

The Impact of Gender on the Professional Identity of Seven Female Teachers of English in Japanese Higher Education¹

Diane Hawley Nagatomo

Abstract

This paper presents the results of a study that investigated the professional identity of seven Japanese female teachers of English in Japanese higher education. The study employed a narrative approach and used Gee's (2000) four perspectives of identity as the theoretical framework to analyze interview data obtained from the seven women, ranging in age from their early thirties to their early sixties. It was found that the participants' gender plays a profound role in the formation of their professional identity from (a) their early access to English language education, which was a foundational step toward becoming university teachers; (b) to how they gained the necessary academic qualifications to become university teachers, and (c) to how they are recognized and accepted within their academic communities. The paper concludes that there is a complex relationship between gender and power that is directly related to English study in Japan and to the employment of female university teachers.

Keywords: Japanese higher education, gender, identity, English teaching

Teachers at universities in Japan, as elsewhere, are considered to be members of a prestigious occupation. However, the total percentage of tenured female teachers in Japanese higher education is only 14% (MEXT, 2006). Female teachers are rarely found in disciplines that have traditionally been considered "masculine," such as engineering (1.2%), agriculture (1.6%) or science (3.7%), and yet, even in areas which have been traditionally considered a "feminine" realm, such as home economics (31.2%), humanities (16.5%) or education (12.7%), females are still in the minority (Fujita, 2006).

One reason why there are so few Japanese female academics is that there are two gendered educational paths in Japan that have led to two separate functions of higher education. The purpose of higher education for women has mainly been to signify their membership in the middle class and to enhance their marital prospects, whereas for men, it has been to gain qualifications for a career (Brinton, 1988; Fanslow-Fujimura, 1995; Matsui, 1995; Amano, 1997; Fujimoto, 2004, 2005). The belief that education for women is a way to enhance one's social status is reflected in the types of universities female students generally attend, the "feminine" subjects they study, and their "low" career aspirations (Brinton, 1988; Fujimura-Fanslow, 1995;

Amano, 1997; Fujimoto, 2004, 2005).

The competition to enter the most prestigious schools is driven by the connection between schooling and lifetime employment (Kemper & Makino, 1993). Even though Japanese women have gained access to higher education in great numbers during the postwar years, career opportunities for women have been, and still are, extremely limited due primarily to socio-political ideologies that keep Japanese women as peripheral members of the workforce by promoting an idealized image of women as housewives and mothers (Brinton, 1988; Fujimura-Fanslow, 1995; Amano, 1997; Liddle & Nakajima, 2000). Although women comprise 50% of the workforce, they are mainly in low-status and low-wage “feminine” jobs related to childcare, teaching, nursing, or in clerical positions in companies (Liddle & Nakajima 2000). Women are seen as temporary, peripheral and replaceable members of the workforce because they tend to exit the workforce in their late twenties and early thirties because of societal expectations of them to place priority on family and home (Dilatush, 1976; Brinton, 1988; Fujimura-Fanslow, 1995; Amano, 1997; Habu, 2000; Fujimoto, 2005). In fact, Fujimoto (2005) argues that a major role of women’s education is to supply an obedient and docile workforce “to support men’s work” (p. 653) and to provide prospective marriage partners for the male employees.

In spite of the career limitations Japanese women face, it is necessary to point out that many women do go to prestigious universities and aspire for and attain careers (Lebra, 1984; Dilatush, 1996; Strober & Chan, 2001; Liddle & Nakajima, 2002). Nevertheless, current statistical data provided by the websites of top prestigious national and private universities in Japan indicate that the percentage of female students is still lower than that of males. Keio University (n.d.), for example, reports that 32% of its undergraduate students are female, and 28.3% of its graduate students and 36.44% of its doctoral students are female. The University of Tokyo has an even smaller percentage of female undergraduate students, only 18.3%, with slightly more graduate students at 26.3% (University of Tokyo, n.d.). Furthermore, at both universities, more female students enroll in liberal arts and human sciences courses rather than those that are career-based such as natural sciences, economics or engineering. The Japanese Ministry of Labor has itself addressed the necessity of incorporating more university-educated women into the workforce in its 1998 *White Paper on Working Women* to deal with the decrease in the working population that will occur in the mid-21st century, and some universities are taking concrete steps to promote greater gender equity. The University of Tokyo, for example, aims to raise the numbers of female researchers to 30% in the short term and to 50% in the long term by improving the workplace conditions.

