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Meaning-making in a community of practice

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Negation among Japanese immigrants
in The Netherlands

by

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Meaning-making in a Community of Practice:

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this paper is to consider the value of the framework of a Community of Practice (CofP) for the analysis of language use, by looking at the use of one linguistic variable in a community that has been brought together through circumstances the majority of them consider unfavourable. One of the key elements of the discussion here is to unpack the extent to which their activities, practices and linguistic resources used by the members of this group warrant framing this group as a CofP, and, as a consequence, to discuss the value of such a framework in analysing language in use.

Specifically, we will analyse the use of one linguistic variable (Standard and dialectal verbal negation in Japanese) by members of a CofP, and discuss the indexical meanings developed and co-constructed for the specific variant (Osaka-style negation). In the course of this analysis we will focus on (i) analysing the use of Osaka Japanese and Standard Japanese negation, and (ii) showing how the 'correct' use is (re)created and policed.

The group of people under discussion here are Japanese women living on the outskirts of Amsterdam because their husbands have been transferred to the area from Japan temporarily on short-term job contracts. The women belong to a non-profit organization run entirely by them, and they frequently meet to arrange a variety of events and participate in activities. In engaging with this group I have come, over time, to see both already constituted and emerging patterns in their actions and their use of resources at hand – both linguistic and cultural – and therefore the question of whether or not they can indeed be perceived as a CofP began to emerge.

As a CofP cannot be defined merely on the basis of some abstract characteristics attributed by a researcher in a top-down manner, nor can it be identified by selecting a group of individuals who simply co-exist in one form or another (by way of being e.g. co-workers or members of the same organization) (Eckert 2006), it provides a challenging endeavour for the researcher attempting to conceptualize a group as a CofP. As King (2014) aptly points out, ethnographic approach to research might bring in the much-needed understanding of the

extent to which the inner workings of a given community have indeed been negotiated by the community itself – a crucial component of the CofP framework. Looking at a group of people engaging together in some common activity, we cannot therefore assume *a priori* the existence of a CofP. What we can do, however, is unpack their engagement with one another and understand the way in which they organize themselves as a group (if they do), thus gaining a more nuanced understanding of the internal workings of a group. Only then can we identify a group or a community with a particular framework.

In discussing the linguistic choices and practices, I will first introduce the ethnographic background of the research and the group under scrutiny, then move on to discussing the concept of a CofP, and how it can potentially relate to the aggregate of speakers at hand, and finally take as example one linguistic feature (Japanese negation) to demonstrate how these speakers have developed the use and indexical meaning(s) of it, and how this meaning is actively negotiated and policed by the speakers themselves.

ETHNOGRAPIC BACKGROUND

Japan on Amstel

Data for this discussion was collected in Amstelveen (south of Amsterdam) in 2012-2013. Amstelveen is known as a place with high density of expatriates in general, but specifically for its large Japanese expatriate community and long-standing links with Japan. It was estimated that in 2008, out of 8600 foreign residents of Amstelveen, 1719 were Japanese, making it the largest expatriate group (http://www.amstelveenweb.com/english). There is a Japanese kindergarten, Japanese day-care, cram school (*juku*),travel agent, dentist, a number of restaurants, and help in Japanese is available in one of the largest hospitals. Three times a year health check is organized for Japanese residents. Doctors who normally reside in Tokyo come to The Netherlands for that time to cater for this particular community. In spring, Japanese *hanami* ('cherry blossom viewing') parties are organized by the river Amstel, and are attended by both local and expatriate communities. The place has come to be referred to at times, albeit often jokingly, as 'Japan on Amstel'.

It is then clear that there is a strong presence of both Japanese residents and Japanese culture in the area of Amstelveen. This seems particularly important in view of the fact that the majority of the Japanese residents are living there for a relatively short term only – participants of this research have all been there between 3 and ten years, and they all refer to themselves as *chuuzaiin* 'expatriates'. The women interviewed for this project are wives of men who were offered a temporary job post in a branch of their Japanese company in Amsterdam or Amstelveen, and are employed on temporary contracts. Upon completion of the contracts, the families return to Japan, where men return to work in their company of origin. At the time of fieldwork, none of the women knew exactly how much longer they would be staying in Amstelveen – they said it could be anything from a year up to ten years. This creates an ongoing sense of insecurity, palpable among the women I talked to, and the

temporality of this experience makes it all the more difficult to engage with any local community – be it Dutch, or expatriate. One of the women interviewed for this project put it like this: 'When you know you will leave at some point it is difficult to make friends. It is difficult to [...] meet people and talk to them, because you know you will leave. Maybe you will leave soon. Meeting Japanese people is easier, because it is the same for all of us.'

'The Club'

The community investigated for this research is a group of Japanese women who are all members of what I will call here 'The Club' (pseudonym). The Club was set up in 1989 as a volunteer-run, non-profit organization. Initially it was organized for Japanese volunteers wishing to get involved in work that would give something back to the community they had moved into. The early activities included organizing events and activities for underprivileged children, and creating and maintaining links between several Japanese and Dutch NPOs. The Club is still run by volunteers, but has since then developed into an organization that mainly supports the Japanese living in The Netherlands. Their flyer, printed in both Japanese and English, reads:

> 'This may be a great opportunity for you to make the best use of your time in the Netherlands, and to mentally reduce the long distance from Japan. We believe that if we share and join forces, deepen friendships and integrate in the local community, we will develop a better understanding of the Dutch society.'

