

Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf

Department of General Linguistics

First examiner: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Kilu von Prince

Second examiner: Dr. Ana Krajinović

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Japanese male pronoun and sentence-final particle usage in song lyrics by the female singer-songwriter Aimyon

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Submitted by: Linnea Brehe

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Abstract

This thesis examines how first- and second-person male pronouns and the sentence-final particles *zo* and *ze*, commonly also described as male, are used in songs by the female singer-songwriter Aimeyon. In particular, I investigated if male pronouns and sentence-final particles always indicate male voice in songs, or if male sentence-final particles also show affective disposition from a female perspective. 50 songs were analyzed for their pronoun and particle usage, followed up by a survey with ten native speakers of Japanese, in which the participants were shown several song texts and text phrases containing male pronouns and sentence-final particles. They were then asked about their gender interpretations of the protagonist, their own particle usage, and their opinions about male pronouns in songs by female singers. The results show that the first-person pronoun *boku* can indicate male voice, but other factors such as specific word usage and diphthong reduction also play a role in depicting the protagonist as male. Despite the usage of *boku*, some survey participants also categorized the song protagonist as female. Conversely, the second-person pronouns *kimi* and *omae* did not contribute to the protagonist's gender determination. Similar to the pronoun *boku*, the results show that the usage of the particles *zo* and *ze* can in both cases lead to categorizing a song as sounding male. However, *ze* is more strongly associated with a male speaker than *zo*, and both particles do not exclusively lead to the impression of male voice, especially *zo* being rather ambiguous. Furthermore, the research shows that *zo* and *ze* both carry inherent meanings of sounding cool, strong and rough, and can be used by female speakers as well, leading to the conclusion that the lyrics can also be interpreted as a female protagonist using sentence-final particles to show affective disposition.

Contents

List of tables	4
List of figures	5
Index of abbreviations	6
1 Introduction	7
2 Male and female speech patterns	8
2.1 Particles	8
2.2 Pronouns	9
3 Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the song texts	11
4 Survey with native speakers	16
4.1 Sentence-final particles in song text phrases	17
4.2 Participants' usage of <i>zo</i> and <i>ze</i>	22
4.3 Male pronouns in song lyrics by female singers	25
4.4 Participants' opinions on male pronouns in songs by female singers	27
5 Conclusion	28
References	30
Appendix	32

List of tables

Table 1: <i>Assertiveness scale of declarative particles</i>	9
Table 2: <i>Gender distinctions in first-person pronouns by context (adapted from Shibamoto Smith, 2003)</i>	10
Table 3: <i>Gender distinctions in second-person pronouns by context (adapted from Shibamoto Smith, 2003)</i>	10
Table 4: <i>Number of songs in each of the four classes</i>	12
Table 5: <i>Class 3 songs in which sentence-final particles are used</i>	13
Table 6: <i>Class 4 songs</i>	15
Table 7: <i>Usage and expression of zo and ze according to the survey participants</i>	22
Table 8: <i>Classification of songs and their particle and pronoun usage</i>	33
Table 9: <i>Tracklists of all albums</i>	34

List of figures

Figure 1: <i>Distribution of participant answers about who would rather say example (4)</i>	17
Figure 2: <i>Distribution of participant answers about who would rather say example (5)</i>	18
Figure 3: <i>Distribution of participant answers about who would rather say example (6)</i>	19
Figure 4: <i>Distribution of participant answers about who would rather say example (7)</i>	19
Figure 5: <i>Distribution of participant answers about who would rather say example (8)</i>	20
Figure 6: <i>Distribution of participant answers about who would rather say example (9)</i>	20
Figure 7: <i>Distribution of participant answers about who would rather say example (10)</i>	21
Figure 8: <i>Direct comparison of answer distributions for all examples</i>	21
Figure 9: <i>Answer distribution for all songs containing boku</i>	25

Index of abbreviations

1	First Person
2	Second Person
ATT	Attributive
DECL	Declarative
DIR	Direction
EMP	Emphasis
EXT	Existence
GEN	Genitive
IMP	Imperative
LOC	Locative
NEG	Negative
OBJ	Object
PL	Plural
POSS	Possessive
PROG	Progressive
PST	Past
REQ	Request
SG	Singular
TOP	Topic
TRF	Transformation
VOL	Volitional

1 Introduction

When studying the Japanese language, a new language learner will soon come across gender-specific distinctions, the most obvious one being gender-specific pronouns. Apart from specific words typically used by either male or female speakers and diphthong reduction of /ai/, /ae/ and /oi/ to /e:/ with male speakers (Shibamoto Smith, 2003, 207), other widely discussed markers of gendered speech in Japanese are sentence-final particles. Those particles are generally said to be an indicator for male and female speech. However, according to Ochs (1990), this indication is made by directly indexing the speaker's affective disposition and thus indirectly indexing the gender of the speaker, as a result of the different social roles of men and women in Japanese society.

There has been done a variety of real-life research about gendered speech, including pronouns and sentence-final particles, such as Miyazaki (2004) investigating pronoun usage of junior high school students and Philips (2001), who observed sentence-final particles used in women's conversations. In fictional works Unser-Schutz (2010, 2015) has done research about the usage of gendered speech in *manga* (Japanese comics).

A less investigated medium of Japanese text and speech are Japanese song lyrics. Here one can see the interesting phenomenon that female singers, among other pronouns, frequently make use of male pronouns, especially the male first-person pronoun *boku* and second-person pronoun *kimi*. Kaleta (2015) investigated song lyrics by the Japanese girl group AKB48, classifying the image of the songs according to their linguistic components, including sentence-final particles and pronoun usage. Her research shows that in songs by AKB48 different male characters make appearances through the use of male speech.

In this current study I want to do deeper research of how Japanese male markers are used in song lyrics by a female artist, in particular, if male markers always indicate male voice, or if they are also showing affective disposition from a female perspective. I will focus on first- and second-person male pronouns and the sentence-final particles *zo* and *ze*, and aim to investigate the following hypotheses.

1. Male pronouns indicate male voice.
2. Male sentence-final particles indicate male voice.
3. Male sentence-final particles show affective disposition from a female perspective.

I will do this by first conducting a qualitative analysis of song texts from five albums of the popular Japanese singer and songwriter Aiyon, classifying them into four different categories.

I will then further examine songs that show distinct male markers but cannot be directly classified as having a male voice when looking at the context of the song.

In a second part of the study, I will conduct a survey with native Japanese speakers to investigate their impressions of the song texts regarding pronouns and particles and their natural usage. The figures in this study were made with *Excel* and for the Japanese examples and song titles the Hepburn romanization system was used.

2 Male and female speech patterns

2.1 Particles

In Japanese there exist various sentence-final particles that “are means by which speakers situate their utterances in discourse; they take informational content and make some indication about how that content is to be “transmitted” to the addressee” (McCready & Davis, 2020, 656). Some of these particles are commonly described as an indicator for male or female speech.

According to Ochs (1990, 295-296), the Japanese particles *wa*, *zo* and *ze* are directly indexing affective dispositions and indirectly indexing the gender of the speaker. She argues that the particles *zo* and *ze* are directly indexing a “coarse identity” and indirectly a male voice. The particle *wa* is directly indexing the “affect of softness” or “delicate intensity”, while indirectly indexing a female voice. Ochs (1990, 295) states that “gender identity in Japanese society is partly defined in terms of these affective dispositions”, and that “softness and hesitancy are expected constituents of female comportment, and forcefulness is part of local conception of being male” (Ochs, 1990, 295).

This ties in the research by Takahara (1991), who investigated the usage of gender-specific particles, especially the sentence-final particles *wa* and *no*, used by female speakers. She shows that the particle *no* was rather undeclarative and nonassertive, resembling English tag questions, and meeting “the social requirement for women’s communicative behavior to be undeclarative and nonassertive” (Takahara, 1991, 68).