Improving the workplace conditions for female researchers is indeed a necessary step to take. Among those 14% of female faculty who have managed to secure tenure at universities, many have reported facing a number of difficulties. They lag behind men in terms of promotion, have less access to research funds, and have fewer opportunities for mentoring by senior professors, who often advise newer professors in areas concerning research and publishing (Sodei, 2005), as well as being victims of sexual and academic harassment (Normile, 2001; McNeill, 2007). The greatest difficulty for female academics in Japan (as well as for women in other professions), however, may be the balancing of family and professional life because of an enduring idealized image of women as housewives and mothers (e.g. Brinton, 1988; Fujimura-Fanslow, 1995; Amano, 1995; Liddle & Nakajima, 2000).

How then, do *female* university English teachers fare in Japanese academia? To what extent does their status as a gendered minority influence their professional identity? Teacher identity has been found to be a critical component of classroom learning and classroom teaching (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005), and it is shaped by the complexities of the wider social context in which people live and work (e. g. Duff & Uchida, 1997; Simon-Maeda, 2004; Tsui, 2007). To date, however, there have been relatively few studies investigating the professional identity of teachers in Japanese higher education (e. g. Nagatomo, 2011a; 2011b; 2012; Simon-Maeda, 2004; Stewart, 2005; 2006), and only Simon-Maeda (2004) investigated the identity construction of women as they negotiated gendered ideological constraints that influence and shape their career trajectories as English teachers in Japanese higher education. These studies, however, have focused on non-Japanese as well as Japanese teachers, but the issues shaping professional identity may be significantly different for non-Japanese teachers, particularly *female* teachers, whose educational and professional paths have been shaped by sociocultural attitudes toward women of their own countries. Therefore, this study focuses only on Japanese women, and the question that has guided this study is the following:

What, if any, is the impact of gender on the professional identity of female teachers of English in Japanese higher education?

Method

Participants and Data Collection

The participants for this study are briefly introduced in Table 1 below. All names are pseudonyms, and because there are so few female academics in some areas of Japan, the names of the prefectures in which the participants work were omitted to protect their identity. The tertiary institutions where these women work range from highly prestigious national universities to academically upper and mid-level private universities.

Table 1 Participants' biographical data

Name	Age	Location	Position	University employed at	Areas of study	Degree s
Taeko	60	Regional	Part-time Lecturer	Private National Prefectural	English linguistics, English education	BA, MA
Keiko	57	Regional	Professor	National	American literature, TESOL	BA, MA, MA
Naomi	45	Regional	Associate Professor	Prefectural	American studies and folklore	BA, MA, PhD
Kumiko	42	Urban	Assistant Professor	Private	Literature, Women's studies English Education	BA, BA MA, MA PhD**
Miwa	35	Urban	Assistant Professor	National	American Literature	BA, MA, PhD
Kana	35	Regional	Assistant Professor	Prefectural	English Lit/Education/ Culture	BA, MA, PhD
Shizuko	32	Regional	Part-time	National Private	Japanese literature / American Literature	BA, MA

Note. **Unfinished indicates withdrawal before completing the doctorate, or currently working toward it.

The participants were interviewed using Seidman's (2006) protocol for collecting teachers' stories. This study utilizes a narrative approach, which deals with any text or discourse that focuses on the stories of people, usually in the form of autobiographies, biographies, life histories and oral histories (e. g. Riessman, 1993, 2002, 2008; Chase, 2005) and makes use of words that "tell the story of individuals unfolding in a chronology of their experiences, set within their personal, social and historical context, and including the important themes in those lived experiences" (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). Narrative research is considered ideal for uncovering the complexity of human behavior because it is human-centered, situates itself in practice, and explores the perspectives of those under study (Lyons and La Boskey, 2002; Webster and Mertova, 2007).

