VERNACULAR STYLE WRITING: STRATEGIC BLURRING OF THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN SPOKEN AND WRITTEN DISCOURSE IN JAPANESE

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Abstract

This paper shows that some Japanese non-fiction writers are using various structural characteristics of spoken discourse in their writing. Their written discourse includes non-canonical word order and long sentences that are produced by combining a series of clauses. Their sentences may lack case or topic marking particles, but they may contain clause-final particles. Their discourse looks like it may have gone through a dynamic, on-going formation process because it includes reformulation and changes in the structure in midstream.

It is proposed that writers who adopt such an approach are deliberately blurring the boundary between speech and writing for multiple reasons. They may be exhibiting their creativity and innovation as well as their anti-establishment ideology. Vernacular style writing may also be an attempt to engage, involve, and connect with their readers. Further, they may be reflecting as well as expressing contemporary society in which orality is viewed favorably and as a result, writing in general has become increasingly more casual than before. The phenomenon discussed in this paper may be viewed as a reflection of erosions and shifting of traditional genres.

Keywords: Writing; Speech; Japanese; Style; Orality; Genre.

1. Introduction¹

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, writing in Japan had developed around the representation of *kanbun*² ('Sino-Japanese written style'). As *kanbun* was a hybrid between Chinese and Japanese in which Japanese is written using Chinese characters and syntax, it had little to do with vernacular Japanese at the time. During the Meiji era (1868-1912), when various governmental efforts to modernize Japan took place, a movement known as *genbun itchi* ('unification of spoken and written styles') emerged. The representation of spoken Japanese in writing was promoted by influential scholars

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²The Hepburn system is used to transcribe Japanese in the Roman alphabet. A macron (¯) is used to express that a vowel is lengthened. However, personal and place names are written without a macron (e.g., Tokyo instead of Tōkyō).

and writers as the dissimilarity between speech and writing was considered a hindrance for accelerated delivery of information (Shibatani 1990; Wetzel 2004).³

Today, written language is not as divorced from speech as it once was. However, there still are crucial differences between spoken and written styles in Japanese. For example, Shibatani (1990) says,

[...], as in most languages, the colloquial language and the written language show different characteristics, and perhaps even more so in Japanese than in English and other European languages. A major factor responsible for the differences between speech and the written language is formality. [...], many of the linguistic features associated with the informal setting of communication disappear in the written form, and those associated with formal environments are the hallmark of the written language. (Shibatani 1990: 359)

Iwasaki and Ono (2001) point out various characteristics of conversational Japanese that are not compatible with the conventional notion of ‘sentence,’ and say the following:

[...], many definitions of the sentence, though typically assumed to be applicable to both spoken and written modes, may actually be adequate only for the written mode of language. (Iwasaki and Ono 2001: 176)

As shown in section 2, various researchers have observed structural differences between spoken and written Japanese.

Recently, there have been writers who adopt various characteristics of vernacular discourse in their writing. This trend has been noticed in the field of literary criticism. For example, Saito (2002) says that *bunshō no kajuraru-ka* (‘casual-ization of writing’) is in progress. Ueno (2000)⁴ calls the trend as *Heisei genbun itchi undō* (‘Heisei movement towards unification of spoken and written styles’).⁵ These literary critics’ comments are largely based on impressionistic observations of the use of casual forms and colloquial phrases in writing. There have not been serious attempts to scrutinize and analyze the adoption of spoken style in writing.⁶

In this paper I examine various written discourse and show that contemporary non-fiction writers are adopting spoken style beyond the use of casual forms and colloquial phrases. The comparison is made between speech and the vernacular style found in writing in terms of specific linguistic structures and expressions. I argue that writers who adopt such an approach are deliberately blurring the boundary between speech and writing for multiple reasons.

³ See also Inoue (2006) for a detailed analysis of the *genbun itchi* movement and how it contributed to the emergence of what has been considered as modern Japanese feminine speech.

⁴ Ueno Chizuko is a well-known sociologist, but Ueno (2000) is a collection of her essays in the field of literary criticism.

