

# **I know what you are, but what am I: Examining Japanese as a gendered language\***

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## **Abstract**

When speaking Japanese there are a number of factors that can affect the speech style that the speaker uses, such as age, gender, role and relationship to the listener. This can make Japanese difficult for the second language learner to master. In this paper I examine one of the most difficult-to-grasp aspects of the Japanese language: gendered speech. Whereas in English the speech styles of men and women can generally be differentiated through tone and inflection, Japanese male and female speech styles are almost like two different languages. These different speech styles can be broken down into many pieces, such as lexicon and sentence final particles. The use of these different aspects of the Japanese language can tell volumes about the person using them, and when used in literature they are very helpful for defining a character's personality.

For this paper, I focus on the different forms of the first person pronoun 'I' in the Japanese language. In Japanese one can use several different words when referring to one's self, such as *boku*, *ore*, *atashi*, *uchi* and *watashi*, to name a few.

My goal for this study is to show how the gendered speech of Japanese is used in both conventional and unconventional ways, and to explore the question of whether gendered language is instinctual in Japanese or whether it must be learned and reinforced by society. To delve deeper into this topic, I look at several works that examine the

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everyday use of language by men and women of varying sexual identities, as well as Japanese comics, or manga.

### **Introduction**

Gendered speech in the Japanese language is an intricate and sometimes confusing occurrence, for native and non-native speakers alike. This point brings up the question of whether or not the use of men's and women's language is a spontaneous occurrence in the everyday speech of the Japanese people.

In their book titled *Japanese Language, Gender, and Ideology: Cultural Models and Real People*, Janet Shibamoto Smith and Shigeko Okamoto argue that women's language and men's language are really just

cultural constructs informed by the hegemonic ideology of language and gender – constructs that have been widely disseminated as linguistic norms in Japanese society not only through popular media but also by language policy makers and linguists like ourselves. (2004:4)

In her book, *Vicarious Language: Gender and Linguistic Modernity in Japan*, Miyako Inoue also argues that women's language is not a natural, everyday way of speaking for women but is really just a way to "normalize" (2006:1) the woman, Japanese speaker.

Inoue also argues that, in more rural areas of Japan, the women do not conform to this use of gendered language.

She goes on and draws from her own childhood experience, explaining how in the small rural town in which she grew up in none of the women ever used women's language (2006). She continues to say that, there and in the rest of Japan, most women "do not have access to -- did not systematically learn and cannot skillfully produce -- the speech forms identified as women's language in their habitual speech repertoire" (Inoue 2006). During Inoue's childhood, one of the few places she heard women's language was on the television being used in dubbed versions of famous American movies. This lead Inoue to consider women's language as "the language of whiteness" since it was the way that American actresses spoke on the television (2006).

For Inoue, women's language was strongly associated with media, movies and commercials. Women's language was not something that occurred spontaneously where she grew up. To Inoue, *onna kotoba*, or women's speech, was much the way of *onē kotoba*, which is discussed in section 5.4.1, was to Goichi, one of Hideko Abe's consultants in her book *Queer Japanese* (2010). *Onna kotoba*, like *onē kotoba*, was a way of speaking that was used for entertainment purposes, and it wasn't until she traveled to Tokyo that she actually heard women's language used in the form of everyday speech (2006).

While Inoue makes many valid points, her experience is not the experience of many Japanese people. Gendered language is not only a distinct feature of Japanese that is examined by non-native and non-speakers for its uniqueness, but it is also a part of the language that many native speakers, both young and old, utilize. In fact, children as young as two years old are already linguistically aware of the gender differences in Japanese (Tanaka 2004). The fact that young children have linguistic awareness of gendered language helps to show that the use of gendered language is a natural part of everyday speech.

### 1. What am 'I'?

"Do you think you can teach me to use women's speech?"  
 "Yes, but I don't really know how it works either." (personal communication, July 2012)<sup>1</sup>

The words that one chooses to use while speaking Japanese are dependent on many factors: age, role, gender and relationship to the listener (Tanaka 2004). These factors have led to the Japanese utilizing a separate gendered language that includes a set of sentence-final particles and a lexicon, which men and women can choose to use to make their speech sound either more masculine or more feminine.

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<sup>1</sup> This conversation took place in Japan, but was conducted in English with Haruka Kuriyama Tsuda College (津田塾大学) Class of 2013.

Since I started my endeavors to master this language the use of gendered language has puzzled me greatly and left me and numerous other Japanese language learners with many questions. This is what led to the previously presented conversation with a native Japanese speaker, a friend of mine. This conversation opened my eyes to the fact that even native Japanese speakers themselves occasionally have difficulties with the use of gendered language, and left me with even more questions than before.

In this thesis I explore the use of gendered language in Japanese, specifically looking at the different forms of 'I', of which there are many. I look at the ways that these different forms are used to help the speaker identify him or herself, and the ways that authors use these forms to convey the personalities of their characters. This is important because, as Lidia Tanaka says in her book, "the governance of first person pronouns by the gender of the speaker is one of the most powerful and meaningful expressions of maleness or femaleness" (2004:122). When one is speaking Japanese, one's use of pronouns is "the first factor to catch one's eye' when seeking sex-differentiated forms in Japanese" (Shibamoto 1987:273). I also examine the question of whether or not the use of gendered language is

a phenomenon that occurs naturally in the everyday speech of Japanese men and women, as opposed to it functioning as a social and cultural construct that has become the social norm in Japan.

First, I briefly discuss the relationship between gender and language followed by information on the history of gendered language in Japanese. Next, I examine the different forms of 'I' that are available to the Japanese speaker: feminine forms, masculine forms and gender-neutral forms. Finally, I state my conclusions and findings on the use of gendered language and its role in the Japanese language.

## **2. Gender and Language**

The relationship between gender and language is one that has been examined by linguists for a number of years. Each language has its own subtle nuances that help the speaker convey either his or her masculinity or femininity. Japanese, however, is one of the few languages where the differences between the language used by women and the language used by men are very distinct. Linguists have noted that Japanese "feature[s] two separate linguistic genres for women and men" (Abe 2010:2). These linguistic

genres have become known in Japanese as *onna kotoba*, 'women's language', and *otoko kotoba*, 'men's language'.