According to Takahara (1991, 71), the particle *wa* gives a softening effect to demonstrative statements, but rather than being female specific speech, *wa* seems to have an inherent hedging function, which can be found in gender-neutral speech as well. It has been further generalized to soften any demonstrative utterance by female speakers, again, to conform with social norms of how women should communicate. This supports Ochs’ (1990, 295) statement that, rather than directly indexing gender, the particles are indexing affective dispositions that have been associated with gender roles.

However, it is important to note that *wa* is said to only be associated with female speech in eastern “standard” Japanese. Another realization of *wa*, commonly used in the Kansai region, seems to have a very similar meaning to the particle *yo* (McCready & Davis, 2020, 667). Moreover, a study by Philips (2001) analyzing sentence-final forms in Japanese women’s conversations shows that young Japanese women tend to choose neutral or moderately masculine forms over feminine forms, which, along with other forms that are not discussed in this paper, also applies to the particle *wa* as well as the particle *no*. Instead of these forms, younger speakers seem to prefer using only the plain form of nouns, adjectives and verbs, and sometimes also use moderately masculine counterparts like the plain verb form followed by the particle *yo*.

As described by McCready & Davis (2020, 660) the particle *yo* seems to provide emphasis or adds a sense of urgency to an utterance and appears to explicitly signal the speaker’s desire for the hearer to accept the content in the scope of *yo*. McCready & Davis (2020) do not report *yo* as a masculine particle, however Shibamoto Smith (2003, 211) states that *yo* is commonly being reported as male.

According to McCready & Davis (2020, 667), the particle *zo*, which is associated with masculine speech, is similar to the particle *yo* and induces a sense of insistency, but with a stronger forcefulness than the particle *yo*. As stated in Reynolds (1985, 18) “*ze* is almost equal to *zo* in its degree of assertion but less authoritative [and] used only towards the speaker’s equal”.

Table 1 shows the declarative particles on an assertiveness scale, which is adapted from Shibamoto Smith (2003), ranking declarative particles on an assertiveness scale on the ground of the analysis by Reynolds (1985).

Non-assertive		Assertive	
<i>wa</i>	<i>yo</i>	<i>ze</i>	<i>zo</i>

Table 1: *Assertiveness scale of declarative particles*

2.2 Pronouns

While particles show indirect indexicality for gender, pronouns seem to have a more direct indexicality of gender.

In Japanese, both men and women share the formal first-person pronoun *watashi* and the very formal *watakushi*. However, there is a gender distinction for pronouns used in less formal situations. There, one can find the pronouns *boku* and *ore* which are associated with a male speaker,

and *atashi*, associated with a female speaker (Table 2). *Boku* is considered a plain masculine pronoun, while *ore* has an other-deprecatory annotation to it (Mizayaki, 2004, 530).

	Context			
	Formal		Informal	
Men	<i>watakushi</i>	<i>watashi</i>	<i>boku</i>	<i>ore</i>
Women	<i>watakushi</i>	<i>watashi</i>	<i>atashi</i>	

Table 2: Gender distinctions in first-person pronouns by context (adapted from Shibamoto Smith, 2003)

Like the first-person pronouns, the formal second-person pronoun *anata* as well as the lesser formal *anta* is used by both female and male speakers. As for informal situations, there exist the male-speaker associated pronouns *kimi* and *omae* (Table 3). As with the first-person pronoun *ore*, *omae* is also commonly considered deprecatory and there is no matching category for female speakers (Ide, 1991, 74). According to Unser-Schutz (2010, 35:1), women in general tend to avoid second-person pronouns and would instead use alternative forms such as the name of the person they are talking to.

It is important to note that the pronouns in table 2 and 3 do not cover all possible Japanese first- and second-person pronouns. There are a lot more variants, but for this thesis I chose to focus only on the ones listed here since they are most common. Moreover, as with the particles, these pronoun forms are described in reference to standard Japanese.

	Context			
	Formal		Informal	
Men	<i>anata</i>	<i>anta</i>	<i>kimi</i>	<i>omae</i>
Women	<i>anata</i>	<i>anta</i>		

Table 3: Gender distinctions in second-person pronouns by context (adapted from Shibamoto Smith, 2003)

While the pronouns *ore* and *boku* are described as male pronouns, there are instances when they are used by female speakers. Miyazaki (2004) studied the pronoun usage of junior high school students. Among other pronouns, she found that out of the students she observed no girl regularly used *watashi*. Instead, a lot of them used the plain male pronoun *boku* or the deprecatory *ore*, the latter often because it was perceived as cool and powerful. When talking to the students Miyazaki (2004) found that a lot of girls considered *watashi* as too formal, and *atashi* as too feminine and formal in informal settings, however, there was one girl who exclusively used

atashi and described it as a normal girls' pronoun having nothing to do with femininity. Some girls made use of a masculine pronoun while conveying a taboo topic, which was generally positively received by other girls. However, powerful boys called those girls "crazy" and other academic-oriented girls found it problematic. Most teachers also thought of girls' use of *ore* as unacceptable.

Miyazaki's study shows that students regularly make use of different pronouns to express themselves and convey different pragmatic meaning, not just regarding masculinity and femininity. Similar to the particles, pronouns seem to also convey indirect and more complex pragmatic meaning, such as *ore* having the properties of power and coolness amongst junior high school students. However, it seems that the pronouns themselves are in general still rather strongly gender-associated and perceived as masculine or feminine. One boy from Miyazaki's study, who belonged to an otherwise all-girl peer-group, often used the pronoun *atashi*, which he got ridiculed for, and a lot of girls themselves did not want to use *atashi* because it sounded too feminine to them.

Unser-Schutz (2015) investigated the use of pronouns in *manga* and found that personal pronoun usage was generally normative, however, all genders seem to have used a variety of gendered sentence-final particles. This again suggests that pronoun usage is rather gender compliant, while the sentence-final particles are being used for showing affective disposition across genders.

3 Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the song texts

For my initial analysis I looked at five albums from 2015 to 2020 by the popular Japanese singer and songwriter Aimyon, which were 50 songs in total. A detailed track list can be found in the appendix (Table 9). The album information was taken from Aimyon's official homepage *ai-myong.net*. The lyrics were taken from *AZlyrics.com* and checked by listening to each of the songs while looking at the lyrics to see if they were correct.

In an article by Kandagawa (2019), in which Aimyon is interviewed about her song inspiration and songwriting process, Aimyon said that the composition of the song lyrics and melody of a song happened simultaneously. She would usually compose the melody while talking, and the intuitively spoken words would become a song. Referring to numerous lyrics written from a male point of view, such as in the song *Kimi wa rokku o kikanai* ("you don't listen to rock") and other songs, the interviewer asked her if there was an artist that she was particularly influenced by. Aimyon replied that Masamune Kusano, the vocalist and guitarist of the Japanese

rock band Spitz was her great inspiration since she first discovered their music in her childhood. She was inspired by old Spitz' lyrics which led her to write *Kimi wa rokku o kikanai*.

While researching Aimyon I did not find any evidence of her being connected to the LGBTQ community or using LGBTQ themes in her songs, which is why I proceeded to interpret all song contexts while assuming a heterosexual relationship. Gendered speech in relation to various sexual orientations might be a topic for further research.

While listening to the songs and reading the song texts I looked at the pronoun and particle usage and categorized the songs according to this into four different classes (Table 4). Class 1 consists of songs with a female voice that became apparent through context and the usage of gendered pronouns and particles accordingly. Similarly, class 2 contains songs that can be classified as having a distinct male voice. Songs that are attributed to class 3 use pro-drop or gender-neutral pronouns and various particles. Class 4 consists of songs that have male markers but cannot be clearly attributed to class 2 through context. Table 4 shows the number of songs in each of the four classes. Out of all 50 songs there were a total of ten songs containing *boku*, and eleven songs containing *kimi*. The pronouns *ore*, *omae* and the plural form *omaera* appear once each. *Bokura*, the plural form of *boku*, appeared twice. As for the particles, *zo* was found in four different songs and *ze* appeared in three songs. A detailed table showing the exact pronouns and particles found in the song lyrics of each song and their classification can be found in the appendix (Table 8).

