

90% Say that the Japanese Language is in a State of Disarray: The Reality of the Times*

From the March 2013 Nationwide Survey on Changes in the Japanese Language

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SHIODA Takehiro

TAKISHIMA Masako

NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute

Media Research & Studies

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http://www.nhk.or.jp/bunken/summary/research/report/2013_10/20131002.pdf

Abstract

- Around one quarter of the respondents believed that the issue of whether news reports should use the word *kyaku* ‘guest’, ‘visitor’, ‘customer’, etc., or *o-kyaku* (the polite language form of *kyaku*) would depend on the type of news story.
- The practice of constricting certain potential verbs like *mirareru* ‘can see’ and *taberereru* ‘can eat’ into *mireru* and *tabereru*, respectively, first began in the late nineteenth century. A sense of incongruence at such a practice was already being expressed during the 1940s, and the general term *ra-nuki kotoba* (‘ra’-dropped possible form of verbs) started coming into use during the 1980s.
- Regarding whether or not *ra-nuki kotoba* such as *taberenai* are considered “strange,” results did not show a noticeable generational difference; however, they did reveal a considerable difference in terms of academic background. The results also suggested that people become more conservative by aging—or in other words, they accept such language during their younger years, but acquire a sense of incongruence toward such language use as they age.
- There was a clear age difference with respect to opinion concerning the kind of language that should be used in NHK broadcasts and whether or not Japanese language is in an extreme state of disarray.
- From the results of this survey, it can be inferred that many people want NHK to avoid using *ra-nuki* form despite the fact that they themselves use those forms.

Foreword

In Japanese, *korareru* is the standard way of saying ‘able to come’, but *koreru* is also commonly used. The existence in a particular generation or society of multiple ways of saying or writing the same thing has been termed *kotoba no yure* ‘linguistic fluctuation’.

This paper is the second part of the report of the previous month on the results of the *March 2013 Nationwide Survey on Changes in the Japanese Language* (containing 39 question items from 1,241 respondents who were aged 20 years or older; for more details, please refer to the tables at the end of the previous month’s paper). Of the results of the survey, this paper reports on the items that demonstrate a particularly interesting aspect or conclusion.

The first chapter of this paper was composed by Masako Takishima, and the remainder composed by Takehiro Shiota.

1. *Bikago* ‘Beautified Language’ in Broadcasts

1.1 Words Prefixed with “O-” or “Go-”

Throughout their daily lives, Japanese people often prefix nouns with ‘o-’ or ‘go-’, for example, *o-tenki* ‘the weather’, *o-kashi* ‘candy’, and *go-aisatsu* ‘greeting’. Such prefixing is used when the speaker wishes to exhibit politeness of speech or to speak of something in a refined manner, and it is therefore called

bikago ‘beautified language’.¹ Many words prefixed with ‘o-’ are actually *sonkeigo* ‘honorific language’, which is used to elevate the rank of the person one is speaking to or about. Examples of *sonkeigo* include *o-kuruma* ‘your/his/her car’ and *o-bōshi* ‘your/his/her hat’. However, the purpose of *bikago* is to beautify or refine one’s own speech, and therefore it generally has nothing to do with the rank of the person being spoken to or about. For example, a Japanese person may consider that uttering the word *sake* ‘alcoholic beverage’ without any prefix would be too coarse and incongruous with one’s usual speech. Thus, irrespective of the presence of the person being spoken to or about, the speaker would use the ‘o-’ prefix (*o-sake*) and thereby achieve a more refined speech. *Bikago* has been described as a way of “keeping up the appearance” of one’s language (Ozaki 2009).

Bikago includes cases where the impression of a word is not significantly affected by whether or not it has the ‘o-’ prefix, as well as cases where the lack of such prefixing will come across as coarse. The subjective impression will vary between individuals. There is a difference between the genders, with females tending to use *bikago* more than their male counterparts. Regional differences also exist. The ‘o-’ prefix tends to be frequently used by people living in the Tokyo area and in the Kansai region. There are also discrepancies among different academic backgrounds and occupations (Inoue 2007).

Furthermore, the use of ‘o-’ or ‘go-’ as *bikago* is increasing year by year. The practice of adding ‘o-’ to words excessively has also been heavily criticized, with some dubbing it *o-yatarazuke* (a play on words—*yatarazuke* can mean mixed-vegetable pickles, and the suffix *-zuke* can mean the addition of the word being suffixed, so in this case it means ‘excessive/reckless ‘o-’ adding’). Many recent commentaries on *sonkeigo* include warnings against the misuse of ‘o-’ or ‘go-’, and it is likely that the reason for this is that the growing use of such prefixing has rendered it increasingly difficult to judge its appropriateness.

1.2 Preceding Studies on *Bikago*

What words are prefixed with ‘o-’ or ‘go-’? During the postwar years, a major survey was conducted that examined this question, and the results identified the words that tend to be prefixed with ‘o-’ and the words that generally resisted prefixation (Shibata 1957).² The Agency for Cultural Affairs has also inquired into ‘o-’ prefixing twice in the past (1997 and 2006) as part of its Survey of Public Opinion on

¹ According to the *Keigo* Guidelines in the Report of the Council of Cultural Affairs to the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture (February 2007), the forms of *keigo* are categorized into *sonkeigo*, *kenjōgo I*, *kenjōgo II*, *teineigo*, and *bikago*. The report defines *bikago* as “language for stating things in a beautified/refined way,” and cites examples such as *o-sake* ‘alcoholic beverage’ and *o-ryōri* ‘cooking/cuisine’.

² Shibata (1957) systematically and randomly selected one in seven of the 47,000 words listed in NHK’s *Nihongo Akusento Jiten [Japanese Accent Dictionary]* (1951), excluded special case words from the sample, and studied the remaining 4,830 words. He then polled 18 housewives living in Tokyo to find out how frequently each of the words are prefixed with ‘o-’. His results were as follows: 1) Foreign words are seldom prefixed; 2) Words beginning with an “o” syllable are seldom prefixed; 3) Long words are seldom prefixed; 4) Offensive words are seldom prefixed; 5) Words concerning color and nature are seldom prefixed; 6) Words concerning dining, moods, emotions, physical condition, etc. are often prefixed; and 7) Words that women do not often use in their daily lives are seldom prefixed.

the Japanese Language.³ According to the analysis of the results, the use of ‘o-’ has risen over the past ten years and is set to continue this rise in the future. Another finding indicated that there is a tendency for speakers to incorporate ‘o-’ prefixing into their speech once they reach adulthood (Inoue 2009).

Through a series of studies (2010, 2011, 2012a, b), Fumio Inoue found that ‘o-’ prefixing differs depending on the speaker’s relationship with the person being spoken to or about.⁴ He also found that the use of ‘o-’ began when females started adding the prefix to words that they were well-accustomed to, that the frequency of prefixing increased until it became established as *bikago* even among males, and that *yōjigo* ‘child language’ was also involved in the process.

1.3 Standards for the Use of *Bikago* in Broadcasts

So how has *bikago* been dealt with in broadcasts? During the postwar years, NHK held a number of discussions in order to create broadcasting standards that would prevent misuse of ‘o-’ prefixing. In the 1947 Language Research Committee Report⁵, there is a section highlighting disarray in *keigo* (‘respectful language’, which includes *sonkeigo* ‘honorific language’ and *kenjōgo* ‘humble language’), and this chapter cited the following sentences as examples of “excessively polite language.”

- *O-netsu ga demashitara o-ishā o o-yobi-itashimashō.*
When you get a (o-)temperature,-I shall call the (o-)doctor. -supotto nyūsu (Spot News)
- *O-yasai no o-nedan o mōshi-agemasu.*
We will tell you the (o-)prices of the (o-)vegetables. -haikyū dayori (Delivery Newsletter)

The Language Research Committee argued that all of these ‘o-’ prefixes cited were redundant, indicating a general awareness of the issue at the time.

³ According to the 2006 survey, of the fifteen words examined, more than 50% of the respondents answered that they use the ‘o-’ prefix for *o-kashi* ‘candy’ (73.3%), *o-sake* ‘alcoholic beverage’ (56.9%), *o-kome* ‘rice’ (56.1%), *o-sara* ‘plate’ (55.4%), and *o-bento* ‘boxed meal’ (51.6%). Compared to the 1997 survey, the proportion of people who use the ‘o-’ prefix for *bento*, *sara*, *su* ‘vinegar’, and *kusuri* ‘medicine’ has increased.

⁴ Inoue (2010) re-analyzed the data of a questionnaire in a certain graduate thesis, and confirmed that aside from a considerable gender difference in the usage of the ‘o-’ prefix, the usage also varies considerably based on the speaker’s relationship with the person being spoken to or about. This data was the result of examining the variance in the usage of ‘o-’ prefixing for the forty-six words surveyed depending on the speaker’s relationship (vertical relationship, degree of familiarity) with four types of counterparts.

⁵ The Language Research Committee (now called the Broadcasting Language Committee) researches the language used in television broadcasts. At the time, linguists Kyosuke Kindaichi, Zenmaro Toki, and Etsutarō Iwabuchi participated as external members.

In 1952, the Japanese Language Council released *Kore Kara no Keigo* (Keigo of the Future)⁶, which outlined the ideal state of *keigo*. The *keigo* to be used in the post-war democratic society was to be plain and simple and thus easy to understand. NHK then devised its own set of standards to reflect this policy. In 1955, the Broadcasting Language Research Committee (present name: Broadcasting Language Committee) agreed to the principle that it is preferable to avoid the ‘o-’ prefix, and then indicated the correct usage of around 180 words. These words were divided into two categories: words that are prefixed with ‘o-’ and words that do not need to be prefixed with ‘o-’.⁷

However, these standards were decided upon with radio announcements in mind. Thus, as the use of *keigo* in television broadcasts grew more complex, these standards became increasingly at odds with the actualities of broadcasting. The results of a 1967 survey on television news revealed that there were numerous examples of the ‘o-’ prefix being used with “words that do not need to be prefixed with ‘o-’,” and it was also pointed out that the ‘o-’ prefix was being used in many cases with words not included in Broadcasting Language Research Committee standards.⁸

Some suggested that new standards be created for individual words, but it was feared that by drawing up meticulous standards that went through word after word stating “this usage is good” and “this usage is

⁶*Kore Kara no Keigo* (May 1952) stated that as a basic policy, *keigo* “should be as plain and simple as possible,” and it set out principles by providing a section entitled “Clarification of ‘O-’ and ‘Go-’.” The content of this section is given below.

4. Clarification of ‘O-’ and ‘Go-’

(1) Cases where prefixing is appropriate [content omitted]

(2) Cases where prefixing may be omitted

Includes cases where the ‘o-’ prefix is used if the speaker is female but omitted if the speaker is male. For example, ‘o-’*kome*, (o-)*kashi*, ‘o-’*chawan* ‘teacup’, and ‘o-’*hiru* ‘lunch’.

(3) Cases where prefixing should be omitted

For example, (o-)*choki* ‘waistcoat’, (o-)*kutsushita* ‘socks’, and (o-)*bīru* ‘beer’ [rest omitted].

⁷ We have confirmed that the content printed in the *NHK Report on Broadcast Research* (1955) represents the decision taken by the 323rd Broadcasting Language Research Committee, but in *Hōsō Yōgo Ron* [*Broadcasting Language Discussion*] 1975, it is stated that there was a summary report in 1951. This report set out seven categories, which were “events, etc.,” “clothes,” “food,” “abodes,” “tools,” “occupations,” and “people, etc.” For more information, see *Hōsō Yōgo Sankō Jiten* [*Broadcasting Language Reference Dictionary*] (Broadcasting Group 1957).

⁸ According to *Gendai Keigo to Hōsō* [*Modern Keigo and Broadcasting*] (Kanno and Takeda 1974), the ‘o-’ prefix was being used with such words as *o-saru* ‘a monkey’, *o-jiki* ‘bowing’, *o-shimeri* ‘rain’, *o-shiro* ‘a castle’, *o-shōgatsu*, *o-seibo* ‘a year-end present’, *o-tagai* ‘mutual/each other’, *o-tenki* ‘the weather’, *o-tokusaki* ‘a customer/client’, *o-najimi* ‘familiar’, *o-haka* ‘a grave’, *o-hanabatake* ‘a meadow’, *o-hanami* ‘flower viewing’, *o-matsuri* ‘a festival’, and *o-rei* ‘an expression of gratitude or a courteous gesture’.

bad,” broadcasters would become enmeshed in such details and that real-life broadcasting would actually be negatively affected.

Having learned from these experiences, today’s NHK has indicated the following rule of thumb for the use of ‘o-’ prefixing (as *bikago*).

Words that Are Prefixed with ‘O-’

The ‘o-’ prefix, as a means to state things politely, gives an impression of neatness when it is used as sparingly as possible.

(NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute, *Language Handbook Second Edition*)

1.4 *Bikago* in Actual Broadcasts

What is the present situation with regard to actual broadcasts? Against the backdrop of the expansion in the use of ‘o-’ prefixing among the public, *bikago* has started being frequently used in natural dialogue in various television programs, such as cooking and interview programs. On the other hand, the principle of “using the ‘o-’ prefix as sparingly as possible” has been followed relatively faithfully by news programs, which are supposed to convey information concisely from a fair and impartial position. In 2012, however, the following question was raised and discussed at the Broadcasting Language Committee held in Sendai.

Question: At present, it seems that *kyaku* ‘guest’, ‘visitor’, ‘customer’, etc. rather than *o-kyaku* is used in news scripts and news reports. Why is *o-kyaku* not used? *Kyaku* sounds unnatural because it comes across as cold and haughty.

The concern raised by the questioner was that the policy followed up until then, namely the policy that “‘o-’ or ‘go-’ should be omitted as much as possible,” might be causing viewers to get a sense of incongruence. Many people involved in broadcasting, particularly news announcers (notably female ones) are considered to have felt some degree of incongruence at the omission of ‘o-’ from nouns. For example, other nouns aside from *kyaku*, such as *kane* ‘money’, *shōgatsu* ‘New Year’, *sake* ‘alcoholic beverage’, *miyage* ‘souvenir’, and *hara* ‘stomach’, often appear in news scripts without the ‘o-’ prefix, and many people have reported the following kind of discord with such a practice.

“During reports on things like corruption cases and the like, if I hear a female newsreader read out something along the lines of ‘the police are following the *kane* (money) trail’, I find myself staring in surprise at the face on the screen. I would normally expect this female announcer to say *o-kane* ... *kane* sounds a little vulgar.”