⁵ ‘Heisei’ is the name of the current period in Japan. The name of the period changes each time a new emperor ascends the throne. The term *Heisei genbun itchi undō* ‘Heisei movement towards unification of spoken and written styles’ obviously makes reference to the unification movement in the Meiji period. Ueno (2000: 11) states that the term was coined by Yoichi Komori.

⁶ Maynard (2007) is an exception. However, her work is mostly concerned with lexical and morphological features and does not discuss structural features of speech that are adopted in writing.

In the next section I will summarize differences between speech and written language that have been discussed in the literature. Section 3 will present examples of writing that possess those characteristics found in speech. In section 4 I will consider motivations behind the adoption of spoken style. Section 5 will conclude the paper.

Books that have been written since 1985 are used as data. To limit the scope of the study, other printed media such as magazine and newspaper articles are not included as data. As I will mention in sections 4 and 5, online communication spaces (electronic bulletin boards, chat rooms, e-mail) would be a place one would find the fusion of speech and writing, but are also excluded from the analysis in this paper. This is because online communication operates and develops quite differently from communication that takes place with regular printed media. It belongs to a different category, which deserves separate research. This paper is concerned with how contemporary writers of traditional medium (i.e., books) are influenced by spoken discourse and how they are manipulating their writing.

Of printed books, I limit my investigation to non-fiction books which are written from an author's point of view. This is because in fiction and non-fiction books with the third person subjects, the author often represents a character's thoughts as if they were speech. The following passage from D. H. Lawrence (cited in Banfield 1982: 65) illustrates this:

A long time after he opened his eyes he realized he was seeing something – something, something, but the effort to recall was too great. No, no; no recall! (Lawrence 1961: 332)

The passage is full of markers of spoken discourse - repetitions, exclamations, and incomplete sentences. However, it is not read as such; it is considered a representation of the character's consciousness. This literary technique, which Banfield (1982: 68) calls 'represented speech and thought' and which is found in Western as well as Japanese literature, is an interesting phenomenon, but is not of concern in this paper because in such representations writing is supposed to approximate speech.

In non-fiction books written from the author's perspective that I examine in this paper, the authors use features of spoken style in the main text (that is, texts that do not contain speech or thought representations). As Lakoff (1982: 254) observes, the use of spoken style in non-fiction, non-dialog narrative exposition, is more striking because "[h]ere the line between oral and written communication blurs irrevocably."

This paper is a part of a larger project which is an attempt to look at various phenomena of style manipulation in Japanese. The non-fiction books cited in this paper come from the more extensive data which include both fiction and non-fiction books, websites, emailed messages, and conversational discourse. These books all may be classified as contemporary essays although the topics range widely from personal to quasi-academic. The authors include both men and women. The demographics of readers are difficult to determine, but the intended audience may be characterized as educated adults.

2. Summary of the differences between spoken and written discourse

Various researchers have discussed differences between spoken and written Japanese. As noted earlier, Shibatani (1990) observes that writing is more formal in general.⁷ This is echoed by Clancy (1982: 61), who says that “[m]any types of written Japanese are formal, impersonal.” On the other hand, she says that spoken Japanese tends to be more personal or involved.

More specifically, the following structural differences have been observed:

- (1) The canonical word order in Japanese is subject-object-verb (Kuno 1973). In writing, SOV order is consistently maintained, but the word order in spoken discourse is more flexible, with subjects, objects, and other constituents appearing after the predicate. (Kuno 1978; Clancy 1982; Maynard 1989; Ono and Suzuki 1992; Iwasaki and Ono 2001; Ono 2006)
- (2) Writers tend to use what would be conventionally thought of as “sentence” (an intermediate level of organizational unit between the unit of clause and the unit of discourse). In contrast, speakers often combine a number of clauses, using non-finite forms of predicates and/or connective expressions. As a result, a “sentence” in speech could be much longer than that in writing (Clancy 1982; Iwasaki and Ono 2001). Further, in spoken discourse a clause is broken down into smaller units, each of which is preceded by a pause and which has a distinct intonation contour (Clancy 1982; Maynard 1989).
- (3) Post-positional particles are used to mark elements such as topic, subject, object in writing. These particles are often missing in speech. (Shibatani 1990; Lee 2002; Ono and Thompson 2003)
- (4) Final particles that indicate interaction-based meanings such as emphasis and confirmation are used in speech but not in writing. (Clancy 1982; Maynard 1989; Shibatani 1990)
- (5) While written discourse is static, spoken discourse is dynamic. Speakers may reformulate their sentence after they start, may change the structure of a sentence in the middle of it, or may use part of one sentence as part of another. The mechanism of speech is interaction-based and constantly adjusting to the immediate environment. (Maynard 1989; Iwasaki and Ono 2001)
- (6) Ellipsis is more prevalent in speech than in writing. (Clancy 1982; Maynard 1989; Shibatani 1990)
- (7) In spoken discourse the addressee constantly participates in the communication by providing feedback such as back-channeling expressions and body gestures, which influences the speaker’s input. This is obviously not present in writing. (Clancy 1982; Maynard 1989)

⁷ Shibatani (1990) recognizes that formality varies depending on the genre of speech and writing. He acknowledges, for example, that formal speech is close to writing in terms of formality.

Of these structural differences between speech and writing⁸, the first five are sometimes missing in some contemporary non-fiction writers' work. This is not to say that these differences have naturally been eroded. These writers are strategically adopting specific features of spoken style discussed in (1)-(5) in their writing. In other words, their writing includes non-canonical word order and long sentences that are produced by combining a series of clauses. Their sentences may lack case or topic marking particles, but they may contain clause-final particles. Their discourse looks like it may have gone through a dynamic, on-going formation process because it includes reformulation and changes in the structure in midstream. In the next section I will show specific examples of these "violations" of written style.

3. Adoption of spoken style in writing

3.1. *Non-canonical word order*

Researchers have found that the canonical word order, SOV, is not necessarily maintained in conversational Japanese. Subjects, objects, and other constituents do occur after the predicate of a sentence. Those sentences in which constituents occur after predicate are classified into two types. In the first type, which is considered to be motivated by factors such as afterthought and repair, there is a prosodic break between the predicate and the post-predicate element. Sentence-final falling pitch is used and an audible pause is placed between the predicate and the post-predicate element. Some examples are given below. The predicate and other sentence-final expressions⁹ are marked with an underline while the post-predicate elements are marked in bold.

- (8) yurushite-kunnai yo. FP¹⁰
 forgive-give

⁸ The differences between spoken and written Japanese are not limited to these structural differences. For example, the use of fillers is frequent in speech (Maynard 1989). There is a set of vocabulary that is associated mostly with speech (i.e., colloquial expressions). *Kango* (Sino-Japanese words) figure more prominently in writing than in speech (Maynard 1998). However, this paper is concerned with the structural differences and similarities and makes only brief references to these other types of differences.

⁹ In the literature that discusses word order in Japanese, sentence-final expressions such as final particles and tag-like expressions are considered to be part of the predicate.

¹⁰ The following abbreviations and symbols are used in the presentation of examples.

ACC	accusative	COP	copula
FP	final particle	GEN	genitive
NML	nominalizer	NOM	nominative
TOP	topic marker		

[] supplementary information

< > overlapped elements in conversation

. a pitch contour which sounds sentence final

, a pitch contour which sounds as if there is more to come

.. a short pause of about 0.2 seconds or less

(The last four symbols are only concerned with spoken data. In the presentation of written data, symbols such as a period and comma are displayed as they are written by writers.)

When other researchers' examples are cited, the presentation is modified so that they are consistent with the rest of the examples in the paper.