Class	Number of songs
1 Female voice (context and markers)	14
2 Male voice (context and markers)	5
3 Neutral (pro-drop or pronouns <i>watashi</i> and <i>anata</i> , both male and female particles)	21
4 Male markers, ambiguous context	10

Table 4: Number of songs in each of the four classes

An example for the classification of a song without pronouns and gendered sentence-final particles as having a female voice through context is the song *Oppai* (“breasts”), in which Aimyon sings about growing up and puberty as a girl. Another song classified as having a female voice, that uses the neutral pronoun *watashi* and the sentence-final particle *wa*, is *Watashi ni kareshi ga dekinai riyū*, which can be translated as “The reason I can’t get a boyfriend”. As the title of

the song already suggests it is a song about a female character talking about why she cannot get a boyfriend.

Similarly, an example for the categorization of a song as having a male voice through context is the song *Jenifā*. Examples (1), (2) and (3) show an extract from that song, which I classified as singing from a male perspective about a girl named Jennifer.

- (1) さよならは言わないでジェニファー
 Sayonara wa iwa-nai-de jenifā
 Goodbye TOP say-not-REQ Jennifer
 “Don’t say Goodbye, Jennifer”

- (2) 今もまだ覚えてる
 Ima mo mada oboe-teru
 now as well still remember-PROG
 “Even now I’m still remembering”

- (3) 君の胸の中でも
 kimi no mune no naka de mo
 2.SG POSS heart ATT inside LOC as.well
 いつか思い出してほしいよ
 itsuka omoidashi-te hoshī yo
 someday remember-REQ want DECL
 “I want you to someday remember it in your heart as well”

To investigate the third hypothesis, I picked the four songs from class 3 (pro-drop or neutral pronouns) in which the male sentence-final particles *zo* and *ze* are used. In three of those songs no pronouns are used and in one of them the neutral first-person pronoun *watashi* is used (Table 5).

Song	Pronoun	Particle
<i>Nau na yangu ni bakauke suru no wa atarimaeda no kurakka</i>		<i>ze</i>
<i>RING DING</i>		<i>zo</i>
<i>Tasogare ni bakabanashi o shita ano hi o omoidasu toki o</i>		<i>zo</i>
<i>Hikarimono</i>	<i>watashi</i>	<i>zo</i>

Table 5: Class 3 songs in which sentence-final particles are used

I ended up not using the song *Nau na yangu ni bakauke suru no wa atarimaeda no kurakka* for my analysis even though *ze* can be found, but since this song is composed of different fixed expressions and pre-existing phrases (Tomi Yoshi, 2021) and *ze* appears to also be a part of such a phrase, I will not include it in my research.

In total I found five example sentences containing the particle *zo* and four example sentences containing the particle *ze*. Example (4) shows the phrase from the song *RING DING* and example (5) the phrase from the song *Tasogare ni bakabanashi o shita ano hi o omoidasu toki o*, in which *zo* is being used.

(4) ほっとけとか言うならまじでほっとくぞ

hottok-e toka iu nara majide hottoku zo
leave.alone-IMP or.something.like say if seriously leave.alone DECL

“If you say ‘leave me alone’ or something like that, I will leave you alone for real”

(5) でも鐘のなる方へは行かないぞ

demo kane no naru hō e wa ik-anai zo
but bell ATT ring direction DIR TOP go-NEG DECL

“But I won’t go to the ringing of the bell”

When conducting internet research about the song, I found Japanese native speakers interpreting example (5) as Aimee singing about her own life (Okakura, 2020; Ponsukī, 2021), which would be a first indication that *zo* was being used from a female perspective to show affective disposition.

Examples (6) and (7) show the two sentences of the song *Hikarimono* in which *zo* is used.

(6) 泣かないぞ

nak-anai zo
cry-NEG DECL

“I won’t cry”

(7) 忘れないぞ

wasure-nai zo
forget-NEG DECL

“I won’t forget”

Song	Pronouns	Particles
<i>Kimi wa rokku o kikanai</i>	<i>boku, kimi</i>	<i>ze, zo</i>
<i>Kaze no sasayaki</i>	<i>boku</i>	
<i>Marīgōrudo</i>	<i>kimi</i>	
<i>Ra, no hanashi</i>	<i>boku, kimi</i>	
<i>Yumeoi bengaru</i>	<i>omaera</i>	<i>ze</i>
<i>GOOD NIGHT BABY</i>	<i>boku, kimi</i>	
<i>Harunohi</i>	<i>boku, kimi, bokura</i>	
<i>Mashimaro</i>	<i>boku, bokura</i>	
<i>Sora no aosa o shiru hito yo</i>	<i>boku, kimi</i>	
<i>Ashita sekai ga owaru toshitemo</i>	<i>boku, kimi</i>	

Table 6: Class 4 songs

In class 4 there are two songs in which male sentence-final particles are used (Table 6). First of all, in the song *Kimi wa rokku o kikanai* the particle *ze* is used two times (Ex. 8, 9), and the particle *zo* one time (Ex. 10). Moreover, the phrase in example (10) also features the pronoun *boku*.

(8) 息を止めすぎたぜ

iki o tome sugi-ta ze
 breath OBJ stop exceed-PST DECL
 “I have held my breath too much”

(9) 乾いたメロディーは止まないぜ

kawaita merodī wa toma-nai ze
 dry melody TOP stop-NEG DECL
 “The dry melody doesn’t stop”

(10) 僕の心臓の BPM は 190 になったぞ

boku no shinzō no BPM wa 190 ni na-tta zo
 1SG POSS heart ATT BPM TOP 190 TRF become-PST DECL
 “The BPM of my heart is now at 190”

In the song *Yumeyoi bengaru* there are two instances of *ze* to be found, which are described in example (11) and (12).

(11) 適当にどっか飛んでっていいんだぜ

tekitōni dokka tondette ii-nda ze
randomly somewhere fly good-EMP DECL

“You can just randomly fly somewhere”

(12) 気力は無駄にあるぜ

kiryoku wa muda ni aru ze
energy TOP waste EXT exist DECL

“My energy is wasted”

As for pronouns in *Yumeyoi bengaru* the second-person pronoun *omae* is used in the plural form *omaera*.

(13) セックスばっかのお前らなんかより

sekkusu bakka no omaera nanka yori
sex only ATT 2PL someone.like than

“Rather than you guys who just think about sex,

愛情求め生きてきてんの

aijō motome ikite-kite-n noni
love seek live-start-EMP even.though

I was born to seek love”

Since *omaera* is deprecatory and there is no matching category for women and considering the context, it seems possible that example (13) shows *omaera* being used from a female perspective, and that this part of the song is about a woman who seeks love and is fed up with men who are only looking for sex, calling them the deprecatory *omaera*.

4 Survey with native speakers

To further investigate the perception of particle and pronoun usage in Japanese song texts, I created a survey with *Google Forms*. The goal was to get some quantitative, but first and foremost qualitative answers from native Japanese speakers. There were ten participants in total, eight female and two male. I separated the survey into four sections and asked questions about sentence-final particles in song text phrases, the participants’ opinions about the particles *zo*

and *ze*, their gender interpretations of the protagonist in song texts, as well as their opinions about male pronouns in songs by female singers.

4.1 Sentence-final particles in song text phrases

In the first section of the survey, I showed the example sentences (4)-(12) and asked the native speakers' opinions on who the speaker of the example sentence would be. In an optional second question for each example sentence I then asked the participants to specify why they chose their answer. There were five different answer options for the question: "In your opinion, who would say this sentence: [Example]?"