### **3. A Touch of History**

Women's language can be traced far back in Japanese history. The study of *nyōbō kotoba*, or court lady's language, used during the mid-Kamakura, about 1250 to 1333 CE, and early Muromachi Periods, around 1337 CE, of Japanese history brought the attention of linguists to the differences in the language used by men and women (Shibamoto 1987), although records of men's and women's speech among nobles goes back as far as the Heian Period, in the 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.

*Nyōbō kotoba* was first used only by courtesans, but soon spread because of its refined and elegant sound (Tanaka 2004). The studies of this time period found that women's speech had a number of characteristics different from men's speech, including special sentence-final particles and exclamations, special address and self-reference terms and the avoidance of vulgar language (Shibamoto 1987).

Much more research has been done on women's language and its history compared to men's language, since it is believed by some that men's language used to be the social

norm and women's language is just a variant of what is now known as men's language (Tanaka 2004). Most works, however, do agree that men's language tends to be not as polite as women's language, more blunt and more assertive (Sturtz Sreetharan 2004) and that men have more choices when it comes to personal pronouns (Tanaka 2004).

#### **4. Source Material**

The majority of the samples seen here have come from books and manga, or Japanese comics. Manga and other similar media are a place where one can easily encounter gendered language in Japanese. I have chosen these as my source materials for several reasons. The main reason I have done so, however, is that for me, as a non-native Japanese speaker, manga is an easy place to find many of the different uses of the Japanese language, both in a common, everyday way and in a more antiquated, out-of-date way.

Although one could argue that this use of gendered speech is not as natural as it would be in the everyday speech of native speakers, I am able to find a large variety of grammatically correct and natural-sounding sample sentences. By using examples from manga, both in original Japanese and English translations, I am able to

show how much of the meaning is lost due to the English language's inability to convey gender in the same way that Japanese can.

### **5. The words we choose**

In this section I look more closely at some of the different words Japanese men and women choose when they wish to refer to themselves. There are many different ways in which one can refer to one's self. Here, I list some of the more common ways, including ones that I have encountered, either through experience in Japan or through reading, although there are many more forms that have not been included. I include transliterated sample sentences along with their translations.

In Japanese, the use of 'I' is optional the majority of the time, because of this it was more difficult to find some of the more uncommon forms of 'I'. Some of the translations for the following examples may therefore also contain the word 'me', 'my' or 'we' instead of 'I'. This is because in Japanese these words are all the same and the different English forms are necessary to render the gloss grammatical in English. To say 'we', 'us' or the plural form of 'you' in Japanese a plural ending, usually *tachi* or *ra*, is added to the form of 'I' or 'you' being used. To say

'my' or 'mine' the possessive particle *no* is usually added after the form of 'I'. On my search for some of the less commonly used versions of 'I' I was only able to find the words in the previously mentioned combinations.

### 5.1. *Onna Kotoba* (women's words)

*Onna Kotoba*, おんなことば 女言葉 'women words', or *Josēgo*, じょせいご 女性語

'female language', are the words and particles women typically use in their everyday speech to make it sound more feminine.

Table 1 contains the feminine forms of 'I' that will be discussed in this section. These forms are given in both their Romanized forms and their original Japanese forms.

**Table 1**

私 - あたし/あたくし ( <i>Atashi/Atakushi</i> )	あたい ( <i>Atai</i> )	うち/ウチ ( <i>Uchi</i> )	One's Name
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#### 5.1.1. *Atashi/Atakushi*

*Atashi* and *atakushi* are some of the most common ways women refer to themselves when they are using *josēgo*. I have decided to put *atashi* and *atakushi* in the same section because they are very similar, the only difference being that *atakushi* sounds slightly more formal than *atashi*.

*Atashi* and *atakushi* can also be written as 私, the same

character that is used for the more gender-neutral *watashi* and *watakushi*, but it is more commonly seen written in kana, the Japanese alphabets hiragana and katakana, as *あたし* or *アタシ* respectively.

1. *Atashi mo obasan no ryōri daisuki desu.*<sup>2</sup>  
I<sub>FEM</sub> also aunt POSS cooking love POLITE<sup>3</sup>  
 'I like your cooking too'.

In this example the character speaking, *Suzu*, is the love interest of the main character in one of the stories from the manga *The Day I Become a Butterfly*. She is a high school age girl. She is not the main character of this story, so the reader is unable to see how *Suzu* uses speech in her thoughts.<sup>4</sup> Her word choice when she is speaking to other characters, however, is typical of a high school age to young adult woman. In this example she is speaking to

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<sup>2</sup> A copy of the original manga page, as well as a copy of the translated page, where this example was taken from can be found in Appendix 1. The speech bubble containing the sample sentence as well as the character that is speaking it have been circled in the original manga page.

<sup>3</sup> *Obasan* literally translates into aunt, however, in Japanese it can also be used when referring to a woman who is older than you. In this example it is referring to the mother of the speaker's friend. In Japanese when addressing someone politely one tends to avoid the second person pronoun 'you'; that is why 'aunt' in the gloss becomes 'you' in the translation.

<sup>4</sup> Like books written in the first person, manga will often follow the main character and allow the reader to know this character's inner dialogue. The reader, however, does not usually know the thoughts of the other, minor characters.

the main character's mother. She maintains her use of *atashi* throughout the story.

### 5.1.2. *Atai*

*Atai* is a form that is no longer commonly used in Japanese. It is a feminine form and has a rather "babyish" (Shibamoto 1987) connotation to it. *Atai* is usually written in hiragana as あたい.

2. *Atai ni mo kuwase-ro.*<sup>5</sup>  
I<sub>FEM</sub> IND.OBJ also feed<sub>IMPERATIVE</sub>  
 'Feed me too.'

The character who is speaking in this example, Kanna, is one of the minor characters in the series *Sakura Wars*, also known as *Sakura Taisen*. She is an easygoing and somewhat tomboyish character. Her character is a martial artist and is one of the fighters in the group of main characters. She has several masculine features but her use of *atai* makes her seem more childish and less threatening. This also helps to make her character more feminine. In this scene she is speaking to some of the main characters in the manga.

### 5.1.3. *Uchi*

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<sup>5</sup> A copy of the original manga page where this example was taken from can be found in Appendix 2.