.. *shachō ga*.
president NOM

‘[He] would not allow [us to do such a thing],
.. **the president.**’
(Ono and Suzuki 1992: 431)

- (9) A: *soshitaru ne,*
and FP
mugiwara-bōshi ga oite-atta wake,
straw-hat NOM left FP
B: *un.*
yes
A: ***michibata ni.***
roadside at
B: *un.*
yes
A: then,
the straw hat was lying [there].
B: Yes.
A: **at the side of the road.**
B: Yes.
(Clancy 1982: 68)¹¹

Ono and Suzuki (1992) speculate that the motivation behind such use of the post-verbal element is that of repair. The speaker of (8) realizes after uttering the predicate that the addressee may not be able to understand the reference of ellipsis, so s/he adds the explicit subject post-verbally. Clancy (1982) says that (9) is an example of an afterthought in which the information after the verb is merely added to give a detail to complete the image of a scene. It is a repair in the sense that a speaker “repairs” a sentence by adding supplementary information.

In the second type of the use of non-canonical word order, the predicate and the post-predicate elements are produced fluently with no pause in between and an unbroken intonation contour. Examples of this use are given below.

- (10) uso na n da aitsura tte.
lie COP NML COP those-guys TOP

Literal gloss is given only when it is necessary. When the discussion centers around the overall discursual characteristics rather than internal, grammatical structure of a sentence, literal gloss is not provided.

When other researchers' examples are presented, the original researchers' translations are provided. Some of their and my translations in English are ungrammatical in the conventional prescriptive sense because the original Japanese sentences are not grammatical. They are left as is so that readers can get the sense of how fragmented and deconstructed they are. Sometimes square-bracketed phases are inserted to aid intelligibility. The original writers' use of regular parentheses is left unmodified.

¹¹ Clancy's (1982) style of presentation of spoken discourse is different from others in that backchannels from the second speaker are placed just below the end of the first speaker's utterance. Since I could not tell from the presentation whether or not the backchannels overlapped with the utterance, I leave her presentation as is.

‘[It’s] a lie, **those guys**’ (Ono 2006: 144)

- (11) ī jan **betsu-ni**.
OK TAG particularly

‘Isn’t [it] OK, **really?**’ (Ono 2006: 144)

- (12) A: *sukī itta no?*
skiing went NML
itsu?
when
B: *<n>*
hmmm
A: *<nani>*
what
itsu?
when
B: *nigatsu no nakaba*
February GEN middle
A: *nani* ***sore***.
what that
- A: Did [you] go skiing?
When?
B: <Hmmm.>
A: <What?>
When?
B: Middle of February
A: What [is **that**]!¹²

(Ono 2006: 148)

Clancy (1982) analyzes this type of non-canonical order as a means of defocusing. What is familiar or easily deducible information is placed after the predicate since it is considered to be semantically subordinate. Ono (2006) attributes this use to emotion. For example, in (12) speaker A’s sense of surprise, jealousy, or disgust is expressed in the use of the non-canonical *nani sore* ‘What!’ If the canonical word order *sore nani* ‘What is that?’ were used, it would be an ordinary interrogative sentence and would not have the same emotive effect. Ono’s explanation of the word order, which is compatible with Clancy’s, is based on iconicity. A speakers’ immediate reaction, which is a manifestation of the subjective or inner feelings of the speaker, is expressed first. The post-predicate part relates the speaker’s immediate reaction to an entity existing in the world, or reframes it and presents a more objectified “take” by the speaker.

The first type of non-canonical word order is frequently used in writing. The predicate is underlined while the post-predicate constituents are bold in the following examples.

- (13) *de, sono kekka, watashi wa sono tesōmisan ni, akkenaku nakasarete*

¹² Ono (2006: 148) translates this utterance just as ‘What!?’ and provides additional information that speaker A is jealous of speaker B since speaker A has not had a chance to go skiing and have fun.

and that result I TOP that palm-reader by quickly be-made-to-cry
shimatta no desu. “Zettai nakanai” hazu no kono watashi ga.
 ended-up NML COP never not-cry supposed GEN this I NOM

‘So, as a result, [I] quickly ended up being made to cry by this palm reader. **Me, who is supposed to “never cry.”**’
 (Yamamoto 1995: 199)¹³

- (14) *yoku mitara bosabosa gami ni hameta habahiro no heabando ni*
 closely if-look unkempt hair in wore wide GEN hair-band in
hasannde-arū. shioreta kyabetsu no ha ga.
 inserted sapless cabbage GEN leaf NOM

‘When I looked at her closely, [I noticed] that [it] was inserted underneath the hair-band she was wearing in her unkempt hair. **A sapless cabbage leaf.**’
 (Hisada 2002: 193)

A period is used after the predicate in both of the examples above as if the sentence ends after the predicate. However, the next “sentence” contains the subject of the first sentence in both cases. Despite the presence of the period, these two “sentences” seem to form one unit similar to the units observed in (8) and (9).

