Finding Mr Right: New Looks at Gendered Modernity in Japanese Televised Romances

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Finding Mr Right: New Looks at Gendered Modernity in Japanese Televised Romances

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Language standardization lies at the heart of Japanese modernity. And numerous aspects of language development intended to fit the modern Japanese state intersect to regiment the linguistic imaginary regarding women's speech. Focus on Yamanote Tokyo-based joseigo *('women's language'), Standard Japanese and certain urban Kansai dialects in popular text and televisual representations of romantic heroines in geographically and linguistically peripheral areas of Japan has been documented, but has left the issue of linguistic masculinity and the romantic hero unexplored. The relation of male speakers to* hyōjungo *was assumed and 'masculine' speaking practices as broadcast in public space have received little attention despite a popular understanding that certain forms (e.g.,* ore *'I', and assertive sentence final particle* zo) *are 'masculine' in effect. Here, we examine images of manly men in contemporary romantic representations set in dialect-speaking areas to illustrate the linkages between the romantic hero and the use of Standard Japanese masculine forms and to offer insight into the underexplored set of possibilities for male speakers circulated in popular media.*

Introduction

Heroes, heroines, and other characters in televised dramas use language in ways that often reflect what research has revealed about the relationships of language style and social life found in their respective societies. In so doing, the television provides its viewers 'a broader cultural ideology of space'[1] which in the case of Japan valorizes Tokyo-based Standard Japanese at the expense of other varieties. Typically, the use of Standard Japanese creates spaces of officialdom or of a middle-class Tokyo-centric norm, while dialect use may be stifled (or even mocked) in deference to the standard or, conversely, used in the construction of overtly local identities. How these varieties are employed in the creation of heteronormative romantic dramas is the subject of our paper.

In the case of Japan, language standardization was seen to lie at the heart of modernity from the beginning of its nation-building projects in the Meiji period (1868–1912). Numerous aspects of language development sought to fit the new modern citizen for his or her – but mostly his – role in the modern Japanese state and a uniform national language was wrought from what had been a cacophony of regional and other dialects.[2]

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[1]McCarthy, *Ambient Television*, 2.
[2]Twine, *Language and the Modern State*; Inoue, 'Gender, Language, and Modernity'; Nakamura, *Onna kotoba*, 98–109. See also Robins, 'Revisiting Year One'.

At the same time, these standardizing projects intersected with other social projects (e.g., the construction of *ryōsai kenbo*, 'good wife, wise mother', ideologies) to regiment the linguistic imaginary regarding women's speech.[3] The construct referred to as Japanese 'women's language' emerges along with modernity, then, overtly constructed along with Standard Japanese (and both based on the speech of the new middle-class in the Yamanote area of Tokyo) and promulgated during the Meiji era.[4] Today, Standard Japanese femininity – and by ideological extension, all Japanese linguistic femininity – is held to be marked by a number of linguistic elements, including pronouns and sentence-final particles (SFPs).[5]

Shibamoto-Smith and Occhi's research on the speech of heroines in romantic dramas shows that they preferentially speak Standard Japanese or the Keihanshin dialects – prestigious urban dialects of Osaka, Kyoto and Kobe.[6] The centrality of *joseigo*, Standard Japanese and certain urban Kansai dialects in popular text and televisual representations of romantic heroines in dialect-speaking areas of Japan[7] has left no doubt that the girl who wants to get her man should try to speak in Standard Japanese or one of the few other culturally acceptable (modern, urban) dialects.

This seems a sufficiently strong tendency for Shibamoto-Smith and Occhi to have tentatively posited a range of acceptability for speech varieties they dubbed a 'modernity gradient' for understanding how likely a given female character may be to inhabit the role of central romantic heroine.[8] The gradient draws on the work of Susan Gal,[9] who noted that in one small community in Austria, it was *young women* who were more advanced in a shift from Hungarian to German (the prestige language) than either older people or young men. Gal argued that this was based on young women's desire to distance themselves from a peasant identity and to set themselves onto a more modern, urban trajectory, even if only symbolically, through speech. Gal concluded that to understand women's roles in speaking, we need to investigate *what women want to express about themselves in speech*.[10]

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[3]Endō, 'Dorama no kotoba'; Inoue, 'Gender, Language, and Modernity'; Inoue, *Vicarious Language*; Nakamura, *Onna kotoba*.

[4]Inoue, *Vicarious Language*; Nakamura, *Onna kotoba*.

[5]Shibamoto-Smith, 'Gendered Structures'; Okamoto, 'Ideology in Linguistic Practice'; Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith, 'Constructing Linguistic Femininity'.

[6]In addition to the sources mentioned in the previous note, see also Shibamoto-Smith and Occhi, 'The Green Leaves'.

[7]Shibamoto-Smith, 'Language and Gender'; Shibamoto-Smith and Occhi, 'The Green Leaves'; Occhi and Shibamoto-Smith, 'Real Women'; Occhi, 'Dialect Speakers'; Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith 'Constructing Linguistic Femininity'.

[8]Shibamoto-Smith and Occhi 'The Green Leaves'. Use of the term 'modernity' derives from our understanding of the sociolinguistic emphasis on the authentic as outlined in Bucholtz, 'Sociolinguistic Nostalgia', 399; in the case of Japan as elsewhere, this locates the dialect speaker outside of the core sites of national modernity: the cities. Japanese language and culture theorist Yasuda, in '"Kokugo" to "Hōgen"', 34–35, also notes that from the earliest modern scholarship on Japanese dialects, one of the recurring themes has been that dialects are important because 'ancient forms remain in dialects' (*hōgen ni kogo ga nokoru*); as time went on, this rather easily slipped over into the stance that dialects are 'behind the times' (*okurete iru*). In *ren'ai dorama* 'romantic dramas', previous research has shown that the heroines should not be backward or 'behind the times'; indeed, they are typically constructed as maximally remote from the peripheral or *okurete iru*, and this is generally reflected in their use of Standard Japanese or a Keihanshin dialect. It is in the sense of 'not backward' that we here use the term 'modern' for the proposed gradient.