(Inoue 1999, *Keigo wa Kowakunai (Keigo is Not Frightening)*)

News stations have searched for a form of broadcasting *keigo* that befits post-war democracy. If it is the case that the increasing simplification of *keigo* in pursuit of neutral and concise news broadcasting has

ended up creating a vulgar, cold, and haughty impression among viewers, then there is surely a need to revise the treatment of *bikago* in news reports. Therefore, in this survey, we presented participants with two news stories in order to ascertain how viewers feel about *kyaku/o-kyaku* (the word raised in the Broadcasting Language Committee), and whether their reaction is dependent upon the type of news story.

1.5 Survey Results

In this survey, in order to investigate which expression—*kyaku* or *o-kyaku*—is considered appropriate, and to investigate whether a viewer's impression of the word is impacted by the type of news story or situation, we asked participants about the use of prefixing in two different news stories.

Question: We will ask you about wording used in news reports.

Please imagine that it is a newsreader speaking. For each of the two phrases, please select one answer that best matches how you feel.

- (i) The auctioned tuna was cut and prepared in a sushi restaurant in Tsukiji and then served to
(A. *kyaku* ‘customers’ B. *o-kyaku* ‘customers (honorific)’)
- (ii) A station wagon crashed into a restaurant. Seven people were injured including the
restaurant’s (A. *kyaku* B. *o-kyaku*)

- 1. Wording A is appropriate
- 2. Wording B is appropriate
- 3. Wording A is appropriate if the newsreader is male, and wording B is appropriate if the newsreader is female
- 4. Wording A is appropriate if the newsreader is female, and wording B is appropriate if the newsreader is male
- 5. Neither is appropriate
- 6. Do not know

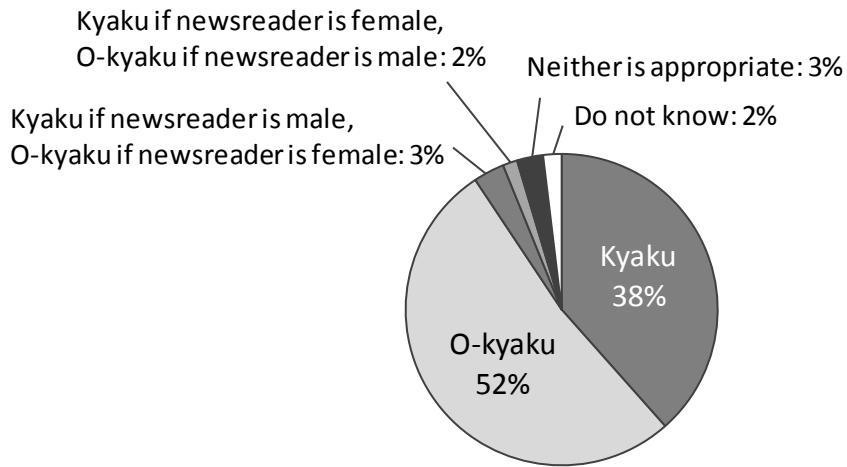
For both (i) and (ii), we referred to actual news reports.⁹ For options 3 and 4, we included gender of newsreader as a factor to investigate whether respondents' judgments can be divided according to the gender of the newsreader.

The results of the first news story about the tuna showed that more than 50% of the respondents answered that a newsreader should say *o-kyaku* irrespective of whether the newsreader is a man or woman (**Figure 1**).

⁹ The news script for (i) is based on a news broadcast from “News 7” Jan 5th, 2012, in which the newsreader actually said “*o-kyaku*.” The lead part of the news story is as follows: “This morning, a tuna priced at over 150 million yen in the season’s first auction in Tokyo’s Tsukiji fish market was swiftly served in a Tsukiji sushi restaurant to (*o-kyaku*).” When preparing the script for (ii), we referred to past news reports concerning accidents and adopted expressions frequently used in such reports.

Figure 1: (Kyaku or O-Kyaku)?

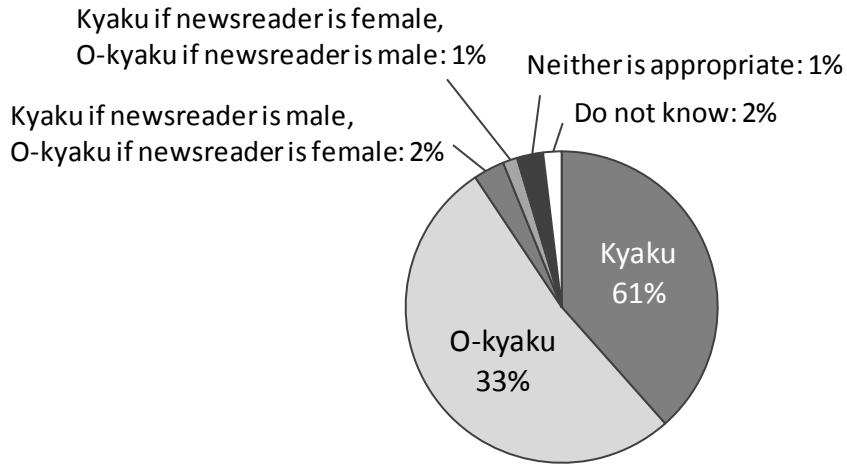
(i) News Story about the Tuna



On the other hand, in response to the news story about the accident (ii), more than 60% of respondents answered that *kyaku* should be used irrespective of whether the newsreader is a man or woman (**Figure 2**).

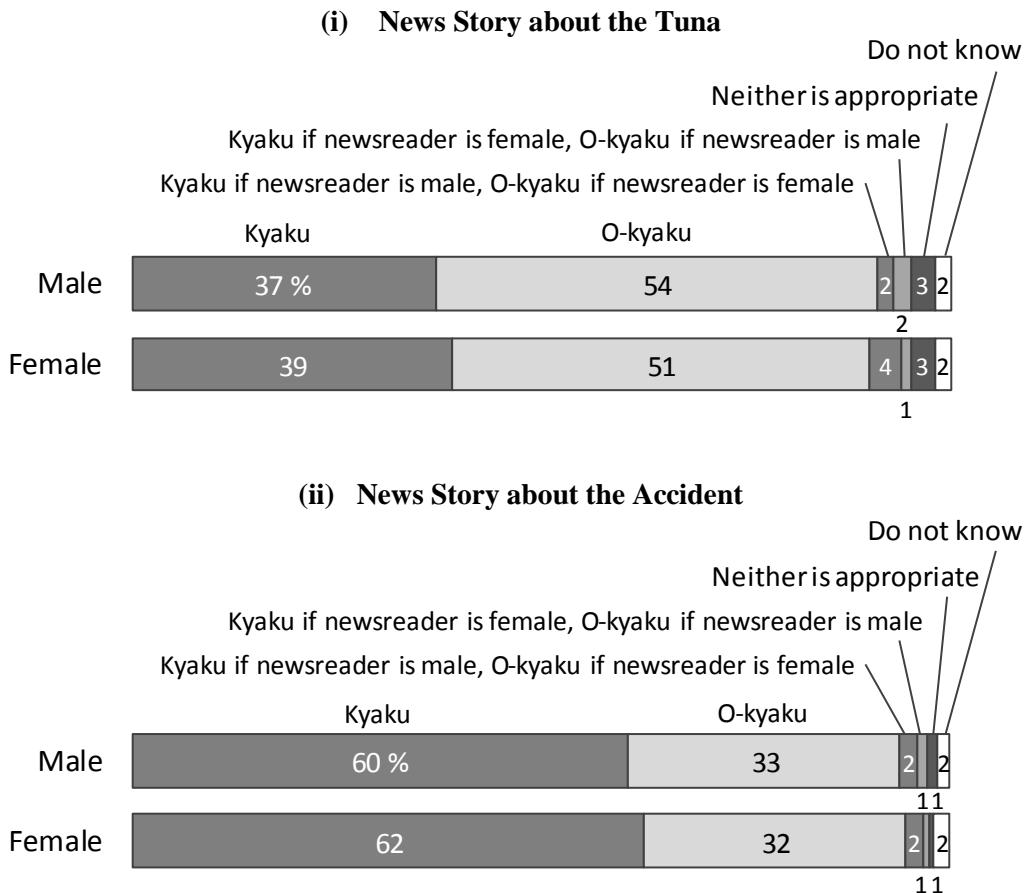
Figure 2: (Kyaku or O-Kyaku)?

(ii) News Story about the Accident



Next we examined the answer rates of respondents in terms of gender. For both news stories, there was hardly any gender discrepancy in terms of the proportion of respondents who answered *kyaku* or *o-kyaku* (**Figure 3**).

Figure 3 (Kyaku or O-Kyaku)? — Respondents (by gender)



**Kyaku* **O-Kyaku* * *Kyaku* if newsreader is male, *o-kyaku* if newsreader is female **Kyaku* if newsreader is female, *o-kyaku* if newsreader is male *Neither is appropriate *Do not know

It is said that *bikago* tends to be used more by females. The 2008 Survey on Language Disarray also found that, concerning the use of *bikago*, “a greater proportion of women compared to men consider ‘o-’ prefixed words ‘not strange’.”¹⁰ However, in this survey, we did not observe a tendency for female respondents to favor *o-kyaku* more than their male counterparts.

¹⁰ Tanaka & Yamashita (2009) presented study participants with ten prefixed nouns that are frequently used in television broadcasts and asked them to select (using multiple answers) the ones that they would feel are “not strange” when used in a broadcast. More women than men felt that *o-shōgatsu* (women: 87%, men: 80%) and *o-kane* (women: 86%, men: 79%) sounded “not strange.”

We examined whether there was a discrepancy in the answer trends between respondents aged 49 or less and respondents aged 50 or above. We found that the *o-kyaku* answer rate was relatively high among the latter group for both questions (i) and (ii).

We also observed a difference based on academic background. For both news stories, respondents who had graduated from university were slightly more likely to select *kyaku*.

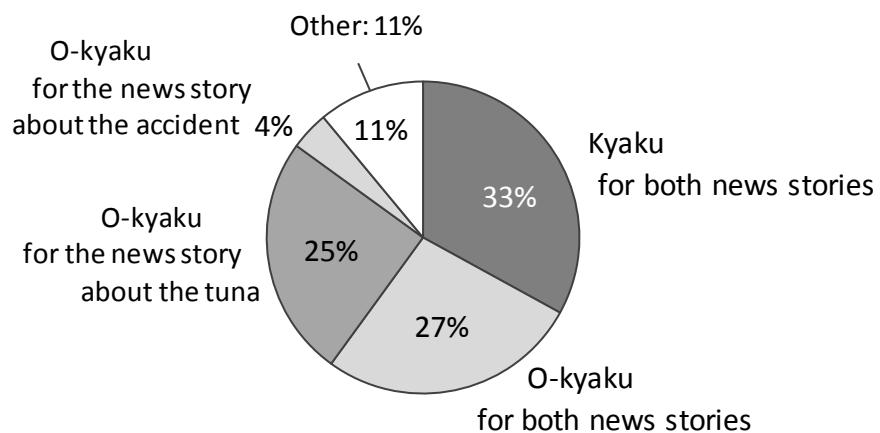
We then turned our attention to those who had selected what were the most popular answers, namely option 1 (*kyaku* is appropriate) and option 2 (*o-kyaku* is appropriate), and sorted the pattern of answers into the following four categories.

The news story about the tuna (i) and the news story about the accident (ii)...

- A: *Kyaku* for both news stories
- B: *O-kyaku* for both news stories
- C: *O-kyaku* for (i), *kyaku* for (ii)
- D: *Kyaku* for (i), *o-kyaku* for (ii)
- E: (Other)

“A” represents the “*Kyaku* supporters” (33%) who selected *kyaku* both for the news story about the tuna (i) and for the news story about the accident (ii). It is likely that they deemed the ‘o-’ prefix to be unnecessary in news reports. On the other hand, “B” represents the “*O-kyaku* supporters” (27%) who selected *o-kyaku* for both news stories. It is likely that they deemed it better to say *o-kyaku* irrespective of the news story. As for the “C” and “D,” they represent the groups who believe that the type of news story dictates which wording is appropriate. “D” (*kyaku* for the news story on the tuna, *o-kyaku* for the news story on the accident) represented only 4% of the sample, but “C” (*o-kyaku* for the news story on the tuna, *kyaku* for the news story on the accident) represented 25%. Thus, the sample can be almost evenly split in three ways: “A,” “B,” and “C” (Figure 4).

Figure 4: (Support Trends for the Two News Stories)



1.6 Analysis of Survey Results

In this survey, more than 50% of the respondents answered that it would be better to say *o-kyaku* in the news story about the tuna (i). These respondents include “*o-kyaku* supporters,” who believe it better to say *o-kyaku* irrespective of the news story, as well as those who believe that *kyaku* should be said in the news story about the accident while *o-kyaku* should be said in the tuna report. Conversely, this finding indicates that the majority of respondents would be highly likely to feel a sense of incongruence toward the use of *kyaku* in the tuna report. Until now, it has been deemed appropriate to use ‘*o-*’ as sparingly as possible in news reports, but with regard to *kyaku*, the finding that viewers are likely to feel a sense of incongruence at the omission of ‘*o-*’ surely merits of consideration.

Furthermore, after investigating through the two news stories the trends among the respondents in terms of whether they believe *kyaku* or rather *o-kyaku* should be used, we can make the following points.

1.6.1 30% of Respondents Consider that *Kyaku* should be Used Irrespective of the News Story

In this survey, the “*kyaku* supporters,” who selected *kyaku* for both the tuna report and the accident report, represented the largest proportion of the entire sample, at 33% of respondents. We interpret this finding as being representative of an attitude among viewers that news reports (which are supposed to convey the facts of a story) should avoid unnecessary sentiment and should instead convey information using neutral wording. The fact that there still remain a certain segment of the population who believe that the news should be conveyed without using the ‘*o-*’ prefix suggests that when using *bikago* on the news, discretion is required.

