's language (e.g., Haig 1990; Ide 1979, 1982, 1990; Jugaku 1979; Kindaichi 1957; Mizutani and Mizutani 1987; Reynolds 1985; Shibamoto 1985; Shibatani 1990). Four differences commonly reported are: (1) that among sentence-final particles, women are not supposed to make use of emphatic sentence-final particles such as *ze* and *zo*, but do make use of the sentence-final particle *wa*; (2) that Japanese women are expected to use politer linguistic forms than men are (Ide et al 1986); (3) that women employ "unnaturally" high voice-pitch levels (Furo 1996; Ohara 1992, 1993); and (4) that women are expected to avoid stronger sounding first-person pronouns such as *ore* and *boku* in favor of the more feminine *atashi* and *watashi*.[6] These and other alleged differences have led to the general view that the speech used by Japanese women is more polite, gentle, and empathetic than that used by Japanese men.

Recent research, however, has been challenging this male-female speech dichotomy with empirical studies of how language is used by Japanese men and women in actual interactional situations (e.g., Matsumoto 1996, 1999; Okamoto and Sato 1992; Okamoto 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997). This emerging set of studies has been finding that the speech used by Japanese women is far more diverse than previously believed. For example, contrary to the idea that sentence-final particles such as *zo* and *ze* are forms exclusively used by male speakers, Okamoto and Sato (1992) and Okamoto (1994, 1995) found that these particles, as well as a number of other supposedly male linguistic forms, were used regularly by young Japanese women, particularly those between the ages of 18 and 23. These results have led some researchers to suggest that instead of being restricted to a specific set of speech forms defined under the category of "women's language," Japanese women have access to a diverse range of speech forms, including those previously deemed specifically to belong to men. Matsumoto (1996: 464) has even suggested that young women's use of unconventional and innovative speech styles (i.e., those that include use

of male forms) "indicates young women's resistance to the dominant ideology that frames the normative concept of femininity."

These recent studies have served as valuable demonstrations of how complicated the relationship between language and gender can be in Japanese society. Instead of merely reducing language to a dichotomy of male and female speech, they have made the point that Japanese possess the ability to use language in innovative ways and create for themselves different and diverse gendered identities. Still, these recent studies do not make any attempt to deny the fact that women are constrained to a certain degree in terms of their language use and that these constraints may be closely related to gender inequalities. Some work by Reynolds (1991, 2000), while resembling some of these recently emerging studies in its focus on actual language usage, suggests nonetheless that the use by women of male linguistic forms has little or no effect on the status of women in society. Focusing on the first-person pronoun *boku*, a linguistic item that is supposedly used exclusively by men, Reynolds observes that some young women do use it on a fairly consistent basis. However, she also finds that this phenomenon occurs predominantly when younger women converse among themselves. Moreover, she suggests that the norms and expectations about male and female language are so strongly ingrained in both men and women that most younger women will stop using *boku* once they leave school and either get married or join the work force, modifying their speech to conform to societal expectations. Thus, according to Reynolds (1991, 2000), the use of more male forms by younger Japanese women ultimately has little significant effect on the overall status of women or women's use of language in the long run.

In addition, also indicative of a relationship between women's use of language and the subordination of women in Japanese society is the fact that researchers, while claiming a convergence between male and female speech in Japanese, have also been suggesting that social expectations toward Japanese women's use of language (particularly the expectation that women use more gentle and less assertive speech) may pose problems for Japanese women trying to break out of traditional roles and make advances in the professional world (Abe 1993; Furo 1996; Reynolds 1990; Smith 1992a; Sunaoshi 1994, 1995a, 1995b; Takano 1997; Takenoya 1998). Often using tape-recordings of actual speech used by women in positions of authority, these studies have operated on the assumption that there was a potential mismatch between expectations about women's use of language and their attempts to fill positions where they needed to display authority. Indeed, some of these studies which have examined

naturally occurring speech, especially directives, used by women in managerial positions, have revealed that women employ techniques such as asking instead of ordering or using language appropriate to the role of a mother when attempting to exercise authority over their employees. (These are termed the "motherese strategy" and the "passive power strategy" in Sunaoshi 1994 and Smith 1992b, respectively.) Instead of being able to manifest power directly in their language, these women use techniques (including a combination of the sentence-final particle *ne*, repetition, softening phrases, backchannels, and intonation patterns) to create rapport so that managerial directives, while lacking in assertive force, will still produce the desired results, namely, to distribute orders to employees and prompt them to carry out their work smoothly and effectively. Through these techniques, women in positions of authority are able to accomplish managerial prerogatives, but nonetheless these findings raise important questions about the relationship between expectations about language use and women's place in society. Might social expectations that women use less emphatic and more gentle-sounding speech forms help explain Japanese women's lack of access to certain domains of society such as business and politics? Should Japanese women wishing to enter these traditionally male-dominated domains adopt unconventional speech styles that include more forceful and assertive male speech forms? Or, should they continue to make use of "motherese" and "passive power" strategies? Given that emerging research on gender and language in Japanese is finding women's speech to be much more complicated than previously imagined, the answers to these questions are undoubtedly neither simple nor straightforward. Still, in light of the tradition of male domination and female subordination in many spheres of Japanese society, they would seem to be the kind of questions that warrant further and deeper (and more critical) reflection.