Anyone can become a member of the club, according to the website. However, at the time of the fieldwork, all of the members were unemployed Japanese women, totalling 18. In terms of activities The Club organizes, they range from open lectures, cherry blossom festivals, to free Japanese conversation classes for the local community. The members meet regularly in the local community centre (but interestingly almost never outside it), at least twice a month to organize events, or simply to chat. Other than that, when there are some special events the meetings are more frequent, and also several of the members meet every other Friday to run Japanese lessons for the local community – people attending these classes range from the Dutch who are simply interested in learning a little bit of Japanese, through students who have been to Japan, or are planning to go, to foreigners who have some links with Japan. The regular club meetings have no strictly scheduled agenda, but everything that happens depends on the activity that is currently being planned, or an issue that is being discussed (change in the committee, setting up a new event etc.). While not all of the members participate in the bi-weekly language class, majority of the members attend the meetings. During the events they organize, members are responsible for distributing or checking the tickets, organizing food, setting up and preparing the room, etc.

All of the current club members are willingly involved in a number of activities, and are quite engaged in the work done at the club. The participation in activities is not actively policed, but it is encouraged, and seems to be one of the key issues for the future members –

how much involvement and participation will be expected of them. Several of the members have mentioned that the numbers seem to have been decreasing over the past years because women are not willing to put in the time and effort needed for things to run smoothly. While the members of The Club meet frequently around matters concerning its activities, they hardly (if ever) meet outside the club setting, or for purposes other than those related to the workings of The Club itself. It became apparent that only two of the members have social ties outside The Club, and others either belong to other networks (e.g. sports club), or are not involved in any other social activities at all. For twelve out of the eighteen club members this is the only social activity outside of their homes.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Community of Practice

In its most straightforward definition, Community of Practice is a 'collection of people who come together around a mutual engagement in an endeavour.' (Lave & Wenger 1992: 464). The defining features of a CofP, as outlined by Wenger, are *joint enterprise*, *mutual engagement* and a *shared repertoire of resources* (Wenger 1998: 73). All of these defining characteristics arise within a CofP. Enterprise within this framework is therefore in the form in which it is both understood by the members, and negotiated by them, and as such understanding of this enterprise (and its negotiation) contributes necessarily to the sense of identity.

While the enterprise connects the members as they construct their membership in the CofP through their mutual engagement with one another, a shared repertoire of resources (both linguistic and non-linguistic), and the mutually understood use of this repertoire emerge in the course of this engagement. The members of a CofP develop various ways of doing things – a shared practice, the defining feature of a CofP, and a significant value of this framework (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992; Eckert 2006). This development of practice *within* the community, and through constant negotiation, comprises a crucial difference between this and other frameworks that deal with aggregates of people, such as speech community, social networks or intergroup theory (cf. Meyerhoff & Strycharz 2011).

CofP, language and The Club

Previous studies have explored the possible explanatory power of Community of Practice in terms of analysing the creation and negotiation of identities (gendered or otherwise) (e.g. Bucholtz 1999; DeFina 2007), or the choice of a given linguistic variant to delimit membership in the given CofP (e.g. Eckert 2000; Mendoza-Denton 2008).

In this paper I will look specifically at (i) certain routines and practices that have developed over time (to establish whether or not we can plausibly analyse this group as a CofP), and (ii) one linguistic variable – negation, to discuss the meaning developed for the use of Standard versus dialectal negation in this community of speakers. We will thus argue for the importance of CofP framework in this instance for our understanding of meanings attributed

to types of negation (Standard or dialectal), and show that language use can be a resource actively policed by members of CofP.

It is crucial to remember that a more in-depth analysis of practices of this particular CofP would necessarily incorporate different levels of language simultaneously, as well as the multiple non-linguistic resources at hand. We are therefore only beginning the analysis by pointing out that even in such a small linguistic unit (one variable feature) we can already see how practices and meanings emerge and are negotiated, both implicitly and explicitly. To do this, we analyse interactions where speakers make choices with regards to the use of local versus Standard variants of negation, and investigate the emerging meanings that can be attributed to these choices.

Taking negation as an example, we will argue that the involvement of women in The Club, which we will present as their most salient CofP at the time, has an influence on the linguistic choices that they make with regards to the Standard or non-standard features. The fact that the women are taken out of their comfort zone in their home country, and are forced to create new networks that are, in essence, fleeting and underspecified as far as the time-frame of their involvement is concerned, make these practices all the more interesting and worth investigating.

METHODOLOGY

The analysis in this paper is part of a larger project looking at the linguistic and cultural practices of Japanese expatriates in The Netherlands. While at the onset of the study the emphasis was put on the linguistic practices in a situation of language and dialect contact and the outcomes thereof, during the actual research it became clear that the practices of this particular group needed to be considered in and of its own, paying closer attention to the ongoing creation of group identity. The method chosen was therefore that of linguistic ethnography. The value of linguistic analysis was strengthened by the ethnographic approach, where ethnography is understood as an outlook on research rather than a set of methods and methodologies (Blommaert 2007). In the linguistic analysis, and the approach to data, I have been relying extensively on methods utilized in the program of interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982).