The second type of non-canonical word order, in which emotion is expressed first, and then a defocused element follows the predicate, is also found in writing.

- (15) *nani-mo shitenai yo watashi wa.*
 anything do-not FP I TOP

‘Did not do anything **I.**’
 (Sano 1985: 63)

As mentioned earlier, in this type there is no pause or break in the intonation contour between the first element that contains the predicate and the post-predicate element in spoken language. In this written example, no punctuation is used between the predicate and the post-predicate constituents as if approximating no pause in speech.

3.2. Clause and intonation unit combining system

Iwasaki and Ono (2001) observe that one of the crucial differences between written and spoken discourse in Japanese is that the latter uses an extensive clause-combining system. They say the following:

The clause-combining system in Japanese allows for sentence formation to be flexible, whereby the (potential) sentence’s end can always escape final closure and can be left ‘open’ for further continuation until it is concluded by a finite predicate form. [...] More specifically, it is a rather extensive system, in that a variety of clause-ending

¹³ Yamamoto (1995) is a collection of short stories and is thus a book of fiction, but this example comes from the author’s afterword, which is non-fiction.

forms with such non-finite forms as *-te*, *-tara*, *-to*, and *-ba*, as well as with conjunctive particles such as *kara* and *kedo*, results in the open structure of spoken Japanese discourse. (Iwasaki and Ono 2001: 196-197)

As a result, a sentence, as is conventionally construed with a finite predicate, is much longer in general in spoken discourse than in written discourse. In her study of oral and written narratives, Clancy (1982) found that the median number of main clauses per sentence in the written narratives was 2.5 whereas the median number for the spoken narratives was 8.3 per sentence. She even had one speaker who told her entire 34-clause story in a single long sentence.

Long sentences are found in some contemporary writers' work as shown in the following example. In (16) clauses are combined with connective expressions *-te* and *-tara*, as discussed by Iwasaki and Ono (2001), which are marked in bold. Other connective expressions and conjunctions (*-temo*, *-tokini* and *-nara*) are also shown in bold.

- (16) *hitori de ikiru onna wa sabishī zo toka fukō da zo toka dorehodo kyōhaku saretemo, ja anta-tachi no yū tōrini shitara dōmo yōkyū wa nebā-endingu ni tsukitsuke-rarete, hitotsu demo sono yōkyūni kotaerarenakatta tokini* “omae no sei da” “omae ga warui” to wari no awanai seme o ukeru kurainara, saisho kara antatachi no kitai nado ganchū ni irezu ni ikitemiyō tte omou onna ga fueta dake no koto.

‘Even though they are threatened and told “A woman living alone is lonely,” or “[Such a woman] is unhappy,” then **if** she did what you guys told her to do, then she would be given never-ending demands, and **when** she could not satisfy even one of those demands, she would be given unfair accusations such as “It is your fault,” and “You are bad,” **if** that is the case, then it is just that there are more women now who, rather than receive such accusations, decide to live without worrying about your expectations in the first place.’

(Haruka 2003: 52)

Another related characteristic of spoken discourse is that a syntactic clause is frequently broken down into a number of small units, each of which is preceded by a pause and which has a distinct intonation contour. These intonation units are often followed by the addressee's backchannels. An example is given below.