Data Analysis

The participants' interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and uploaded into qualitative data analysis software (NVivo) and examined for recurring patterns and themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data was then analyzed using Gee's (2000) theory of identity, which defines identity as being "recognized as a certain 'kind of person,' in a given certain context" (p. 99). Gee offers four useful perspectives to view how people see themselves and how they are seen. These perspectives are: 1) identity that is formed by nature (N-identity); 2) identity that is bestowed from institutions (I-identity); identity that develops through interaction with others (D-identity) and 4) identity that occurs when one affiliates with a group or a system (A-identity).

Discussion

N-identity: The appropriateness of English as an Area of Study

This section discusses how the participants' N-identity of gender is at the heart of their identity as teachers, and as such, permeates the other perspectives of identity offered by Gee (2000). The most striking finding was the impact of gendered sociopolitical attitudes toward and expectations of women in Japan in initially leading the participants toward English study, which was a foundational step toward their careers as English teachers. For four of the women, the decision to major in English was not their first choice, but they felt that few other options were available. This was particularly evident in the narratives of the two oldest women in the study. Taeko decided to study English, rather than mathematics, because she felt that it would be too difficult to compete against male students in university and when it came time to seek employment. Keiko wanted to study Japanese literature but her father convinced her that English literature would be a better choice because she would always be able to earn a supplementary income by teaching English from home after marriage.

Parental disapproval of some of the participants' initial career goals was also found to influence their decision to major in English. Although Kana *liked* English in school, she wanted to become an actress. When she successfully auditioned for a Tokyo theatrical troupe, however, she faced strong opposition from her family, who were certain she would end up "nothing better than a Ginza bar hostess." Unable to defy them, she went to university and

majored in English instead. Kumiko's parents opposed her dream to become an artist. Her comment below not only describes the strength of the influence her parents had over her educational decisions, but also reflects prevailing attitudes toward women and education at that time.

I...was very, very interested **ART**, so I wanted to go an art school. But my parents were so against that. So my parents recommended me to go a girls' high school and a girls' university and major in English literature. That was kind of common at that time—a common and popular way...for girls. You know...girls go to women's universities and major in English or in English literature. And after, they work for maybe three or four years, they can get married and they can.... Well, that's my parents' perception...so I kind of followed their way. I went to a women's high school and women's university and majored in English and American and literature.... maybe I was not critical when I was young. I just followed my parents' way.... I didn't tell my parents I didn't want to be a teacher. I tried to be secret.”

Attaining English proficiency has been, and still is, perceived to be one way for Japanese women to break into the career market (Kobayashi, 2007b). Miwa drew upon this belief to convince her parents that the expense of sending her to a prestigious private university in Tokyo to study English language would result in a high-paying job for her. Miwa was a passionate reader who really wanted to study literature, but chose English language instead so that she “could have more options later.”

Shizuko's educational background differs somewhat from the other participants, because her undergraduate degree was in Japanese literature, another popular area of study for Japanese women. She did not like English as a student, but after doing “boring” routine clerical work for several years, she changed her attitude and returned to school:

I recognized that if I use, if I'm fluent in English, I am a good...person...I mean, I am a person who can earn a lot of money [laughter]. So that's why I started learning English

[...] to get a nicer job [laughter], to get promoted.

The widespread belief in the power of being able to convert English into remunerated work is one reason behind its popularity as an academic subject for women. Kobayashi (2007) argues that such beliefs tend to ignore underlying ideologies that have segregated women into tertiary institutions that do not necessarily provide access to a career. For the women in this study, developing English proficiency was indeed an important foundational step in their careers, but more importantly, it was the status that they gained as undergraduates from good, and in some cases, highly prestigious universities, that allowed them to proceed to graduate school, providing them with the credentials they needed to become university English teachers.