[9]Gal, 'Peasant Men', 292.

[10]Ibid., 293, emphasis added.

Shibamoto-Smith's and Occhi's findings for Japanese televisual dramas indicated that the closer a female character's speech was to the central urban dialects of Tokyo or the Keihanshin region (to the left side of the gradient in Figure 1), the more likely she was to find herself in the role of Ms Right.

Female characters linguistically inhabiting the Japanese periphery were less likely to do so.[11] This work, however, has left the issue of linguistic masculinity and the speech of the romantic hero unexplored. The relation of male speakers to *hyōjungo* has been assumed and 'masculine' speaking practices have received less attention in Japanese sociolinguistics than has feminine speech despite a popular understanding that certain forms, e.g., *ore* 'I', and assertive sentence final particle *zo*, are 'masculine' in effect.[12] This relative invisibility has particularly been the case throughout the post-World War II era, as prior models of the 'manly man' have lost their allure.[13] But, as with the tango, gendering takes two.[14] SturtzSreetharan has provided us with some clues as to how and where Japanese men – in her case, Kansai dialect speaking men – encode their masculinity in speech. Like Standard Japanese, masculinity in the Keihanshin Dialect cluster is marked by first person pronouns and sentence-final particles and is affected by stage in the lifecourse, social role, and the interactional demands of particular conversations.[15]

But as she makes very clear, the real speaking practices of men tend to be assumed rather than studied, and there are all too few empirical studies of men, especially men caught in the act of *being manly*. Here, we *assume* that romantic heroes engaged in heteronormative romances will, in fact, be acting manly; this assumption deserves, to be sure, further consideration in terms of Japanese cultural constructs and the current preferences for such extraordinarily *un*manly men as the awkward *otaku*[16] hero of the
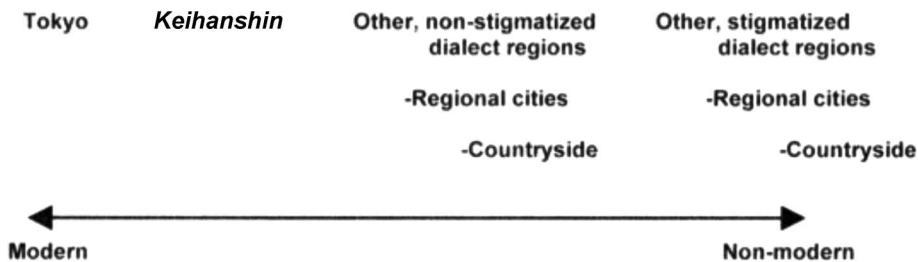

FIGURE 1. Modernity Gradient. From Shibamoto-Smith and Occhi, 'Green Leaves', 540.

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[11]Differences in the way non-Standard forms, even the high prestige forms of the Keihanshin region, are used to construct different kinds of feminine romantic centrality in love dramas are touched upon in Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith, 'Constructing Linguistic Femininity', where differences in romantic heroinehood as they are advanced in the 2005 NHK five-episode romantic drama *Koisuru Kyōto* by constructing a soft-spoken Kyoto dialect speaker as the central romantic heroine and opposing her, in one episode, to an Osaka dialect speaker, who is less successful in love, are discussed.

[12]This popular understanding is fundamental to developing popularly circulating stereotypes of 'characterological figures' (Agha, *Language and Social Relation*, 77) or *yakuwarigo*, 'role-typified language (Kinsui, *Vācharu nihongo*).

[13]Fujimura, 'Wakamono sedai'.

[14]Sturtz, '*Uwaki tte iu*'; SturtzSreetharan, 'Students, *sarariiman* (pl.), and Seniors'; SturtzSreetharan, 'Japanese Men's Linguistic Stereotypes'; SturtzSreetharan, 'From Student to Sarariiman'.

[15]SturtzSreetharan, 'I Read the *Nikkei*, Too'; SturtzSreetharan, 'Japanese Men's Linguistic Stereotypes'; SturtzSreetharan, '*Ore* and *omae*'.

[16]*Otaku* has a range of meaning, but for our purposes here, we may consider the nearest English equivalent to be a merging of 'gawky' and 'geeky'.

2004 novel *Densha otoko* [Train Man],[17] but we take it at present as a starting assumption. At a minimum, successful romantic heroes do tend to experience a happy ending.

We further assume that a look at romantic heroes in dramas constructed within the 'social-realist paradigm', intended to portray sufficiently realistic aspects of the society in which they are made to allow viewers to recognize them as their own, serve to help us understand what kinds of publicly circulating models of attractive men are available against which actual men may be matched.[18] More specifically, in considering men's language use in romance dramas, we are examining representations of speaking practice (along with other elements, such as locations where stories occur)which are intended to be 'proximate', that is, to be 'located within discourses … recognizable to viewers throughout the society in question'.[19] We also claim that, however much fictional representations do not serve as mechanical templates for real life lovers, they offer us an otherwise hard-to-access glimpse into what largely female viewers take as reasonable ways-of-being for men in love. Accordingly, in this paper, we explore the language practices of Mr Right in romantic representational contexts.

How Are Heroes Represented?