Option 1: a girl/woman

Option 2: probably a girl/woman, but could be a boy/man

Option 3: both

Option 4: probably a boy/man, but could be a girl/woman

Option 5: a boy/man

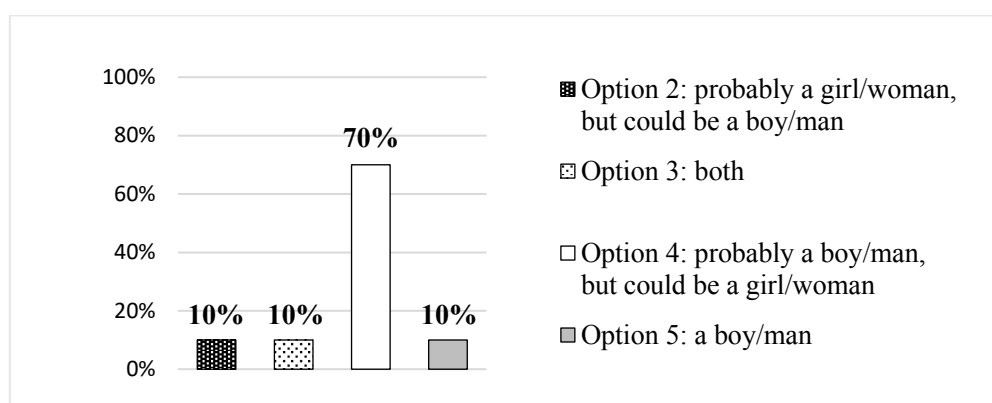


Figure 1: *Distribution of participant answers about who would rather say example (4)*

Figure 1 shows the distribution of participant answers for example (4). The majority of 70% of participants chose option 4, thinking that the expression would probably be said by a boy/man, but it could be a girl/woman. Three other participants chose option 2, 3 and 5 respectively. Here one can see a tendency towards the sentence sounding masculine since the majority chose that it would probably be a boy/man, however, it is not clear cut because only one person thinks only a boy/man would say the sentence, and two other people think it could be both or would probably be a girl/woman.

The most popular reason for people to pick the answer that is sounded rather masculine was because of the particle *zo*. According to the participants, the sentence-final particle *zo* sounded

rough and masculine, and most women would not use it. Another participant who also picked option 4 said that it sounded like a person with a strong personality would say that sentence. One female participant said that she would not use *zo* and that, especially in this case, there was anger behind it and *zo* when being said angrily would make it sound aggressive and dominant. Apart from reasons having to do with the particle *zo*, there are also a couple of other reasons why people chose their answer. One female participant for example stated that she would not use imperative forms as described in example (4), instead she would use a softer request form, which is why she categorized it as rather male. Moreover, according to her, the word *majide* (“seriously”) is gender neutral, but some people would categorize it as sounding masculine and aggressive. She said she thought of it as rather masculine, but it could also be a girl/woman because female delinquents might use masculine expressions. Another participant also pointed out that imperative expressions like *hottok-e* (“leave.alone-IMP”) are thought as boys’ language, but that lately more and more girls were starting to sing powerful songs with rougher words.

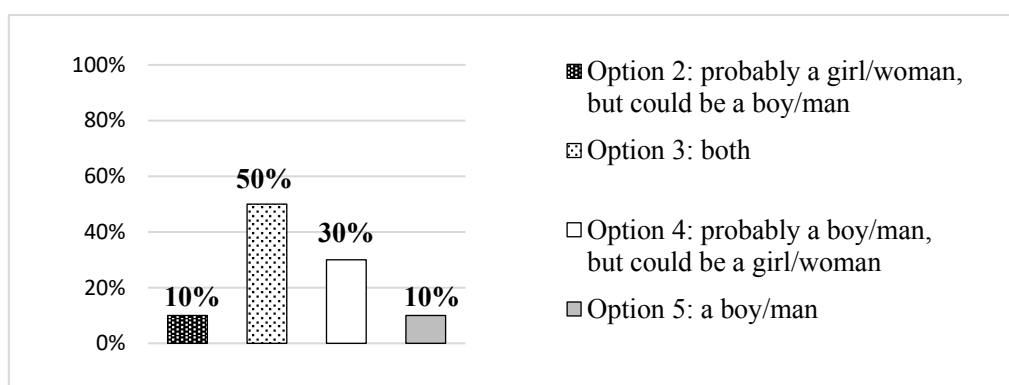


Figure 2: Distribution of participant answers about who would rather say example (5)

Figure 2 shows the distribution of participant answers for example (5). Similar to figure 1, instead of there being a clear distinction for the sentence coming across as either male or female, even more people voted for “both” as for who would most likely say the sentence in example (5). As for the reasons why they chose option 3, the participants said that they would hear both men and women talk like that, that it sounded like someone from a fictional story was talking but they could not imagine a specific gender, or that they simply could not guess the gender from this sentence. The participant who chose option 5 said most women would not use *zo*, and the three participants who chose option 4 also stated that it was because of the particle *zo*. One female participant pointed out that she has never said this sentence-final particle out loud, but sometimes does use it in her mind. To her, the sentence in example (5) does not sound like anyone would use it in a daily conversation, but if someone would say that phrase in his or her

mind, both genders could say it. This fits the previously made observation that the sentence seems to be Aimyon singing about herself. In this case it could be categorized as self-talk by Aimyon, in which she uses the particle *zo*.

Interestingly, one male participant categorized the sentence as probably said by a girl/woman because the word *kane* (“bell”) led him to visualize a female character, but he made no comment about the sentence-final particle.

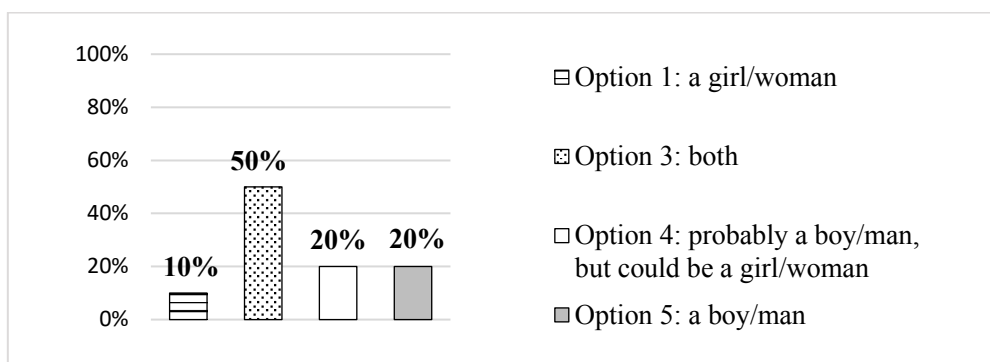


Figure 3: Distribution of participant answers about who would rather say example (6)

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of participant answers for example (6), which is very similar to figure 2. There were 50% of participants voting for option 3, 20% voting for option 4 and another 20% for option 5. Surprisingly, one of the participants voted for option 1. However, he unfortunately did not give a reason why he made this choice. As for the other answers, many participants chose the same reason as in the previous two questions, stating that most women would not use *zo*, or picturing a boy or man because of *zo*. Moreover, one person who chose option 3 in the previous question and now chose option 5 said she chose this answer because men were growing up being told that crying was shameful, so the protagonist could be a boy who said this sentence to himself.

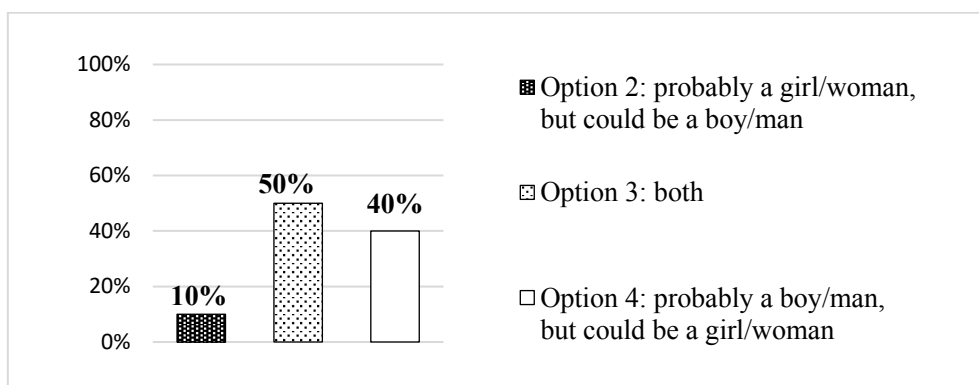


Figure 4: Distribution of participant answers about who would rather say example (7)

Figure 4 shows the distribution of participant answers for example (7). There are varying answers, again with the majority of participants choosing option 3, another 40% choosing option 4 and a single person voting for option 2, with basically the same reasons as in the previous questions concerning the particle *zo*. Again, one participant said that *zo* at the end of the sentence made it sound masculine, but boyish girls/women could add the particle as well.