1.6.2 Almost 30% of Respondents Consider that *O-kyaku* should be Used Irrespective of the News Story

On the other hand, the “*o-kyaku* supporters,” who selected *o-kyaku* for both the tuna report and the accident report, represented 27% of the sample. Included in this group are those who consider that when conveying news about *kyaku*, *bikago* should be used irrespective of the news story. Put another way, it may be surmised that this group represents a section of the population who feel the un-prefixed *kyaku* is coarse and that it is better to word it in a polite manner through the use of the ‘*o-*’ prefix. As to the possible reasons for using the *bikago* expression *o-kyaku*, one may cite Japanese society’s attitude toward the *sonkeigo* expression, *o-kyaku-sama*. *O-kyaku-sama* is a way of addressing *kyaku*. According to the rules of classic *keigo*, which differentiates between *uchi* and *soto* (outsiders and insiders), when the customer is not present, the terms *kyaku* or *kokyaku* should be used; however, it has been argued that this rule no longer applies.¹¹ In customer service manuals and similar literature, customers are always referred

¹¹ Noguchi (2009) described the increase in the number of people who always prefixed and suffixed *kyaku* (*o-kyaku-sama*) as signifying “the ‘absolute *keigo-ization*’ of *o-kyaku-sama*,” and made the following assertion: “With some exceptions, *keigo* in modern Japanese is ‘relative *keigo*'. Therefore, while the meaning remains the same, a word may be said in a number of different ways depending on the person one is speaking to or about and the situation (...) It is apparent that this rule no longer applies to *o-kyaku-sama*.”

to as *o-kyaku-sama* notwithstanding their presence/absence, and it is claimed that this has caused increasing numbers of people to use *o-kyaku-sama* as a *bikago* expression. It may well be the case that it was from such an attitude that the respondents obtained a sense of resistance toward the term *kyaku* and felt more comfortable with the *bikago* expression *o-kyaku*. While further examination of the reasons for supporting *o-kyaku* is necessary, it may be considered that an essential aspect when considering *bikago* in news reports are the transitions this “*o-kyaku* supporters” group will undergo in the future.

1.6.3 Some Respondents Considered *O-kyaku* Preferable Depending on the News Story, Situation, etc.

In this survey, 25% of the respondents considered that while *kyaku* is appropriate in the accident report, *o-kyaku* is appropriate for the tuna report. This group believes that the news story or situation dictates whether *kyaku* or *o-kyaku* should be used. Such an attitude may be related to the intrinsic meaning of *kyaku* as well as to the position of the *kyaku* within the situational context.

If we look up *kyaku* in the dictionary, we find the following definitions: “1. a person who visits someone’s household or place of residence upon that person’s invitation or for some particular business; 2. a person who pays money for goods or services” (*Daijirin (Major Japanese Dictionary)* Third Edition). Based on these definitions, the *kyaku* is always understood as being counterpoised against the ‘host’ or the ‘shop’ (‘host↔*kyaku*’, ‘shop↔*kyaku*’). In the tuna report, the *kyaku* are the *kyaku* ‘customers’ of the “sushi restaurant” (“shop”), and between the “sushi restaurant” and the *kyaku* a commercial relationship exists between the “service provider” and the “service receiver.” In other words, in the tuna report, the *kyaku* fulfill the role of the “sushi restaurant’s *o-kyaku-sama*” (the sushi restaurant’s revered patrons). Therefore, we can get an idea of why the respondents of this group probably judged *o-kyaku* to be the better choice based on the situational relationship of “sushi restaurant↔*kyaku*.” In this case, rather than *bikago* being an motivational factor, it is probably more accurate to say that these respondents felt some kind of sentimental consideration toward the “restaurant’s *kyaku*,” and so *sonkeigo*—a manner of speech in which the person being spoken to or about (the *kyaku* in this case) is elevated—would have been a strong element.

As for the accident report, while the *kyaku* are in fact the “restaurant’s *kyaku*,” the commercial relationship between the “*kyaku*” and the “restaurant” is unimportant. The “attribute” of the people injured in the accident that took place in the restaurant just happens to be “restaurant’s *kyaku*,” but their *kyaku* role or *kyaku* relationship is not the issue at hand. It was probably for this reason that the respondents felt that the neutral expression *kyaku* should be used.

While the principle until now has been for news reports to “use the ‘o-’ prefix as sparingly as possible,” the results of this survey reveal that the ‘o-’ prefix is sometimes judged appropriate depending on the news story or situation and also the intrinsic meaning of the word in question.

1.6.4 No Gender Difference Was Observed in the Decision of whether *O-kyaku* or *Kyaku* should Be Used

It is generally claimed that females tend to use the ‘o-’ prefix more than males. However, in this survey, for both news stories, scarcely any of the respondents answered “*kyaku* if newsreader is male, *o-kyaku* if newsreader is female” (3% for the tuna report, 2% for the accident report). In other words, it can be said that the gender of the newsreader had hardly any bearing on the decision of whether *o-kyaku* or *kyaku* should be used. Furthermore, looking at the gender breakdown of the respondents, in both news stories there was no noticeable difference in gender ratio among those who believed *kyaku* to be appropriate and those who believed *o-kyaku* to be appropriate. There was also no gender difference in the “*o-kyaku* supporters” group (27%), who selected *o-kyaku* for both news stories, which suggests that *o-kyaku* as *bikago* is used evenly among males and females. Other surveys have reported that *o-kane*, *o-furo* ‘bath’, and *o-shōgatsu* are also used as *bikago* expressions equally among males and females.¹² It may be claimed that these results reflect the increasing use of *bikago* among males. Men are increasingly getting involved in cooking and childcare, and the use of the ‘o-’ prefix has been spreading among males accordingly (Inoue 2012a). If the number of *ikumen* ‘fathers who take an active role in childcare’ grows and the use of the ‘o-’ prefix among males increases, it may be assumed that people’s impressions when hearing *bikago* in broadcasts will also change. Future research investigating the usage of *bikago* among males is necessary.

Let us return briefly to the attitudes toward *bikago* during the postwar years. In the aforementioned basic policy outlined in *Kore Kara no Keigo*, the following is stated:

Regarding the language spoken by women, *keigo* and *bishō* ‘eulogistic language’ are used to a degree beyond what is necessary (excessive ‘o-’ prefixing is an example of this trend). It would be desirable for women to reflect and be mindful of this point, and for language to be simplified thereby.

At the time, excessive ‘o-’ prefixing by women had become an issue, and female announcers were encouraged to be mindful of words that were not prefixed with ‘o-’ (such as *miso* and *shōyu* ‘soy sauce’) (Kindaichi 1978). The ‘o-’ problem was by and large a “women’s problem.” However, along with the changing times, the use of *bikago* has spread among men, and so it may be claimed that we have now arrived at a time when ‘o-’ words must once again be reappraised.

¹² Using the *Nihongo Hanashi Kotoba Kōpasu* [Corpus of Spoken Japanese], Aizawa (2006) investigated how *o-kyaku* is used in daily life. His study revealed that *o-kyaku* is one of the most frequently prefixed words, ranking just after *o-kashi*, *o-tera* ‘temple’, *o-sara*, *o-shiro* ‘castle’, and *o-miyage*(souvenir), and that it is used as frequently by men as by women. He also found that other words such as *o-kane*, *o-furo*, and *o-shōgatsu* were also used frequently, with both genders using them at about the same rate

1.7 The Future of *Bikago* in Broadcasts

In this survey, we investigated which expression—*kyaku* or *o-kyaku*—would be considered appropriate when used in two different news stories. By focusing singly on the single word *kyaku*, we were able to infer that people’s judgment on whether the ‘o-’ prefix should or should not be used will depend firstly on the news story or situation, secondly on the intrinsic meaning of the word and the social context, and thirdly on the viewer’s expectations toward the newsreader. We also found that in the case that the ‘o-’ prefix is considered preferable, it can potentially be used as both *bikago* and *sonkeigo* depending on the way the news is interpreted and the individual’s attitude toward the language.

It is extremely difficult to create standards for determining the words that should be prefixed with ‘o-’ and the words that should omit the prefix. According to the traditional attitudes toward broadcasting *keigo*, excessive ‘o-’ prefixing should be avoided. However, it is also essential to keep an eye on recent trends regarding ‘o-’ prefixing and search out a form of broadcasting that sits well with viewers’ general awareness. A consideration of how *bikago* should be treated in broadcasts may well be a key part of finding the ideal form of broadcasting *keigo* for a new age. We would like to advance research further in pursuit of a form of broadcasting that “communicates” information to viewers in a way that gives due consideration to how such communication will be received by viewers.

2. The Problem with *Ra-nuki Kotoba*

First, let us consider the nature of *ra-nuki kotoba* (‘ra’-dropped possible form of verbs). Put in the simplest terms, a compelling reason for omitting the ‘ra’ syllable is that doing so enables one to clearly and concisely indicate the potential form of certain verbs (the *kamiichidan* conjugation class (hereunder: “-iru” verbs”), the *shimoichidan* conjugation class (hereunder: “-eru” verbs”), and the ka-column irregular conjugation class (hereunder: the “k-irregular verb”) (Shioda March 2001, April 2001). The modern Japanese verb “to read” is *yomu*. When conjugated as *yomareru* it could potentially be interpreted as either a light honorific (“he reads”) or the passive form (“it is read”). If conjugated as *yomeru*, it would be interpreted as the potential form (“can read”).

Honorific: *Kono hon wa, mō yomaremashita?*

Have you already read this book?

Passive: *Kono shōsetsu wa, gaikoku de mo yoku yomareteiru.*

This novel is being widely read abroad.

Potential: *Kono hoteru de wa Nihon no shimbun ga yom eru.*

In this hotel, you can read Japanese newspapers.

The reason for this is that *yomu* is the *godan* consonant-stem verb (hereunder: “consonant-stem verb”), meaning that it has a unique conjugation for indicating potential (*yomeru*), and this is widely recognized and accepted as an essential part of modern Japanese.

However, the situation is not as simple when it comes to ‘-iru’ verbs, such as *miru* ‘look’, ‘see’, ‘watch’, etc., ‘-eru’ verbs such as *deru* ‘emerge’, ‘go out’, etc., and the k-irregular verb *kuru* ‘come’.

Honorific: *Kono shiryō wa, mō miraremashita?*

Have you already seen this document?

Passive: *Kono eiga wa, gaikoku de mo yoku mirareteiru.*

This movie is widely watched abroad.

Potential: *Kono hoteru de wa Nihon no terebi ga mirareru.*

In this hotel, you can watch Japanese television.

As one can see, the potential form of such verbs is identical to the honorific form and passive form, and this can sometimes be a cause of confusion. For example, Noguchi (2013) describes an episode in which she said to a student, “On Friday I will be in Building 10, can you come? (*koraremasuka*),” to which she got the reply, “Oh Professor Noguchi! Please don’t speak to me in honorifics!” (121). While the speaker had uttered the verb *korareru* (in this case, it was in the *masu*-form: *koraremasu*) with the intended meaning of “can you come,” the listener erroneously interpreted it as the honorific “will you come?” However, if one omits the *ra*, then the only possible form for the very would be the potential form.

Potential (*ra-nuki*): *Kono hoteru de wa Nihon no terebi ga mireru.*

In this hotel, you can watch Japanese television.

Gogo, koremasu ka?

Can you come this afternoon?

Ra-nuki is normally considered something to be avoided. On the other hand, the advantage and rationality of *ra-nuki* as shown in the above example have been well demonstrated, and so one often hears, especially from academics in the field of linguistics, opinions such as “*ra-nuki* is an extremely natural linguistic development,” and “it is useless to resist the change.” However, other linguists have rebutted such attitudes.

When considering the *ra-nuki* phenomenon, one must first understand when this change began, and when it was coined as *ra-nuki* (*kotoba*).

2.1 When Did “*Mireru*”-Type Parlance First Come into Use?

It is reported that “*mireru*”-type parlance first came into use as a regional dialect during the Meiji era. It then started cropping up in conversations in Tokyo, from the Taishō era to the early Shōwa era, and there were even examples of such forms appearing in written Japanese. The use of this phrasing spread rapidly after the Second World War, but it was already being criticized from the time of the war onward. The comprehensive and general term *ra-nuki* (*kotoba*) first surfaced at the end of the Shōwa era, and by the Heisei era, it was treated as something akin to an everyday word.

2.1.1 Identification as Regional Dialect: 1897

Among the documents listing the colloquial grammar of Tōtōmi (corresponds to the western part of the modern day Shizuoka Prefecture), it is recorded that the dialect of the region featured expressions such as *nigereru* ‘can escape’ and *ukereru* ‘can receive’. Matsushita, the author of the document, is a native of Tōtōmi. He writes that if one were to say *nigerareru* or *ukereru* in Tōtōmi, there is a risk that it would be mistaken for the passive form (‘given the slip’, ‘be received’).

In Tokyo, non-consonant-stem verbs are conjugated with *rareru*—i.e. *nigerareru*, *ukereru*, etc. However, if one were to say *nigerareru* or *ukereru* in Tōtōmi, it may be mistaken for the passive form. Thus, in Tōtōmi one should cut off part of the *rareru* such that *nigerareru/ukereru* becomes *nigereru/ukereru*.

Daizaburō Matsushita (1897) *Shintei Tōtōmi Bunten* [New Book of Tōtōmi Grammar] (*Shintei Nihon Zokugo Bunten: Tsuketari Tōtōmi Bunten* [New Revised Version of the Book of Colloquial Japanese Grammar: With Section on Tōtōmi Grammar]), re-recorded in Benseisha, 1997

2.1.2 Identification as Common Spoken Japanese: 1899

Sometimes speakers will omit the *ra* from ‘-iru’ verbs, ‘-eru’ verbs, and the k-irregular verb, and utter them in the ‘*reru*’ form.

Okireru ‘can arise’ *dereru* ‘can emerge’, ‘go out’, etc. *uereru* ‘can plant’ *koreru* ‘can come’

Shigematsu Mitsuya (1899) *Kōgo no Kenkyū* [Research on Spoken Language] (*Bunpō to Kokugogaku* [Grammar and Japanese Philology]), re-recorded in Chūbun Kanshoten, 1932.

The term in the title, *Kōgo* ‘spoken language’, is used to make a contrast to written language. However, one cannot ignore the possibility that the regional dialect of the author Mitsuya’s birthplace (present day Tsuruoka City, Yamagata Prefecture) may have had some influence on his observations.

To indicate potential, vowel-stem verbs (‘iru’ verbs and ‘eru’ verbs) are conjugated with *reru* or *rareru*. Examples include *yomareru* ‘can read’, *nigereru* ‘can escape’, *nigerareru* ‘can escape’, etc. However, *rareru* cannot be used for consonant-stem verbs. Hence, one cannot say *yomarereru*.