*Uchi* is another female version of 'I'. It is considered to be *Kansai ben*, or Kansai dialect. Therefore it is primarily heard in the speech of women from the southern central region of Japan. This region includes, among others, Kyoto and Osaka prefectures. *Uchi* can be written in kana as *うち* or *ウチ*, as in the manga example below. It also has the kanji, or Chinese character, of 内 though it is more commonly seen written in kana.

3. *Daijyōbu betoran no uchira ni makashi toki.*<sup>6</sup>  
 Okay veteran LINK I<sub>FEM PL.</sub> IND. OBJ entrust time  
 'No problem, leave it to us veterans.'

Konoka, the character speaking in this example, is a young optimistic and cheerful girl. She is one of the main characters in the manga series *Magical Teacher Negima*. Her family is from the Kansai region of Japan, which may be why she uses this less common form of 'I'. Her choice of this form of 'I' makes her sound feminine and also gives readers a hint at where she is from. In this example she is speaking to a group of her classmates.

#### 5.1.4 Names

One other way to refer to one's self is to use one's own name in place of 'I'. This also occurs in English, but

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<sup>6</sup> For the manga pages see Appendix 3.

is more common in Japanese. Using one's name in Japanese instead of one of the variants of 'I' sounds childish and is sometimes used by women to sound cute. In Japan, and in manga and anime, it is not uncommon to hear a young child or even a young woman refer to herself in the third person. This way of referencing one's self does not have the negative connotations that using the third person sometimes has in English.

4. *Nē kondo ha Airisu ga oni da yo.*<sup>7</sup>  
 INTERJECTION next time TOPIC Iris SUBJ. demon AUX. V !<sup>8</sup>  
 'Hey, next time I'll be a monster.' (translation mine)<sup>9</sup>

Iris, the character speaking here, is a young girl, about 10 years old, from the same story as Kanna. She is the youngest member of a secret task force known as the Imperial Assault Force. Her character is childish and is frequently seen carrying a teddy bear. By using her own name instead of one of the other self-reference pronouns, Iris is portrayed as a young and innocent child. Here she is talking with a man who is part of the Imperial Task Force.

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<sup>7</sup> These manga pages can be found in Appendix 4.

<sup>8</sup> In Japanese *yo* is often used as a spoken exclamation point.

<sup>9</sup> This was translated by me and double-checked by a Kimiko Suzuki of the Haverford Japanese department.

## 5.2. *Otoko Kotoba* (men's words)

*Otoko kotoba*, <sup>おとことば</sup> 男言葉 'men words', or *dansēgo*, <sup>だんせいご</sup> 男性語

'male language', are the words and particles used, typically, by men in their everyday speech to make it sound more masculine.

Table 2 contains the masculine forms of 'I' that will be discussed in this section. These forms are given in both their romanized forms and their original Japanese forms.

**Table 2**

僕 - ぼく/ボク ( <i>Boku</i> )	俺 - おれ/オレ ( <i>Ore</i> )	俺様 - おれさま ( <i>Ore sama</i> )	わし ( <i>Washi</i> )
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### 5.2.1. *Boku*

*Boku* is a form of 'I' that is commonly heard in Japanese, especially when the speaker is a young boy or when the speaker wishes to sound more polite but keep a degree of masculinity to his speech. *Boku* can also be heard in a number of songs performed by both men and women. *Boku* contains a small degree of masculinity, but is not nearly as strongly masculine as *ore*. *Boku* is commonly seen in both its kanji form, 僕, and its two kana forms, ぼく and ボク.

5. *Boku ni ha koe ga nakatta.*<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix 5.

I<sub>MAS</sub> to TOPIC voice SUBJ. NEG. PAST  
 'I have no voice.'<sup>11</sup>

The speaker in this example is a teenage boy, Masariya; he is the main character of the story, although he has appeared as a secondary character in an earlier story in the same manga, *The Day I Become a Butterfly*. He is mute, so the reader only has access to his thoughts and is deprived of any spoken communication between him and other characters.

Masariya is portrayed as a young, shy boy in the manga and when thinking, he uses *boku*. Masariya's use of *boku* helps to make him seem innocent and childish (in contrast to all the other male characters who use *ore* -- which is discussed in the next section), which fits with the personality that was established for him earlier in the manga. He uses *boku* consistently throughout this story.

### 5.2.2. Ore

*Ore* is another masculine form of 'I' in Japanese. It has a slightly stronger masculine connotation than *boku*. In some circumstances, the use of *ore* is considered quite rude. Generally, young boys around elementary school age are

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<sup>11</sup> Although this sentence is in the past tense in Japanese I have chosen to keep the English translation in the present, as this how it is featured in the English version of the manga.

discouraged from using *ore* for this reason. It is commonly used by boys of high school age and older. It is common in all three forms of the Japanese writing system. Kanji, 俺, hiragana, おれ, and katakana, オレ.

6. *Ore yōji aru kara. . .*<sup>12</sup>  
 I<sub>MAS</sub> tasks have because  
 'I've got stuff to do, so. . .'

Here the character speaking is a high school age boy, Mikami. He is one of the main characters in this story in the manga, *The Day I Become a Butterfly*, but not the protagonist so the reader does not see the type of speech he uses in his thoughts. Throughout the story Mikami is portrayed as a strange individual, but he is really just an average high school boy, which his use of *ore* reflects. In this scene he is speaking to the main character of the story, another high school aged boy.

#### 5.2.2.1. *Ore sama*

*Ore sama* is a form of 'I' that comes from combining *ore*, written in kanji as 俺, and *sama*, written in kanji as 様, a suffix generally placed after the names of other people to show respect, almost like calling someone *sir* or

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<sup>12</sup> A copy of the original manga page, as well as a copy of the translated page, where this example was taken from can be found in Appendix 6.

*lady*. *Sama* is a suffix that is only used when speaking to or about someone other than one's self. *Ore sama* is a masculine form and when it is used it projects onto the person or character a very egotistical feel. It is commonly used for characters such as villains. Since expressing one's humility is an important part of Japanese culture, *ore sama* is rarely heard in spoken language. It can also be written in hiragana as おれさま.

7. *Ore sama memoriaru.*<sup>13</sup>  
 I<sub>MAS</sub> Mr.<sub>POLITE</sub> memorial  
 'My *testimonial*.' (translation mine)

In this example the character speaking is a minor character, Prussia, in the manga *Axis Powers Hetalia*. In this manga, which is about the personified countries of the world and their lives during World War II, Prussia is vain, proud and power hungry. His use of *ore sama* shows that he thinks very highly of himself, to the point that he believes he is better than everyone else. To try and give this character the same depth, in the English version of the anime (cartoon), Prussia refers to himself as "Awesome me."