Japanese ideal heroines and heroes in print text category fiction tend to be a bit different from Western romantic heroines and heroes in that they are not typically described in great detail and, when they are described, they tend to be rather average, neither spectacularly attractive nor hyper-feminine or masculine.[20] That is, Japanese category romances don't describe heroines/heroes the way their western counterpart Harlequin or Mills and Boon texts do,[21] but they are picky about the way the principal lovers *talk*. To the extent that this latter selectivity is true of televisual romances as well, then the questions here are twofold: is it essential for romantic heroes to use Standard Japanese or some near counterpart, as it appears to be for romantic heroines? and, is it essential for romantic heroes to use 'strongly masculine' forms in their speech in the same fashion that romantic heroines use 'strongly feminine' ones?[22]

In terms of the question of where a romantic hero is 'best' located, Tokyo comes first. As Kinsui notes, 'heroes, classically, speak *hyōjungo* "Standard Japanese".'[23] According to Kinsui, from the late nineteenth century on, under Japan's nation-building programs, Standard Japanese, based on one style of Tokyo dialect, was circulated throughout the country via popular print media and subsequently through radio, film, and television. Ultimately, the notion that heroes speak Standard Japanese spread throughout the country. An alternate possibility for hero speech exists in the Keihanshin category of Kyoto, Osaka, and Kobe. This dialect area, as noted by both Shibatani and Kinsui,[24] was the *de facto* cultural center before the modern era and remains a high prestige region to the present.[25]

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[17]Fujimura, 'Wakamono sedai', 192. For a discussion in English of *Densha otoko* and its *otaku* protagonist, see Stevens, 'You Are What You Buy'.
[18]Castelló, Dobson and O'Donnell, 'Telling It Like It Is?'.
[19]Ibid., 467.
[20]Shibamoto-Smith, 'Language and Gender', 117.
[21]Radway, *Reading the Romance*.
[22]See, e.g., Mizumoto, 'Terebi dorama to jisshakai'.
[23]Kinsui, *Vācharu nihongo*, 51.
[24]Shibatani, *The Languages of Japan*, 185–186; Kinsui, *Vācharu nihongo*, 78–79.
[25]Shibamoto-Smith and Occhi, 'The Green Leaves'.

The finding that Tokyo or other prestige urban dialects are associated with hero speech makes sense in light of who the romantic heroes tend to be – *sarariiman* – but, although it is the *sarariiman* who is the most frequent 'hero' of televisual romances, and thus constructed as attractive to romantic heroines, other men also appear in that role, as we see below. One issue that arises is an issue of attractive masculinity vs. that of attractive economic stability. Certainly in terms of the latter, the Tokyo-based *sarariiman* with his feet planted on the *shusse kaidō* 'highway to [career] success' is the most immediately recognizable as implicitly desirable. Then, too, the *sarariiman* is the man who is known to be reliable and predictable, if only for his pre-dawn departures and midnight returns; he is conveniently out of the house and out of the way of his wife, but can be counted on to provide financial security.

However, even while providing for his family, many have noted the speed with which a married *sarariiman* becomes dependent on his wife for nurturance; indeed, some argue that a *sarariiman*'s wife is merely his mother and men can quickly give up the external trappings of masculinity when alone with their partners.[26] When cast in this light, one must consider how 'manly' a *sarariiman* really is. Nonetheless, we introduce the televisual *sarariiman* as a recognizably attractive prospective mate, on the one hand, while hinting that he may not be the most recognizably manly man, on the other. This assessment extends to his speech, for the polite Standard Japanese style associated with the *sarariiman* would not include heavily gender-marked features.

Let us, then, examine an example of *sarariiman* hero speech.

Love and the White-Collar Worker

The NTV Network's 2007 nighttime drama *Haken no hinkaku* ('The Dignity of the Temp') features Ōmae Haruko as Ms Right. Ōmae is an extraordinary temp, who never smiles, pulls her punches, or does overtime. Hirakawa notes that this 'unlovable' behavior stands in contraposition to the advice of many business manners books aimed at women in Ōmae's age and position.[27] As she starts her work at S&F Foods, whose wonderful slogan is 'eat the world with a fork & spoon', she quickly crosses swords (*à la* Harlequin or Mills & Boon) with Mr Right, regular (and elite) employee Shōji Takeshi. This drama explores the different attitudes toward temp workers and regular employees, especially the frictions in interpersonal relationships between the two groups. It also affords Shōji a context in which to fall in love. We introduce him as he arrives at work just as Ōmae does, and he attempts to assess her reaction to his (sudden, unannounced) kiss the last time they met (see Dialogue 1). Stereotypically masculine Standard Japanese forms are in boldface.

(1)   Takeshi, Haruko, and co-worker Kensuke

Takeshi:	
Ōmae-san. **Ore** ga daun shite ru aida ni, keiyakusho no saigo made, kogitsukete kureta tte kiita n da kedo . . .	Omae-san. I heard that while I was off sick [*daun* 'down'] you saw the contract through.

(continued)

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[26]Fujimura, 'Wakamono sedai', 195.
[27]Hirakawa, 'The Dignified Woman'.

Haruko:
  Keiyaku o nasatta no wa, Kirishima-buchō desu ga, sore ga nani ka?

It was Department Chief Kirishima who did the contract, but what's that to you?

Takeshi:
  Iya (いやッ) *kon'ya orei ga shitai n da kedo. Onaji kama no meshi daiichidan tte iu koto de fugu demo tabe ni ikanai ka?*

Oh no . . . . I'd like to [take you out to] thank you tonight. As a first stage [in our romance], would you go out for *fugu* 'blowfish' with me?

Haruko:
  Fugu.

Fugu.

Takeshi:
  Kirai?

Don't you like it?

Haruko:
  Shinu hodo suki desu.

I love it.

Takeshi:
  Haa (exhale) *Yokatta. Jaa..*

Phew (exhale). Good. Then . . .

Haruko:
  Demo Shōji-shunin to wa tabetaku arimasen.

But I don't want to eat [it] with you.