2.3. *Japanese Language Textbooks*

Whether we interpret the finding that some Japanese women are using more male speech forms as indicative of women's resistance to male domination or whether we believe that little change is on the horizon, we do need to at least recognize that the situation concerning women, men, and language in Japan is not as clear-cut as most Japanese language textbooks make it out to be. In an examination of five widely-used Japanese language textbooks, Siegal and Okamoto (1996) found that although all five of the textbooks explicitly refer to gender differences in speech by classifying some speech forms as specifically male and others as female, none of the textbooks provides much, if any, explanation about the

convergences between these male and female forms. Our own observations of one of the textbooks examined by Siegal and Okamoto (1996), *Situational Functional Japanese* (Tsukuba Language Group 1991, 1995), supports their findings. This textbook uses symbols in the text—one little figure shaped like a man and another shaped like a woman (in other words, a shape with or without a dress)—to inform students which linguistic forms are supposed to be used only by men and which are supposed to be used only by women. It offers no commentary whatsoever about the status of women and men in Japan or about the language that they use. For example, the female symbol is attached to the sentence-final particle *wa* when it is introduced even though this form is sometimes used by men. As several researchers have noted (Kitagawa 1977; McGloin 1990, 1997; Martin 1975), although sentence-final *wa* is often considered a female speech form, it is not unusual for men to use *wa* in sentence-final position with a falling intonation. Yet, the fact that this aspect of language use in Japan is completely ignored by the textbook means that students are never afforded the opportunity to even consider the convergences and divergences of this particle *wa*.

Of course, the problem of lack of commentary can be overcome if the teacher supplements the textbook with outside sources and classroom dialogue about the subject. However, in informal discussions with many of our teaching colleagues, we learned that they are rarely able to take time in the classroom to provide further details to their students about the issue of gender inequality in the Japanese language and in society in general. In our experience, it is common practice among teachers to simply correct their male students for using "feminine" forms and their female students for using "masculine" forms. This view is also supported in studies by Siegal (1994, 1996; cf. Ogulnick 1998). Siegal documents the resistance of women learners of Japanese from the United States to the language forms stereotypically associated with femininity in mainstream JFL syllabi. So it seems that often students are obliged to follow their teacher's directives concerning gender-related language and may be given no reason to suspect this might be a problem worthy of further thought. What curricular and pedagogical alternatives are there to such an approach?

2.4. *Critical Pedagogy*

In Freire's philosophy of education, human beings are treated as actors whose vocation is to "act on perceived reality in order to change it for the improvement of life conditions" (Crawford-Lange 1981:258). What action, if any, a person comes to take on that perceived reality depends on her/his ability to reflect on the world, a process described as that of "distancing oneself from, describing, and interpreting a perceived reality" (ibid). Education, as a process of human development, is necessarily entwined in the construction of perceived realities. Education can foster a "critical" reflection of the world that supports and even encourages human beings' efforts to improve life conditions. Or, education can be a vehicle for instilling in people a sense of the world that leads them to accept it as it is, or as it is presented to them, thereby deterring them from seeing the need to take action to alter or improve it. In either case, education is never neutral; "it always implies a specific interpretation of human beings and their world" (ibid).

The type of education that breeds acceptance of the world as it is has been linked metaphorically to the depositing of money in a bank, and was termed by Freire (1970: 53) the "banking" concept of education. In "banking education," students are taught to accept their teachers as pillars of knowledge. Teachers deposit this knowledge in the students and never suggest to students that they question the knowledge being bestowed on them. The banking approach to education "will never propose to students that they critically consider reality" (ibid., 55). It is perhaps true that "banking" gives students the chance to build up a stock of knowledge. However, discussion about how this knowledge relates to the issues and dilemmas that students are faced with in their own lives does not occur. As Freire (1970: 54) states, "the more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them." If our objective as teachers who care about society is to give human beings the opportunity to critically reflect on and act on their position within society, then the banking concept of education has to be rejected outright.

As an alternative, Freire (1970: 64) advocates a problem-posing education, where, rather than instilling a sense of the world into the students, students, through a dialogue with their teachers, "develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in progress, in transformation."[7] A problem-posing education "strives for the emergence of consciousness" (ibid., 62), whereby teachers and students become "jointly responsible for a process in which

all grow" (ibid.) and develop the kind of consciousness that will allow them to take the actions necessary to improve their life conditions.