As the discussion here is embedded in a larger project looking specifically at negation (*inter alia*), negation was naturally also taken into consideration as one of the variable features to analyse. However, it was not *a priori* assumed that negation will necessarily need to carry any kind of meaning for this particular community, the actual interactional and socio-semiotic meaning of negation among this group of speakers turned out to be significant.

Ideally, with ethnographic ideals in mind, it would have been of immense value to the research to be able to engage in an ongoing in-depth participant observation, which would incorporate all of the members of The Club within the club setting and outside of it. In reality,

however, it proved difficult to do for several reasons: the nature of this community is such that it is a very closed group, being a group of immigrants (and so strangers in this locality), as well as being Japanese. The participants themselves, towards the end of my research, shared with me that they were not willing in the beginning to allow me to attend the meetings, and only did it as a matter of exception. Bearing these difficulties in mind, I approached the research in such a way that would allow me to see the inner workings and self-organization of the group, while at the same time making sure that I am not in any way breaching their feeling of comfort and safety in my presence. Off the record I participated in a number of meetings of The Club, and was invited to several of the events, where I was allowed to take notes as the meetings and events were held. For the linguistic analysis, data was collected in two forms: (i) a set of 7 recorded, semi-structured conversations between the researcher and 2-3 Japanese women, that lasted between 60-90 minutes, and (ii) a set of two recordings of meetings of club members, where they discuss the current affairs and plan an upcoming event.

The women were first approached informally, and the first conversations we had were not recorded. I was then invited to participate in two Japanese language sessions that the club members run for the local community, where I was introduced to the other members. Only after one or two informal meetings with any given person, the interactions were recorded and these are the basis for the linguistic analysis and the discussion. The audio-recorded conversations were transcribed in ELAN for a time-aligned transcription, and relevant utterances (i.e. those containing any form of negation) were extracted and analysed. All of the conversations were held in Japanese, either at the local community centre where the women meet regularly (the meeting place for Club members where a number of the Club's activities are held), or in a café of their choice – this was to ensure as much as possible the informality of the situation and the comfort of the participants. The groups of club members were self-selected, which meant that all of the members were informed about the ongoing research and then they decided among themselves who was going to show up for a given recording.

Out of 18 members of The Club at the time, 8 agreed to participate actively in the research, in that they agreed to meet and talk with me. The geographic make-up of the group at the time of fieldwork was as follows: four women from Osaka, two from Kyoto, six from Tokyo, three from Nagoya, three from Kyushu. The make-up of the community is of importance when we consider the linguistic choices with regards to negation.

DEVELOPING MEANINGS AND PRACTICES

Learning to be

The main objective of The Club is organization of events for the Japanese community, and each of the members is endowed with a certain amount of responsibility and a specific set of tasks. Discussing these tasks constitutes an important part of the meetings. But there is also

another, less explicit and not officially stated, function of this community – providing support for each other in the situation the women have found themselves in. In that sense as well, as has become apparent through conversations and in off-the-record comments, the women who have been in The Netherlands for a longer period of time have become self-elected mentors for the ones who have been here for a shorter period of time, showing the newer members where and how to get things done, and providing informal support. In that sense the component of passing the knowledge comes through as one of the important traits of this CofP (cf. Wenger 1998), not only with regards to the tasks involved in work done within The Club, but also life in The Netherlands in a very general sense. The Club is therefore construed by its members as a platform of learning actually how to *be* – how to exist in these circumstances, how to engage with the reality, and how to use the resources at hand. There seem to be three distinct levels of learning happening for the new members joining The Club: (i) they are explicitly guided as to what their roles and responsibilities will be within the organization, (ii) on the side-lines, in off-hand comments, they are taught about life in The Netherlands, life in Amstelveen, and (iii) they learn to understand and follow (or not) certain practices and routines.

Any explicit teaching that I observed was done by five members, who, as I was told, had been in The Netherlands for the longest time (between five and seven years), and so have also been club members for longer. The role of these mentors is visible also in their policing of the use of linguistic resources, as I discuss in the section below, and so the identities and roles within the Club are being actively co-constructed by its members in relation to one another (cf. also Wenger 1998: 130-131).

Mutually constructed practices and identities

I was observing the activities within the Club for a period of 10 months, and on a number of occasions it became clear that as an outsider I had no access to certain routines – such as who gets through the door first, who sits where during the meetings, and no understanding of the use of certain resources – such as jokes, which were clearly understandable to the members but not me, and stories involving past members of 'The Club', which clearly constituted common knowledge. When I started my fieldwork, Noriko – a woman from northern Japan – had just joined The Club, and during the first meeting I attended she was instructed where to sit at the table, and had kept that place in all other meetings I had been allowed to attend. I, however, was never told where to sit. My identity as an outsider, who is not (and most likely never will be) construed as a member, was clear from the beginning, and so there was an understanding of who is, and potentially who can be, construed as one (cf. Wegner 1998; Holmes & Meyerhoff 1999).