Takeshi:
  E? Nan de?

Huh? Why not?

Haruko:
  Jikyū sanzenman moratta to shite mo Shōji-shunin to wa tabetaku arimasen.

Even if they were paying me ¥30,000,000 an hour, I wouldn't want to eat [it] with you.

Takeshi:
  *E? Chu–ch–ch–ch–chotto matte, iya, ichiō, hora, anō . . . **oretachi**, aa iu koto ni natte, itta yo ne, okotte nai tte . . .*

What? W, w, wait, no, well, for the moment, look, well . . . we sort of are in this relationship. Didn't you say you weren't mad?

Haruko:
  Sono hen o tobimawatteru hae ga, tamatama kuchibiru ni tomatta kara tte, hae ni hara o tateru ningen ga imasu ka?

Is there anyone who gets mad if some fly that happens to be flying around in the area accidentally lands on their lips?

Takeshi:
  Hae?

Fly?

Haruko:
  Sō. Hae desu.

Yes. Fly.

Takeshi:
  *Chotto **matteee! Ore** ga hae nara, anta denshinbashira **da! Ore** datte tamatama, tamatama denshinbashira ni butsukatta dake **da**!*

Wait just a minute! If I'm a fly, you're a telephone pole. I, too, just accidentally happened to bump into a telephone pole.

Kensuke:
  Shōji-san . . . ochitsuite

Shoji-san . . . calm down.

Takeshi:
  ***Tomeru na**, Ken-chan. Hae yobawari sareta n **da zo**! Dare ga **omae** nan ka!? Dare ga tokkuri nan ka? Dare ga denshinbashira nan ka?*

Don't stop me, Ken. I was called a fly! Who are you? Who's the turtleneck [wearer]?[28] Who's the telephone pole?

It is noteworthy that there are few very masculine features present in his speech. We note the asymmetry in politeness (plain forms for him vs. *desu*/∼ *masu* forms for Haruko), and the use of *ore*, the strongly masculine first person pronoun. But for the most part, his

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[28]*Tokkuri* is, literally, a sake bottle with an attenuated mouth; it is used to refer to women who wear turtleneck sweaters, as Ōmae Haruko commonly does.

language is relatively neutral – impressively so given the rise in his volume and apparent irritation in the face of her dismissive reaction. This data aligns with earlier findings that, in fact, the *sarariiman* in Japan is the picture of male normativity, at least with regard to the career contexts for Mr Right. However, it would appear that their linguistic practices are actually in contradiction to stereotypical notions of male speech as assertive, forceful, and filled with unmitigated, authoritative forms.[29] Instead, 'their speech styles are relatively polite . . . , correct, and above all (gender) neutral'.[30] And, indeed, it is not until goaded into a rage by the woman he is coming to love that we see a significant increase in forcefully masculine forms, with *tomeru na* (the bald imperative 'don't stop [me]'), *da zo* (the plain copular form, associated with men's rather than women's speech + the strongly masculine sentence final particle *zo*), and second person pronoun *omae* (also associated with sexist men's usage toward women).

Data indicating that romantic hero *sarariiman* are not the most masculine speakers coincide with SturtzSreetharan's data on Kansai men's speech. Even if they do represent hegemonic masculinity they apparently practice it through strongly masculine linguistic manifestations neither in real life nor as they are represented on TV. In fact, ethnographic interviews show that real people may not know how masculine men speak either. SturtzSreetharan has found that, while women identified stereotypical masculine forms of Standard Japanese speech (e.g., *ore*, *omae*, *zo*), they denied knowledge of any men who spoke this way.[31] *Sarariiman*, as portrayed in the post-*torendii dorama* that comprise our data, may be one kind of Mr Right, and they express their 'rightness' through consistent use of Standard Japanese (or, in a handful of cases, one of the Keihanshin dialect complex), but they do not tend to express this through strongly masculine speech forms.

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, real *sarariiman* may not present themselves publicly with the most masculine persona; this coincides with Sturtz-Sreetharan's findings that *sarariiman* are not strongly masculine in their speaking practices, even though they have managed to circulate ideologically as representing hegemonic masculinity.[32] This very contradiction needs to be explored – *sarariiman* may embody hegemonic masculinity in terms of political-economic or symbolic masculinity, but *linguistically* masculine men may need to be sought elsewhere.

At this point, however, we are left to conclude that we do not know much about the strongly *masculine* varieties of Standard Japanese that form the basis of publicly circulated stereotypes and their relationship to romantic attractiveness, but that insofar as our romantic heroes are *sarariiman*, Standard Japanese (or the counterpart Kansai forms) seem to be the order of the day. However, not every hero lives in Tokyo. Let us, then, explore what happens in more peripheral locales.

Regional Romeos

Our next data is taken from *Wakaba*, a 2005 NHK TV morning drama set in two very different parts of 'regional' Japan – Miyazaki and Kobe. Wakaba was born in Kobe and lived there until the 1995 earthquake, in which her architect father was killed; subsequently, the family (Wakaba, her younger brother, and mother) returned to the

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[29]Kiesling, 'Men's Identities and Sociolinguistic Variation.'
[30]SturtzSreetharan, 'Gentlemanly Gender?', 88.
[31]SturtzSreetharan, 'Gentlemanly Gender?'.
[32]Roberson & Suzuki, *Men and Masculinities*.

mother's home in Obi, Miyazaki prefecture, where Wakaba finished junior high school, high school, and as the series begins, is about to graduate from college. A plot twist will then take her back to Kobe for her first post-college job. Wakaba has two suitors, one located in Miyazaki, where she spent her adolescence and college years, and one she meets after moving (back) to Kobe to apprentice at a nursery business.