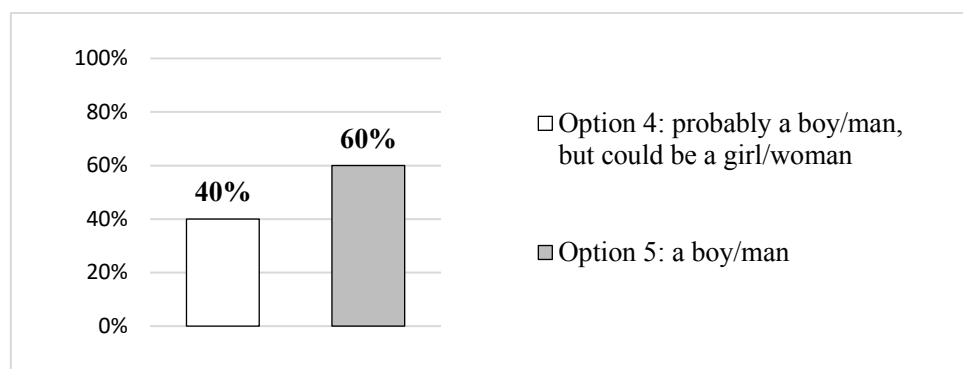


Figure 5: *Distribution of participant answers about who would rather say example (8)*

Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of participant answers for example (8). This time the example sentence contains the particle *ze* instead of *zo* and a clear tendency towards the sentence sounding like a boy/man would say it can be observed, with 60% of participants voting for option 5 and 40% for option 4.

All participants said that *ze* sounded very masculine and based their answer upon this. One participant said that he knew some girls who spoke like that, although those type of girls were not very common and more often found in fiction than in real life.

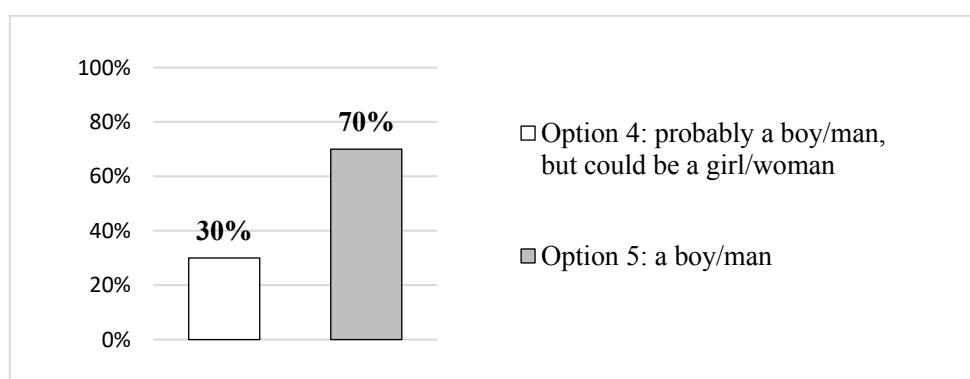


Figure 6: *Distribution of participant answers about who would rather say example (9)*

Figure 6 shows the distribution of participant answers for example (9). Here, a pattern similar to figure 5 can be seen with a distribution of 70% voting for option 5 and 30% voting for option 4. The reasons were the same as previously for example (8).

The results for example (11) and (12) both showed the same distribution of 60% of participants voting for option 5 and 40% voting for option 4 as in figure 5, again with the same reasons given for example (8), stating that the particle *ze* sounded very masculine.

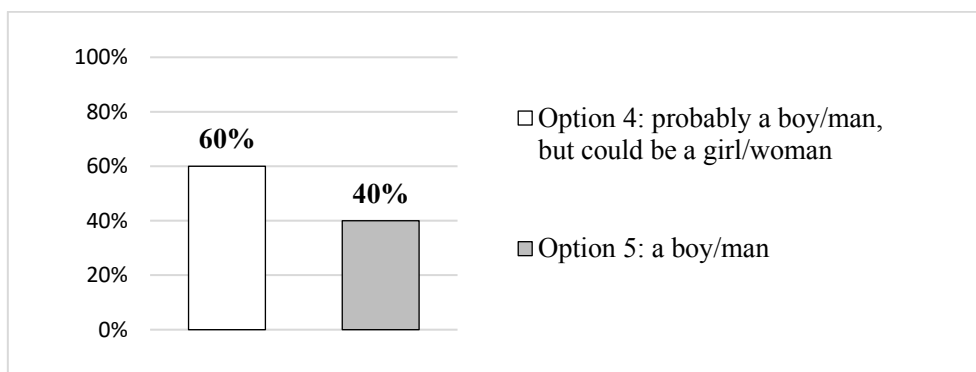


Figure 7: *Distribution of participant answers about who would rather say example (10)*

Lastly, figure 7 depicts the distribution of participant answers for example (10), which contains the particle *zo* and in contrast to the previous examples also the male pronoun *boku*. Compared to the answer distributions for the other examples containing the particle *zo*, as shown in the figures 1-4, there is a clear tendency towards the sentence sounding male and not as much variation.

As for the reasons, the participants stated that *boku* was how boys/men call themselves and *zo* was masculine. One participant pointed out that sometimes you would see a so-called *bokukko* in fiction, a slang word for a young woman who uses the first-person pronoun *boku*.

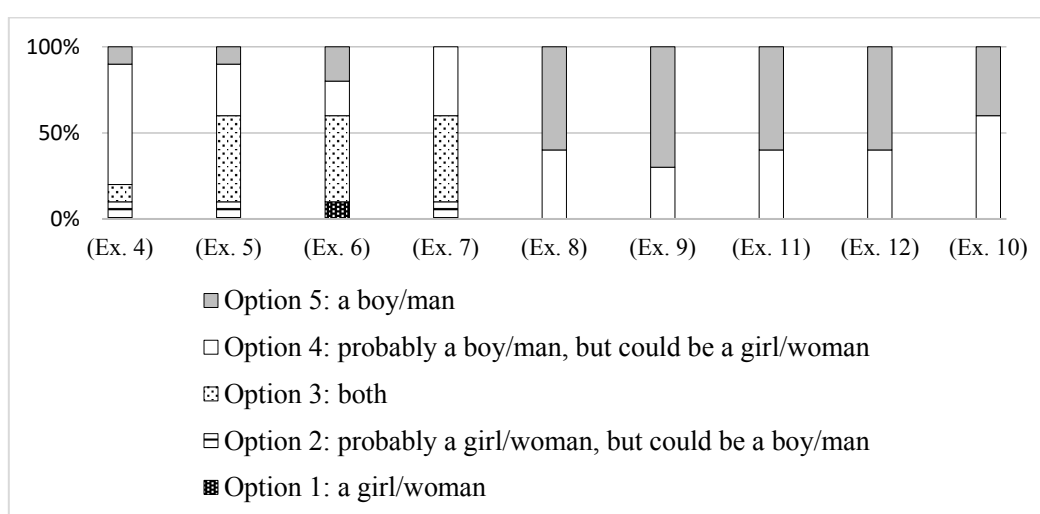


Figure 8: *Direct comparison of answer distributions for all examples*

Figure 8 shows a direct comparison of the answer distributions for all examples. The example sentences (4)-(7) contain the particle *zo*, examples (8), (9), (11) and (12) contain the particle *ze* and example (10) contains the pronoun *boku* as well as the particle *zo*.