Daizaburō Matsushita (1901) *Nihon Zokugo Bunten* [Book of Colloquial Japanese Grammar: Third Edition] (*Shintei Nihon Zokugo Bunten: Tsuketari Tōtōmi Bunten* [New Revised Version of the Book of Colloquial Japanese Grammar: With Section on Tōtōmi Grammar]), re-recorded in Benseisha, 1997.

Regarding the term *zokugo* ‘colloquial’ which appears in the title of the book pertaining to “spoken language,” it refers to the language spoken among the Tokyo middle class. It therefore also refers to the language that, through being commonly understood, would become the standard language of future speakers (page 2 of the aforementioned book). Matsushita indicates that both *nigereru* and *nigerareru* were being used in spoken language. Thus, here too, one cannot discard the possibility that Matsushita’s mother dialect may have biased his observations.

2.1.3 The Situation from the Taishō Era Onward

The use of such verb conjugation is considered to have spread in Tokyo as a result of the Great Kantō Earthquake. The Great Earthquake and the social changes and migration that took place during the recovery period resulted in the influx of many different regional dialects into Tokyo, in particular, into Yamanote ‘the uptown middle-class quarter’(Tanaka 1983: 307-308). During the mid-Taishō era, forms such as *okireru*, *ukereru*, and *koreru*, were being used among people, albeit not in formal situations.

The *ra* of the *rareru* is omitted from verbs such as *okirareru*, *ukerareru*, and *korareru*, which therefore become *okireru*, *ukereru*, *koreru*, respectively. Such conjugation can be witnessed with ‘-iru’ verbs, ‘-eru’ verbs, and irregular verbs. Such parlance is used in simple speech, but these forms are not used in more formal speech.

Daizaburō Matsushita (1924) *Hyōjyun Nihongo Bunpō* [Standard Japanese Grammar]
(Same content as in Daizaburō Matsushita 1930, *Kaisen Hyōjyun Nihongo Bunpō* [Revised Standard Japanese Grammar])

Examples of such verb conjugation also began appearing in written Japanese.

Nani, ano sawa wa suso made orireru nante mono ja nē. Yanagi no ha de mo koite kuttera

What? You’ve got to be crazy if you think you can go down the gulley to the foot. You’d be better off stripping off willow leaves and eating them!¹³

(Utterances of a Farmer in Komoro, Nagano Prefecture)
Tōson Shimazaki (1912) *Chikumagawa no Sukechi* [A Sketch of Chikumagawa]

Mata kore hodo teire shita sono hana no hitotsu mo mirezu ni oitaterarete iku jibun no hō ga...

Me? I’m being driven away, unable to see even one of the flowers that I had worked so hard on?

Zenzō Kasai (1918), *Ko o Tsurete* [Bring the Children]

Omae datte, soko kara dete wa koremai.

Even you can’t get out from there.

Masaji Ibuse (1923) *Sanshōou* [Salamander]

Soto no mon no temae, korenain’da yo.

Considering that there is an outsider here, I can’t come.

Kunio Kishida (1926) *Mura de Ichiban no Kuri no Ki* [The Best Chestnut Tree in the Village]

Jinsei wa tsui ni junkan shōsū no naka kara derenai.

In life, you cannot escape from recurring decimals.

Takiji Kobayashi (1926) “Nikki [Diary] 1926.6.7,” *Kobayashi Takiji Nizenshu Dainanakan* [Second Collection of the Works of Takiji Kobayashi, Volume Seven]

Iika, koko e nido mo sando mo, denaoshite koreru tokoro ja nain’da.

You understand? This is not a place you can come back to a second or third time.

Takiji Kobayashi (1929) *Kani Kōsen* [The Crab Cannery Ship]

¹³ It should be noted that Hideo Suzuki (1994) suspects that *orireru* might have been a misprint of *oriru*.

Ginsaku wa ikka wo hanarete mireru yō ni natteita.

Ginsaku was then able to see his family from a distance.

Yasunari Kawabata (1933) *Hatachi [Twenty Year's Old]*

Nakamura (1953) writes that he became aware of the use of such parlance by the Tokyo's "new upper classes" (as opposed to the uptown "middle classes") in 1928, and that its use spread rapidly after the end of the war. As for postwar NHK radio broadcasts, while there are no reported examples of such parlance being used in news and weather reports, there was a case where the phrase *tatteireru kodomo* 'children that can keep standing' that was used during a news analysis program in 1951. It was also reported that the following phrases were spoken by a contestant in the quiz program *Nijū no Tobira* 'Twenty Doors' in 1947: *Sore wa yagai de mo miremasu ka?* 'Can you see it outside?' and *Nikugan de miremasu ka?* 'Can you see it with the naked eye?'

As part of a study conducted by the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics in 1949, 147 and 544 Tokyo residents were surveyed about the use of *ko(ra)renai*, and *tabe(ra)renai*. The study aimed to investigate the extent of variance and fluctuation in each case (National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics 1951). The study was likely the very first fact-finding survey conducted on the matter.

In 1950, *mireru* appeared in a newspaper headline.



Asahi Shimbun (morning edition)
September 12th 1950

[Caption]

[日食は見える /

Nisshoku wa mireru /

"You can see an eclipse"]

The year 1952 saw the release of a Japanese language dictionary that included *koreru*.

Koreru (2) (Intransitive, '-eru' verb) Able to come (colloquial)

Kyōsuke Kindaichi (ed) 1952, *Meikai Japanese Dictionary* (revised edition), Sanseidō.

2.1.4 Identification as Nonstandard Japanese

As Kanda 1964, Tanaka 1983, Inoue 1992, Niino 2012, among others, indicated in their respective works, such parlance was already being cited as nonstandard Japanese in the year 1943.

Examples of vocabulary or syntax that can destroy the beauty and precision of modern Japanese

While *rareru* ought to be used when signifying potential, a considerable number of people use *reru* instead. Moreover, such usage is frequently found among the writings of intellectuals. For example, *kakerareru* ‘can run’ becomes *kakereru*, and *tojirareru* ‘can bind up’ becomes *tojireru*.

(*Nihongo*, 3-6, June 1943)

In addition, the following identification was made, from which one can infer that the view that the usage was erroneous had already been established during the period preceding the end of the war.

In some regional dialects, the ‘-*reru*’ ending is sometimes used with the imperfect form of non-consonant-stem verbs to signify potential. For example,

Okirenai ‘cannot arise’, *miremasu* (masu form of *mireru*), *ukereru*, *koreru*.

Even though the potential auxiliary verb *reru* should only follow the imperfect form of consonant-stem verbs, it seems that it is also frequently used with non-consonant-stem verbs. Be that as it may, it is certainly not standard parlance.

Kōkichi Yuzawa (1944) *Gendai Gohō no Shomondai* [Issues in Modern Grammar]

The following concerns a letter from a viewer that was taken up as a subject of debate at the 1964 Broadcasting Language Committee.

A viewer wrote in to say that during the program *Gogo no Sanpo Michi* [Afternoon Walking], *miremasu* was said instead of *miraremasu*.

(...) As the viewer points out, one sometimes hears the parlance *mireru* nowadays. Nevertheless, it cannot be considered appropriate broadcasting language.

(Language Research Team of the Television Program Research Department 1964) “Broadcasting Language Memo 18”
Appeared in *NHK monthly Report on Broadcast Research*

Some argue that the next development that will follow *ra-nuki kotoba* will be *re-tasu kotoba* (*re*-added possible form of verbs, in which potential verbs derived from consonant-stem verbs are supplemented with *re* (Shioda 2001; Inoue 2003; Shin 2004; Sano 2009, 2012; and Matsuda 2012)). However, as one can see from the following example, resistance to *re-tasu kotoba* was already being expressed from a much earlier stage.

Asoko ni kuruma wa okerenai yo ‘You can’t leave your car there!’ —I have grown indifferent to such frequently heard words as *kireru* ‘can wear’ and *tabereru*, but words like *okereru* ‘can leave’ invoke an adverse reaction even in one so thickheaded as I. (Teacher [age: 24], Tokyo)

Letters section, Asahi Shimbun Morning Edition January 5th 1969

Thus, considering that seventy years have already elapsed since it was first identified as non-standard Japanese, “*mireru/tabereru*” parlance is by no means a recent manifestation of language disarray; rather, by now it has surely come of age.

2.1.5 So When Was the Term *Ra-nuki* Coined?

While the term *ra-nuki* (*kotoba*) is now in common usage, it apparently has not been around for such a long time. Before the term became established, unwieldy wording was used such as that it was seen in the title of Nakamura’s thesis, Such Parlance as “*Koreru*,” *Mireru*,” *Tabereru*,” etc. (1953).

However, one can also find examples of wording that is much more similar to *ra-nuki* (*kotoba*), such as the following.

Nowadays, even in Tokyo, one often hears such speech as *mireru*, *kireru*, and *okireru*. How should we consider this series of potential expressions? It is apt to consider that this represents the dropping of the *ra* syllable from normative syntax like *ikirareru* ‘can live’ and *nerareru* ‘can sleep’.

Kōichi Miyachi 1953

There are various theories regarding the establishment of this type of potential verb. Some argue that it was established as a phonetic contraction in which the *ra* is omitted from the potential verb *rareru*...

Sumiko Kanda 1964

I was asked why one removes the *ra*, despite it being essential.

October 9th 1976, Asahi Shimbun morning edition, editorial opinion section

The “Missing *ra* Syndrome”

July 6th 1983, Tokyo Shimbun morning edition, heading from the letters section

I believe that words such as *orirenai* ‘cannot go down’ etc. require the *ra*, as in *orirarenai*, but nowadays the *ra* is being omitted.

19\June 21st 1984, Asahi Shimbun morning edition, editorial opinion section

Kireru, mireru, dereru, koreru... such *reru*-style talk has been spreading among the young people for some time now...

December 1984, *Jisho ni nai Kotoba Omoshiro Tokuhon* [Words you won’t find in the dictionary: An Interesting Textbook]
Shufu-to-Seikatsusha

The oft-highlighted *mireru* and *tabereru* have formidable advantages in that by dropping the *ra*, the potential can be clearly differentiated from the passive, and the pronunciation becomes much easier. It is for this reason that they have proliferated to the extent that it has.

March 1st 1986, Asahi Shimbun morning edition, reader’s letter

(Ryōichi) Satō: Regarding “*reru kotoba*,” the results of Tetsuya Kunihiro and Masachi Nakamoto’s study (“Report on Survey of Variance in the Tokyo Dialect” 1984) reveal that “*kireru*” is “often used” by around fifty-five percent of people aged under twenty years old.

March 1988 “Symposium on Changes in Language,” “Language” Series 28: *Changes in Language*

The following is the earliest appearance of the nomenclature *ra-nuki* among the material the author acquired.

Concern about ‘ra’-nuki kotoba

(...) While it is commonly heard parlance nowadays, one is concerned about the use of ‘*ra*’-*nuki* *kotoba* such as *mireru* and *tabereru* in television programs and in daily conversations. (...)

January 13th 1980, Mainichi Shimbun morning edition, title and content of reader’s letter

Then from 1987 onward, the term begins to appear frequently in newspapers and similar media.

Indignation at the prevalence of *ra-nuki kotoba*

January 12th 1987, Tokyo Shimbun morning edition, title of reader’s letter

Hard to accept “*ra*” *nuki* pronunciation

August 6th 1987, Yomiuri Shimbun morning edition (Tokyo Metropolitan area edition), title of reader’s letter

***Ra-nuki* “*reru*” language (1)**

September 2nd 1987, Yomiuri Shimbun morning edition (Tokyo Metropolitan area edition) heading

Unpleasant sounding *ra-nuki kotoba*

November 10th 1987, Tokyo Shimbun morning edition, title of reader’s letter

In recent years, there have been various discussions about “disarray” or “fluctuation” in the Japanese language. Aside from the problem of so-called *ra-nuki kotoba* such as *mireru* and *okireru* and the accent thereof, as has been identified in the research data and analysis of the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics study “Linguistic Life in Major Cities” (March 1984), it has also been pointed out that there are problems concerning such parlance as *gakusei suru* and *seishun suru* (literally ‘do student’ and ‘do youth’, meaning experience student life/experience youth life), the inundation of foreign origin words, and the prevalence of manga lettering.¹⁴

Agency for Cultural Affairs (1988) *The Culture and Cultural Administration of Japan*

“*Ra-nuki*” *kotoba*

April 9th 1989, Asahi Shimbun morning edition, column heading

“*Ra-nuki*” *kotoba* must be remedied!

August 24th 1989, Mainichi Shimbun morning edition, title of reader’s letter

Where I live, *ra-nuki* is a splendid expression

August 30th 1989, Mainichi Shimbun, title of reader’s letter

¹⁴ It should be noted that in the article “Linguistic Life in Major Cities” published by the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics study (1981) cited here, such wording as *ra-nuki* (*kotoba*) is not used.

It appears that the term *ra-nuki* started being commonly used by linguistics researchers from the 1990s. There are, however, a few examples of its use by linguistics as early as the 1980s.

The categories listed in Yomiuri Shimbun's serial "Tokyo Kotoba" are "ga-column nasal sound," "changes in sa-column sound," "new Tokyo dialect," *ra-nuki kotoba*, and "changes in accent," etc.
Kanno 1988

Nowadays, people are using the often criticized syntax of *mireru*, *kireru*, and *tabereru*. The classic syntax for indicating the potential of these verbs is *mirareru*, *kirareru*, and *taberareru*. These verbs are constricted into *mireru* etc. in what has been dubbed "*ra-nuki kotoba*," and such parlance has spread considerably owing to the fact that it is much easier to utter.

Nomoto 1989

The same applies with so-called *ra-nuki kotoba* such as *kireru* and *mireru*.

Nomoto 1989

(Kikuo) Nomoto: I reckon that so-called *ra-nuki kotoba* such as *mireru* and *kireru* has not yet entered the official lexicon.

April 1990, "Symposium on Language Usage," "Language" Series 32: *Language Usage*

On July 17th, 1992, NHK's education channel broadcast the program "Language is ever changing: *mirareru* or *mireru*—which does the majority favor?" During this program, the term *ra-nuki* was used.