A critical pedagogy in or of a foreign language would require that teachers engage students in dialogue that will give those students the opportunity to understand how use of the language being studied contributes to the oppression of women, minorities, or classes. As teachers, we would need the ability to communicate with students about the target society and culture so they can come to reflect critically on the various aspects of the culture they are studying about and preparing to enter into. This way, the students themselves can determine through their reflection the type of actions, if any, that they can and are willing to take as participants in the target culture to address such problematic aspects.

Freire's critical pedagogy has been criticized by some, especially by feminist pedagogues, on the grounds that it ignores issues of gender asymmetry (Vandrick 1994; Weiler 1991). However, both critical and feminist pedagogy share a fundamental goal: "to emancipate and educate all people, regardless of gender, class, race, ethnic origin, wealth, etc." (Vandrick 1994: 78). In addition, some sympathetic critics have pointed out that there is a large and understandable overlap in the classroom practices and activities which are used by each (Gore 1998). Both modes of pedagogy (if indeed they can be distinguished) strongly encourage teachers to develop an ability to communicate with students that will foster critical reflection about the various aspects of the culture they are studying and, in many cases, preparing to enter. This way, the students themselves can determine whether and how they can contribute to the improvement of the life conditions of oppressed people throughout the world. We were well aware from the outset that our attempts to promote this type of reflection in the JFL classroom would meet with certain difficulties, some of which will be discussed in the next section, but especially given the imbalance between the inequalities facing women in Japanese society and the lack of commentary in Japanese language textbooks about the complicated, yet important relationship between gender and language, we nonetheless felt that it was part of our obligation as teachers and concerned members of society to provide students with an opportunity to think about this very important issue.

3. The Study

3.1. *Setting*

At the time of the study reported here, Yumiko and Scott taught in a JFL program at a large state in the western United States. Like many such programs, it gave high priority to students' memorization and subsequent accurate production of grammatical patterns on discrete point tests. Teachers were not actively discouraged from teaching about Japanese society and culture, but with the curricular priorities just mentioned and the large quantities of linguistic material to be covered, few teachers were able to give much attention to the general cultural context of the language.[8] In order to maintain a high degree of continuity within the program, all teachers of a certain level were expected to follow the same syllabus and give the same tests. The teaching style was for the most part left to the discretion of each individual teacher, but this type of overall curricular structure meant that all teachers of a given level were expected to teach the same material at approximately the same time and test the students on that same material against predetermined standards. Even though the class we studied was a beginning-level class, we knew that this curricular structure did not change much in the higher-level Japanese classes. We knew that students who went through and passed this class would move to higher levels of Japanese and more of the same kind of structured curriculum. Thus, we ultimately had to decide, based on our study of critical pedagogy, whether we wanted to merely continue to subscribe to the banking method of education or whether we wanted to attempt to give the students the opportunity to reflect on and think critically about the material they were learning.

However, it was clear that we were not in a position to move all at once to a more explicitly critical or feminist pedagogy. Institutional constraints were considerable, even if we had had full confidence in our command both of the slightly different instructional techniques and curricular emphases that might be required and of how students might respond to them. Accordingly, we decided to explore this area via a small-scale intervention within the existing curriculum and institutional structure (in line with an understanding of teacher research that would advocate teachers engaging in such small-scale, local explorations; Crookes 1993). We devoted four regular class meetings in succession to a course module that was constructed from a critical pedagogy point of view and that focused on gender-related differences in JFL.

3.2. *Participants*

The intervention was implemented in Scott's beginning-level Japanese class, which consisted of seventeen students, eleven male and six female.[9] All the students were between the ages of 18 and 21, and, as is common

in many Japanese language classes in the western part of the United States, a significant number of students were of Japanese heritage. In this case, sixteen of the students were of Japanese ancestry, and the remaining individual was of Chinese descent. As just noted, the class was a beginning-level class, but since it was the second semester of beginning Japanese, it was expected that students were already familiar with many important features of Japanese grammar. For example, it was assumed that students had some knowledge of sentence-final particles, the elaborate honorific system, and both the distal and direct conjugational forms of verbs. In addition, those students who had taken the first semester of beginning Japanese at that particular university had, through their work with the textbook, been exposed to gender differentiation in the language. In particular, the textbook had clearly emphasized that certain sentence-final particles and first-person pronouns were to be used only by women and others only by men.

3.3. *Materials*

We used a set of four videotaped Japanese TV commercials that we felt displayed Japanese women and men in mostly stereotypical ways.[10] Commercials have been used in FL classes because of the variety of cultural information they contain (Martínez-Gibson 1998). There is, of course, a risk that much of the information will be idealized and therefore not completely typical of the target culture, but we nonetheless considered commercials to be a good opportunity to foster classroom dialogue. We also chose these specific examples because they featured young people (in their twenties). We felt this aspect would allow us as well as the students to focus on gender differentiation without having to worry about age and associated status differences. The first commercial is an advertisement for a chocolate bar, featuring a popular young female singer. This commercial is mostly devoted to showing her in a short dress, and it provides at the end a close-up of her lips when she actually eats the product. The second is a pie ad featuring three young women in a living room having tea and dessert (the pie). At the end of the ad, they say that a woman's happiness rests on having three essential things: money, a man, and the pie. The third commercial promotes instant soup. A young man (in real life a popular singer and actor) is urging someone off camera to make the instant soup for him. The soup is served to him, he eats it, and is happy. The last commercial, which also features a popular young actor, is for a vitamin drink. It shows a man driving a car at high speed. He lets out a scream because of having to go so fast, but then he drinks the vitamin drink and becomes visibly relaxed.