4.2 Participants' usage of *zo* and *ze*

In the second section of the survey, I asked the participants' opinions about what the particles *zo* and *ze* expressed and in what situations in general those particles would be used in Japanese. Table 7 shows the usage and expression of *zo* and *ze* which I collected from the participant answers. According to the participants, the particles sound strong and rough, which is why they were commonly thought as male language due to the Japanese cultural norm that boys must be strong and girls must be lady-like. For this reason, the particles also seem to be often used in *anime* (Japanese animation) and *manga* to emphasize a character's personality.

Especially the particle *ze* seems to be seen as sounding cool, while *zo* sounded more neutral, according to one participant.

Particle	Usage	Expression
<i>ze</i>	calling or inviting someone	sounds boyish, strong, rough, cool
<i>zo</i>	expressing determination, wanting to exaggerate something	sounds strong, rough, more neutral than <i>ze</i> , aggressive or cheerful depending on situation

Table 7: Usage and expression of *zo* and *ze* according to the survey participants

One participant said that she thinks *ze* is used when inviting someone to do something as described in example (14).

- (14) 飲み行こうぜ！
 nomi ik-ō ze
 drink go-VOL DECL
 “Let's go drinking!”

To her, the particle *zo* can be used by both men and women, depending on the situation. She gave the example of the same sentence ending of informal present tense + *zo* (Ex. 16) for two different situations. In the first situation, when said in a cheerful tone, the sentence in example

(15) could be said by both woman and men alike. Although the participant said she would not use the form in conversations herself, she pictured a cheerful and popular woman could say such a sentence as well as a man.

(15) 飲むぞ！

nomu zo
drink DECL
“Let’s drink!”

However, when the informal present tense + *zo* (Ex. 16), would be said with anger it would sound dominant and aggressive to the participant and she would categorize it as male. Nevertheless, it is not stated that a woman would not also be able to make use of the particle when being angry. The participant described that if she were in a fight with her boyfriend and he would say something like example (17) it would sound threatening to her.

(16) - するぞ！

suru zo
do DECL
“I’ll do - !”

(17) 出ていくぞ！

deteiku zo
out.go DECL
“I’m leaving!”

Another participant said those particles were used by boys or men when wanting to exaggerate something, for example when yelling at someone (Ex. 18).

(18) 俺は社長の息子なんだぞ！

ore wa shachō no musuko nanda zo
1SG TOP company.president GEN son EMP DECL
“I am the company president’s son!”

In a second question I asked the participants if they would use the particles *zo* and *ze* themselves, and, if so, in what kind of situations. As described earlier, one participant already stated in the previous question that she would not use either particle in a conversation herself, but she would

sometime use *zo* when talking to herself, like cheering herself on as shown in example (19). Another female participant said that she would use *zo* as described in example (20) but would not use *ze*.

(19) 勉強するぞ！

benkyō suru zo
study do DECL
“I’m going to study!”

(20) 頑張るぞ！

ganbaru zo
do.one’s.best DECL
“I will do my best!”

Conversely, one female participant said she does use both particles but only when talking to friends or family since those particles were informal. Moreover, a male participant said he uses *zo* in situations where he is trying to provoke someone to do something, but he barely uses *ze*. If someone would use *ze* when talking to him, he said he would feel like that person was trying to look cool or being frank. The other six participants all stated that they would not use those particles, but one of them said that she might use them as a joke. As for a reason why they do not use those particles, two female participants from Kansai region pointed out that both particles were being used in standard Japanese and they would not use those because they spoke the Kansai dialect.

The results coincide with Ochs’ (1990) findings of the particles indexing a “coarse identity” since both particles carry the attribution of sounding strong and rough. Moreover, the participants’ answers also coincide with Reynolds (1985), who said that *ze* was less authoritative than *zo* and used toward the speaker’s equal, since, according to the participants’ answers, *ze* is said to be often used when calling or inviting someone and, in contrast to that, *zo* would express determination and could even sound aggressive depending on the situation.

Interestingly, looking at the assertiveness scale in table 1 *zo* was described as the most assertive particle. However, contrary to that, according to the survey results, *ze* seems to be more regularly categorized as masculine, and one participant said that *zo* sounded more neutral than *ze*, so one could assume that *ze* would be the more assertive and thus more masculine particle.

4.3 Male pronouns in song lyrics by female singers

In the third section of the survey, I showed the complete song texts of all class 4 songs (Table 6) and asked the participants for each of the song texts if they thought the protagonist of the song was male or female, or if it could be both, and why they thought that. The aim of this question was to see if the male pronouns of the class 4 song texts would lead to the participants concluding that the protagonist was male.

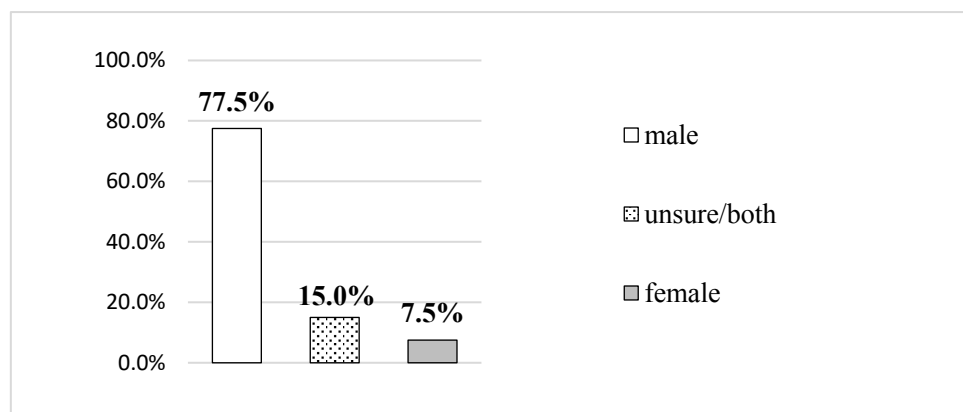


Figure 9: Answer distribution for all songs containing boku

Figure 9 shows the answer distribution of all answers for the 8 songs containing the pronoun *boku* in percent. Out of a total of 80 answers there were 62 answers saying it sounded male, 6 answers saying it was female, and 12 answers where participants were unsure or stating it could be both.

In 27 out of the 62 answers for a male protagonist, participants stated that it was because of the pronoun *boku*. In 21 answers no reason was given, and 14 answers contained reasons not specifying *boku* for thinking it sounded like the protagonist of the song was male. Instead, there were reasons such as it sounded like the protagonist wanted to protect someone and, because of the typical conception of men protecting women, a male protagonist protecting a girl came to mind. Moreover, according to the participants, certain action verbs sounded like men would do them.

Other reasons were simply subjective impressions, for example that it sounded male because it gave off a feeling of a daydreamer and the participant said men tended to be daydreamers while women were more realistic. One participant also did not mention *boku*, but said it sounded male because of the particle *ze*, and two others said the usage of the word *beibē* (“baby”) made it sound male.

As for the people who could not decide if the protagonist was either male or female, the reasons were that, for example, in one text the word *tifanīburū* (“Tiffany blue”) was used and one participant thought it did not sound like men would use such a word, but markers such as *boku* were also used, so she did not know how to categorize it. One participant who answered that the protagonist could be both male and female said that although it said *boku* in the text it did not mean that the protagonist was male in particular because *boku* would also be used by female singers. Here, a distinction has to be made between singer and protagonist of the song, since it is not clear if the participant referred to it as the protagonist in the song text possibly being female, or just the singer being female.

As for the six people who answered that the protagonist would be female in their opinion, some did not give a reason at all, and others said that the used words were women-like. One participant also shared the same opinion about the word *tifanīburū*, but it made her categorize the voice of the song text as female. Another participant said that for some reason he got the impression of a woman from a sub-culture wearing black make-up when he read the song text.