The event that likely played an instrumental role in making *ra-nuki (kotoba)* by-and-large a common word was the publication by the Prime Minister's Office on September 27th, 1992 of the Results of the Survey of Public Opinion on the Japanese Language (republished by Agency of Cultural Affairs in 1993). The analysis of the results of the public opinion survey in the document included a section titled "Attitudes toward so-called '*ra-nuki kotoba*'." The newspapers then ran articles based on the content of this publication with headings such as the following: "'*Ra-nuki kotoba*'—A common word among the young" (September 28th 1992, Asahi Shimbun morning edition). In addition, *ra-nuki kotoba* was included in the section on "Customs and Trends" in the 1993 edition of *Basic Knowledge of Modern Language* (Jiyūkokuminsha, released January 1993 [note that it was not included in the 1992 edition]).

2.2 Analysis of Survey Results

2.2.1 Overall Trends

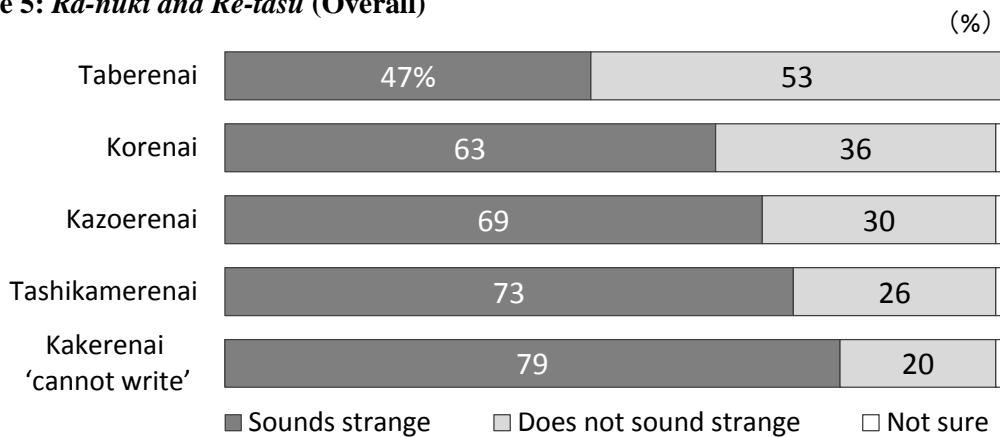
First, we examine the overall results for the five question-items in this survey (four questions on *ra-nuki*, and one question on *re-tasu*).

Throughout the preceding studies on *ra-nuki*, there is a trend whereby "the fewer syllables a verb has, the more likely *ra-nuki* will occur."¹⁵ If this is the case, then when it comes to the results of these question

¹⁵ Please refer to Katsumi Shibuya (1993) or Kenjirō Matsuda (2012). Note that in the song lyrics shown below, the few-syllabled verb *iru* (be present *animate*) is conjugated as *ireta*, but the verbs *shinjiru* 'trust' and *kotaeru*

items, we should expect the order of acceptability to be as follows: *Korenai*>*taberenai*>*kazoerenai* ‘cannot count’>*tashikamerenai* ‘cannot confirm’. However, the actual results did not conform to this expectation. The sense of incongruence (i.e., “sounds strange”) for *korenai* was much greater than anticipated (**Figure 5**). The question given to respondents was *8-jī made ni wa totemo korenai* ‘By no means can I come before 8:00’ (the same phrase used in past surveys; a point which we will return to later). It may well be the case that the word *totemo* ‘by no means’ does not register as a familiar modern Ja panese word. This is an issue that should be addressed in future studies.

Figure 5: Ra-nuki and Re-tasu (Overall)



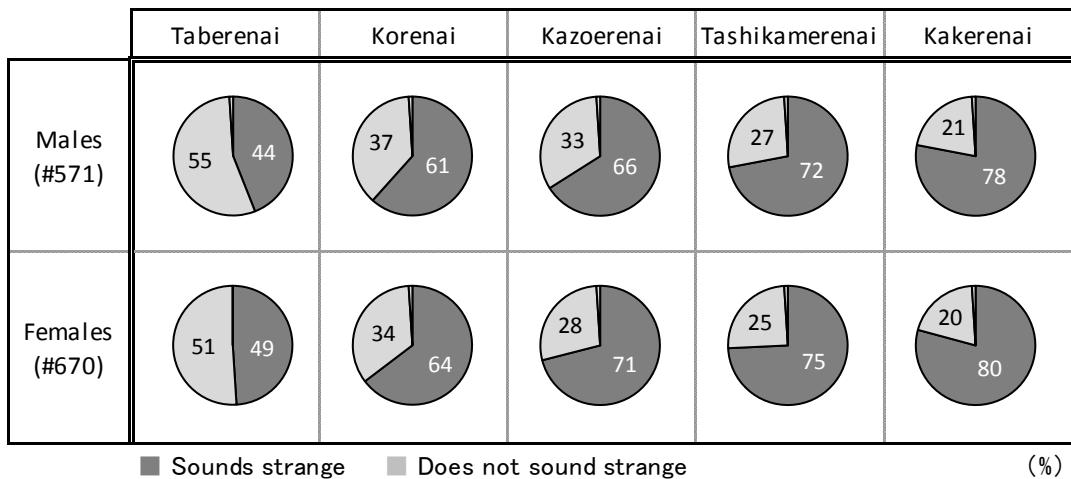
2.2.2 Trends by Personal Attributes

The first gender-specific trend observed was that for each question item, female respondents were more likely to select the answer “sounds strange” (**Figure 6**). The tendency for females to be stricter and more circumspect towards the *ra-nuki* phenomenon than males is in accordance with what has been expressed in past studies, namely that “in response to various questions pertaining to linguistic attitudes, female respondents are more likely to give normative answers.”

“respond” are not conjugated correspondingly as *shinjirezu* and *kotaerezu*. The following is therefore an example of *ra-nuki* and *ra-iri* (*ra-present*) existing together in the same song lyrics.

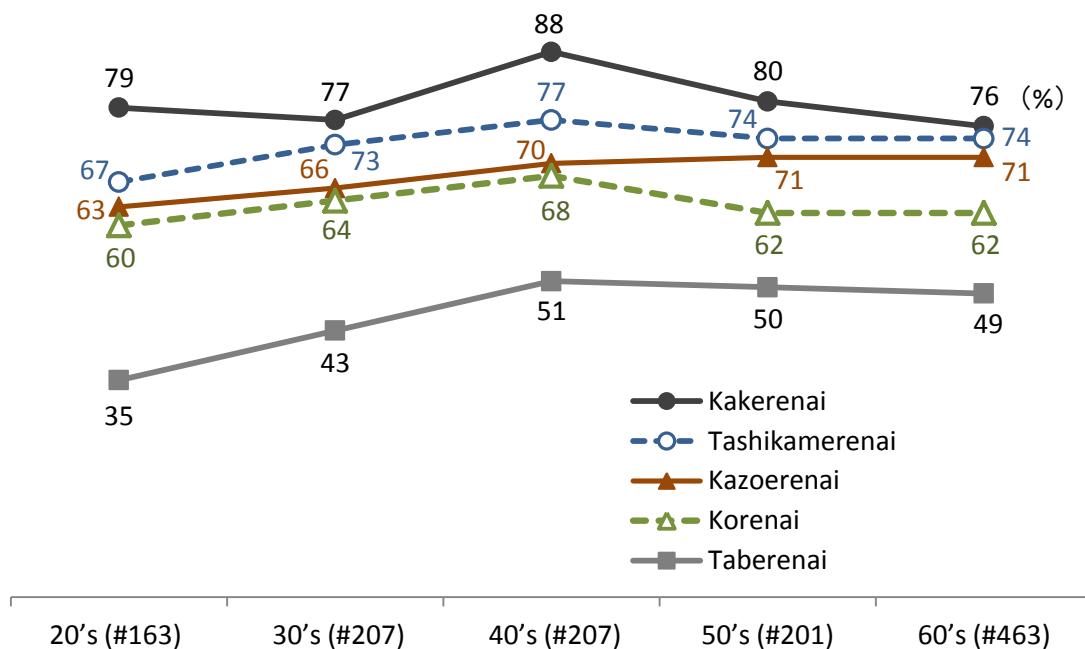
Sayonara sae jōzu ni ienakatta Ah anata no ai wo <u>shinjirarezu</u> obieteitano (...) Nanni mo iezu tada naiteru dake de Hontō no kimochi itsu demo ietanara Soba ni <u>ireta</u> ne zutto Ah anata no ai ni <u>kotaerarezu</u> nigete gomen ne Sayonara sae jōzu ni ienakatta <i>Anata ni Aete Yokatta</i> , lyrics by Kyōko Koizumi, 1991 (Underlining by authors of this paper)	Couldn't even say goodbye properly Ah, I was scared, unable to trust your love (...) Couldn't say anything, I could only weep If I could have told you my true feelings anytime Then I could have been there at your side, always Ah, I'm sorry, I couldn't respond to your love and I ran away Couldn't even say goodbye properly
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Figure 6: Ra-nuki and Re-tasu (by gender)



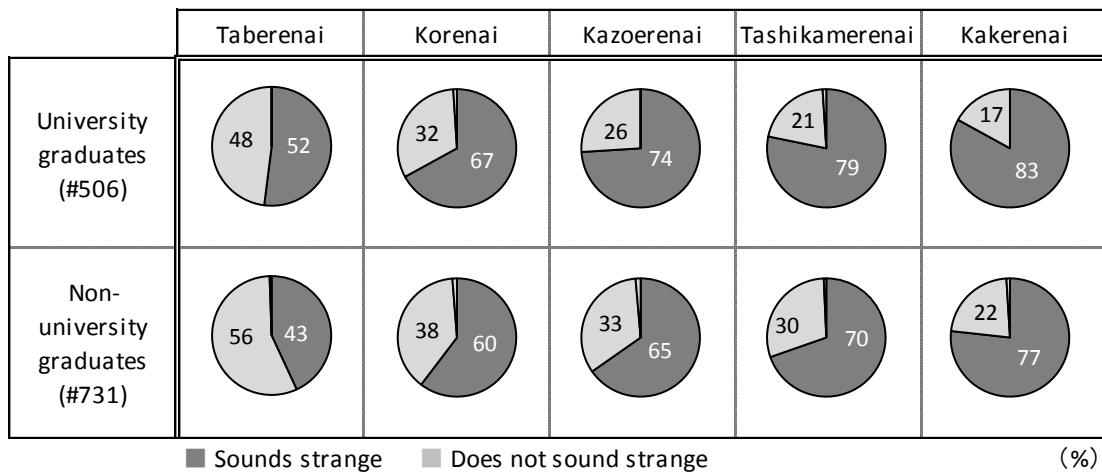
Looking at the results by age, with the exception of the *taberenai* question item, no major difference was observed (**Figure 7**). At first glance, this finding is somewhat curious; however, we will discuss this result in greater detail later in the paper.

Figure 7: Ra-nuki and Re-tasu “Sounds Strange” (by age)



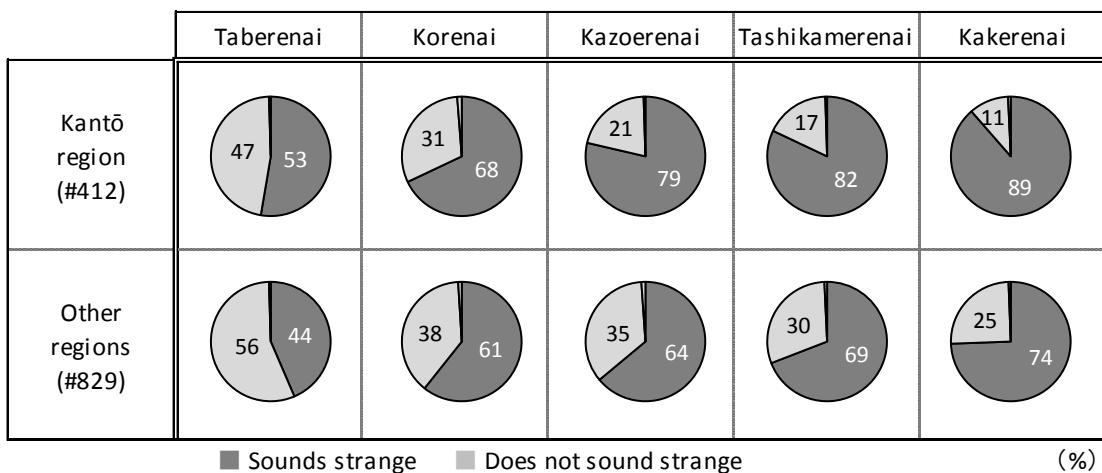
Turning next to academic background, for each question item, university graduate respondents were more likely to answer “sounds strange” than non-university graduate respondents (**Figure 8**). This finding suggests that a person’s education has some bearing on whether or not they consider “*ra-nuki* to be acceptable.”

Figure 8: *Ra-nuki* and *Re-tasu* (by academic background)



As for differences by region, the most conspicuous finding was that compared to the respondents from other regions, respondents from the Kantō region were considerably more likely to answer “sounds strange” (**Figure 9**). *Ra-nuki* is an issue that cannot be separated from region, and it is necessary to advance further discussions while treating the data with due care.¹⁶

Figure 9: *Ra-nuki* and *Re-tasu* (by region)



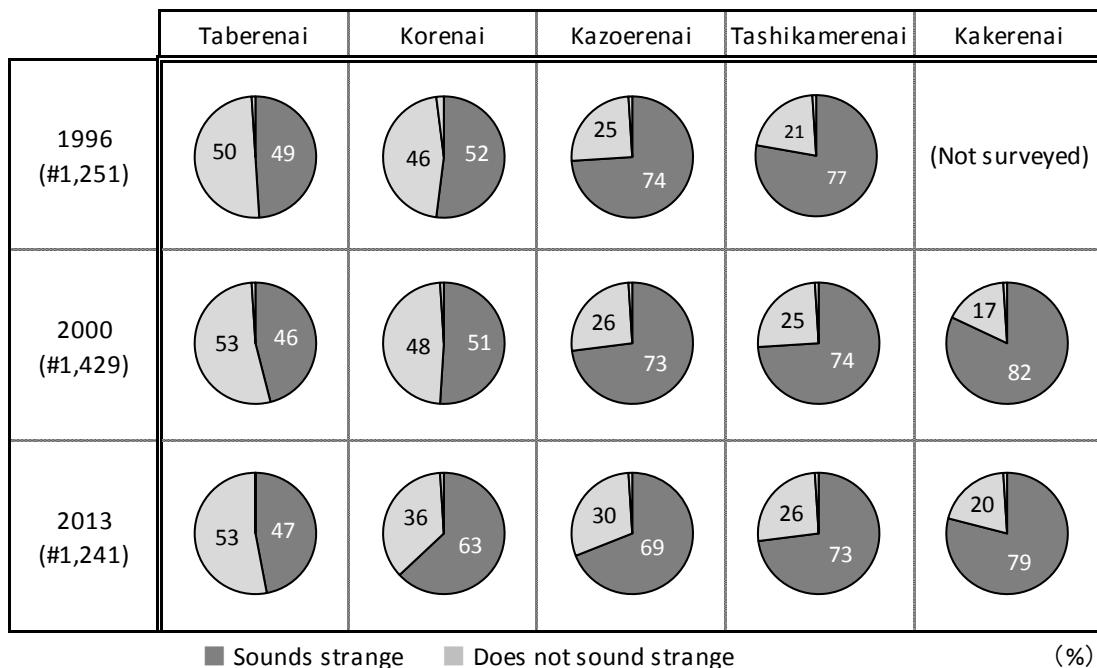
¹⁶ See Footnotes 17 and 20 of Takehiro Shioda & Yōko Yamashita (2013)

2.2.3 Comparison with Past Surveys

There have been past surveys (1996, 2000) with largely the same content as the one at hand (Kajiki 1996; Shioda 2001).¹⁷ The wording of the questions set to the respondents was identical. However, there were differences in sampling method. Whereas the two past surveys used two-stage stratified random sampling, this survey utilized a three-stage stratified random sampling based on the area sampling was used. Regarding the question items, the 1996 survey also included *mirenai* and *ikarenai* ‘cannot go’, but did not include *kakerenai*.