- (17) A: ... u—nto .. ano kondo,
sono mango o totte-ita ojīsan ga,
B: hai.
A: ko zūtto totte itte,
...shita ni modot ...ki no shita ni orite mitara,
B: hai.
A: sono ... hito kago goto ga.
... zenbu dokka ni,
... nakunatte ite,
B: ee--.
A: ...sō yū ... okashī nā to omotte,
B: hai.
A: ... u..m ... uh next,
the old man who was picking these pears,

- B: Yes.
 A: uh was still picking them,
 ...and when he came back down ... climbed down to the bottom of the tree,
 B: Yes.
 A: that ... whole basket,
 ... had disappeared,
 ... somewhere,
 B: Oh--.
 A: ...'that's ... strange' he thought,
 B: Yes.
 (Clancy 1982: 73)

In writing, addressee backchannels are obviously missing. However, some writers break down syntactic clauses into smaller units by using comma, as if these units correspond to intonation units in spoken language. See the following examples.

- (18) *kochira gawa ni wa, midori to aka to kuro no hijikake isu mittsu bakari, yoko ni chūgoku jidai mono rashī kozukue, sono ue ni kutani yaki, bakadekai e mo burasagari, sore wa sofā to onaji hageshii pinku, yuka wa perusha jutan, sore ga ribingu rūmu no honno ichibu na no ne.*

'In this side [of the room], [there are] about three arm chairs in red and black, next to them is a little Chinese desk that seems to be a period furniture, on top of it is a Kutani pottery, a huge painting is also hung, that is in the same strong pink as the color of the sofa, on the floor is a Persian rug, this is just a small part of the living room, you know? (Sano 1985: 83)

- (19) *jūgo fun no honyomi mo, notakuta notakuta, yaruki ga aru n da ka nai n daka (nai n desu. dangen dekimasu), kocchito shite wa, hontoni iraira, de, koe o araragete, donattari, sugondari.....iya da na, konna koto shite nani ni naruno kanā to, muryokukan to munashisa to jikokeno ni uchihihigareru no wa, oya de atte tō no honnin de wa nai.*

'During her fifteen minute reading time, [in which she reads] painfully slowly, it is not clear whether or not she has a will to learn (no, she has no will, I swear), I get irritated, so, I raise my voice, yell at her, threaten her ... I hate this, what would all this bring, thinking these thoughts and being crushed with helplessness, emptiness, and self-hate is the parent, and not the person in question.'
 (Ito 2004: 202)

3.3. Lack of post-positional particles

One of the typological characteristics of Japanese is that it has post-positional particles that mark grammatical relations such as subject, topic, and object. Researchers have noted that post-positional particles such as *wa* (topic marker), *ga* (nominative case marker), and *o* (accusative case marker) are often missing in spoken discourse. They also note that sentences without *wa*, *ga*, or *o* are not merely casual versions of sentences with the particles and that there are regularities that govern the non-use of the particles

(Tsutsui 1984; Shibatani 1990; Suzuki 1995; Lee 2002; Hudson 2007). For example, Shibatani (1990) observes that it is impossible to supply a particle to the following sentences and still retain the same meanings. The non-marked noun phrase in each example is shown in bold.

- (20) a. **watashi** *samishii wa*.
I lonely FP

‘I feel lonely’

- b. **watashi** *ureshī no*.
I glad NML

‘I’m glad.’

- c. **ore** *suki ya nen*.
I like FP FP

‘I like (it/you).’ (Shibatani 1990: 368)

In discussing (20a), Shibatani says that if the topic marking particle *wa* is inserted after the subject/topic *watashi* ‘I,’ the sentence would turn out to be an objectively analyzed sentence in which the speaker makes a rational judgment about herself. Such a sentence would not be appropriate when a woman is appealing to her lover, revealing her feeling to him/her. (20a), which is without *wa* or other particles, is a direct expression of the speaker’s inner feeling and thus would be appropriate in the context described by Shibatani. He says the following with regard to sentences shown in (20).

An utterance of this type, which never occurs in formal speech or writing, is an a grammatical sentence in the sense that the elements constituting a state of an internal feeling are simply juxtaposed without going through the normal grammatical processes due, perhaps, to the spontaneity of the utterance. (Shibatani 1990: 369)

This emotive use of non-marked noun phrases is found in some contemporary writing.