One of the key aspects often discussed in informal part of the meetings, were the differences between Japanese and Dutch ways. Sometimes they were mere mentions of simple things (like the fact that Dutch dishwashers are too loud, or the meat is sliced too thick at the

butcher's), but at times these turned into full-blown conversations revolving around these topics. Foregrounding this topic allowed the members to construct themselves as first and foremost Japanese abroad, relocated to an unknown and mostly unfriendly reality, putting aside all the differences that may possibly emerge from the differences of their age, life experience or place of origin. In this way, the members foreground their shared experience and identity – being Japanese wives of the men who were relocated, and needing to stick together, but these were also examples of a 'shared discourse, which reflects a certain perspective on the world' (Wenger 1998: 131, cited in Holmes & Meyerhoff 1999). Regardless of the extent to which these differences (between Dutch and Japanese) are real or imagined, they allow the members to affirm the divide between themselves as a group, and the society they have found themselves in, thus serving as interactional devices for strengthening the sense of community among the members. They have been detached from their homeland in the physical sense, and so their way of creating belonging now lies solely outside the realm of autochtony perceived as physically being in the land of origin (cf. e.g. Geschierre 2009) – they reassert their belonging to some distant autochtonous land through locally developed networks, one of them being The Club they belong to. One of the ways in which this is visible is through the discourse foregrounding the commonalities between the Japanese women, vis-à-vis the Dutch 'other', thus strengthening the 'us-them' dichotomy over any other local differences within the group. Yet another is the choice of Standard Japanese as the common (unmarked) code for communication among the members from different parts of Japan.

The exact processes involved in co-construction of membership within The Club are a matter of another discussion, however it is important to note here that over time it became clear that this community satisfies the three fundamental criteria of a CofP, i.e. mutual engagement, jointly negotiated enterprise and a shared repertoire of resources. We will now turn to analyse the indexical meanings developed within The Club for one specific linguistic variable – negation – and its Standard and dialectal variants.

Negation – meaning-making in the CofP

I will now turn to look at one specific linguistic resource, whose indexical meanings (Eckert 2008) seem to have developed within this group – i.e. negation. Since members of The Club come originally from different parts of Japan, they bring in with them many varieties of Japanese that are locally spoken. Over time it became apparent that Standard Japanese is the unmarked choice for majority of communication among the women. However, local variants were not unheard in the informal meetings, and in conversations after the meetings over coffee. I will now examine the use of negation in discourse, as this particular variant seemed to stand out in the way it was used by the members.

<u>Negation in Japanese</u>

Negation is an interesting phenomenon for this kind of enquiry, as there is a large area subject to variation. Negation in Japanese is expressed by means of bound morphemes suffixed to the element that is being negated, which can be: noun (N), adjective (A), nominal adjective (NA) and verb (V). The Japanese negation system consists of a large number of morphemes classified according to tense and formality (Tsujimura 1996; Hansen 1999; Hayashi 1999). The table below, reproduced from Matsumoto & Britain (2003:49) shows this variation in Standard Japanese.

	Informal			**Formal**				
Non-past	V		nai	V		masen;			naidesu
	N	dewa/ja	nai	N	dewa/ja	arimasen;	dewa/ja	naidesu
	NA	dewa/ja	nai	NA	dewa/ja	arimasen;	dewa/ja	naidesu
	A	ku	nai	A	ku	arimasen;	ku	naidesu
Past	V		nai	V		masendeshita;			nakattadesu
	N	dewa/ja	nai	N	dewa/ja	arimasendeshita;	dewa/ja	nakattadesu
	NA	dewa/ja	nai	NA	dewa/ja	arimasendeshita;	dewa/ja	nakattadesu
	A	ku	nai	A	ku	arimasendeshita;	ku	nakattadesu

Table 1. Variation in Standard Japanese negation, adopted from Matsumoto & Britain 2003:49.

In addition to a number of possible Standard Japanese negation patterns, there is a high degree of regional variation between Eastern, Western and Kyushu dialects (National Language Research Institute 1993; Shibatani 1990).

DATA

Out of all recorded conversations, 481 interactions with utterances containing negation were extracted. Negation was coded for: category (verb, noun, adjective and nominal adjective); presence/absence of the polite ending *desu/masu*; tense (past, non-past, present progressive); variant (Standard Japanese or dialect); context (free chat or meeting) and the origin of the speaker. Nonstandard negation was found only in the negation of verbs. In all other grammatical categories (i.e. nouns, nominal adjectives and adjectives) only Standard Japanese variants were used. Table 2 combines data for *verbal* negation in plain (i.e. informal) form. Shaded forms are the ones present in the dataset.

	Eastern dialects	Western dialects (incl. Shikoku)	Kyushu dialect	Kansai dialects
Non-past	-nai;-nae;-nu;-nee	-n	-n	-hen; -n; -hin
Past	-nakatta; -nkatta; -nanda	-nanda; -nakatta; -zatta	-ndatta; -njatta; -zatta	-henkatta; -nkatta; -hinkatta

Table 1. Verbal negation patterns across regions (combined from Matsumoto & Britain 2003; Shibatani 1990; Shinji 2001; Strycharz 2012; Tsujimura 2014).