### 5.2.3. *Washi*

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 6 page 44.

*Washi* is a form that is not heard as often in everyday speech as *boku* and *ore*. Older men, around 50 years or older, usually use it when they are speaking to those who are of a lower status than they are (Shibamoto 1987). Therefore, it has become a stereotype for older, male professors, and is exemplified by this type of character in books and manga

(<sup>Kinsui</sup>金水 2007). It can be written in hiragana as わし.

8. *Daga, washi ha misutā Pottā to misu*  
 However I<sub>MAS</sub> TOPIC Mister Potter and Miss  
*Guranjyā ni hanasu ga arun jya.*<sup>14</sup>  
 Granger to speak SUBJ. have<sub>REASON</sub> then  
 'However, I have something to talk to Mister  
 Potter and Miss Granger about.' (translation  
 mine)

The previous example was taken from the third Harry Potter book, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. The character speaking here is Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry; and he is speaking to the school nurse, Madame Pomfrey. Dumbledore is an old man who was a professor before becoming headmaster. To help Japanese readers understand Dumbledore's character more clearly the translator has him use *washi* to refer to himself.

### 5.3. Gender-Neutral words

<sup>14</sup> Original text: だが、わしはミスターポッターとミスグランジャーに話すがあるんじゃ。

The words in this section are considered gender-neutral, and can be used by either men or women. They alone do not contain any connotations of masculinity or femininity. Although, when used in certain circumstances or when compared with other words, they can gain either masculine or feminine connotations.

Table 3 contains the gender-neutral forms of 'I' that will be discussed in this section.

**Table 3**

私-わたし/わたくし ( <i>Watashi/watakushi</i> )	自分-じぶん ( <i>Jibun</i> )	われ ( <i>Ware</i> )
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### 5.3.1. *Watashi/Watakushi*

*Watashi* and *watakushi* are the most commonly encountered forms of 'I' in Japan. They can be used by both men and women, and are considered a polite form of 'I'. *Watakushi* is generally considered to be a more formal form of *watashi*, although either can be used in a formal situation, such as a job interview. *Watakushi* is also the form used when using extra modest or humble expressions in Japanese (Banno, 2008). Just as with *atashi* and *atakushi*, I have chosen to discuss these two forms together since the only major difference between them is that *watakushi* is

slightly more formal. Similar to *atashi* and *atakushi*, *watashi* is much more common in everyday speech than *watakushi*.

*Watashi* is also the first form that is taught to a person learning Japanese as a second language. Just as *washi* has become a tool that authors use to show that their characters are older, male professors, *watashi* is commonly used for characters who have learned Japanese as a second language, showing that they do not have the same grasp of the gender differences in the Japanese language that a native speaker would (金水<sup>Kinsui</sup> 2007). Compared to the masculine forms of 'I', *watashi* is considered rather feminine, however, when compared to the feminine forms it is considered neither masculine nor feminine. *Watashi* is most commonly written in its kanji form, 私, although it can also be seen in hiragana as わたし.

9. *Watashi wa burraku mūn no purinsu demando* .<sup>15</sup>

I<sub>NEUTRAL</sub> TOPIC black moon POSS prince Demand

'I am Prince Demand of the Black Moon.'

The character speaking here is a villain, Prince Demand, from the series *Sailor Moon*. His character has

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<sup>15</sup> See Appendix 7. The speech bubble containing the sample sentence as well as the character that is speaking it have been circled in the original manga page.

neither strong male nor female personality traits, so he is seen using *watashi* during his time in the series. Here he is introducing himself to the main character of the series, Sailor Moon.

### 5.3.2. *Jibun*

*Jibun* literally means 'one's self'. It is not as commonly heard as *watashi* or some of the forms of 'I' with stronger gender connotations. Although it is used and can be translated as 'I', it is more common as 'one's self' or 'myself'. *Jibun* is most commonly seen written in kanji as 自分, the first character can be read as 'one's self' and the second character has several meanings, including 'part', 'understand' and 'know'.

Some researchers claim that *jibun* is a masculine form. It is considered old-fashioned and is associated with militaristic groups and men in sports (Abe 2010). However, for reasons that will be explained later in section 5.4.2 I am placing *jibun* in the gender-neutral category.

10. *Jibun wa dare yori kirawareteru mitai.*<sup>16</sup>  
I<sub>NEUTRAL</sub> TOPIC who than hate<sub>PASS.PRESENT.CONT.</sub> like  
 'I think he hates me most of all.'

This example was taken from the same story as the example for *ore*. Here the person speaking is the main

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<sup>16</sup> See Appendix 8 for the manga pages.

character, a sickly and feminine-looking boy named Uka. This example is spoken in his thoughts. Here, and when speaking to older characters, he uses *jibun* to refer to himself. His gender is not stated at first so his use of *jibun* coupled with his feminine appearance leaves the reader questioning this character's gender for the first few pages of the manga.

Later, when Uka is speaking to other characters his age, he switches to *ore*. This not only shows the reader that Uka is male, but it also helps Uka to assert his masculinity to other characters despite his feminine looks.

11. *Mikami tte angai ore no koto suki*  
 Mikami<sub>TOPIC</sub> unexpectedly I<sub>MAS</sub> POSS thing like  
*dattari shite ne*<sup>17</sup>  
 like to do right<sup>18</sup>  
 'It's almost as if you like me or something,  
 Mikami.'

### 5.3.3. Ware

*Ware* is an older form of 'I'. It is rarely used in spoken speech, however, it can be seen in literature and in manga (personal communication, November 2012).<sup>19</sup> *Ware* can be

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<sup>17</sup> See appendix 8 pages 49 and 50.

<sup>18</sup> In Japanese *tte* is usually the short form of *to*, which is used as a quotation marker. In this case, however, *tte* is being used to mark the topic of the sentence. *~tari suru* can also be translated as 'doing things like . . .'

<sup>19</sup> Maho Okumura, Bryn Mawr College Class of 2016.

written in kanji as 我 , which is also the Chinese character for 'I'. It can also be written in hiragana as われ.