- (21) **koitsura** *kusatte-ru*.
these-guys be-rotten

‘**These guys** are rotten.’
(Taguchi 2000: 12)

- (22) **koitsu** *zettai-ni ganchū-ni-nai ze*.
this-guy absolutely not-pay-attention FP

‘**This guy** is absolutely paying no attention.’
(Hashimoto 1986: 349)

Ono and Thompson (2003) noticed that some non-marked first person singular pronouns in spoken discourse provide a subjective framework for, or stance towards, the rest of the utterance.¹⁴ An example is given below.

- (23) *atashi dakara kakkoī to omo-
otokonoko no supootsu de kakkoī to omotta no wa
juudoo to kendo*

‘So **I** tho-cool, what [I] thought were cool in boys’ sports are judo and kendo.’
(Ono and Thompson 2003: 332)

Ono and Thompson observes that in this usage speakers start their utterance with the first person singular pronoun as they know that the utterance will have something to do with them, but at that point have not yet formulated the morphosyntax (or even the trajectory) of the utterance itself. As a result, the resultant utterance is often not grammatically well formed.

A similar use of the first person singular pronoun is found in writing.

- (24) *watashi konogoro sakanaya ni kotteite, michi ni mayotta toki ni mitsuketa
kōkyūjūtakuchi no naka ni potsun to atta sakanaya de, totemo iki no ii sakana
ga atte, soko no uchi no onīsan wa, uchi no sakana wa takai yo to yū no ga
kuchiguse na n dakedo, aoao pikapika no iwashi go-hiki hyaku-en de.*

‘I am into seafood stores these days, in the seafood store I found when I got lost in a rich neighborhood, there were really fresh fish, the young guy from that store, he has the habit of saying his fish are expensive, their blue and shining sardines are one hundred yen per five.’
(Sano 1985: 149)

The use of *watashi* in (24) is similar to the use of the first person singular pronouns discussed in Ono and Thompson (2003) because it seems to provide a frame at the beginning of the sentence but the trajectory of the sentence seems to change in midstream, and the resultant sentence is not grammatically well formed. Ono and Thompson (2003) also note that the frame-setting function is well adapted to the clause-chaining property of Japanese grammar (discussed in section 3.2 in this paper). They say that a speaker uses the first person singular pronoun in a frame-setting function at the onset, and then adds several clauses, each one chained to the next. This is exactly what is happening in (24).

3.4. Use of final particles

Final particles refer to particles that occur phrase-, clause-, or sentence-finally. In spoken discourse, a number of different particles such as *ne*, *yo*, *zo*, *sa*, and *wa* express the illocutionary force of the message, the speaker’s attitude and evaluation towards the

¹⁴ Ono and Thompson (2003) do not say that the first person singular pronouns have this frame-setting function when they are unmarked, but in many of their examples the pronouns are unmarked or marked only with final particles.

message and the addressee, and/or concern for the addressee's comprehension. They are sometimes associated with gender of the speaker and formality of the situation. Shibatani (1990: 386) observes that Japanese informal speech is characterized by the frequent occurrence of these particles and states, "Indeed, it is exceedingly rare to hear an utterance that is not marked by a final particle of one kind or another." The following example shows occurrences of *ne* and *sa* in speech.

- (25) A: *ano .. tabenagara ne,*
 B: *un.*
 A: *... ano-- ... ojisan no mae o ne,*
 B: *un.*
 A: *aso ...sono toki ojisan ga sa,*
 B: *un.*
 A: *shita ni orite kite ne.*
 B: *un.*
- A: ...uh ...while they were eating them,
 B: Yes.
 A: ... uh-- ... in front of the man,
 B: Yes.
 A: ... at that time the man ,
 B: Yes.
 A: climbed down to the ground.
 B: Yes.
 (Clancy 1982: 62)

As seen in the above example, the addressee often gives feedback when a final particle is used. Considering this fact and the result of her investigation in which written narrative data contained no final particles, Clancy (1982: 63) concludes, "Clearly, these particles are elicited by the communicative context, and serve as a means of supporting and maintaining a face-to-face interaction and assuring the adequacy of the communication."