The dataset contains verbal negation associated with Standard Japanese, i.e. V+*nai*, as well as tokens of V+*hen* and V+*n*. While V+*hen* occurs in the dialects of Kansai area, V+*n* is a feature of other nonstandard varieties as well (see Table 2). However, all tokens of V+*n* were found in the speech of people from Osaka, and therefore we combine these three tokens with all other Osaka-style tokens in the further analysis. The interactional meaning of these three tokens also matches that of the V+*hen* variant, as we will see below[1].

While Standard negation is found across all tenses (past, non-past and progressive) and both with and without overt honorific marking, Osaka-style negation is only found in utterances with no honorific marking *desu/masu* in non-past tense. This is perhaps not surprising, as we could expect to find dialect used in more informal speech (Jones & Ono 2008).

Verbal negation constituted 301 tokens (63% of all negative tokens). 19 out of 301 tokens are Osaka-style negation.11 Osaka-style tokens were found in the speech of people whose origin is Kansai area, but the remaining 8 were found in the speech of women from Tokyo, Nagoya and Kyushu. This suggests that Osaka-style negation has gained social meaning in this CofP, which we will explore in the analysis below.

VARIANT CHOICE AND MEANING-MAKING IN A COFP

Standard and nonstandard variants as resources

While in theory all of the members have their local variants of Japanese at their disposal, throughout observation it became apparent that the unmarked choice of communication

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[1] Kansai is the area in Western Japan, with cities of Osaka, Kyoto and Kobe. While both V+*hen* and V+*n* negation can be found in other Kansai varieties, as is also seen in Table 2, we refer to it here as Osaka-style negation. The reason behind this being that while there are speakers from other parts of Kansai area, namely from Kyoto, V+*hen* is not observed in their speech.

within the group is by large Standard Japanese. However, there have been instances where local variants (at all levels of linguistic structure) occurred in interactions[2].

Table 3 shows the distribution of all tokens of verbal negation (in raw numbers), according to: the context (meeting or free chat), politeness (presence or absence of polite marking on the utterance) and reference (to self or other).

	Politeness		Reference: self or other		Context	
	Polite	Plain	Self	Other	Meeting	Free chat
Osaka Japanese	0	19	1	18	1	18
Standard Japanese	98	184	175	107	109	175
Total	98	203	176	125	108	193

Table 3. Distribution of all verbal negation according to politeness of the utterance, reference to self or other and interactional context.

The distributional data alone shows that the use of Osaka-style negation in this CofP is limited to the informal context of free chat, and is used in utterances with no overt polite marking, that refer to some other. There is one exception to this, and in this particular interaction the use of Osaka-style negation is noticed and actively policed, as we will observe in the extract below. All other exchanges in the corpus containing Osaka-style negation went unnoticed. This again supports our claim that there seems to be an agreed-upon meaning, with which members of The Club use Osaka-style negation. The interaction in Extract 1 takes place between three members of The Club – Miho (Tokyo), Naoko (Nagoya), and Emi (Osaka). There were 8 women present altogether during this meeting, and the members were discussing the agenda for the upcoming months, specifically focusing on organizing a piano recital. Miho is the one responsible for checking and organizing guest numbers, and the discussion on how many people can be expected ensues. In all extracts the following conventions are used: = marks are used for latched utterances, [] brackets for overlapping speech, - for interrupted utterances, and : for lengthened sounds; nonstandard variants are underlined, Standard Japanese variants are **bold**, and verbs marked with honorification are shaded, as they are also relevant for the discussion of this interaction.

Extract 1

1. M: sore ja::,nan nin gurai kuru deshoo
        So, well, how many people are coming?

2. N: nijuu kana=
        Maybe twenty…

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[2] Although this paper focuses on negation, this was also observed for a number of other linguistic features – common and implicitly agreed-upon policy, especially during meetings, seemed to be communicating using Standard Japanese morpho-syntactic and lexical features

3. E: =nijuu made <u>ikahen</u> to omoukedo-
        I don't think it will come up to twenty

4. M: - a, Osaka-bendete kita na::
        Oh, Osaka Japanese came out.

5. {all laugh}

6. E: ja toriaezu nijuu ni [shimashoo]
        So for now let's make it twenty

7. M: [un, nijuu de]-
        Ok, twenty

In the process of mutual engagement, one aspect of the co-construction of membership in a CofP is members' ability or willingness to learn certain rules (Wenger 1998). Observing ways in which members, implicitly or explicitly, (re)negotiate the rules of conduct and the use of resources provides us with insights as to the inner hierarchy of the group, as well as the co-construction of identities and types of memberships. In Extract 1 the comment which occurs after one of the members uses Osaka-style negation in her speech, suggests that the use of dialectal negation is warranted in some contexts, but not others. Miho, who leads this conversation on the number of guests, is older than the other two members, and also has been a member of The Club longer. Her comment to Emi's use of Osaka-style negation can then be seen as an active use of her leading role of being the one who can 'teach' the correct use of resources. The reaction to this comment is laughter of all present members, followed by a swift return to the conversation that was interrupted. No offer of explanation, or indeed explicit repair, is offered by Emi, and no other comment is made by any other member, which might suggest the comment was warranted, no further discussion was necessary, and all present understood it in the way probably intended by the speaker. Clearly, this off-topic comment is seen by all members (including Emi and Miho) as a change of frame (Goffman 1986), where a temporary break occurs in the main line of interaction.