Apart from the song texts containing *boku* there was one song that only contained *kimi* and another that contained *omaera*. The song containing *kimi* was categorized as male by five participants, as female by three participants, and two participants were unsure.

Three participants who categorized the voice as male said that it was because the protagonist sees someone wearing a straw hat in the lyrics and in their imagination only women wear straw hats, except for men who do agricultural work.

Interestingly, one person who was unsure of the protagonist’s gender said that there was no expression that was usually only used by either men or women, which suggests that *kimi* is not gendered. Out of all participants only one person specifically mentioned *kimi*, but in the context that the person who is being called *kimi* is showing weak behavior, leading to the assumption that it is a girl, so in reverse the protagonist of the song would be male.

One participant was aware that the song was sung by a woman and thus categorized the protagonist as being female. It is not clear whether the knowledge of who the singer of the song was had influenced the impression of the protagonist’s gender.

The song containing *omaera* was categorized as male by six participants, as female by one participant, and three participants were unsure. Interestingly, here one participant who was unsure also stated that there was not anything gender-specific about the song, even though it contained *omaera* and the particle *ze*. In contrast to that, another participant thought it sounded male because of the particle *ze*.

No participant mentioned the word *omaera*, which leaves the impression that similar to *kimi*, *omaera* could normally be said by both men and women.

Another reason for participants to categorize the protagonist as male was the word *urusē* (“noisy”), whose standard form is *urusai*. Here one can see a diphthong reduction from /ai/ to /e:/ that typically occurs with male speakers. Moreover, to the participant, the protagonist talking about sex made it sound like it was a man because Japanese culture was hindering women to talk about sex. However, lately it was getting safer for women to talk about sex. A second participant also mentioned that she thought it was a male protagonist because Japanese girls/women tended to be less willing to talk about sexual topics.

4.4 Participants’ opinions on male pronouns in songs by female singers

In the last section of the survey, I asked the participants the direct question of how it sounded to them when a female singer used the pronouns *boku* or *kimi*. For example, if it would come across as the protagonist of the song being male, or the singer singing from a male perspective. Five participants said that the usage of the pronoun *boku* sounded like the protagonist of the song was male. Out of the other participants, one said that she was also wondering why female singers would use *boku*, and that it sounded like the singer was telling someone else’s story, in contrast to when the neutral pronoun *watashi* was being used. A second participant said that it felt like the singer was using both female and male perspectives in a song, so one could argue that different markers were being used as a device to show different point of views. In contrast to that, another participant perceived the usage of *boku* in a song as neither male nor female. A fourth participant said that there was nothing that felt at odds if a female singer used *boku*, and the last participant said that it was obvious to her that the protagonist was male, but because there were a lot of idol songs in which female singers would use *boku* she would also sometimes get the impression that it were boyish girls.

Interestingly, as already suggested in the previous section, the pronoun *kimi* does not seem to be gender-specific since one participant directly said that it was gender-neutral and someone else said it would not contribute to the protagonist determination.

In the last question of the survey, I asked the participants’ thoughts about why female singers would use male pronouns in their songs. The answers varied from thinking it was to directly express a man’s feeling, to having a strong protagonist, and separating the content of the song from the singer’s personal experience, making it sound more fictional. Five answers contained reasons such as gathering sympathy from both men and women, singing without gender bias

and pursuing some sort of neutrality by using male pronouns as a female singer. One participant said the gender of the first-person narrator would remain unclear, tying into the theory of female singers using male pronouns to make the lyrics less personal.

5 Conclusion

Concerning the first hypothesis, one can say that the male pronoun *boku* does to a degree indicate male voice, since the majority of people thought the protagonists of songs making use of *boku* were male. However, not all reasons stated that it was clearly because of the usage of the first-person pronoun. Other factors also played a role in depicting the protagonist as male, such as specific word usage and diphthong reduction. Moreover, some participants even categorized the protagonist as being female, despite the fact that the song texts contained the pronoun *boku*. So, while the pronoun usage does seem to play a role in how a song text appears to a listener, it still seems to be rather subjective.

Additionally, contrary to popular research that categorizes the pronoun *kimi* as male, the results of the current study suggest that *kimi* is rather gender-neutral. The same applies to the pronoun *omae*. It might be true that these forms are primarily used by male speakers, but my research shows that, at least to the native speakers I interviewed, second-person pronouns do not directly index the gender of the speaker.

Apart from indicating male voice, it seems that female singers also make use of male pronouns to express gender neutrality, appealing to both male and female audiences and separating personal stories from the content of the song.

This correlates with the findings by Kaleta (2015) in her study about the Japanese Idol group ABK48, in which she cites ABK48's producer Akimoto Yasushi, who stated that AKB48 had no set target audience, and he would write lyrics to be enjoyed regardless of age or gender.

In Aimee's case however, the use of male markers seems to also have to do with where she is taking her inspiration from, such as the vocalist of the band Spitz. Even though my analysis is primarily concerned with the impression on the listener rather than the writer's intention, her intuitive songwriting style leads me to assume that she might be first and foremost just writing whatever she likes, rather than intentionally appealing to different audiences.

Regarding the second hypothesis, the results show that both *zo* and *ze* can lead to categorizing a sentence as sounding male. However, there seems to be a difference between the two particles. As for the examples containing *ze*, all participants said that it sounded as though the person saying the sentence was male or probably male.

In contrast to that, categorization of the example sentences containing *zo* varied a lot, often with people being unsure about the gender of the speaker. The people who categorized example sentences with *zo* as male often reasoned that it was because of the particle that sounded male. So, in conclusion one can say that the sentence final particles can in fact indicate male voice, but it is not definite, since even with the particle *ze* not everyone categorized the examples as male-sounding only. Moreover, categorization also depends a lot on the listener as for how it sounds to them personally. Additionally, it seems that even though it is categorized as being less assertive, the particle *ze* sounds more masculine than *zo*.

Concerning the third hypothesis, it can be confirmed that the particles in general indeed show affective dispositions since they convey meaning such as sounding cool, strong, and rough. Moreover, it seems that the particle *zo* has an inherent meaning of expressing determination but depending on the situation and tone of voice it can sound either aggressive or cheerful.

While the majority of participants report that they do not use the particles in a conversation themselves, one female participant actually does use them. Nevertheless, personal usage depends a lot on personality as well as language background. Despite the majority of female participants not using the particles themselves, the results of the survey show that the usage of those particles is not restricted to male speakers and thus does not directly indicate male voice but could also be used by female speakers to express affective dispositions.

On this basis one can assume that Aimeyon also uses the particles in her songs to make use of their inherent meaning and expressing affective dispositions of the speakers in the songs, who can be both male and female. This ambiguity, which gives room for interpretation by the listener, could also be seen as another way to appeal to a wider audience, but as mentioned before it can be doubted whether Aimeyon does this intentionally or not.

The current study focuses only on songs from one artist and there were only ten people participating in the survey. In further studies one could conduct a study using song lyrics from various artists and survey a larger group of people with more varied backgrounds and gender identities, such as non-binary and genderfluid people. Investigating older song texts in contrast to recent songs in the context of how Japanese society and cultural norms are shifting, and how it might be represented in the song lyrics through pronoun and particle usage could also be an interesting subject for further studies.