I-identity: The Path toward Graduate Education

This section discusses how the participants gained access to their I-identities as university teachers. As Gee (2000) says, an I-identity is bestowed upon a person when they are recognized to have certain qualities by an institution. These women have been hired by their institutions as university teachers, and thus, have an I-identity as such. An examination of the educational paths of these women indicates that the process of becoming a university teacher in Japan, particularly an *English* teacher, may be quite different for women than it is for men. First, let us consider Keiko and Taeko, who like many women of their generation, worked briefly (Keiko as a high school teacher and Taeko as an office clerk) before getting married and having children. Keiko's life changed in her late twenties when she got divorced and returned to her parents' home with her children. She entered her prefecture's national university where she obtained an MA in English literature. At that time, university English teachers were in great demand, but unlike her male cohorts who found tenured positions upon graduation, Keiko and her female cohorts could not. Unemployed, she entered the university's PhD program, but dropped out after she was hired by the English department of a private women's two-year junior college. She taught there for ten years before moving to a more prestigious national university where she is currently associate professor in a humanities chair of a science department.

Taeko spent twenty years taking care of her family, teaching English to neighborhood children, and volunteering as a guide for foreign tourists—utilizing, in a gendered-appropriate manner, the cultural collateral she had obtained as a female graduate from her prefecture's national university. When her marriage ended, she faced the near impossible task of reentering the workforce (see Habu, 2000; Liddle & Nakajima, 2000). Taeko decided to improve her English skills by enrolling in classes offered by an American university. When she noticed an announcement of a newly forming English education graduate department at her alma mater, she decided to apply for that as well. She passed the entrance examination, later finding out that she had scored the highest of all the applicants. Her achievement—to be able to go from “housewife” to “graduate student”—was considered such an accomplishment that there was a write-up about her in the newspaper. Taeko commuted between both tertiary institutions: improving her English academic skills at the American university, and studying toward an MA at the Japanese one. She said the year she was doing “double schooling” was difficult, but she managed because she “had guts.”

Taeko became a university teacher at the age of 50. Other than having had one three-year non-renewable full-time position, she has been teaching part-time. She does not attribute her part-time status to her gender, but to her age: had she obtained tenure, she would have been older than her colleagues in more senior positions, which would have resulted in discomfort in the workplace due to the hierarchical nature of Japanese society (see Nakane, 1970). Nevertheless, removing herself from the workforce for twenty years in order to marry and raise a family prevented her from progressing along the same professorial career trajectory as male colleagues, who would not have had such a career interruption and would not be trying to gain an entry level position in their fifties.

The path toward graduate education among the younger participants differs in many ways from that of Taeko and Keiko. First, the opportunity to study abroad became widely available for Japanese, and such experiences as undergraduates enabled Kumiko, Miwa, and Kana to envision futures that extended beyond gendered norms. Kumiko, for example, decided to become a journalist after she attended a conversation school in the United States for several months. She worked for several years to save money, but her mother “cried for three days” in protest when Kumiko finalized her plans to study abroad because she wanted her to “get married and raise children.” Nevertheless, Kumiko went against her parents’ wishes, telling them that she could do whatever she wanted because she “had money.” She returned to Japan seven years later as a radicalized feminist with a BA in Journalism and an MA in Women’s Studies. Although Kumiko was unable to find a position as a lecturer on women’s issues as she had hoped, she did find English teaching jobs, first at a high school, and then part-time at several universities. After teaching part-time for a number of years, she decided to return to graduate school to study TESOL in order to improve her chances of obtaining tenure. Although she said that she originally looked down on those who just “taught English”, she found TESOL more interesting than she had anticipated. After receiving her MA, she enrolled in the university’s PhD program. Kumiko’s shift in academic focus was a sound investment for her because she was hired for a tenured position in the economics department of a well-known private university in the Kanto area.

Unlike the five other participants in the study, Kana and Miwa went to graduate school immediately upon completion of their undergraduate degrees. Kana obtained a two-year scholarship to study abroad immediately after completing her BA in Japan. During that time she completed two MAs and received another scholarship to do doctorate study. Miwa entered the MA and PhD program of a prestigious national university in Japan, but went abroad with a scholarship to complete her PhD studies. Now many universities favor applicants that have completed their doctoral studies (Hada, 2005), whereas previously an MA was generally sufficient to obtain tenure (Nagasawa, 2005). Unlike the other women in this study who entered university teaching after twists and turns in their private lives leading them to graduate school, Kana and Miwa became university teachers as soon as they were awarded their PhDs, without any break in their academic careers.