Jun'ichi (Wakaba's Miyazaki suitor) is the son of a local farmer who will inherit his family's farm; he proposes first. Firmly rooted in the Miyazaki locale, he speaks Miyazaki dialect. Wakaba had been alerted that he wanted to marry her by a friend who heard his drunken confession at a party on some previous evening. In Dialogue (2), Jun'ichi proposes over a gift of some peppers (*piiman*) from his farm. In this transcript, the bold forms are Miyazaki dialect and the underlined forms are forms that are the same across Kyushu and Kansai dialects. We determine their alignment (that is Kyushu or Kansai) by context; accordingly all bold *and* underlined forms are here counted as Miyazaki dialect forms.

(2)   Wakaba and Jun'ichi

Jun'ichi:
> *Yo* (Wakaba nods) . . . *A, kore. Uchi de toreta piiman. Tabete.*

Hi. Oh, here. [These are] peppers from our place. Try them

Wakaba:
> *Eh? . . . Aa, arigato.* (Wakaba reaches for the basket, Jun'ichi grabs her hand)

What? Oh, thanks.

Jun'ichi:
> *Ke..Ke . . .*

W-w-wo . . .

Wakaba:
> *Eh?*

What?

Jun'ichi:
> *Kekkon **senka**? Ore wa mae kara <u>kangae totta</u> **to yo**. Daigaku sotsugyō shitara, omae ni puroposu shite, kekkon shiyo tte.*

Won't you marry me? I've been thinking about you [as my bride] for a while. [Thinking] when I graduate from college, I'll propose and we'll get married.

Wakaba:
> *Chotto matte. Kekkon tte, atashi . . .*[33]

Wait a minute, marriage, I . . .

Jun'ichi:
> *. . . Matte kure. Zenbu kiite kure. Ii <u>yaroo</u>?* (Wakaba nods, Jun'ichi drops her hand) *Daigaku ni haitte, omae no koto mite, hitome de ki ni itta **to yo**, ore wa. Genki de, itsumo akarukute, **konge** no anata*[34] *to issho ni kurasetara **donge** shiawase ka na tte. Isshō omae no egao o mitai to genki ga hoshii **to yo**. Ore ga genki <u>yattara</u> omae o shiawase ni suru jishin ga aru. Kekkon shite kure. Kono tōri*

Wait. Hear me out. Okay? When I got to college and saw you, I liked you right away. You're lively and always upbeat, and I thought if I could be with you how happy I would be. I want [always] to have your smiling face and your vitality (*genki*). If I'm happy (*genki*),[35] I'm confident I'll make you happy. Marry me. I'm begging you.

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[33]Here, Wakaba uses *atashi* 'I', a Standard Japanese feminine pronoun; this serves as a reminder that previous research has shown that televisual representations of even very regional romantic heroines appear to require adherence to Standard Japanese and its femininity codes; Shibamoto-Smith and Occhi, 'Green Leaves'.

[34]According to informants from Miyazaki, *anta* rather than the Standard Japanese *anata* would be the proper dialect form; note also that Jun'ichi uses the more intimate and old-fashioned *omae* both before and after this single use of the formal and standard *anata*.

[35]Presumably made happy by Wakaba's smiling face.

Jun'ichi's pronouns are Standard Japanese and interesting: *ore* and *omae*,[36] though he does use *anata*[37] once, too.

Wakaba's other suitor is Kobe architect Masaya. His father travels internationally on business while his mother writes for a travel magazine and cares for lodgers (including Wakaba) in their spacious Meiji-period Western style home. Masaya is thus a much more urbane young man who starts off as a company employee (*sarariiman*), but ultimately goes independent and opens his own architect's office. He speaks Kobe dialect, one of the Keihanshin cluster. He proposes to Wakaba while in hospital, having been injured in a typhoon. In this transcript, the Kobe dialect exclusive features are in boldface, and the overlapped (Kansai-Kyushu) features are underlined. These, too, are contextually determined to be Kobe dialect features.

(3) Wakaba and Masaya at the hospital

Masaya:
*Tama ni wa kega suru **n** mo **warunai na.***   It's not so bad to be injured every once in a while.

Wakaba:
Nani iu ton!?[38]   What are you saying?

Masaya:
Yatto egao ga modotta.   Your smile finally returned.

Wakaba:
Aa ... tanjōbi purezento wasurete kita.   Ah. I forgot your birthday present.

Masaya:
A. Purezento yattara hoka no hoshii mon ga aru.   Oh, if it's a present, there's something else I want.

Wakaba:
Nani?   What?

Masaya:
*Kimi ya. Kekkon **seehen** ka?*   You. Won't you marry me?

Wakaba:
Kekkon?   Marriage?

Masaya:
Ore wa Takahara Wakaba to kekkon shitai.   I want to marry Wakaba Takahara.

Both Jun'ichi and Masaya speak dialect. Wakaba – are we surprised? – marries Masaya.

Men and the Modernity Gradient

Earlier, we noted the findings of Shibamoto-Smith and Occhi who, with respect to linguistic femininity and the attractive romantic heroine, conclude that the real Ms Rights of the world tend toward the most cosmopolitan speech, Standard Japanese, or its next nearest equivalents, the Keihanshin dialect cluster. Here, we extend that tentative frame for detecting who might qualify, linguistically, to be the central romantic figure to include romantic hero candidates as well, arguing that male characters whose speech falls on the left side of the gradient will be more likely to get the girl.

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[36]Which is not a good predictor of romantic success for men; Shibamoto-Smith, *Language and Gender*, 124.
[37]But not the pronoun currently most acceptable to women, *kimi*; see Dialogue (3).
[38]Wakaba's *-ton* (Standard Japanese progressive *-te iru*) is also a Kobe dialect form.

