

More gentle and less stubborn Kyushu-danji men: Discourse marker, nanka, as stance taking among young Japanese

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In recent years, sociolinguistic variationists turn increased attention to discourse variation although discourse features have been less investigated in the past (Macaulay 2002; Pichler 2010). A reason for this movement may lie on the ground that it is well documented, in fact, especially in qualitative studies that discourse features can play crucial roles in creating social meanings and hence contribute to the construction of speakers' identity or persona (Moore and Podesva 2009). This paper investigates the use of an understudied Japanese discourse marker, nanka ('like', 'somehow', 'anything') and explores its meanings by examining language change over time and discourse of two young Japanese men.

The first half of this paper investigates changes in the use of the discourse marker nanka, drawing from two sets of spoken data recorded in Kyushu, the southwestern island of Japan. The first set of data is naturally occurring conversations recorded by the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics from 1978 to 1983 with 8 participants (4 female; 4 male) ranging in ages from 63 to 86 years old. The second set of data consists of 9 speakers (5 females; 4 males) in their 20s collected by one of the researchers in 2007 and 2008 through ethnographic techniques and sociolinguistic interview. This panel study clearly demonstrates that nanka is a relatively newly developed discourse marker, which has been taken up among young Japanese speakers today. Old speakers from over 40 years ago limited the use of this lexical item to a restricted grammatical function, but young Japanese today have expanded its use through grammaticalization for interactional purposes to indicate their multiple stances that change momentarily in interaction. The last half of this paper focuses on the discourse of two young male speakers whose personae and use of nanka exhibit clear contrasts. While previous studies on the use of discourse markers such as "like" in English have identified women as more frequent users of the features (e.g. Romaine & Lange 1991; Ferrara & Bell 1990; Tagliamonte & Hudson 1999), our Japanese data shows that the most and least frequent users of the feature are both male. Close examination of the discourse of these two males demonstrates that nanka indexes multiple stances (e.g. epistemic and evaluative stances) in moment-to-moment interaction through which the speakers' personae are constructed. While there is a distinctive gendered ideology around a strong, stubborn, and assertive stereotypical masculine Kyushu-danji (Kyushu men) in Japanese society, we argue that the frequent use of nanka by a male speaker helps to construct a new type of masculinity, more gentle and less stubborn Soshoku-danishi (herbivore men).

The present paper brings much needed discussion to the use of Japanese discourse features from a variationist approach. We show first that the increased use of nanka, namely the language change, occurs through the grammaticalization process and then that young Japanese speakers use nanka to index various stances in interaction. Finally, we discuss the new form of masculinity present among young Japanese men, which the use of nanka contributes to.