Each of the four commercials provided a considerable range of gendered speech. For example, the first commercial presented the students with an example of stereotypical female language. As the camera zooms in on the popular young singer's lips at the end of the ad, she makes use of the feminine sentence-final *wa* in uttering *Aa oishii wa* 'Oh, it's delicious'. In contrast, the last commercial offered an illustration of what could be called stereotypical male speech. Not only does the actor use a relatively low pitch and stern tone of voice as he rushes around in his car, but he also employs both the male first-person pronoun *ore* 'I' and the direct negative command form *na* in making the exclamation *Ore-tachi wa ittai nani ni konna ni kawaiteru daroo. Makeru na!* 'What on earth are we thirsting for? Never give up!'.

3.4. *Procedures*

The instructional sequence for the four-day module was designed as follows:

Day 1	Introduce topic, begin discussion of topic, assign reading.
Day 2	Discuss reading, distribute transcripts of commercials, work through transcripts in groups, show commercials and discuss them.
Day 3	Show commercials again, stop after each commercial for discussion, break students into small groups to make their own commercials, have students perform commercials.
Day 4	Discuss grammar point that is to be used as part of a role-play, divide students into pairs for role-play, perform role-plays, assign wrap-up questions as homework.

The reading distributed on the first day was a two-page overview of language and gender in Japanese which was taken from Loveday 1986 and which focused primarily on the social meanings of voice pitch in Japanese society. We decided on a reading focusing specifically on voice pitch because we felt that even students with limited proficiency in the Japanese language would be able to react to and comment on—in English—the voice pitch levels used by the participants in the commercials. However, by no means was it our intent to ignore other aspects of the relationship between gender and language in Japanese. In addition to voice pitch, Yumiko and Scott also planned to make use of previous exposure to gen-

der differentiation in sentence-final particles and also first-person pronouns as part of the module's discussions and activities. Yet, although certain aspects of the Japanese grammar, particularly sentence-final particles and first-person pronouns, would seem to fit quite well into a module devoted to gender in Japanese society, one of the greatest challenges of our module was integration of the grammar point listed above for Day 4. Because of the organization of the course curriculum, Scott felt the need to introduce, as part of the module, a grammatical pattern, namely, the conditional *-tara* form, that was going to appear on the next lesson quiz. Thus, even though we are not aware of any research on gender differentiation in the use of the *-tara* form, this represents one point where curricular constraints led us to adjust our attempt to foster critical thinking about the language to meet the need of a curriculum that taught and tested discrete grammar points.

To help facilitate discussion about the topic, Yumiko attended the last three days and sat with the students. Yumiko had sat in on Scott's class before, so the students were familiar with her. All four classes were audiotaped and subsequently transcribed. A brief open-ended questionnaire was completed by the students at the end of the module. We reviewed this data shortly after the course as a whole was finished, and we analyzed it according to our own questions and concerns about the feasibility of the idea, the ability of ourselves and our students to handle this approach (§§4.1–4.4 below), and in accordance with other themes which emerged as we reviewed the data and reflected on the experience. Our approach to the data analysis was broadly qualitative-interpretive (cf. Davis 1995), within a teacher-researcher perspective (e.g., Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh 1993).

4. Findings

4.1. *Would Dialogue In Any Sense Be Possible?*

As mentioned earlier, central to the concept of critical pedagogy is the idea of dialogue between students and teacher. Even in many supposedly egalitarian cultures, this is by no means common in classrooms. However, using English to initiate the student-teacher interaction, we found that this group of students was willing to engage in dialogue with their teachers on this topic.[11] For example, on the first day, Scott related an anecdote from his time in Japan. He told students that when he visited a school as part of his job, it was always men who would greet him and engage him in conversation while women would shuffle in and out of the room to serve tea and a snack. Scott's anecdote was responded to and matched by a student who related his own anecdote about his mother, a Japanese woman who, despite being very strong and domineering at home, had, when the student observed her in her predominately Japanese workplace, been passively bringing tea and snacks to male coworkers and customers.