However, an implicit repair can be seen in Emi's response in line 6. She agrees to Naoko's suggestion of twenty guests coming to the recital, even though she initially suggested the number will not be as high in the line immediately preceding the off-topic exchange. She also switches from using plain form of verbs, which had been her default throughout this particular interaction up to this point, to a choice of addressee honorification (*shimashoo* 'let's make'). This can indeed be seen as a form of repair, though not explicitly stated, but rather in a way of temporarily shifting the subtle power relation in this interaction. While throughout this interaction Emi is comfortable in addressing Miho in plain (non-honorific) form, once some kind of in-group code is breached, there seems to be the need to employ politeness as one measure of repair, if only temporary.

This exchange points, yet again, to the mutual co-construction of identities within The Club, where some members are positioned and (re)position themselves as mentors, or possibly core members, while others, those still learning the norms and ideologies, like Emi, are perhaps more peripheral. Whether or not this is a process that needs to be completed, that is whether Emi will ever (choose to) construct her identity as a core member, or whether (and to what extent) she will be construed as such by other members is an entirely different matter.

We will now focus on the exchanges where the switch to local Osaka variant went unnoticed, to show the kind of meaning that is indexed by these variants.

'Us' and 'them'

Using linguistic resources to draw boundaries between 'us' and 'them' is one of the more often employed practices to include and exclude, to assert ones place within one community but not another, as well as to compare ourselves to others. In the group under discussion the discourse used when (re)creating the us-them boundaries (most notably explicated in the discussions of Dutch versus Japanese, but not only) points to the fact that making this distinction is an important component of asserting and foregrounding group identity (cf. Meinhoff & Galasinski 2008). With respect to the use of Osaka-style negation, we will explore how its use is also employed to serve this purpose in interactions.

We will discuss three extracts from the dataset. First one is the most typical of this community – the use of Osaka-style negation delimits the boundary between 'us' Japanese, and 'them' Dutch, and is found in the speech of a person from Osaka[3]; the second example also shows a case where Osaka-style negation is used to mark the boundary between 'us' Japanese, and 'them' Dutch, but this time is found in the speech of a woman originally from Tokyo; the third extract shows a more dynamic boundary-making practice, where Osaka-style negation is used to delimit boundaries between 'us' and 'them', but ones that are not as clearly drawn with respect o different nationalities. All uses of Osaka-style negation, in addition to reasserting the in/out-group boundaries, are also connected with strong negative evaluation of the person or event described.

Extract 2 is taken from a conversation between Tomoko (Tokyo), Mai (Tokyo) and Yui (Osaka). The discussion takes place after one of the Japanese classes in a community centre. I participated in the class, and was allowed to stay on and record a conversation between three club members. Throughout the conversation Osaka-style negation V+*n* occurs once, and V+*hen* three times, two of which are discussed here: one in Extract 2 and one in Extract 3. The first occurrence is found in the speech of Tomoko, who is originally from Osaka, the second one appears in the speech of Yui from Tokyo. This is not unusual in this CofP– local

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[3] It is important to remember here that also for speakers of Osaka Japanese in this CofP the default (as far as we can observe in our dataset) with regards to the use of negation is Standard Japanese.

Osaka-style negation can be found in the speech of majority of the members, regardless of their place of origin.

Extract 2

1. Y: kocchi no sakanawa suki ja nai
         I don't like the fish here

2. A: e nande desu-
         Why is that?

3. Y: -nan to naku nihon no hoo ga=
         Somehow [the fish] in Japan…

4. T: =kirei ni kirimi ni natteru {laughs}
         Is cut neatly

5. Y: nankanama de taberu no ga
         Somehow eating it raw

6.   chotto warui kedo
         It's a bit bad, but

7.   (inc.)

8.   osashimi toka
         For example sashimi

9. M: un un
         yeah, yeah

10. Y: demo yappari
         But clearly

11.   shinsen da to no wakarun da kedo
         I understand that it's fresh

12.   nanka
         somehow…

(…)

13.   daremo
         nobody

14.   sashimi de taberareru yo te itte <u>kuren </u>kara
         Tells you 'you can eat this as sashimi'

14

15.   moo sashimi wa**tabenai** ne
        I don't eat sashimi anymore

14 out of 19 tokens of dialectal negation occur in this kind of context – in conversations
where the Japanese and the Dutch, or the Japanese and Dutch ways are being compared and
contrasted, with negative evaluation of the Dutch ways presented in a more or less explicit
way. First occurrence of Osaka-style negation can be seen in line 14, where Yui comments on
the difficulty of buying fish for sashimi, as nobody here (i.e. in The Netherlands) tells you if
the fish is suitable for sashimi. Throughout the chat all the ladies compare the Japanese and
the Dutch ways of preparing, selling, and afterwards also eating fish and meat, with an
underlying message that it is different and better 'back home'. Osaka-style negation marked
on the verb occurs further two times in a similar context, this time used by speakers of Tokyo
variety of Japanese. Notice also the immediate use of SJ negation by Yui in line 15, when she
refers to herself. It is especially interesting, since Yui herself is from Osaka.