12. Warera mo mata taiko no  
 I<sub>NEUTRAL PL</sub> also still ancient times POSS  
 mukashi kara<sup>20</sup>  
 former from  
 From ancient times . . .<sup>21</sup>

In this example three new characters are introducing themselves to Sailor Moon, the main character of the series. All three of these characters are female and are speaking to another female. Sailor Moon is of a higher status than the three characters so they are using this older form to humble themselves. This form also does not give off either masculine or feminine connotations in this context.

#### 5.4. Words used in different ways

Japanese gendered language is not only used in the commonly thought of way: women use women's language and men use men's language. In this section I will discuss some of the ways that gendered language is used colloquially.

In her book, *Queer Japanese: Gender and Sexual Identities through Linguistic Practices*, Hideko Abe looks

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<sup>20</sup> Manga pages in appendix 9.

<sup>21</sup> The translation of this example does not contain 'I' or one of its variants due to the differing sentence structures in Japanese and English. If you look at the English version of this manga (page 51) you will see that 'our' appears right after this.

at the way that people of differing genders and sexual identities use language (2010). Abe examines how people with different sexual and gender identities use gendered language to “reject the essentialist notion that there are two distinctive categories of sexes, women and men, which are constituted by separate social roles and responsibilities” (2010).

#### 5.4.1. *Onē kotoba* (queen’s speech)

*Onē kotoba*, or “queen’s speech” as Abe refers to it, is a term that refers to a homosexual man’s use of women’s speech (2010). The phrase *Onē kotoba* has negative connotations in the gay community and is seen as language used solely for entertainment purposes. Some refer to it as *dōke kotoba*, which can be translated as the speech of clowns (Abe 2010). *Onē kotoba* is very similar to *onna kotoba*, and there is debate whether or not it is the same as *onna kotoba*, the only difference being that it is used by men instead of women, or whether it is just a manipulation of *onna kotoba*.

13. *Atashi jyoyū nano*<sup>22</sup>  
       I<sub>FEM</sub>           actress   EMPHASIS<sub>FEM</sub>  
       ‘I’m an actress’

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<sup>22</sup> A copy of the original manga page, as well as a copy of the translated page, where this example was taken from can be found in Appendix 10.

The character, Grell, speaking here is a man who looks and acts like a woman. He dresses in a feminine manner and is often seen flirting with one of the main male characters of the series. Before this scene the reader is introduced to Grell, who is in the disguise of a butler. The reader is clearly told, that Grell, in his butler disguise, is a man, however, even in this disguise he still looks feminine. Once he reveals himself, Grell begins to use female speech. In both the anime and the manga Grell's character is rather comical and supports the stereotype of *onē kotoba* being used just for entertainment purposes.

#### **5.4.2. "Lesbian Bar Talk"<sup>23</sup>**

Compared to *onē kotoba* and the speech styles of gay Japanese men, the speech of Japanese lesbians has not been studied as closely, mostly due to the fact that Japanese lesbians are expected to remain unseen and unheard in society (Abe 2010).

Since most lesbians in Japan wish to remain anonymous they are very conscious of which forms of 'I' they use when speaking to others. Abe spent time at lesbian bars in Nishi-chome in the city of Shinjuku in Tokyo, Japan. Here she found that the forms of 'I' that are used in lesbian bars

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<sup>23</sup> This is also the title for a section in Hideko Abe's book *Queer Japanese: Gender and Sexual Identities through Linguistic Practices*.

could be almost any of the forms mentioned in this paper. Several women, however, did mention that their preferred form is *jibun*. These women claimed that *jibun* was more gender-neutral than any of the other forms of 'I'. They stated that it did not have the femininity that is associated with *watashi* and *atashi* and it did not have the masculine connotations of *boku*, *ore*, and *washi*. One woman even went so far as to say "Why do I need to use *boku*? I do not even like men" (Abe 2010: 44).

14. *Ne sekkaku dakara dare ka*  
 Hey with trouble therefore who question  
*ore to kēkoshinai*<sup>24</sup>  
 I<sub>MAS</sub> also practice<sub>NEG</sub><sup>25</sup>  
 'Since you're here, will one of you spar with me?'

This example was taken from the popular children's manga *Sailor Moon*. In this scene the person speaking is a female character known as Amara Tenoh in the English adaptation. This character is known for frequently dressing as a man. Although her sexuality is never clearly stated she does kiss the female, main character of the series

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<sup>24</sup> See appendix 11.

<sup>25</sup> *Sekkaku* literally means 'with trouble' or 'at great pains' but in this sentence it is being used to mean 'so it won't go to waste' ('it' being the other person's presence). In Japanese one can ask another person if they want to do something by putting the verb in the negative tense and asking the sentence as a question.

several times and has a close relationship with one of the other female characters.

In this scene many of the characters either believe that Amara is a man or they are confused by her gender. Her appearance and use of *ore* help her to present herself as a man to others.

As Abe describes when speaking about the women she met in the lesbian bars of Japan, Amara switches the forms of 'I' she uses. When she is just regular Amara Tenoh she uses *ore*, but when she is seen as her alter ego, Sailor Uranus, she uses *atashi*.<sup>26</sup>

15. *Kono atashi ni oitsuite kuru nante*  
 This I<sub>FEM</sub> to catch up to come such as  
*kēsan gai datta nā*<sup>27</sup>  
 calculation outside PAST EMPHASIS  
 'And here I was thinking you'd never be able to  
 catch up to me.'

The alter ego of Sailor Uranus dresses more femininely than Amara Tenoh usually does and is part of a bigger all-female group of super heroes. Sailor Uranus's change to *atashi* could be a way to show that she is part of the group and reaffirm her identity as a woman.

## Conclusion

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<sup>26</sup> This happens in the manga, however, if you watch the anime you will notice that Amara Tenoh uses the masculine form *boku* all of the time.

<sup>27</sup> See appendix 11 pages 57 and 58.

The plethora of choices in Japanese for the first person pronoun 'I' serves many functions. It helps the reader or listener determine the gender and sometimes the social status of the speaker. Occasionally these forms of 'I' can even give the reader or listener a hint as to the sexual orientation of the person who is utilizing the language. A speaker of the Japanese language can intentionally and unintentionally reveal much about himself or herself depending on the form of 'I' that he or she uses. Although these different forms can cause difficulties for translators when they are translating from Japanese to English, they add a new level of depth to the characters of a story when translating in the opposite direction.