Dialogue became more elaborate on the second day. Students discussed the short reading passage that had been assigned as homework. One student began the discussion by saying he noticed that many young Japanese women used a very high-pitched voice, and that he found it annoying. Several other students agreed with his comments. Yumiko responded that she had found that Japanese women with a high-pitched voice were rated by other Japanese as more likely to be attractive, to be young, to marry a desirable man, and to have a less prestigious job. Women with low-pitched voices were perceived as older, having a higher chance of remaining single for life, and having a prestigious job such as a lawyer, doctor, or university professor (Ohara 1997). Yumiko, who happens to have a fairly low-pitched voice for a Japanese woman, also told of a few occasions on the telephone when she was mistakenly taken to be a man. Students asked why this mistake might have been made. Yumiko remarked that it was because Japanese society puts pressure on women to be feminine and that sounding young and cute constitutes a major part of the Japanese image of femininity. She presented her response as a personal opinion and not as some objective piece of knowledge that students were to accept without question. In the discussion that ensued, teacher, visitor, and students further explored what femininity meant in a Japanese context. A good portion of the discussion did proceed with the students asking questions and Yumiko and Scott giving their opinions, but some students also gave their opinions about how they felt about femininity and images of femininity in Japan.[12] One of the notable aspects of the dialogue that developed was the proportion of students who involved themselves in the discussion. Although it was generally the case in Scott's that class some students were willing to raise their hands and ask questions about the material being learned, such participation had, prior to the module, been limited primarily to about five of the seventeen students. In contrast, by the third day of our module, at least two-thirds of the students had contributed to the discussion, with most of them offering more than just one comment or question. In fact, two of the students who took the initiative in the early stages of our module to offer comments—the student who produced the anecdote about his mother and the student who noted his annoyance at young women with high pitched voices—had not been

among those inclined to freely volunteer questions prior to our four-day investigation.

4.2. *Would Our Students Have Any Kind of Critical Perspective on Japanese?*

As the class began viewing and discussing the Japanese commercials on the second day and extending into the third day, students displayed an ability to voice critical comments. In fact, when the students viewed the first commercial, which showed a scantily clad young woman advertising chocolate, they questioned some of the opinions and information we, the teachers, had given them. Pointing out that the woman in the commercial had a low-pitched voice, the students remarked that the image contrasted sharply with what Yumiko had told them about voice pitch and cultural images of femininity. Students had a similar reaction to the third commercial, which showed a Japanese man eating soup. They noted that the man's voice was quite high. In responding to these comments, Yumiko told students that what she had presented in class were the results of one study and were not meant to be the definitive answers on the topic. In class discussion, students brought up the idea that a low-pitched voice on the part of young Japanese women may conjure up images of sexiness and raised the possibility that there was no real social stigma attached in Japanese society to a man with a high-pitched voice. As part of this discussion, one female student remarked that despite the man's high-pitched voice, the commercial was still sexist because it was a man eating soup that had been prepared by a woman.

Students' comments on the second and fourth commercials were also not simply accepting. Many students, especially the women, expressed disbelief and even outrage at the dialogue between the three young women in the second commercial, who used the punchline that a woman is happy if she has money, men, and a pie. Most of the students found the fourth commercial, which showed a screaming and frantic Japanese businessman drinking a vitamin drink to revitalize himself for more work, very humorous. Scott told them that the commercial might be appealing to Japanese businessmen, but many of the students questioned its appeal, while others, drawing on their knowledge of the long work hours put in by Japanese businessmen, felt that it reflected the pressure that such men must feel. In the ensuing discussion, a few students were quite critical of Japanese business practices, which, they felt, lead to neglect of the male workers' spouses and children.

The majority of the discussion focused on the voice pitch levels used by the people appearing in the commercials and the students' perceptions of and knowledge about Japanese culture (e.g., Japanese business practices). In retrospect, given that the class was devoted to the Japanese language, we realize that we should have made more effort to discuss other linguistic features of the commercials, namely, pronouns and sentential endings. Nonetheless, we were pleased to see a dialogue developing in the classroom. As the discussion continued, the students did not always agree with each other, and they were not afraid to point out to us inconsistencies between our explanations and what they were seeing in the authentic materials. This is exactly what we were striving for. The students showed the ability to relate at least some of what they were learning to their own experiences and feelings, and just as importantly, to express themselves while participating in a classroom discussion about certain aspects of the target culture.

4.3. *Was There Room for Language Practice in a Critical Discussion?*

Although the discussions of our four-day topic occurred in English, taking class time for these discussions did not prevent us from offering students opportunities to practice the target language. Prior to the four days of experimental class procedures, Scott had used primarily drills of grammatical patterns, role-plays, and short skits to prompt students to use the target language in class, and even with the addition of classroom dialogue, Scott was still able in the four days to incorporate role-plays and short skits into the class agenda. On the third day, after the students had already discussed the commercials, Scott brought with him to class a set of actual products, including *wasabi,* cologne, lipstick, toothpaste, *musubi* mix, and curry mix, and after having the students divide themselves into five groups of three or four students, had the students make their own commercials. On the fourth day, students broke into pairs and engaged in an "open" role-play. That is, besides stipulating that students were to use the target language to construct and act out a dialogue, no constraints were placed on the roles they were to take. Some of the pairs made husband-wife dialogues, some constructed dialogues between friends, and some groups put themselves in the role of business associates.