If all three surveys are compared, one can see a slight decline between 1996 and the present in the “sounds strange” answer rate for all items, with the exception of *korenai* (Figure 10). Nevertheless, this trend is not particularly conspicuous.

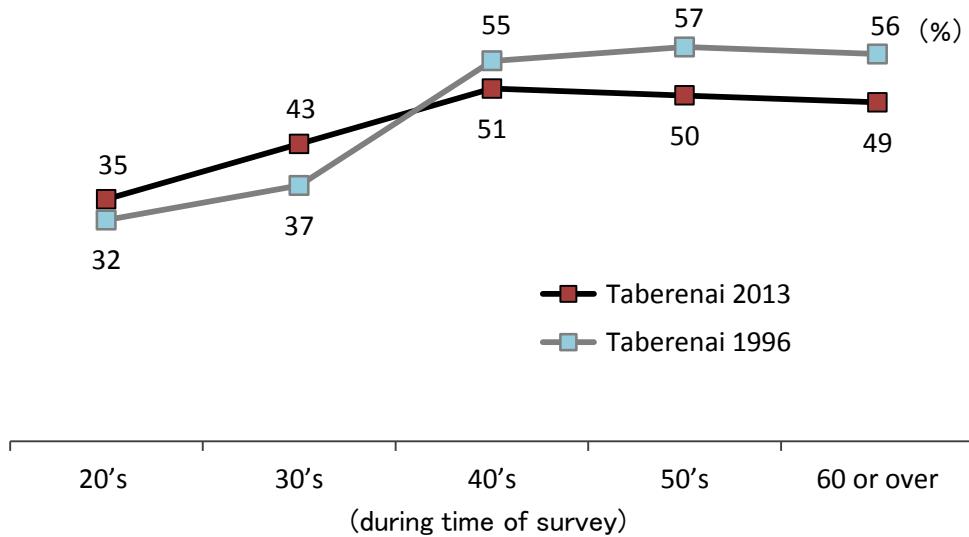
Figure 10: Ra-nuki and Re-tasu (comparison with past surveys)



We then ventured to compare the results by age for *taberenai* in the 1996 survey with those found in the present survey. Doing so revealed that the age disparity had become less pronounced than in past investigations (Figure 11).

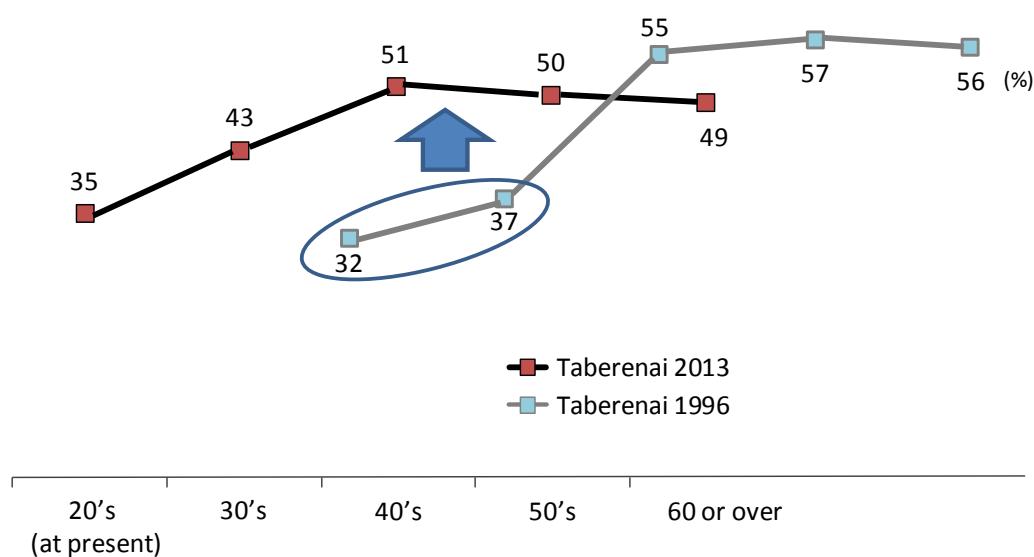
¹⁷ Examples of reports of surveys that examined *ra-nuki* and were conducted in connection with the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute include Shin’ichi Tsuchiya (1971), NHK Language Research Group (1980), and Hiroshi Ishino (1980). However, these studies were different in format and therefore we did not cite them.

Figure 11: Taberenai “Sounds Strange” (comparison of age breakdown for two surveys)



Those who were in their 20's (age 20-29) during the time of the 1996 survey were aged 37-46 at the time of the present survey. In order to ascertain how this cohort has changed during the interval between surveys, we shifted the line in **Figure 11** representing the 1996 survey age breakdown to the right by seventeen years. Doing so allowed us to identify a considerable leap in the answer rate for “sounds strange” among middle-aged respondents (those aged 37-46 in the present survey who were in their 20's in the 1996 survey, and those aged 47-56 in the present survey who were in their 30's in the 1996 survey) (**Figure 12**). In other words, in this age cohort, the sense of incongruence regarding *taberenai* has risen over the seventeen-year interval. We can therefore say that the respondents “became more conservative” with age.

Figure 12: Taberenai “Sounds Strange” (comparison by converting age to present)



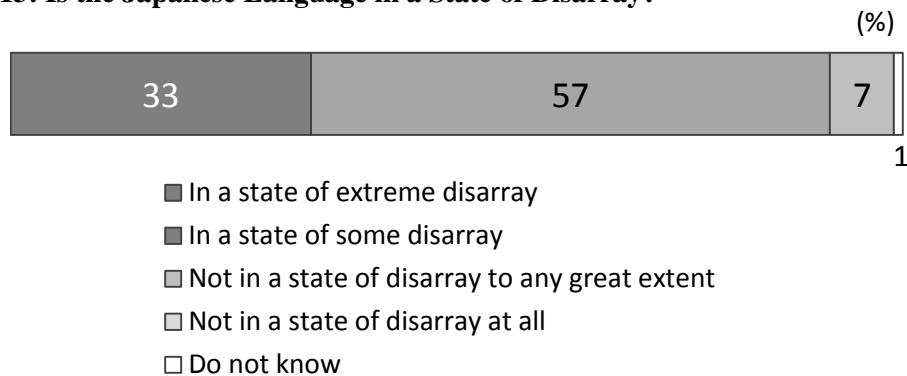
3. Questions Inquiring into Normative Consciousness

We also asked general questions about the present situation of the Japanese language, and how the Japanese language should be treated in NHK broadcasts.

3.1 Is the Japanese Language in Disarray?

According to the survey results, 33% considered that the Japanese language is “in a state of extreme disarray,” and 57% considered that it is “in a state of some disarray,” which, when taken together, represents more than 90% of the sample (**Figure 13**). “In a state of some disarray” was the most popular answer, with “in a state of extreme disarray” coming in second. Those who felt that the Japanese language is not in a state of disarray were in the minority. From this point on we will focus chiefly on the two answers, “...some disarray” and “...extreme disarray.”

Figure 13: Is the Japanese Language in a State of Disarray?



Looking at gender, the “...extreme disarray” answer was popular among female respondents (**Figure 14**). This finding is in line with what was highlighted in the preceding chapter, namely that “in response to various questions pertaining to linguistic awareness, female respondents are more likely to give normative answers.”

Turning to age, the “...some disarray” answer was popular with young respondents, and we observed that the “...extreme disarray” answer rate generally rises with age (**Figure 15**). The popularity of both answers then evens out at age 60 and over.

As for academic background, many of the university graduates answered “...some disarray,” while relatively few answered “...extreme disarray” (**Figure 16**). One should bear in mind that this finding reflects age difference to some extent (as there are a large number of university graduates among the young).

Figure 14: Is the Japanese Language in a State of Disarray? (by gender)

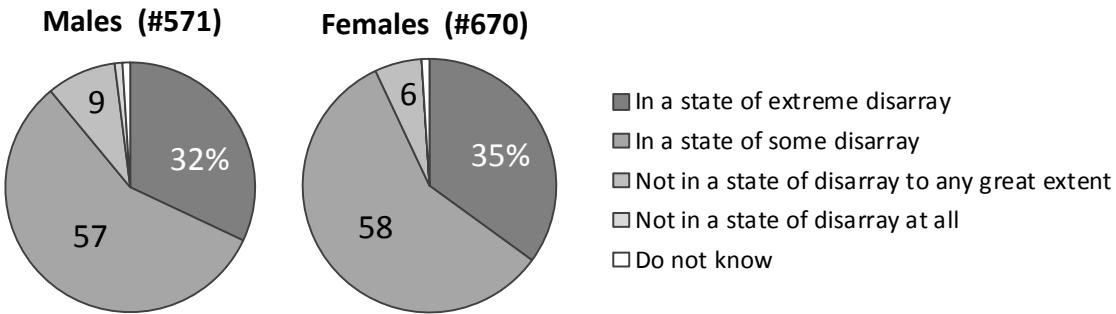


Figure 15: Is the Japanese Language in a State of Disarray? (by age)

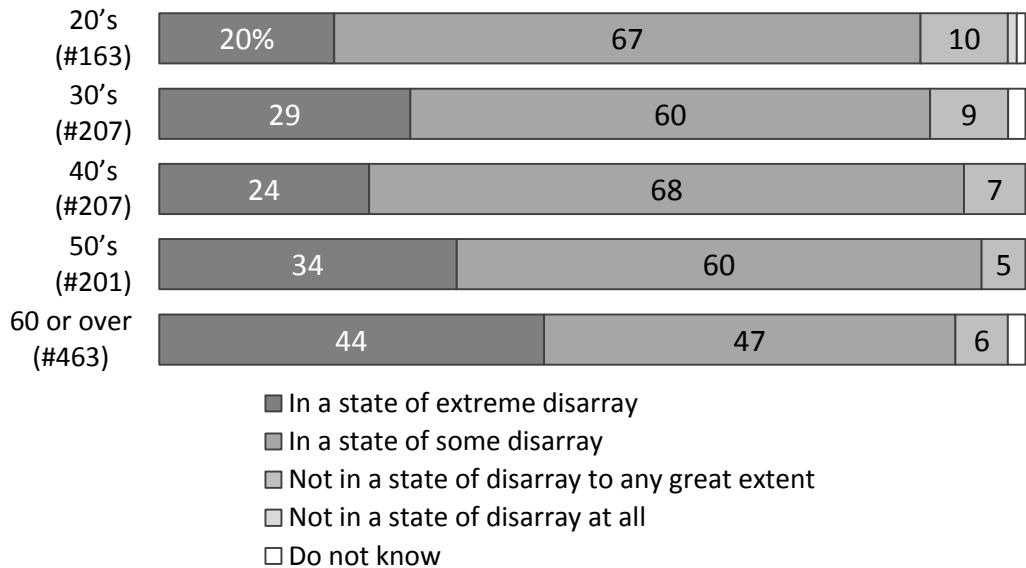
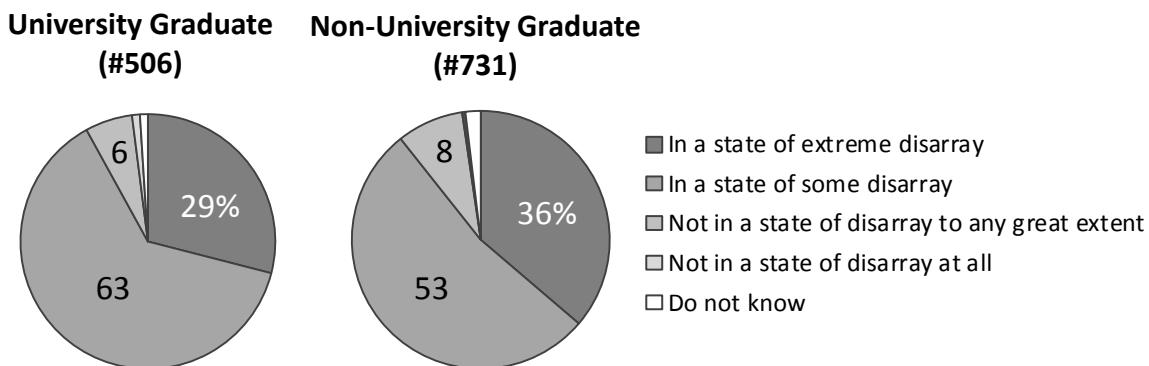