Many scholars comment on the gender differences in the Japanese language. The question of whether or not these gender differences are a cultural construct has been brought up many times. In some parts of Japan the masculine and feminine forms are rarely used if they are used at all. Looking at the origins of women's language and men's language, it is clear that both have been in use for a considerable amount of time, although it would appear that men's language is older. Considering that women's language is the younger of the two it is reasonable to say that

women's language is a social and cultural construct that over the years has become a fixture in the Japanese language.

In modern Japan the differences between men's language and women's language are clear. What started as the speech of courtesans has become a fully functioning section of the Japanese language, so much so that even from a young age children are aware of these differences. Although I do agree with parts of Inoue's assessment of women's language, it is also clear that women's language has come to be a well-integrated part of Japanese. Many women in various prefectures and towns utilize it and women's language has even found a place in the speech of certain men.

### **Findings**

A very interesting aspect of Japanese that I became aware of while looking through the different manga was a switching that occurred between the different pronouns. While reading the manga, I noticed that the characters not only switched what forms of 'I' they used based on who they were speaking to, but they also switched their pronouns based on whether or not they were speaking out loud or in their thoughts. Switching depending on whom a character is speaking to was predictable considering that one of the

factors that determines a speaker's choice of 'I' is the speaker's social status compared to the listener. The switching between the character's internal use of 'I' and his or her external use of 'I', however, came as a surprise.

This difference between the character's spoken word choice and his or her choice of the non-verbal words used in his or her thoughts is one that would be difficult to observe in other forms of media and other data. This topic, however, is still a very intriguing one, that would no doubt produce interesting results if studied further. If given the opportunity, I would continue my research by analyzing the internal use of 'I' in Japanese and how it may be affected by factors different from those that affect the spoken 'I'.

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- <sup>きんすい さとし</sup> 金水 敏 (Kinsui, Satoshi). 2007. <sup>やくわりご</sup> 役割語. Japan: <sup>しゅつぱん</sup> くらしお出版 (Kuroshio Publishing Company).

Appendix 1





YOU AND I...