The many years that it takes to acquire graduate degrees, particularly PhDs, means that entry into the labor market could be postponed for ten years. With no guarantee of permanent employment after obtaining a PhD, many people, particularly men who are expected to secure a permanent spot in the work force as quickly as possible (Liddle & Nakajima, 2000), may be unwilling to embark on such a gamble. However, lower career expectations for Japanese women may have made it socially acceptable to choose to postpone entering the workforce (like Kana and Miwa) or to exit the workforce (like Kumiko, Naomi, and Shizuko) in order to pursue their studies (e. g. Habu, 2000; Burton, 2004; Kobayashi, 2007a). There are few tenured university positions available, but there are numerous part-time positions, especially for qualified English teachers. In the worst-case scenario, a woman could teach English from her home, as Keiko’s father suggested. Even part-time university teaching, which Taeko and Shizuko do, is considered a good, high-status method of earning an income for women, and is often better than, as Shizuko discovered, working full-time in an office doing dead-end clerical work as an

“office lady.”

Although it has been argued that the time and money spent studying English abroad and at home does not result in better career opportunities for Japanese women (Burton, 2004; Kobayashi, 2007b), the participants in this study were able to convert their knowledge and their degrees into careers as tenured and part-time university English teachers. However, as we shall see, even though they are entitled to identify as university teachers, and they are recognized by society to be university teachers, their identification as such is complicated by the gendered perceptions others have of them.

D-identity: “I’m a professor – you can’t treat me like that”

This section looks at how the participants’ D-identities are shaped through the discursive practices of their colleagues and acquaintances. Again, the participants’ N-identity of gender appears to be at the forefront of how they are treated. These women experience a struggle between their desire to be seen as professionals (and in the case of Kumiko, Kana, and Miwa, as feminists as well) and their wish to get along with and be well liked by their male colleagues. This struggle is particularly evident in Kumiko’s comment below:

We have very few female teachers, so they treated me as a kind of princess [laughter]. They are so nice to me. Maybe I’m a woman. That’s the reason. Because the year we entered the university, we had, you know, three male instructors. Newcomers. Others in our college are really old, like 50 years old or 60 or 70 years old. So they are so nice to me. They think of me...as a daughter. Yeah, they are so nice. [laughter] *demo, maaa...*[but, well...] it’s in one way, a kind of discrimination. Because I’m a woman, they treat me nice. Mmm. I feel complex feelings. You know they treat me nice because I’m a woman. But you know, I don’t want them to treat me as **bad**.

Kana, who recently returned to Japan after having lived abroad for many years, also experiences struggle in communicating with her older male colleagues. She feels tense when speaking to them because she is worried about inadvertently causing offense. But they speak to her in a manner which is “a little bit sexist,” which Kana says was “unheard of” when she was studying and teaching abroad. Nevertheless she adopts a feminine, indirect, and subdued way of communication, which detracts from her self-identity as a strong and independent woman, admitting that she cannot help enabling such sexist behavior through her submissiveness because that was how she was brought up.

In addition to gender-biased discursive practices in the workplace, shallow praise heaped upon them by those not connected to academia also causes discomfort. Kumiko complains, “If I say I am a college teacher, they are kind of ohhhhh, they kind of back and change their attitude...you know, until then, they were very friendly. But after I say I’m a college teacher, *ahhhhhhhh, dakara...subarashii desu ne* [ahhhhhhh. So. How wonderful.] You are fantastic. I just don’t like that praise.”

Miwa also dislikes how people, particularly men, become insultingly solicitous when they learn that she teaches at a famous university, but at the same time, she enjoys the respect that it commands:

They [men] regard women so low to begin with, so when they see women they think they are better than – women, in general whatever that is. So when they see someone with more credentials in a sense. They are like, “Oh I’m sorry...uh huh. My education is not as good as yours.” So they change their attitude. At least I’m teaching at [name] University.... When you are a woman, people kind of.... you know, ‘you are just a girl’ kind of attitude all around. Especially from older men. So, someday I have to be a professor and say [laugh] ‘I’m a professor you can’t treat me like that.’