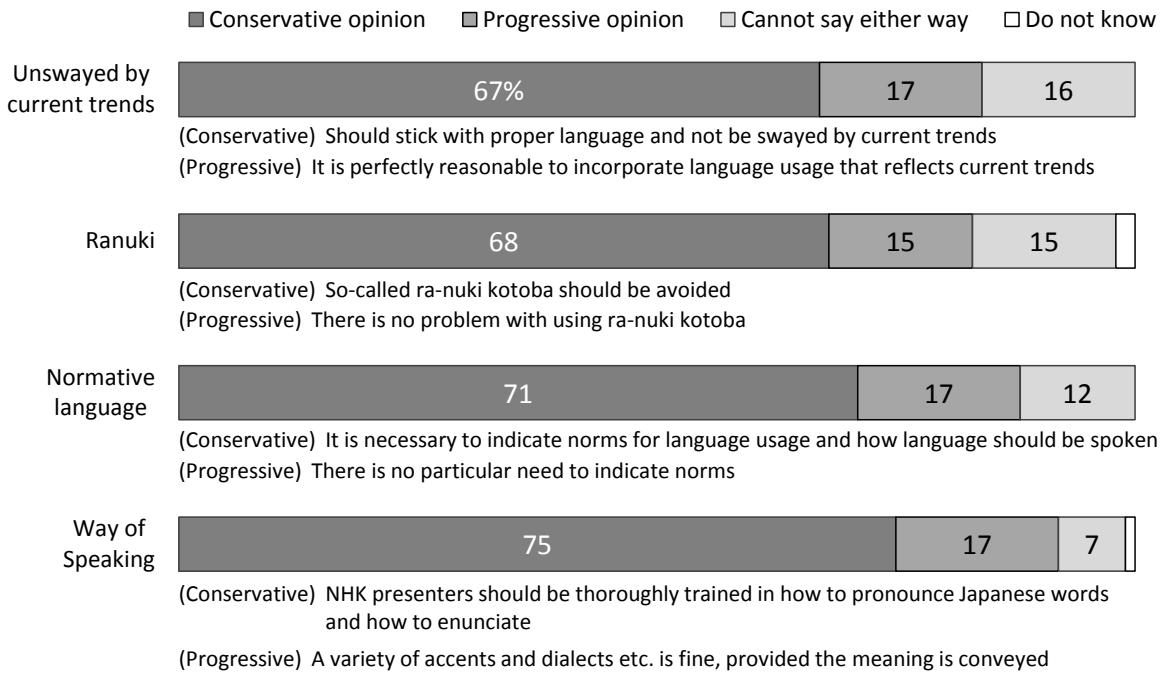
Figure 16: Is the Japanese Language in a State of Disarray? (by academic background)



3.2 What about NHK Broadcasts?

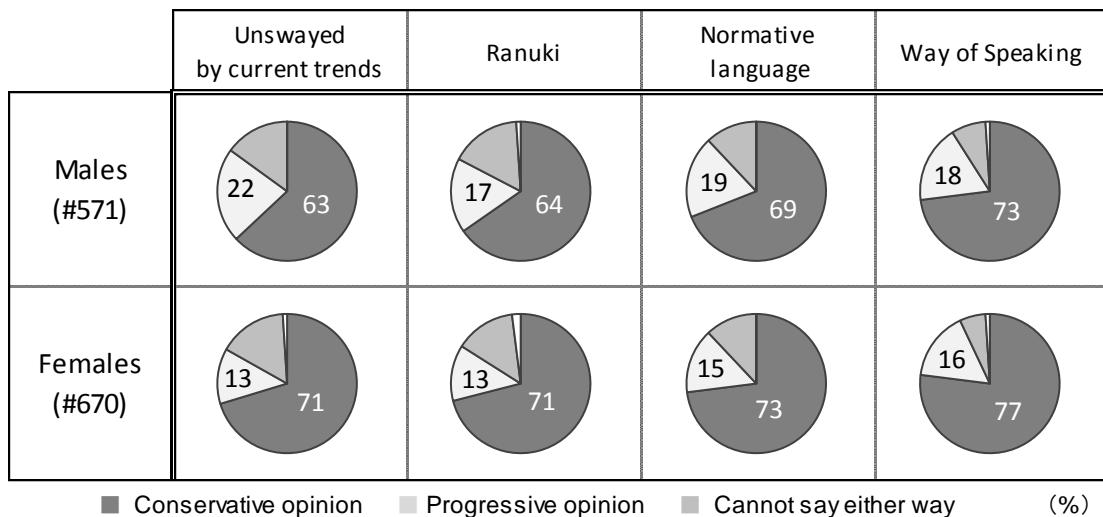
We then inquired into language usage in NHK broadcasts. For each question, most of the respondents gave a conservative opinion (**Figure 17**).

Figure 17: What about NHK Broadcasts? (overall)



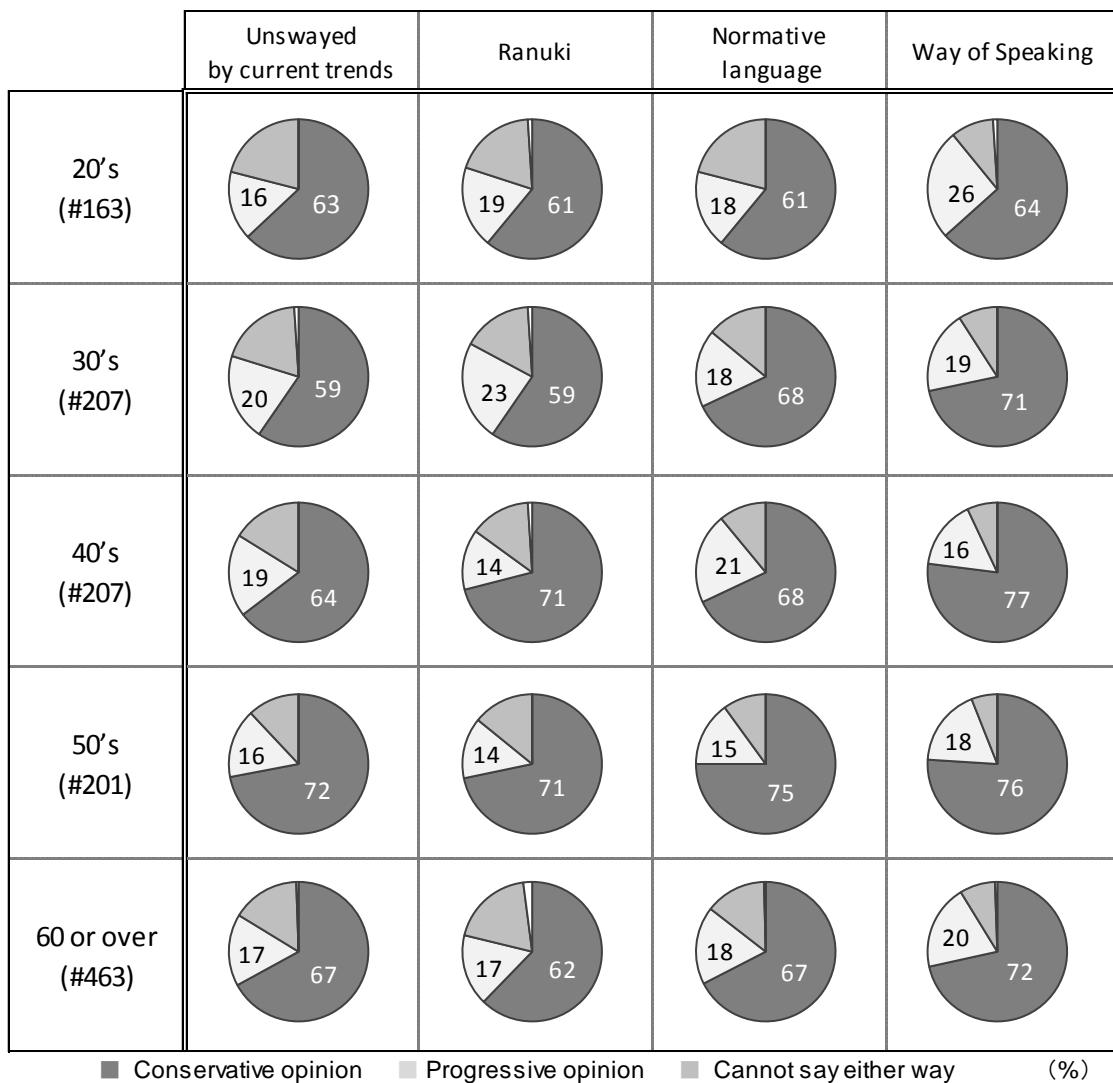
Looking at gender difference, female respondents were more likely to give a conservative opinion (**Figure 18**). This finding is consistent with the normative tendency previously discussed.

Figure 18: What about NHK Broadcasts? (by gender)



Regarding age difference, we did observe a general trend whereby the proportion of conservative opinions is greater with higher age groups, but this trend was not significant enough to be considered reflective of a major age gap (**Figure 19**).

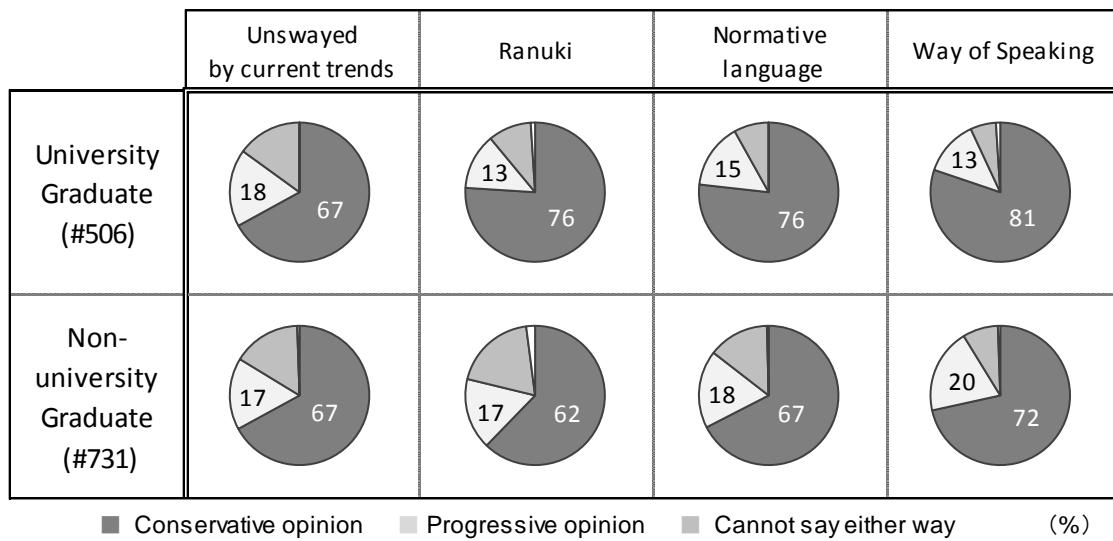
Figure 19: What about NHK Broadcasts? (by age)



A particularly noteworthy finding is that when we look at the age distribution for the item “so-called ‘*ra-nuki kotoba*’ should be avoided on NHK broadcasts,” we can see a sudden rise in “conservative opinion” from the 40’s onward, in contrast with the other items. There appears to be a strong tendency for the view that *ra-nuki* is unacceptable to become firmly fixed in middle-aged members of society. This finding is related to the observation seen in **Figure 12**, namely that people “become more conservative with age.”

As for academic background, while there was no difference with respect to the item “NHK broadcasts should stick with classic language and not be swayed by current trends,” for all other items, graduate respondents were more likely to give a conservative answer (**Figure 20**).

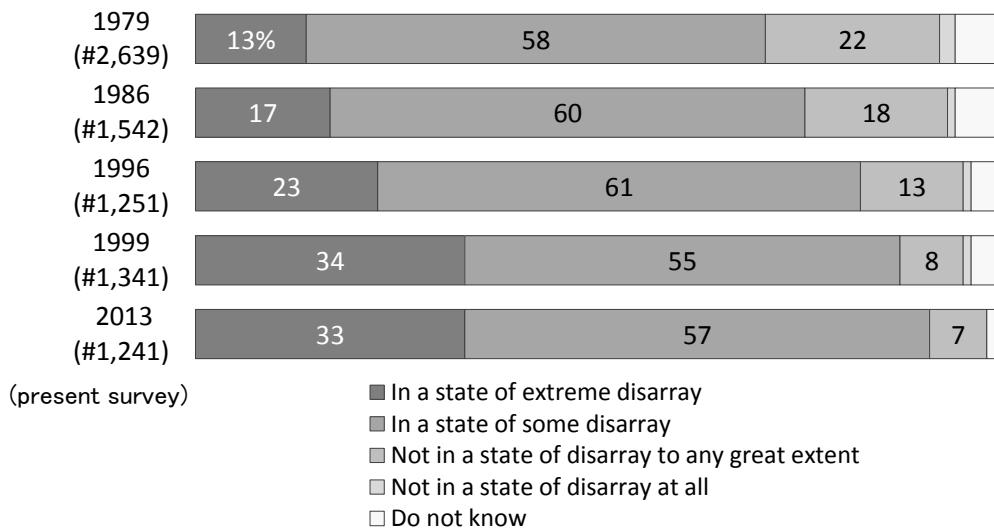
Figure 20: What about NHK Broadcasts? (by academic background)



3.3 Comparison with Past Surveys

There have been past surveys (1979, 1986, 1996, and 1999) which have asked the public for their opinion on whether “the Japanese language in a state of disarray” (NHK Public Opinion Research Group 1980; Ishino 1980; Ishino & Inagaki 1986; Kajiki 1996; Mogami & Yamashita 2000).¹⁸ A comparison of these past surveys gives the impression that the view that the Japanese language is “in a state of extreme disarray” is becoming more prevalent as the years go on (**Figure 21**). At least in terms of attitudes, a “sense of disarray” is growing year by year.