4.4. *A Flexible Approach to Gender-Related Language*

In the main part of the course (prior to our module), students had become familiar with the use of role-plays and short skits as a means of practicing grammatical patterns and vocabulary that appeared in the textbook and

on the tests. In our module, students included in their skits gender-marked linguistic items, especially personal pronouns and sentence-final particles, which they handled in an active and playful manner. For example, one group consisting of two men and one woman used *wasabi* as their product in creating a commercial where one man was challenging the other man about how much of it he could put on his food. The student doing the challenging used the sentence *Dono gurai taberu ka*? 'How much will you eat?'. The form of this sentence is very direct, almost rough-sounding and typical of the kind of language men would use with each other. After the student who had been challenged took a bite, the other male student challenged him once again, using the very direct and straightforward *Motto! Motto!* 'More! More!'. The student stressed the emphatic sense of this expression by pounding on the desk. Before his interlocutor could answer this second challenge, the woman in the group issued the warning *Totemo karai desu yo* 'It is very hot', which, although a warning, has a more polite linguistic form than the utterances of the male students, thereby conforming to the stereotype that women are to speak in a more polite manner than men. Also in an apparent effort to make her character more feminine, the woman raised the pitch of her voice to a point that was recognizably higher than her normal speaking voice. However, despite her warning, the challenged student went on to pretend to eat his spicy food, and after he took a bite, he turned to the (imaginary) camera, lowered his voice even more, and, in a phrase that captured the mood of this commercial, growled *Otoko no wasabi* 'Man's *wasabi*'.

However, not all of the groups conformed to cultural gender stereotypes. In fact, based on the way they constructed and acted out their skits, it was apparent that for at least some students, their understanding of gender-marked linguistic items was not as a strict dichotomy of female vs. male language but rather as a set of resources that could be used by either gender to highlight certain aspects of the identities they were trying to project. In one group in which gendered stereotypes were apparently being challenged, the students reversed gender roles by having two women visit the apartment of a man with the intent of getting him to cook for them. Upon being allowed to enter the man's residence, one of the women uttered in a very direct, nonpolite form *Onaka suita yo* 'I am hungry', and then the other asked a very direct question *Nani o tsukuru?* 'What will you make?'. The male student then responded by holding up the product and saying, in a formal, more polite form, *Musubi o tsukurimasu* 'I will make rice balls'. He then proceeded to pretend to make rice balls and upon finishing them said *Dekimashita. Hai, tabete kudasai* 'They are ready. Please eat them'—an utterance that also has a formal, polite form. Upon taking a pretend bite, the female students simultaneously exclaimed *Oishii!* 'Delicious!', once again using a very direct and nonpolite linguistic form.

The students' awareness of sociopragmatic aspects of language was also clear in the role-plays on the fourth day. Even though one of the objectives of this exercise was to have the students practice the conditional *-tara* form in order to prepare for the upcoming lesson quiz, students still made use of sentence-final particles to gender-mark their speech. Students playing male roles made frequent use of *zo* and *ze*, and students playing female roles used the sentence-final particle *wa*. In pairs which played against stereotypes, it was evident in the choices of sentence-final particles that some men meant to take on female roles and some women male roles. In addition, students tried to alter the pitch of their voices according to their roles, with men even willing to raise the pitch of their voices to play female roles. The students' purposeful and experimental use of these aspects of the Japanese language suggested that they were becoming aware of the relation between language and one important aspect of identity, namely gender (cf. Siegal 1994, 1996).

4.5. *The Utility of Authentic Materials*

Authentic materials were important for this intervention.[13] Of course, communicative approaches to language pedagogy have long recognized the usefulness of authentic materials in the foreign-language classroom, while criticizing published materials for their lack of authenticity (e.g., Duda, Laurens, and Remy 1973; Cathcart 1989; Makino 1988; cf. Clark 1998). For us, however, instead of just being tools to facilitate language learning, authentic materials in a critical pedagogy lesson plan become texts representative of the culture that are to be scrutinized by the students and serve as the basis for discussion of and critical reflection on the culture. The television commercials we used did provide students with a model of the way the target language is actually used, and Scott took the time in class to read through transcripts of the commercials with the students before showing the video, with the hope that students would be exposed to and learn some new vocabulary and sentence structures. Yet the utility of these commercials hardly stopped there. They provided Scott with a basis for facilitating active discussion of the way gender was expressed in Japanese, and they likewise served as the basis for the students to begin to reflect seriously on an important sociocultural aspect of the Japanese language.

4.6. *Resistance or Change*

At the end of our module we had students complete a questionnaire consisting of the following three open-ended questions.

(1) What do you feel you have learned in the past few days of class?
(2) How do you feel about what you have learned? (i.e., do you like the image being portrayed in Japanese commercials?)
(3) Do you think anything needs to be done to change the image?