Extract 3 is taken from the same interaction, and it occurs later on in the discussion. Osaka-
style negation is found in the speech of Mai, a speaker of Tokyo variety of Japanese.

Extract 3

1. M: inu ni totte wa sugoku yasashii kuni {laughs}
        It is a very good country for dogs

2. T: watashi wa orandajin ga sugoku suki
        I like the Dutch people very much

3.   nanka shissoo de
        somehow, modest,

4.   shoojiki de
        honest,

5.   shinsetsuna ki ga shimasu
        and they seem kind

6.   ningen wa nihonjin yori
        People in here, more so than the Japanese,

7.   orandajin no hoo ga hito ga ii yoo na ki ga shimasu
        the Dutch make the impression of being good people

8.   kin- gokinjo-san toka ne
        neigh- people in the neighbourhood

9.   koko ni kiteru toka orandajin mo sugoku shinsetsu desu=
        Dutch people who come here are also very kind

10. M: =a koko ni kiteru hito wa ne
        Ah, yes, people who come here

11.   demo nanka
        but, somehow,

12.   'hello'mo <u>iwahen</u> hito mo atta koto aru
        I have also met people who don't even say 'hello'

13.   orandajin ne
        Dutch people

Still talking about the good and bad sides of living in The Netherlands, Mai says that The Netherlands are a good country for dogs (line 1) – she herself has a dog, and enjoys going for walks with it. Later on she also says it is nice because there is so much greenery, and so the dogs can run around. Laughter at the end of that comment might suggest that she finds it difficult to come up with any good sides of living here, and this is the only thing she can think of, that she would consider a positive. This is also apparent throughout the conversation in her numerous comments, as well as in her partial rebuttal of Tomoko's comments in lines 2 through 9, where Tomoko says how fond she is of the Dutch, and how much they appear friendlier and kinder than people in Japan. In Lines 10-12 Mai comments on that saying that while people who come here (i.e. to the community centre to learn Japanese with the ladies) are nice, she has also met people who don't even say hello. This is where her use of Osaka-style negation (V+*hen* in *iwahen* '(they) don't say') appears.

Extract 4 comes from a casual conversation between three club members. One of the more heavily explored topics was again that of the differences between the Japanese and the Dutch, but this time on a number of occasions the Dutch were actually compared to the people from Osaka. This is significant, as one of the participants – Nao – comes from Osaka and strongly identifies with the city. Akiko and Kana are both from Tokyo.

<u>Extract 4:</u>

1. N: Osaka wa nanka [soo da to **omowanai**]
       In Osaka, well, I don't think it's like this

2. A: [nanka Osaka tabun soo] ja nai to omou kedo
       Well, I think it's not like this in Osaka

3.   {A & N laugh}

4. A: nanka (.)
       well

5.   aisoo ga Orandajin no hoo ga ii
        Dutch people are better at greetings

6. K: soo da yo ne
        That's right, isn't it?

7.   nikoniko shiteru shi, hanashi kaketekureru shi
        They smile, start conversations

        {A turns to N}

8. A: kedo sore ga soo **kanjinai**?
        But you don't feel that way?

9. N: watashi wa dakara
        So, that's why, for me

10.   kekko onnaji yoo na kanji ga shite
        I feel pretty much the same

11.   gyaku ni Igirisu ni itta toki ni sugoi
        On the other hand when I went to England (it was) incredible

12.   hyoojoo <u>kawarahen </u>shi
        They don't change facial expressions

13.   nanka
        somehow

14.   nanimo iwazu tada **matteru**
        Just waiting, without a word

15.   densha de
        on the train

16.   watashi wa zutto **shabetteru** no-
        I was talking all the time

17. A: - ara
        wow

18.   kono hito okotteru no ka
        Are these people angry?

19.   {all laugh}

In line 1 of this extract Nao suggests that people in Osaka are as friendly as people in The Netherlands – she responds to Akiko's previous comments earlier on in the interaction about people in Japan and people in The Netherlands being very different in terms of how friendly and approachable they are. Yet again, in expressing her opinion about her hometown (Osaka) Nao, perhaps unexpectedly, uses Standard Japanese. She hesitated noticeably before she answered, which probably prompted Akiko to also suggest that Osaka might be a different case (line 2). Both Akiko and Kana agree, here and throughout the conversation, that the biggest difference between people in Japan and in The Netherlands is that people in The Netherlands smile more, start conversations with strangers (see lines 5-7), and are generally much more open than the Japanese. They also judge these qualities as positive, and ones that make living in The Netherlands easier than it would have been otherwise. Nao strongly identifies with Osaka, and this has been apparent in a number of times throughout the conversation, with her comments that imply Osaka is different than the rest of Japan, and therefore she enjoyed living there. In her reference to Osaka we do not see a topic-induced shift into dialect (as one might have expected), but dialectal negation appears for the first time in line 12, where Nao describes English people and their ways in contrast to Osakans and the Dutch. Similarly to Yui, in Extract 2, Nao uses SJ negation to refer to herself (V+*nai* in *omowanai* (I) don't think), while Osaka-style negation to refer to an out-group member's behaviour (V+*hen* in *kawarahen* 'don't change'). Nao clearly aligns herself with the kinds of people who do smile, say 'hello' and are generally friendly, which in her experience the Osakans and the Dutch are, but the English are not.