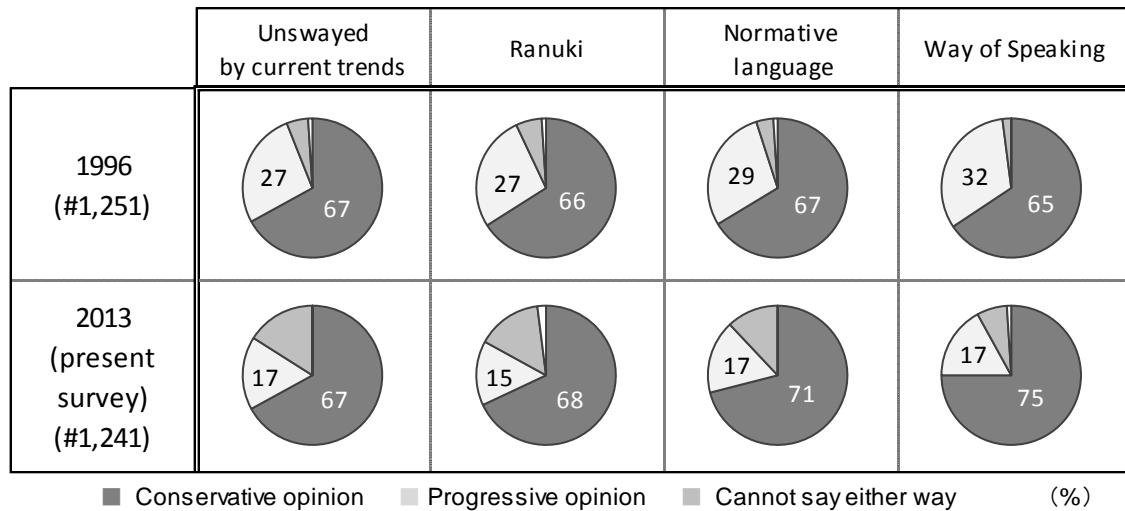
Figure 21: Is the Japanese Language in a State of Disarray? (comparison with past surveys)



¹⁸ The 1979 and 1986 survey polled men and women across Japan who were aged 16 and above. The surveys conducted after 1986 targeted men and women aged 20 and above.

The questions respondents answered concerning language usage in NHK broadcasts were exactly the same as in the 1996 survey (Kajiki 1996). A comparison of the surveys reveals that, as an overall trend, progressive opinion has declined, and the “cannot say either way” answer has become more popular (**Figure 22**) (Shioda 2013).

Figure 22: What about NHK Broadcasts? (comparison with past survey)



A particularly notable difference in the results of the present survey compared to the past surveys is that 75% of the respondents in the present survey answered that “NHK presenters should be thoroughly trained in how to pronounce Japanese words and how to enunciate,” whereas only 65% had given this answer in the 1996 survey. On the other hand, 17% of the respondents in the present survey answered “a variety of accents and dialects is fine, provided the meaning is conveyed,” compared to 32% of respondents who gave this answer in the 1996 survey.

4. Discussion concerning Age Gap

We will now turn again to the age gap, and discuss trends related to this grouping in detail. **Figure 23** and **Figure 24** show the “conservative answers” to each question item, discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, and rearrange responses according to the cohorts “49 and under” and “50 and above.”

Figure 23: Age Gap concerning whether *Ra-nuki* Syntax is considered “Strange”

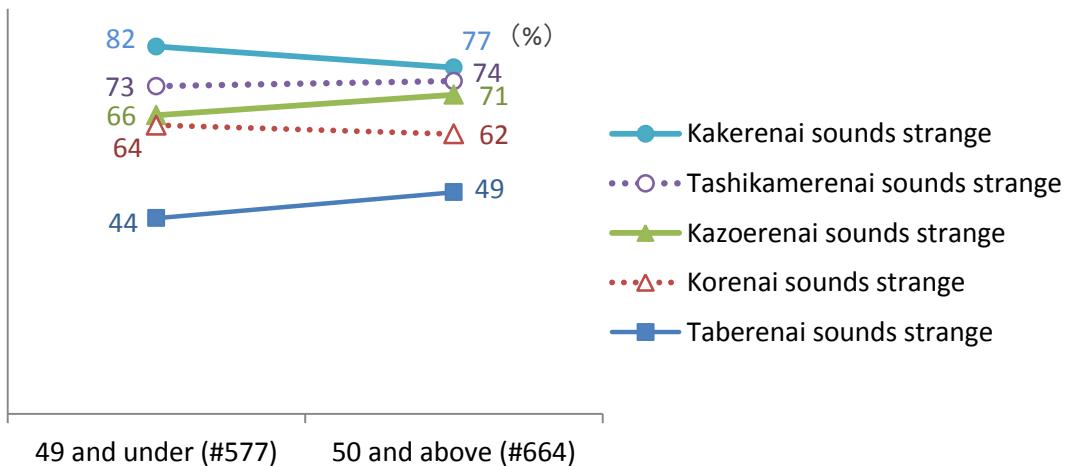


Figure 24: Age Gap in Items related to “Attitudes toward Language Usage in NHK Broadcasts and whether the Japanese Language is in a State of Disarray”

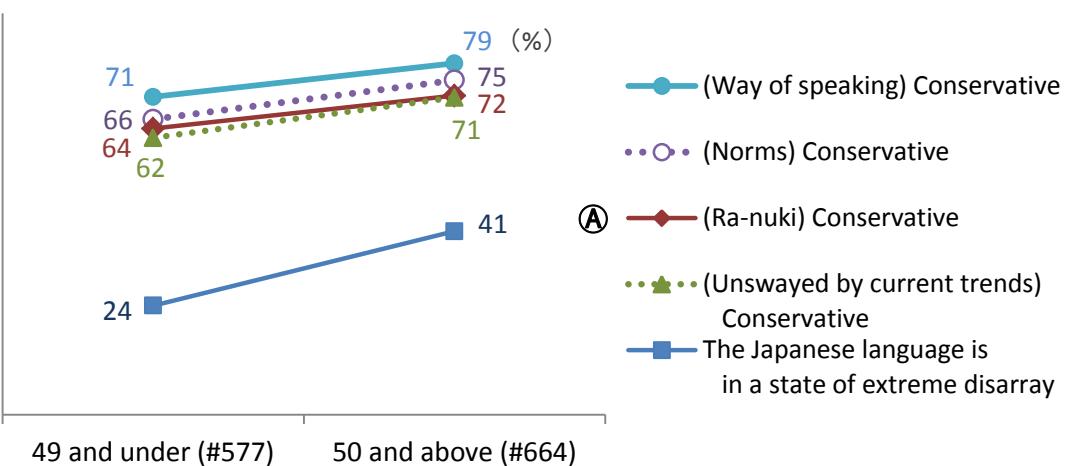
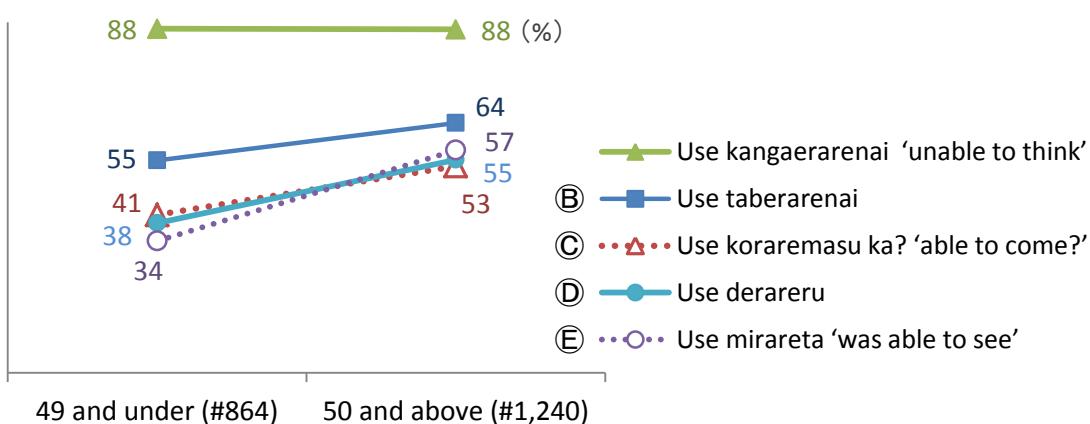


Figure 25: Age Gap according to Agency of Cultural Affairs’ Survey (2011)



The words *kakerenai* and *korenai* were much more likely to be considered “strange” by those aged 49 or under. With regard to *kakerenai*, this finding is potentially related to the fact that *re-tasu kotoba* (of which *kakerenai* is an example) have not yet permeated among the public to such a great extent. Regarding *korenai*, as pointed out previously, one may surmise that this was less to do with *ra-nuki*, and more to do with a sense of incongruence at the wording of the question—*totemo (korenai)* ‘by no means can I come’.

As for *taberenai*, *kazoerenai*, and *tashikamerenai*, those aged 50 and above were more likely to consider them “strange.” That being said, the age gap was not particularly significant, at a range of around 1-5%.

On the other hand, there was a relatively strong age gap regarding the items on language use in NHK broadcasts and whether or not the Japanese language is in a state of disarray, whereby respondents aged 50 and above were more likely to give conservative answers. The gap between respondents aged 49 and under and respondents aged 50 and above was at around 8-17%.

The Agency of Cultural Affairs’ survey (2,104 respondents, implemented in 2011, Agency of Cultural Affairs, 2011) inquired into which was more commonly used—*taberarenai* or *taberenai*. In **Figure 25**, we re-aggregated these results for cohorts “49 and under” and “50 and above.” The data shows a lack of any age gap, the reason being that even the younger generation does not often use *ra-nuki* syntax for the many-syllabled *kangaerarenai* / *kangaerenai* verb, but it does show a clear tendency toward conservative answers among the 50 or above group with regard to the other question items.

To sum up, an age gap can be observed in the results of the two surveys “Attitudes toward the Use of *Ra-nuki* Syntax” (Agency of Cultural Affairs’ Survey) and “Attitudes toward Language Usage in NHK Broadcasts and whether the Japanese Language is in a State of Disarray,” but there was no noticeable age gap with respect to whether or not the *ra-nuki* syntax is considered strange as an individual from of word.

5. What *Ra-nuki Kotoba* Reveals about Change in the Japanese Language: Final Thoughts

Let us compare the line in **Figure 24**, which indicates “(*Ra-nuki*) Conservative” (NHK Survey: the answer that *ra-nuki kotoba*, such as *mireru* as opposed to *mirareru* should be avoided), with the lines in **Figure 25**. The “(*Ra-nuki*) Conservative” line (Ⓐ) in **Figure 24** has a higher position than every “use *ra-iri* syntax (i.e. do not use *ra-nuki* syntax)” line (ⒷⒸⒹⒺ) in **Figure 25**, the one exception being *kangaerarenai*. In other words, we can make the following claim: The extent of the public demand for NHK to avoid *ra-nuki* across-the-board outweighs the extent to which *ra-iri* is used by individuals. From the data, we infer that there are many people who use *ra-nuki* themselves, but wish NHK to avoid *ra-nuki* in broadcasts (Shioda 2009).

One factor in this is the public’s desire for NHK broadcasts to be a source of normative language, but an additional factor is the attitude that one ought to consider *ra-nuki* syntax as strange (and that one should therefore answer as such in a survey). Such normative consciousness has probably been formed as a result

of people's social experiences, including encounters with the mass media (*ra-nuki* labeled as incorrect), school education (students lose marks if they use *ra-nuki* in school tests¹⁹), and job-hunting activities (use of *ra-nuki* can be disadvantageous in job interviews). The existence of such a notion is strongly connected to the lack of a noticeable age gap in **Figure 23** (i.e., even the younger generation answered that *ra-nuki* with various verbs is strange). The finding that more than 90% of respondents answered that the Japanese language is in a state of extreme or some disarray forms an essential premise when one considers such issues as *ra-nuki*.

As argued by Hidaka (2009), this normative consciousness can be interpreted as something that has slowed the progress of *ra-nuki* as a manifestation of linguistic change.

Concerning the results of the 1974 survey by age cohort conducted by the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics, Noda (1990) stated that “In fifty years’ time, most people will be saying ‘mireru’” and that “In twenty-five years’ time, will ‘mirareru’ have become old people’s language?”²⁰ If we count from the time the book was written, “fifty years’ time” would be 2040, and “twenty-five years’ time” would be 2015. Today, as we draw closer to the year 2015, can we really say that *mirareru* is “old people’s language”?

The disparity between Noda’s prediction and the reality in 2015 bears testimony to the difficulty of using age gaps at the time of survey—i.e., apparent time surveys—to accurately predict linguistic change in terms of real time.²¹ When compared to the forecasted progress of *ra-nuki* based on the age gap at a certain point in time, actual progress has been slow.

Our next point is connected to the observation made in relation to **Figure 12**, namely that the public becomes more conservative with age with regard to their language habits. We consider that the “acquisition of normative consciousness after entering adulthood” has a larger role in the inhibition of natural linguistic change than is generally imagined. In other words, language does not change of its own accord in and of itself, but rather it is strongly influenced by the “consciousness” of the humans who use it. *Ra-nuki* is a prominent example, which as mentioned earlier in this paper, has a long history, with 70 years having elapsed since it was first identified as prompting a sense of incongruence.

¹⁹ According to Minoru Yamamoto (1982), forms such as *mireru*, *dereru*, and *koreru*, among others, have still not been recognized as standard syntax for junior high-school textbooks in 1981 (Mitsumura Toshio), and he stated that “*Mireru*, *koreru* etc. are incorrect syntax” (Tokyo Shoseki).

²⁰ These statements are headlines from a column attached to the main text in Hisashi Noda (1990). The contents are as follows: “Forty years’ time from now – in 2015 – those of us who were teenagers in 1974 will be in their fifties. Thus, with the assumption that *mireru* continues to be used by people in their fifties at the same rate of 62%, I designed a graph showing the predicted usage rates for other generations.” The author thus states very carefully that the argument is based on the assumption that there is no fluctuation. In addition, page 97 of Hisashi Noda (1991) extends the time period: “I believe that everyone will be using *mireru* and *tabereru* in both speech and writing in a hundred years.”

²¹ This viewpoint is strongly connected to major arguments made in Shōichi Yokoyama (2011) and Shōji Takano (2012).

We surmise that an indirect cause of the normative consciousness in relation to *ra-nuki* and the arousal of a sense of incongruence is the fact that the use of *ra-nuki* in Tokyo came later than in other regions (i.e., Tokyo speakers were likely to have an attitude reflective of a provincial dialect). In this paper, survey results showed that people from Kantō were more likely to answer “(*ra-nuki* syntax) sounds strange” than people from other regions (**Figure 9**). We would like to readdress this finding in a separate paper.

The “acquisition of a normative consciousness after entering adulthood” does not necessarily manifest itself in every linguistic phenomenon or change. It is likely the case that the majority of linguistic changes progress and come to completion without anybody really noticing (relevant examples include the change of using kanji for writing *kara-age* (fried chicken) and the increasing acceptability of the phrase *jijitsu wo shirete yokatta* ‘fortunately I could find out the truth’, both of which were discussed in a previous paper, Shioda & Yamashita 2013).

As a future challenge, we would like to investigate the question of which types of linguistic phenomena are subject to change-inhibition as a result of the “acquisition of normative consciousness after entering adulthood.”

(Takehiro Shioda & Masako Takishima)

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