But what about the poor guy from the periphery? Looking back at Wakaba's unsuccessful Miyazaki suitor, Jun'ichi, we learn that he did, in the end, get married, but it was through an *omiai* arrangement – out of favor with most young Japanese these days – and viewers were never introduced to his bride. There are, however, more promising examples of rural fellows who get the heroine, despite their dialectal speech. One of these is Iguchi Shōhei, a wall plasterer from northernmost Honshu and a speaker of the stigmatized Aomori dialect.

Our data here, previously discussed by Occhi from the perspective of dialect in media more generally,[39] was taken from the fall 2006 Fuji TV drama *Yama onna/kabe onna* (Mountain Woman/Wall Woman).[40] As the title may suggest, the main theme of this romantic comedy/drama is the imagined conflict between busty and flat-chested women, set in a classy Tokyo department store. The top salesperson and main character (Ms Right) is the tall, beautiful Aoyagi Megumi, a native Aomorian, who switches between flawless Standard Japanese at work and the highly stigmatized and rough northern Tsugaru (Aomori) dialect with fellow dialectal speakers in her evening hangout, the *Dainingu Kafe* (Dining Cafe).[41] Her childhood friend, and, ultimately, her Mr Right – Iguchi – seems unable to code-switch at all, despite the fact that he travels around Japan and indeed the world as an artist who specializes in installing decorative and traditionally inspired walls. To Megumi's dismay, he is the subject of harsh criticism when he addresses attendees of an exhibit of his work at her department store. In Dialogue (4), Tsugaru dialect features are in boldface.

(4)   Iguchi Shōhei and Megumi in Tokyo

Iguchi: *Shakank**ō**ⁿ no Ig**ⁿ**uchi desu. Iyaiya, **kotta** na hitomae de shaberu nante hajimete nan de-* [laugh] *iya- nani shabettara ii n **dabe ga***	I'm Iguchi the plasterer, um, it's the first time for me to speak in front of a lotta people like this . . . hm, what the heck should I say?
Megumi: *Iguchi . . . .*	
Iguchi: *Shakan **ttsū** no wa Asuka jidai no koro kara aru daiku to narabu dentōteki na shokugyō **da ja, Ora**[42] **daba** mainichi **tschi** to kakutō shite kurō **shitera.** A- Kyōto juraku tsuchi to Awaji asagi tsuchi o haigō shitara*	Plastering walls is a craft from the Asuka era (552–645 AD), yeah, it's a traditional profession alongside carpentry. For a guy like me, it's a daily struggle fighting with the mud . . . oh, and if it's a compound of Kyoto Shuraku mud and Awaji pale yellow mud . . .

(continued)

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[39]Occhi, 'Dialect Speakers'.
[40]A reference to the small breast size of the central romantic heroine *vs.* other women at her workplace.
[41]Megumi's ability to code-switch, which is perfectly aligned to setting, stresses the private/public dimension for variety choice; we argue that this is yet another way in which publicly circulated language sends audiences normativizing messages, here the message being that the best romantic heroines keep theirs out of the public space for language.
[42]The masculinity characteristics of first-person[male] *ore* (here, dialect variant *ora*) are beyond the scope of this paper; it should be noted, however, that although all our heroes use *ore* rather than the less hyper-masculine *boku* in informal interactions, only Iguchi uses a dialect variant of this form.

[Audience mumble that they can't understand him, ask if he's a foreigner, laugh]

Megumi:

Kare ga shabete iru no wa Tsugaru-ben desu. Wakarinikui to omoimasu ga, kiite agete kudasai. Kare wa isshōkenmei hanashite ru n desukara!	What he's speaking is Tsugaru dialect. I think it's hard to understand, but please listen because he's speaking from the heart!

To be sure, that Iguchi turns out to be the central romantic hero in this drama contradicts what we have assumed about the centrality of Standard Japanese-speaking *sarariiman* in the romance and marriage stakes in contemporary Japan. But he is, and it is obvious from the beginning of the series that he is going to get his girl, who is not an invisible, *miai*-based partner, as in the case of Jun'ichi, but the central, romantic heroine.

This raises the issue of whether *all* romantic heroes can be constructed of speakers of *any* dialect, and here we would have tentatively to argue no. Iguchi's success at a particular kind of alternative to the dominant *sarariiman* model of successful young manhood seems to be what qualifies him as attractive despite his linguistic *un*attractiveness, and we are left to consider the relation of speaking practice and occupation in the construction of romantic heroes in ways we need not in the cases of their female counterparts.

With Iguchi as a distinct *counter*-example to Kinsui's claim that the hero speaks Standard Japanese, and in the face of Shibamoto-Smith's and Occhi's previous findings about the romantic heroine, then, we would like to conclude with a few brief suggestions about what dramas reveal about a character's potential to be Mr Right. That these are simply suggestions, or guideposts to future research, hardly needs mention, and we offer these thoughts to provoke precisely that future empirical research, on real as well as fictional men.

So . . . What Makes Men Hot?