The women in this study *are* university teachers, and they identify as such. However, the discursive practices of those around them who seem to be viewing the world with “gendered blinders” constantly seem to remind them that although they have prestigious careers, their status as women is at the forefront of how they are seen. This becomes all the more evident in the next subsection, which explores how the participants’ affinity toward their workplaces is determined to an extent by their position as gendered outsiders.

A-identity: “I find that men are definitely in charge”

This section discusses how the participants’ female gender influences their A-identities – that is, the degree to which they feel they are accepted as full participating members of their university communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). University teachers, as with those in all occupations, share experiences and engage in activities that signify membership in that community. Teachers with tenure, for example teach, conduct research, and sit on university committees. However, as these women’s narratives revealed, they feel somewhat isolated in their workplaces because of having so few female colleagues. Keiko, for example, is only one of six female professors out of fifty-two; Kumiko is one of eight out of a hundred; and Naomi is one of two out of fifty. Naomi’s comment below succinctly summarizes the other women’s sentiments as well:

I find men definitely are in charge of everything. I can’t say that this is a distinct difference, a regional difference or not. But it’s just the situation that I happen to encounter.... There tends to be different unspoken rules between men [laughter] but something that I can’t understand or get [laughter]. Something is happening underneath that I cannot see.

In Japan, workplace relationships are often cemented with behind-the-scenes, after-hours socializing, from which women are often excluded. Kumiko, for example, says she was not wooed for membership in any of the *habatsu* (factions that compete for power) at her university, although a male assistant professor that was hired at the same time was. She attributes this exclusion to the “deeply rooted sexist beliefs of the male professors” that consider women as “unimportant” in the politics of her university. Although Kumiko says that she has decided to focus on her own research and teaching, this exclusion has impacted the degree of allegiance she feels toward her university, and makes her feel somewhat of an outsider there.

Poole (2003) also noted that male professors in Japan might have more affinity toward the universities for which they work than do female professors, who are often excluded from administrative practices that lead to roles of responsibility. Although he does not justify such

behavior, he explicates it by saying that the women in his study did not “necessarily want such positions, knowing full well the time commitment involved” (p. 264). He cited one woman saying, “As a woman, I am not asked to participate in a lot of meetings and committees. This can be seen as either positive [more time to focus on research and teaching] or as negative [being excluded]” (p. 264). What Poole does not consider, however, is that the decision to concentrate on research activities may be the *result of* exclusion from the power politics of the university, and not necessarily by choice.

Furthermore, it is important to consider the root of gendered exclusionary practices, which may be related to the notion of Japanese lifetime employment, which demands loyalty and devotion from employees. If lifetime employment (or, in the case of university teaching, tenure) has traditionally been exclusively for *men*, attitudes toward female university teachers may be laden with gender bias that still perceives tenured women as temporary and replaceable females, not valuable enough to entrust with important university work. Men, on the other hand, may see such committee work as a way to “make and implement changes” (Poole, 2003, p. 264) within their university. The women may say they choose to concentrate on their own research to build their resume and they, like Kumiko, may envision a future in a different university. However, changing universities may not always be feasible, or even possible. Even if women can move to higher-ranking universities on the basis of their research, they may still encounter gendered exclusionary practices there as well.

Keiko, for example, was happier teaching at the lower-ranking junior college where she used to work, not only because there were more female colleagues, but also because her area of study was better appreciated. Although she currently teaches for a more prestigious institution, she feels that English, particularly literature, has become devalued:

They don't...they don't support English studies. And...language communication by English is compulsory at the moment. But the other Japanese history teachers said “we want to abolish it” or something like that. So that is very severe for me. [...] They have a kind of inferiority complex. Until now, English was so popular. So English teachers were valued in college education. So at the moment, they have a bad attitude toward me. So that is not good.

One has to wonder if there is a connection between the devaluation of English, which has traditionally been considered a “feminine” subject (Kobayashi 2002), and the atmosphere of Keiko's workplace, where the professors and the students are predominantly male.

The final issue to consider is one that has been cited to be the greatest obstacle for working women in Japan: balancing a career and married life (e. g. Fujimura-Fanslow, 1995; Amano, 1997; Liddle & Nakajima, 2000). When Japanese women are married, they generally refer to themselves as “housewives” whether they work outside the home or not. Marriage is not merely a state of being, but an occupation that involves household chores and familial responsibilities, particularly child-rearing.