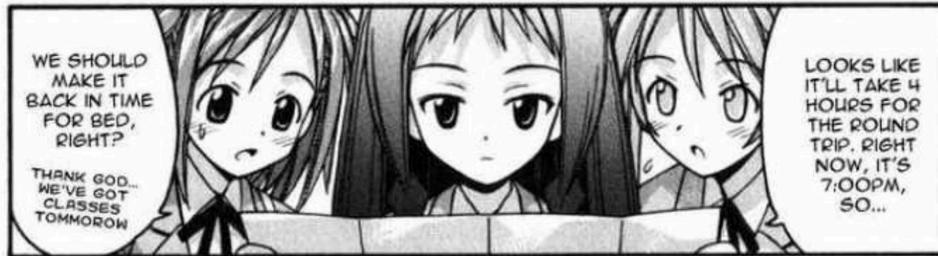


Appendix 2

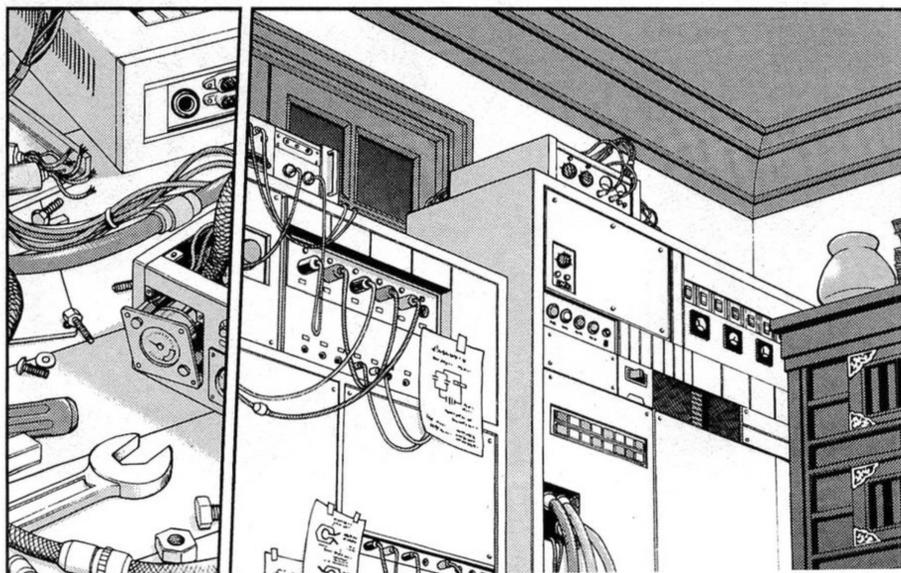


Appendix 3

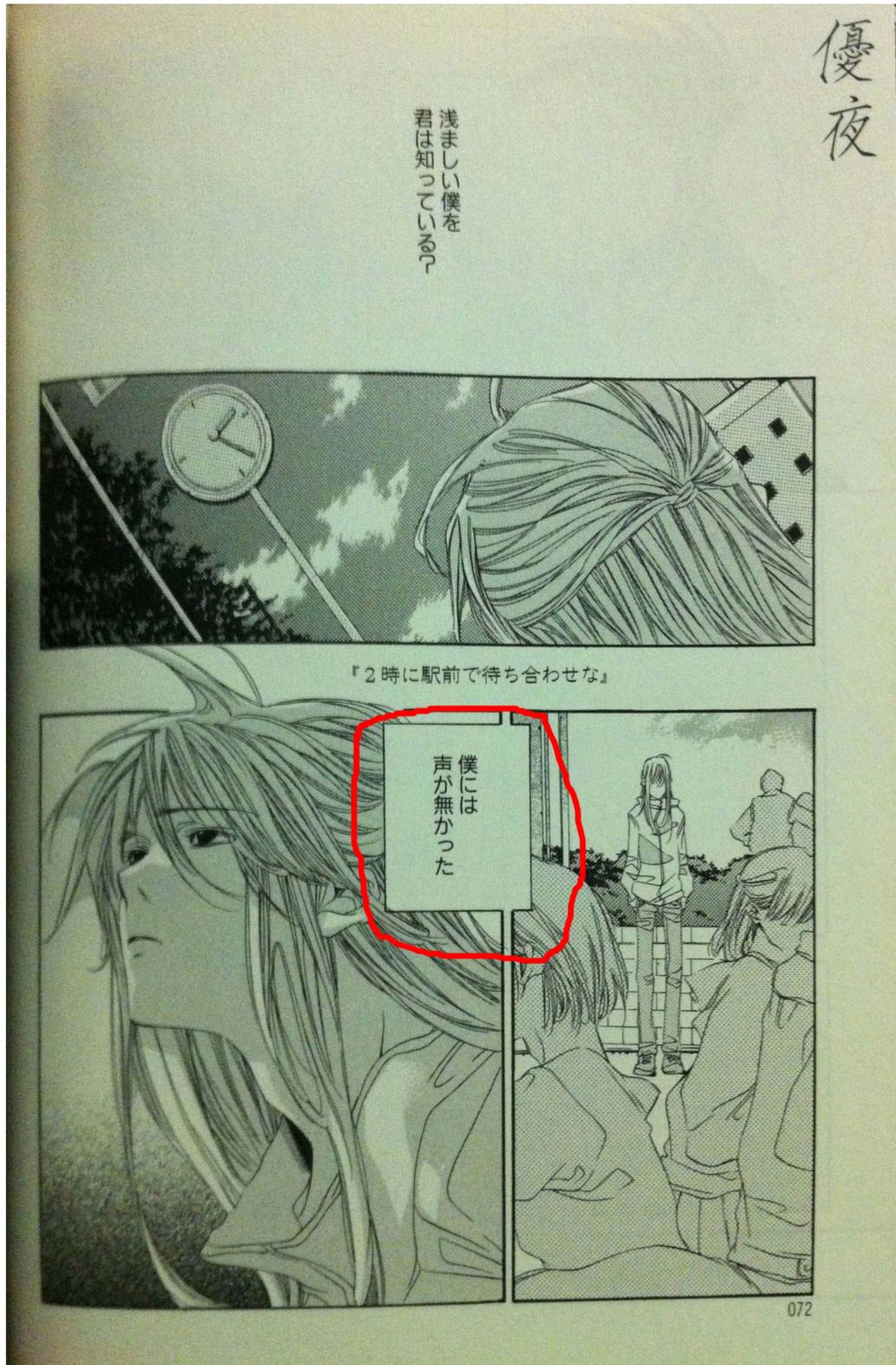




Appendix 4



Appendix 5

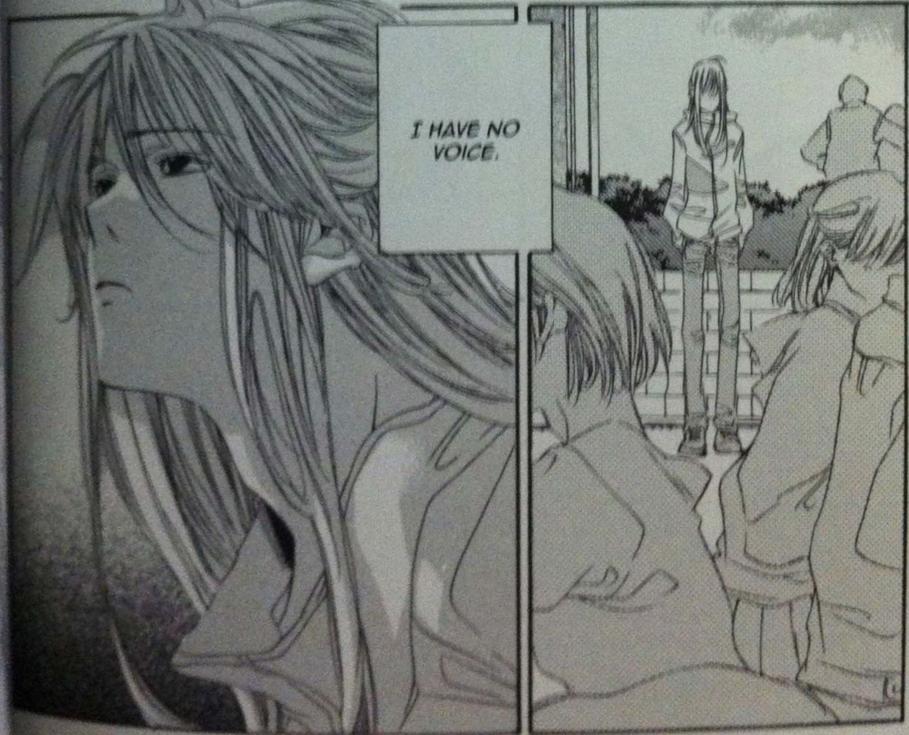


MASARIYA

DO YOU KNOW  
ABOUT THE  
WRETCHED SIDE  
OF ME?