It's not merely speech. There is a truly revealing amount of silence from televisually represented male lovers, accompanied sometimes by lunging embraces, sudden kisses, and the like – but all too rarely are Japanese romantic heroes *chatty* about their romantic feelings. This accords well with other work on the Japanese 'hero';[43] drawing on earlier work on *otokorashisa* 'manliness',[44] Satō concludes that in modern times, the romantic hero in Japan is not like a Western playboy, but rather *mukuchi* 'silent', going for the girl with a stern demeanor.[45] This may particularly be true outside the *sarariiman* role. Kondo reminds us that 'conventional wisdom depicts artisans as taciturn, a bit rough in their manner, not quite skilled at the niceties of social interaction'.[46] In her study, artisans described themselves as *kuchi ga omoi* 'lacking skill in conversation' (lit., having a heavy mouth) and *kuchikazu ga sukunai* 'not talkative'. This aligns culturally with 'a defining feature of masculinity', the trait of *fugen jikkō* 'silent action'[47] as well, arguably,

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[43]Fujimura, 'Wakamono sedai'.
[44]Satō, *Otokorashisa*.
[45]Fujimura, 'Wakamono sedai', 194.
[46]Kondo, *Crafting Selves*, 240.
[47]Ibid., 241.

as with Kiesling's discussion of working class men's alignment with physical power rather than the power of standard language eloquence.[48]

Employment success is key. Our analysis suggests that career success is a must for the romantic hero in televisual dramas. This is not required to the same degree of romantic heroines as depicted in the public discourses of television dramas, at least those analyzed here. Our heroes, however, need not just success but the right *kind* of success; at this point, we can only speculate precisely what the 'right kind' of success may be, but to date in our research we see that this seems more crucial to romantic herohood than the 'right' kind of speech.

With respect to the dictate that 'the hero speaks Standard Japanese', we suggest here, based on cases like that of Iguchi, who is implausibly incomprehensible to a non-Tohoku audience but who has made a highly successful career through his mastery of a rare Japanese craft,[49] that it is less necessary for *him* than it is for *her*. There are other cases narrated in similar ways – where a cool occupation trumps correct language practice – both in romance novels and on television.[50] In such cases, Mr Right may not be a *sarariiman*, but he must be successful. He *may* attach to a non-Tokyo locale by designing and building traditional Japanese plaster walls, by growing *Kyō-yasai*, or making *wagashi* (Japanese sweets). He *may* be an artist, such as Sarumaru Keitarō, the Osaka-dialect speaking *kanari yūmei na fotojānarisuto* 'relatively famous photojournalist' who is the Mr Right in NHK's 2005–2006 morning drama *Kaze no Haruka* ('Haruka of the Wind'), set in Ōita prefecture. But whatever successful career path the non-*sarariiman* romantic hero follows, it is highly unlikely that it will be that of a plumber, a janitor, or a dry cleaner's delivery man.

In fact, class issues in romantic texts are extraordinarily interesting and understudied, although in the dominant narrative of the *torendii dorama* of the 1980s and their successors up to the present, the primary character construction is of a middle-class male, whether the male so constructed could, given his particular background and employment, actually *be* middle-class in real life or not[51] and this, in our sample, appears to interact in interesting ways with regionality as manifested in dialect use. The imperative for the romantic hero to speak Standard Japanese, then, seems only to be over-ridden by an overwhelming success in certain quite delimited and specialized occupational fields. Refinement of how non-*sarariiman* occupational positionality interacts with social class and regionality in publicly circulating images of romantic heroes is a most promising field for future research.

At present, however, we can venture to claim that Standard Japanese, though relevant for the construction of romantic heroines in the public space of televisual dramas, is only one of the factors which may be relevant for their counterpart romantic heroes. This makes sense when one considers that, both in fiction and in real life, women's attractiveness tends to be articulated as centering around their personal attributes, while men's centers more around their accomplishments, and particularly their career

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[48]Kiesling, 'Men's Identities'.
[49]For an extended discussion of artisanal pride and identity, see Kondo, *Crafting Selves*.
[50]See, for example, the case of 2004 NHK Monday Drama Series hero Satake Keigo, who has left his father's exclusive, Tokyo-based French restaurant to return to his grandfather's land in Kyoto to grow *Kyō-yasai* (Kyoto vegetables) and who wins his Kyoto Ms Right with a highly implausible – because he was born and raised in Tokyo – Kyoto-dialect-lite.
[51]Ōta, 'Producing (Post)Trendy Japanese'.

accomplishments – one is tempted to invoke the old saying *otoko wa dokyō, onna wa aikyō* (men should be brave,[52] women should be charming). Of course, since our data are television dramas and the characters are actresses and actors, both heroes and heroines in our corpus are physically attractive;[53] here, however, we are referring to the dramas' constructive focus on what elements of heroes *versus* heroines count as attractive in the larger narrative of the fictional romance. Nonetheless, all things being equal, we see that there is a tendency for successful Mr Rights to speak Standard Japanese, or its Kansai companions, Osaka, Kyoto, and Kobe dialects. The limits and mutual relations between occupation, regionality, and language in delineating an appropriate Mr Right need much more exploration.

Conclusion

In this paper, we started from the position that televisual portrayals serve to regiment popular attitudes about contemporary imagined 'masculinity' and that language is centrally involved in this process. We have seen some ways in which the language–masculinity linkage for romantic heroes is more complicated than the language–femininity linkage appears to be for romantic heroines, at least in terms of the absolute centrality of Standard Japanese.

What we have learned from our preliminary examination of some televisual texts, however, is that cultural masculinity remains problematic – more *assumed* than really worked out in principle – but that heroes tend to represent the center or, when they do not, to represent some 'cool' aspect of Japanese tradition, often centered on the arts or on artisanal production. They 'speak' their romantic attractiveness only in part through language – another key ingredient is occupation, and that occupation appears to relax the constraint that the hero speak Standard Japanese.

They also are rarely rewarded for aligning with older models of aggressive masculinity. As Fujimura notes in his study of the history of the representational politics of Japanese masculinity, the old model of rugged masculinity that forcibly drags a woman along behind her man is passé. The old public image encapsulated in the directive *ore ni tsuite koi* 'follow me' – and here note the use of the assertively masculine first-person pronoun *ore* and the bald imperative verb form *koi* – just doesn't work well any more.[54] Culturally accepted as it may be, the man who presents in *teishu kampaku* 'petty tyrant, male chauvinist' mode – performing as a man who can demand 'services, attention, and indulgence by women in an authoritarian manner, with the expectation of being obeyed'[55] – is not going to be getting Ms Right's positive attention until he changes his ways, as Shōji is finally forced to do in *Haken no hinkaku*.