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Appendix

Class	Song	Pronouns	Particles
1	<i>Anata kaibō junnaika ~shine~</i>	<i>watashi, anata</i>	<i>wa</i>
	<i>Otagai samayan</i>	<i>watashi</i>	
	<i>Marumaru chan</i>	<i>watashi</i>	<i>wa</i>
	<i>Shiawase ni naritai</i>	<i>watashi, anata</i>	
	<i>Tsuyogarimashita</i>	<i>atashi, anata, watashi</i>	
	<i>Dōse shinu nara</i>	<i>watashi</i>	<i>wa</i>
	<i>19 sai ni naritakunai</i>	<i>watashi</i>	
	<i>Sukitte itte yo</i>	<i>watashi, anata</i>	
	<i>Oppai</i>		
	<i>Watashi ni kareshi ga dekinai Riyū</i>	<i>watashi</i>	<i>wa</i>
	<i>Matoryōshika</i>	<i>watashi, anata</i>	<i>wa</i>
	<i>Chōyō</i>	<i>watashi, anata</i>	
	<i>Popuri no ha</i>	<i>watashi</i>	
	<i>Chika</i>	<i>watashi</i>	<i>wa</i>
2	<i>Wakatte kureyo</i>	<i>kimi, boku</i>	
	<i>Horoyoi</i>	<i>ore, omae</i>	
	<i>Ai o tsutaetaida toka</i>	<i>boku, kimi</i>	
	<i>Jenifā</i>	<i>kimi</i>	
	<i>Mangetsu no yorunara</i>	<i>kimi</i>	
3	<i>Yakō basu</i>		
	<i>Nau na yangu ni bakauke suru no wa atarimaeda no kurakka</i>		<i>ze</i>
	<i>Doro dango no tensai ita yo ne</i>		
	<i>Akogarete kitanda kashi</i>	<i>watashi</i>	
	<i>Ikite itanda yo na</i>		
	<i>Futari no sekai</i>	<i>watashi, anata</i>	<i>wa</i>
	<i>Itsumademo</i>		
	<i>RING DING</i>		<i>zo</i>
	<i>Hyōhaku</i>	<i>watashi</i>	<i>wa</i>
	<i>Futari dake no kuni</i>		<i>wa</i>
	<i>Purezento</i>	<i>anata</i>	
	<i>Koi o shita kara</i>	<i>watashi, anata</i>	<i>wa</i>
	<i>Konya kono mama</i>	<i>watashi</i>	
	<i>From yonkai no kadoheya</i>		
	<i>Tasogare ni bakabanashi o shita ano hi o omoidasu toki o</i>		<i>zo</i>
	<i>Shigaretto</i>		
	<i>Sayonara no kyō ni</i>		
	<i>Hadaka no kokoro</i>	<i>watashi</i>	
	<i>Manatsu no yoru no nioi ga suru</i>	<i>watashi</i>	
	<i>Sonna fū ni ikiteiru</i>	<i>watashi</i>	<i>wa</i>
	<i>Hikarimono</i>	<i>watashi</i>	<i>zo</i>
4	<i>Kimi wa rokku o kikanai</i>	<i>boku, kimi</i>	<i>ze, zo</i>
	<i>Kaze no sasayaki</i>	<i>boku</i>	

	<i>Marīgōrudo</i>	<i>kimi</i>	
	<i>Ra, no hanashi</i>	<i>boku, kimi</i>	
	<i>Yumeoi bengaru</i>	<i>omaera</i>	<i>ze</i>
	<i>GOOD NIGHT BABY</i>	<i>boku, kimi</i>	
	<i>Harunohi</i>	<i>boku, kimi, bo-kura</i>	
	<i>Mashimaro</i>	<i>boku, bokura</i>	
	<i>Sora no aosa o shiru hito yo</i>	<i>boku, kimi</i>	
	<i>Ashita sekai ga owaru toshitemo</i>	<i>boku, kimi</i>	

Table 8: Classification of songs and their particle and pronoun usage

Album title and year of release	Track number and song title
<i>Tamago</i> (2015)	1. 貴方解剖純愛歌~死ね~ (<i>Anata kaibō junnaika ~shine~</i>)
	2. 分かってくれよ (<i>Wakatte Kureyo</i>)
	3. お互い様やん (<i>Otagai samayan</i>)
	4. ○○ちゃん (<i>Marumaru chan</i>)
	5. 夜行バス (<i>Yakō basu</i>)
	6. 幸せになりたい (<i>Shiawase ni naritai</i>)
	7. 強がりました (<i>Tsuyogarimashita</i>)
	8. ナウなヤングにバカウケするのは当たり前だのクラッ歌 (<i>Nau na yangu ni bakauke suru no wa atarimaeda no kurakka</i>)
憎まれっ子世に憚る (<i>Niku-marekko yo ni habakaru</i>) (2015)	1. どうせ死ぬなら (<i>Dōse shinu nara</i>)
	2. 19 歳になりたくない (<i>19 sai ni naritakunai</i>)
	3. 好きって言ってよ (<i>Sukitte itte yo</i>)
	4. 泥だんごの天才いたよね (<i>Doro dango no tensai ita yo ne</i>)
	5. おっぱい (<i>Oppai</i>)
	6. 私に彼氏ができない理由 (<i>Watashi ni kareshi ga dekinai riyū</i>)
	7. ほろ酔い (<i>Horoyoi</i>)
青春のエキサイトメント (<i>Seijun no ekisaitometo</i>) (2017)	1. 憧れてきたんだ 歌詞 (<i>Akogarete kitanda kashi</i>)
	2. 生きていたんだよな (<i>Ikite itanda yo na</i>)
	3. 君はロックを聴かない (<i>Kimi wa rokku o kikanai</i>)
	4. マトリョーシカ (<i>Matoryōshika</i>)
	5. ふたりの世界 (<i>Futari no sekai</i>)
	6. いつまでも (<i>Itsumademo</i>)
	7. 愛を伝えたいだとか (<i>Ai o tsutaetaida toka</i>)
	8. 風のささやき (<i>Kaze no sasayaki</i>)
	9. RING DING
	10. ジェニファー (<i>Jenifā</i>)
	11. 漂白 (<i>Hyōhaku</i>)

瞬間的シックスセンス (<i>Junkanteki shikkusu sensu</i>) (2019)	1. 満月の夜なら (<i>Mangetsu no yorunara</i>)
	2. マリーゴールド (<i>Marīgōrudo</i>)
	3. ら、のはなし (<i>Ra, no hanashi</i>)
	4. 二人だけの国 (<i>Futari dake no kuni</i>)
	5. プレゼント (<i>Purezento</i>)
	6. ひかりもの (<i>Hikarimono</i>)
	7. 恋をしたから (<i>Koi o shita kara</i>)
	8. 夢追いベンガル (<i>Yumeoi bengaru</i>)
	9. 今夜このまま (<i>Konya kono mama</i>)
	10. あした世界が終わるとしても (<i>Ashita sekai ga owaru toshitemo</i>)
	11. GOOD NIGHT BABY
	12. From 四階の角部屋 (<i>From yonkai no kadoheya</i>)
おいしいパスタがあると 聞いて (<i>Oishī pasuta ga aru to kīta</i>) (2020)	1. 黄昏にバカ話をしたあの日を思い出す時を (<i>Tasogare ni bakabanashi o shita ano hi o omoidasu toki o</i>)
	2. ハルノヒ (<i>Harunohi</i>)
	3. シガレット (<i>Shigarettō</i>)
	4. さよならの今日に (<i>Sayonara no kyō ni</i>)
	5. 朝陽 (<i>Chōyō</i>)
	6. 裸の心 (<i>Hadaka no kokoro</i>)
	7. マシマロ (<i>Mashimaro</i>)
	8. 空の青さを知る人よ (<i>Sora no ao-sa o shiru hito yo</i>)
	9. 真夏の夜の匂いがする (<i>Manatsu no yoru no nioi ga suru</i>)
	10. ポプリの葉 (<i>Popuri no ha</i>)
	11. チカ (<i>Chika</i>)
	12. そんな風に生きている (<i>Sonna fū ni ikiteiru</i>)

Table 9: Tracklists of all albums

Declaration of Academic Integrity

Hereby, I declare that I have composed the presented bachelor thesis with the title “Japanese male pronoun and sentence-final particle usage in song lyrics by the female singer-songwriter Aimeyon” independently on my own and without any other resources than the ones indicated. All thoughts taken directly or indirectly from external sources are properly denoted as such. This paper has neither been previously submitted to another authority nor has it been published yet.

Osnabrück, 14.10.2021

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LBrehe', with a stylized, flowing script.

Linnea Brehe