DISCUSSION

The making of boundaries

As has been discussed in other research (cf. Ball 2004; Strycharz 2012), local variants of Japanese, rather than indexing a straightforward identification with a certain locale, are used to mark the in/out-group boundaries in a dynamic way. Two factors play a key role in this (re)making of boundaries in the CofP discussed here: self-identification with specific groups of people and their behaviour, and evaluation of these groups of people. Neutral remarks about the Dutch alone don't seem to warrant the use of Osaka-style negation, but both factors (i.e. out-group marking and negative evaluation) need to be present.

The significance of in/out-groupness, or *uchi* and *soto*, has been discussed in numerous research on Japanese culture and language (e.g. Bachnik 1994). What is crucial about the understanding of how the *uchi-soto* boundaries are being (re)asserted is that they are not in any way static.

> The Japanese are known to differentiate their behaviour by whether the situation is defined as *uchi* or *soto*... Where the demarcation line is drawn varies widely: it may be inside vs. outside an individual person, a family, a group of playmates, a school, a company, a village or a nation. It is suggestive that the term *uchi* is used colloquially

to refer to one's house, family or family member, and the shop or company where one works. The essential point, however, is that the *uchi-soto* distinction is drawn not by social structure, but by constantly varying situations. (Lebra 1976:112)

The negotiation of *uchi* and *soto* marking needs to therefore be seen as ongoing and subject to (re)evaluation and change. Not only are these boundaries different for different people, but it is also clear that they can be fluid for any given speaker.

The crucial difference between the uses of Osaka-style negation in our sample, and discussions of local variants used for similar kind of work in other research, is the reaproppriation of dialectal variants to mark the *soto* out-groupness, rather than *uchi* in-groupness. This is indeed unexpected, as the local variants are instinctively more likely to occur in contexts where belonging is being foregrounded, and where intimacy or closeness is underlined (see e.g. Ball 2004). Here, however, the indexicality of local variant is being reevaluated, as the CofP consists of women from different places throughout Japan. We can see the actual process of meaning-making with regards to linguistic resources at hand, specific for this CofP. Regardless of their place of origin, the women seem to have agreed upon the use of SJ as the common means of communicating, and Osaka-style negation is used to mark the *soto*, out-group member, the 'other', who not only differs from 'us', but whose behaviour we evaluate negatively. This is visible in the prototypical uses of Osaka-style negation, where the Dutch are being compared to and contrasted with the Japanese (as in Extracts 2 and 3), but also in a more dynamic way, where the boundaries are being reasserted along the lines of self-identification with those who not only are like us, but whose behaviour is likeable and agreeable to us (as in Extract 4), regardless of nationality. Extract 4 presents a unique example in the corpus, where the intra-Japanese differences are being foregrounded, and dialect is used to mark these foregrounded distinctions. However, even though Nao (Extract 4) backgrounds the CofP identity (Japanese women in The Netherlands), and foregrounds her local identity (Osakan), she nonetheless plays by the rules of thisCofP using Osaka-style negation to refer to the 'other', *soto* members.

It is also worth noting that both Nao and Yui (Extract 4 and 2), who are originally from Osaka, use SJ negation to refer to themselves, which again shows that Osaka-style negation is reserved to a different kind of indexical meaning. Extract 1, where the 'incorrect' use of Osaka-style negation is being actively policed, provides yet another source of support for this interpretation.

Osaka Japanese – identities, indexicality and the process of meaning-making

Specific reasons for using Osaka-style variant, as opposed to any other variant, are not clear. However, the status and popular images associated with Osaka-style Japanese within Japan (also represented in the wider discourses in the media) might shed some light on the choice of Osaka-style variants when delimiting the us-them boundary simultaneously negatively evaluating some 'other'. Osaka variety of Japanese is (at least to some degree) widely

recognized across Japan (Onoe 1999; Strycharz 2012), and its ethnolinguistic vitality (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor 1977) is relatively high (Strycharz 2012). Osaka-style negation V+*hen* is widely recognized as one of the key features associated with Osaka variety of Japanese. Osaka Japanese overall is widely represented in Japanese media in comedy shows, where one recognizable (and oft-represented) character is that of an *Osaka-no obachan* (Osaka Auntie – see e.g. SturtzSreetharan 2008; Strycharz 2012), who is a loud-mouthed, complaining lady, very much unlike the stereotypical Japanese 'womanly woman'. It is therefore possible that the speakers of this CofP are tapping into this particular image, employing a linguistic stereotype (Osaka-style negation) to, essentially, complain about their life in The Netherlands, or about any other social distinctions.

CONCLUSION

I have discussed how this community shapes its practices and ideologies, and, effectively, how the members learn to negotiate the commonly understood meanings. As an example of such commonly developed linguistic practices, I showed an unexpected use of local (Osaka-style) negation as an interactional device to mark boundaries between the in-group and the out-group.

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