So the daring, aggressive warrior-like masculinity of the past fades into something gentler, kinder, and even a bit timid. To prefigure success in romance, what our hero needs now is a kind, gentle (*yasashii*) stance *vis-à-vis* the heroine, a deep understanding (*rikai*) of her person and her needs, and he needs to exhibit these qualities with no

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[52]Which we offer as a reference to behavior in public – that is, economic, martial, scholarly, and governmental domains.

[53]And the demand for romantic heroes in real life to attend to matters of physical attractiveness increased during the latter years of the twentieth century as well; see Miller, *Beauty Up*.

[54]Nor does its full version *damatte, ore ni tsuite koi* 'shut up and follow me'.

[55]Salaman, 'Male Chauvinism', 137.

bravado (*kyosei*) or vain posturing (*mie o haru*).[56] We end up, thus, with a rather non-aggressively masculine guy as romantically *otokorashii* 'manly', and this leads us right back to the claim that, if we need to 'hear' the hero, he'll be speaking Standard Japanese or some other urban dialect to the left on the Modernity Gradient, and not too strongly masculine a version of those dialects at that.[57] He cannot speak in a way that would place him on the far right side of the Modernity Gradient, that is, speak with too strong or too stigmatized a regional dialect that would show him to be an undesirable hick – unless he is an artist or artisan, in which case this is forgiven.

Despite his ideological centrality, however, problems remain for the Standard Japanese speaking Romeo. He needs to state his love in a form that comes across as confident (*-te* forms without honorific donatory auxiliaries, a preference for the non-polite *kure* over *kudasai*) and assertive without being belligerent. In earlier episodes of the drama *Haken no hinkaku*, we see that overbearing speech, however Standard, is where the hero Shōji goes wrong at first. The successful Standard Japanese-speaking Romeo has to be especially careful about his second-person pronoun use. The correlation of second-person pronoun choice is particularly sensitive, because it is a particularly salient marker of men's real or represented attitudes toward women, particularly in Standard Japanese. This may be a more widespread marker; Occhi's 1990s ethnographic interviews document the objections of Sendai *OL* (female clerical workers) to the use of *omae* in *enka* music.[58] This is a fraught issue and getting it right is critical. Real life men, when talking with male peers, have low incidences of second person pronouns in general; young men, however, have significantly higher frequencies of second person pronouns than do established *sarariiman,* and their second person pronoun of choice is *omae*, with an occasional *kimi* thrown in.[59] We argue that this use is likely to be reversed when these young men talk with their lovers, at least if they know what is good for them. In televisual representations of romance, Standard Japanese speaking heroes tend toward the more currently acceptable *kimi* as the second person pronoun of choice as their romances blossom. This is accompanied by other carefully calibrated choice of linguistic forms, constructing heroes who carefully avoid assertive or aggressive forms that resonate with older, more chauvinistic models of masculinity. But by now our romantic hero begins to take on overtones of Yamada Tsuyoshi in *Densha otoko* (Train Man). So, in order to project attractive masculinity, what is a would-be romantic hero to do?

And it is here dialect may come to the rescue. The regional Romeo, constructed in a regional dialect, is allowed to sound rougher and more aggressive than the Tokyo *sarariiman* is ideologically constructed, by virtue of his simultaneous alignment with the warmer, more emotionally available language of Japan's periphery. The social effect of dialects is perfectly laid out in the introductory remarks to the Miyazaki prefectural Education Committee's 1985 report on dialect to the effect that dialects are language varieties *rooted in localities* – in other words, in the *furusato* or the heart's home – and thus

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[56]Fujimura, 'Wakamono sedai', 195.
[57]LeBlanc, *The Art of the Gut*, offers an alternative model of masculinity to the *sarariiman* in her study of two local politicians, whose constructions of themselves as politicians centers, she claims, on their constructions of themselves as manly men, including – in the case of the regional, older politician she describes – forcefully masculine speech. In real life, this may be so; in post-trendy romance dramas, however, political figures rarely appear, and in our corpus, are never the romantic heroes; politicians play larger and more central roles in *keizai dorama* 'economic dramas' and the like.
[58]Occhi, 'Namida, Sake and Love'.
[59]SturtzSreetharan, '*Ore* and *omae*'.

are the very best forms of expression for strengthening a sense of local identity, even though, unlike Standard Japanese, they may be *rustic* and *rough*.[60] A romantic hero needs to attract and convince his love, and Standard Japanese stereotypical masculine forms may be too aggressive and rough and potentially alienating, while Standard Japanese male speech *without* masculine forms may sound wimpy. But under the right conditions,[61] although it has an aura of 'roughness', dialect may come to Mr Right's rescue. It can be roughly masculine but emanates from a man rendered in some sense endearing rather than aggressive or sexist by virtue of his peripheral position *vis-à-vis* ideologically normative Japanese masculinity. The work of SturtzSreetharan has demonstrated how real men[62] use dialect to perform authority *and* affection toward their interlocutors. To be sure, this was mostly the case of her fully adult male speaker consultants rather than of the younger men in her corpus. And romantic heroes are, typically, young, as are all the men in our televisual representational corpus. But it may be that they have something to learn from the elders, especially when trying to attract the right woman in the hinterland.

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[60]Miyazaki-ken Kyōiku Iinkai, *Hōgen*.

[61]And here we argue that 'conditions' for men include their occupation: Jun'ichi's rough dialect is not endearing because the condition of non-metropolitan profession (farmer) is not right, whereas Iguchi's rough dialect is coupled with artisanal mastery of a traditional craft.

[62]As opposed to fictional male characters, not as opposed to wimpy men.

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