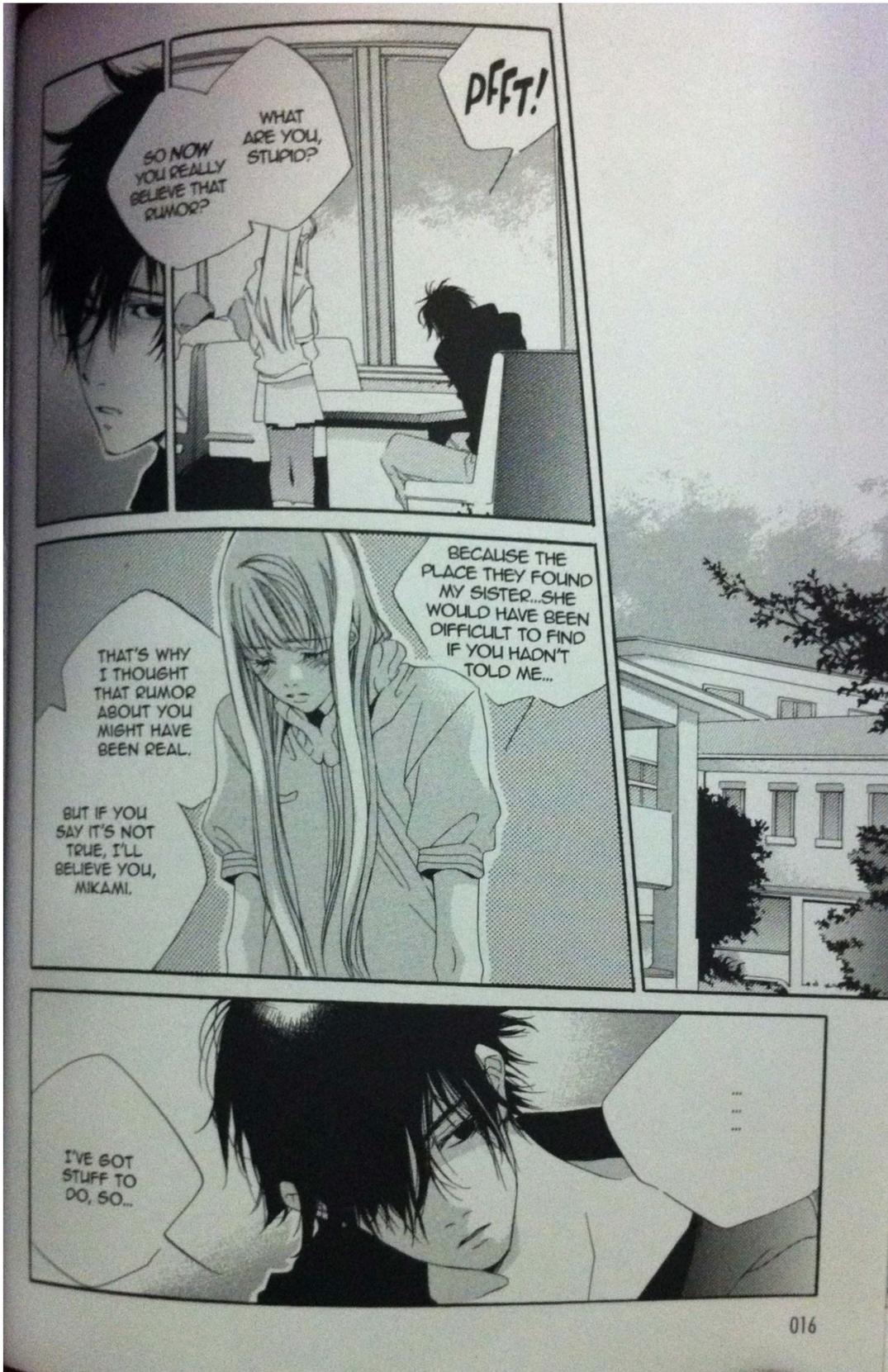
"LET'S MEET AT TWO O'CLOCK IN  
FRONT OF THE TRAIN STATION."



I HAVE NO  
VOICE.

Appendix 6





おれさまメモリアル



# おれさまメモリアル

◆これまでのあらすじ◆  
せっかくオーストリアがケチな野郎だって教えてやったのに  
スイスの野郎に追い出された…



小さい頃、プロイセンは教皇に許してもらってやりたい放題でした

Appendix 7





I'D LIKE TO HAVE A NICE LONG CHAT WITH YOU

I'VE LOST CONTROL OF MY BODY...!

NOW

fwoosh!

OF THE BLACK MOON

I AM PRINCE DEMAND



SO YOU'RE THE ONE WHO ATTACKED CRYSTAL TOKYO!

DEMAND!



I ATTACKED YOU FULL FORCE WITH THE DARK CRYSTAL USING MY EVIL EYE ATTACK. YOU RECOVERED QUICKLY. BUT THAT'S TO BE EXPECTED OF ONE WHOSE BODY UTILIZES THE POWER OF THE SILVER CRYSTAL.

BUT I DOUBT YOUR BODY WILL DO SO WELL ON THIS PLANET



YES

IT CAN'T BE...

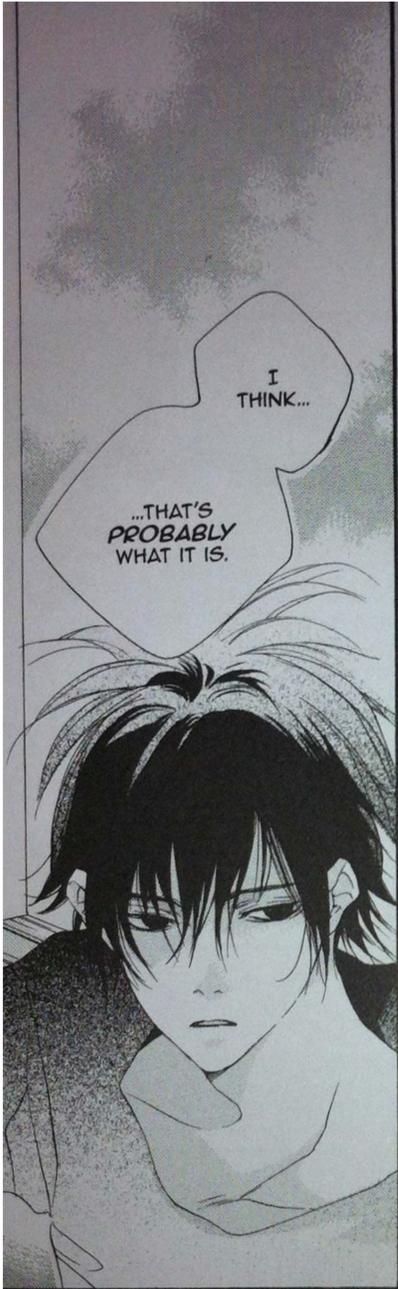
IS THIS NEMESIS?

Appendix 8









I  
THINK...

...THAT'S  
PROBABLY  
WHAT IT IS.

JUST  
WHEN I  
HAD  
DECIDED  
TO GIVE  
UP...



...JUST  
KIDDING.

IT'S ALMOST  
AS IF YOU  
LIKED ME OR  
SOMETHING,  
MIKAMI.

HAHAHA.

HAHA.

YEAH.



WHAT?

Appendix 9





**Our Princess ...**

**We are willing to make amends for the many offenses we have given you.**

**How-ever ...**

**These were all done to protect you and this planet.**

**Please forgive us.**

**From ancient times...**

**Our duty was to repel intruders from outer space.**

**We protected the Silver Millennium from afar.**

**Just as you, Princess, and the Silver Millennium have been reborn in this world..**

**We too were promised rebirth as you were...**

**And we were reborn on this planet.**







Appendix 11