Shizuko, who identifies as a teacher, a translator and a housewife, says she prefers engaging in activities related to teaching and translating, rather than those connected to the home. Her academic shift to English literature from Japanese literature has given her access to a

prestigious, high-paying career that she loves. Still a novice at teaching, she invests a great deal of time in classroom preparation. Her comments below demonstrate how she handles the demand of her multiple identities:

If my semester is over, my lifestyle is quite changed. I wake up and I make breakfast [laughter] and I do the laundry and do translation work. And I am always in the house, you know. I don't like staying in the house. So once the semester starts, I give my students lots of energy to...so I, even if I am frustrated, once I change my mind, my mind is from my students.

She goes on to say:

To tell the truth, I want to have a baby, but I want to continue to work. [...] I have a dilemma now. Maybe after teaching one more year, I want to have a baby. [...] In Japan, for now, it is so difficult to have both.

It may be difficult for Shizuko to do both teaching and child rearing, but her strong allegiance toward teaching may make it easier for her to cope. Furthermore, because teaching is a high-status job, she may have more approval from her family and from society to continue working. Shizuko optimistically believes, "When I get more confident, then I have a child. That's the plan."

Conclusion

This study has investigated the impact of gender on the professional identity of seven Japanese female teachers of English in Japanese higher education. Gee's (2000) four perspectives of identity allowed us to examine multiple layers that shape these women's professional lives. We have seen how their gendered N-identities were at the heart of their early access to English language education. Gender was also seen to influence how these women obtained the necessary qualifications to claim I-identities as university teachers, for their paths toward graduate education were also loaded with sociopolitical overtones that govern Japanese women's lives. Even after attaining recognition as members of a prestigious occupation, the participants' D-identities are negotiated and renegotiated through the discursive practices of others, which often causes tension in how they wish to project themselves (as professionals and/or feminists) and in their desire to get along well with their colleagues and acquaintances. The participants' gender was also seen to be a barrier that prevented them from having the same rights and privileges as their male colleagues, influencing their A-identities in their workplaces. They are keenly aware of being peripheral members of their faculties because of their gender. As Naomi put it, she sometimes feels like an interloper in a "men's club" because she is unaware of the unspoken rules. Kumiko's coworkers, who treat her like a "princess" or a "daughter," intend to make her feel at home, but it is hard to imagine that newly hired male employees would be treated like a "prince" or a "son." Instead, they are wooed to give allegiance to the various *habatsu* (political factions), which shape their A-identities for many

years.

The part-time teachers in this study, Taeko and Shizuko, who do not have an institution to affiliate with, do not experience the same sort of gender isolation in the workplace that the tenured teachers do. Neither sees her part-time status as a career limitation, most likely because each feels lucky to be able to “reinvent” herself as a university teacher after having been a housewife, as in Taeko’s case, or a clerical worker, as in Shizuko’s case. Part-time university teaching provides them with an enhanced sense of professional identity that they would not have been able to obtain had they not gained access to university teaching. Nevertheless, it is also important to point out that some female academics (for example, a woman with a PhD who is unable to find a tenured position due to gendered hiring practices) would find their own part-time status as a sign of a “dead-end” career.

This study was undertaken to better understand the lives of Japanese women teaching English in Japanese higher education, but the findings from these women’s narratives are not intended to be generalizable to the wider population of Japanese female university teachers. These women’s stories and their experiences are uniquely their own and, as such, do not speak for others. Nevertheless, it is plausible, even likely, that the issues that have emerged from this study will resonate with other Japanese women teaching English in the Japanese tertiary context. The study’s findings suggest that there is a real, albeit complex, relationship between gender and power, one which is directly related to the study of English in Japan and to the employment of female teachers of English in Japanese higher education.

Note

- 1 An expanded version of this article can be found in Chapters 2 and 6 of my book, *Exploring Japanese University English Teachers’ Professional Identity* (2012). I am grateful to Multilingual Matters for their kind permission to use selected portions of the book for this article.

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