In their answers to question (1) all of the students wrote that they had learned about gender differences in the way the Japanese people use their language, and most of the students made remarks about the cultural stereotypes and expectations placed on women in their actions and use of language. For question (2), most of the students expressed either their dislike of the images of women being displayed or their amusement at the images. It is perhaps not surprising that, in expressing their dislike, many of the female students referred to Japan as a sexist society. For example, one female student wrote, "I thought Japan was kind of a sexist society but never realized it was this bad." Another wrote, "I am amazed at how sexist Japan is, even the language is sexist." It was mostly the men who wrote that they found the commercials funny and enjoyable.

The answers given for question (3) fell into the following four categories: (a) feel no need for change; (b) feel there should be change, but have no thoughts on how to change it; (c) feel there should be change, but feel the change has to be initiated by Japanese women themselves; and (d) feel there should be change and offer some potential ways to change it. For example, one male student wrote explicitly, "I don't think anything needs to be changed." Another male student commented that he did not want the image to change because, "I pretty much felt comfortable with what was given." These comments, together with their responses to question (2) (that the commercials were funny and enjoyable), can be seen as a sign of "male resistance to female issues" (Benesch 1998).

On the other hand, three of the fifteen responses fell into category (d), and these were all written by female students. One suggested that people should participate in awareness-raising activities similar to the ones the engaged in by the students themselves in class. She wrote:

> I feel that by raising an awareness there is more of a choice involved in how people act. Just like how we watched the commercials and analyzed them, similar activities can aid people in seeing the various actions and behaviors of a society and expected by society to be used (especially by advertisers since they are trying to design a commercial that will play upon people's feelings and entice them to buy their product/service).

Another female student suggested that the change has to be initiated by Japanese women themselves. She wrote the following:

> I can understand why women would feel inferior to men. Because men control business and government and most of the other important parts of society, I can understand why women feel the need to serve them tea and to use gentler, more polite language. But I also think that women help contribute to their inferior status by agreeing to serve men. If they want to bring change, they have to try not to treat men as being so superior. Maybe changing their use of language to make it closer to that of men would only be a small change, but it would serve as a sign to men that women wanted to change society.

Of course, the fact that only three students offered thoughts about how society can be changed does not in any way mean that the other students did not think critically about the issue. Critical pedagogy does not stipulate that students have to arrive at any one conclusion. That a variety of opinions was found in the questionnaire responses suggests we had not forced our own opinions on the students.

5. Conclusion

In this report we have presented an account of a small, teacher-generated and implemented intervention which explored the practicality of a critical perspective on language and language teaching within an established JFL university course. This was, obviously, a very small-scale exploration, and no claims are made which go beyond the specific circumstances reported. We have to recognize, too, that although our insider status has enabled us to give a well-informed account of our practice, the fact that we were in a hierarchical relationship with our students may have inhibited them from fully reporting their views to us. At the same time, however, it is our position that our previously established and relatively relaxed relationship to them, not to mention the behavior they exhibited during the module in sometimes challenging and questioning our opinions in discussion, contributes positively to the "trustworthiness" (in the sense of Lincoln and Guba 1985) of this account.

Our exploration is in line with some interesting new trends in FL teaching. Besides the old tradition of critical pedagogy and its near neighbor, feminist pedagogy, language specialists in particular are beginning to draw on the insights of critical language awareness (e.g., Fairclough 1992) and critical discourse analysis (e.g., Fairclough 1989, 1995) in

reviewing what a language syllabus might consist of (e.g., Lancaster and Tailor 1992; Stubbs 1992).

In discussing this small project with colleagues, a number of concerns have been raised (including by reviewers) to which we should make preliminary responses. Some teachers have expressed worry that in opening to students the range of ways that the Japanese language is used by men and women (or we might say, by those of greater or lesser power) in varying social contexts, we run the risk of "teaching our students a nonstandard Japanese" which will only be seen as erroneous by their Japanese interlocutors. One response (suggested by a *JLL* reviewer) is that if we are *sensitizing* students to the range of forms and possibilities, we are enabling them at least to be more critical listeners who understand the "subtext of Japanese verbal interactions" better than would otherwise be the case. But we feel that we can go further in justifying these practices. Because real Japanese is not simply dichotomized by gender but, as Okamoto (1995, 1996, 1997) has shown, is dependent on contexts, the version of "standard" Japanese still presented in many textbooks is descriptively incorrect, and we would be misrepresenting the language to students if its full complexity were not adverted to. At the same time, we would also be derelict in our duty if we did not share with our students the fact that the same level of competence in Japanese will be commented on and interpreted differently by some Japanese in Japan depending on the appearance of the speaker (and possibly even the venue of the interaction). Thus, a command of the full range of gender/power-appropriate forms, for example, might be seen differently if the speaker is of Caucasian descent as opposed to Japanese descent.[14] As teachers of Japanese, we cannot, of course, just divide learners into two kinds (Japanese ancestry vs. non-Japanese ancestry), nor can we separate them according to ancestry into pre-determined categories. Nonetheless, we need to remain aware of the fact that students, because of factors such as ethnicity, gender, age, and others, bring with them a range of complex identities that can and should be taken into consideration when teaching JFL.

Another point that comes up is whether non-Japanese students have any right to express criticism of any aspect of Japan, let alone be involved in any actions that might be based on such criticism. Again, in our specific context, the first response is to point to the inapplicability of a dichotomy of identity here. Our students were not "100 percent Western," though they are obviously by no means "completely Japanese." One of us (Yumiko) is Japanese by birth and initial cultural upbringing but has spent considerable time outside of Japan. Does this make her not 100 percent Japanese? (Unfortunately, there are some who would say so!) Can teachers express *any* criticism of *any* aspect of Japanese culture while teaching the Japanese language? One response to this apparent dilemma is to reflect on the cultural dimension of FL teaching in general. It would be good if students of a FL could come to a deeper understanding of their own as well as the target culture through FL study. To do so, they need to be helped to reflect (preferably critically, we would say) on their own culture at the same time as they are introduced to problematic aspects of the target culture. As one reviewer of this piece pointed out, "It is important for students to understand that they should avoid making judgments about cultures other than their own based on their own cultural frame of reference." At the same time, students *will* make judgments about the target culture based on their own unexamined values, unless they are assisted in taking a more nuanced view through some form of critical reflection and dialogue which looks at both cultures, but does so in a way that does not essentialize them. Recognizing the nonhomogeneity of both home and target cultures (in an era of "postmodernity") would appear to be important. In subsequent versions of the module discussed here (not to mention any entire course we might be able to offer which was fully structured from a critical or feminist point of view) we would naturally involve the students themselves in discussion of these issues (particularly if the students were, like ours, have experience living in Japan or dealing with Japanese people outside of Japan).

Whether or not Japanese language and culture are changing, we feel any JFL teacher who has a feminist perspective must consider whether and to what extent teachers, as language users, contribute to perpetuating the gender stereotypes and related oppression. Such individuals may wish to draw on some of the techniques and perspectives reported above, and we hope that this account will contribute to stimulating necessary explorations in this area.

NOTES

1. We would like to express our appreciation to two anonymous reviewers who provided extremely helpful comments and criticisms. Any remaining errors are our responsibility alone.

2. The authors of this study had different roles and responsibilities. We use our first names, when necessary, to clarify who did what and when.

3. Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974: 3) noted that female subordination, where

women have fewer powers and prerogatives and are excluded from certain prestigious activities, is a "universal fact of human social life."

4. It is interesting to note that while Ueno (1997) has maintained that western feminists should not underestimate or downplay the power that women possess within the family, she also has published work citing inequalities facing women attempting to make advancements in the workplace (Ueno 1994).
5. That a deep and important relationship exists between language and gender inequity has been recognized not only by specialists on the Japanese language but by other theorists as well (e.g., Aries 1997; Cameron 1990, 1992; Gibbon 1999; Talbot 1998).
6. We choose to offer especially these four aspects of language as examples because they were the features that became the most salient to the learner-subjects in our study. Further discussion follows later in the paper.
7. For Freire dialogue is not just a pedagogic device but a concept of considerable theoretic importance, which derives directly from his view of what it is to be truly human: the "vocation" mentioned at the outset of this section. (The term "dialogue" itself has not been well-defined in this literature, but for a comprehensive analysis see Burbules 1993).
8. A common problem, of course (see Martínez-Gibson 1998 inter alia).
9. The students who were the subjects in this study were using volume 1 of the previously mentioned *Situational Functional Japanese* textbook.
10. See Suzuki (1995) for a feminist analysis of commercials produced in Japan. Fischer (2000) discusses commercials in a critical/feminist pedagogy context.
11. We understand a dialogue as at least minimally a two-way exchange of remarks pertinent to the matter being jointly explored. See note 6 above. In higher-level classes it might be desirable to initiate dialogue using the target language, but since this was a lower-level class, we felt that by employing English (the first language of all the students), it would be easier to foster dialogue in the classroom.
12. We are grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for the point that if a teacher gives information and students provide opinions in response, this is not a big step away from banking education. However, this move then allows the class to move on to more dialogic interaction, once the students have some material to work with.
13. For one thing, authentic materials are readily available. Yumiko took the commercials from some videotapes of Japanese television shows she had made during an earlier trip to Japan, and Scott and Yumiko found the products used for the skits either at home or in the store. Authentic materials also proved effective as simple tools for promoting dialogue and critical reflection in the classroom.
14. As is the case in many contexts of FL use. Fluent Japanese speakers of English in, say, Los Angeles, will not get as many compliments on their speech as they would in Iowa.

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