Even though they are not in a face-to-face communicative situation, some writers are using final particles. A variety of final particles are used including *yo*, *ne*, *na*, *zo*, and *wa*, as illustrated in the following examples:

- (26) *datte sore wa, jibun o kijyunchi ni chikazukeyō to shitari, kikakuka sareru koto kara orichatta hito no koto dakara ne.*
- ‘Because that refers to people who have quit trying to approximate themselves to the standard or being standardized, **you know?**’
(Fushimi 1998 [1991]: 8)
- (27) *kōyū tokoro de konjō warui n da yo na, ore tte.*
- ‘In this kind of thing, I am ill-natured, **you know.**’
(Hahimoto 1986: 396)
- (28) *ī zo, ī zo. kore wa okuno fukai fukai fukai fukai fukai fukai fukai fukai hanashi ni naru zo.*

‘Good, good, **I say**. This will be a deep, deep, deep, deep, deep, deep, deep, deep, deep story, **I say**.’
(Aoyama 1998: 84)

- (29) *kōyū hitokoto wa denwa de itte yo, denwa de, tte omowazu, fakkusu ni mukatte sakende shimatta wa.*
omake ni kono hi wa fakkusu toraburu ga tsuzuite ne. yoru jūji sugi ni, gera wo okurimasu kara, chekku shite konyachu ni modoshite to denwa ga atta node, kirikaete oita wake yo.

“‘Call to tell me this kind of one-phrase statement, call!’ I yelled at the fax machine in spite of myself, **really**.

On top of that, I had a lot of fax troubles, **you know?** There was a phone call that said that they would send me the proofs around ten o’clock at night and that I should return them by midnight, so I had switched the phone to the fax mode, **you know?**’
(Hisada 2002: 90)

3.5. Dynamic sentence formation

As mentioned in the introduction, Iwasaki and Ono (2001) question the conventional notion of sentence. They argue that the traditional definition of a Japanese sentence only applies to written Japanese and that it does not work for spoken Japanese since it is incompatible with the extensive clause-combining system (discussed in 3.2 in this paper) and the dynamic aspect of sentence formation in speech. What do they mean by dynamic sentence formation?

Spoken discourse often looks chaotic as it contains false starts, interruption, premature termination, overlap, repair after the sentence ends, and other uneven features. These have been considered to be “performance errors.” However, Iwasaki and Ono (2001) note that qualitative analysis of these features reveals what they call “on-line mechanisms” that are motivated interactionally and managed locally. Specifically, the mechanisms include the following features (copied from Iwasaki and Ono 2001: 180-181 with slight modifications):

- (30) a incrementation [This refers to non-canonical word order discussed in 3.1 in this paper. SS]
- b. reformulation: Production of an element in order to redo any linguistic expression just produced.
- c. interpolation: Production of a sentence or a clause in the middle of forming another. With interpolation, two or more sentences can be produced simultaneously.
- d. local management: Shaping the form of the sentence which is currently unfolding based on what has been produced in the immediate context.
- e. bridging: Using part of one sentence as part of another. The result is two sentences interlocked by one common element.

It would be reasonable to say that these features represent the essence of spoken language as they reflect dynamic, interactive nature of speech. Thus, one would expect that writers cannot adopt these features because they are not engaged in on-going, emerging interactions as speakers are. However, some writers do attempt to utilize some of these crucial features of vernacular discourse as shown below. Certain parts of the examples are marked in bold to facilitate explanation.

- (31) *Soko de wa “kurea” e no kimochi wa sōtō ochitsuita mono de, to yuu ka, ochitsukisugite komaru kurai no mono ni natte ite, hitome ni wa enman na kankei ni natteiru.*

‘There, his feelings toward “Claire” **are quite calm, or what should I say, have become disturbingly too calm**, and their relationship appear to be amicable.’

(Aoyama 1998: 206)

- (32)=(24)

watashi konogoro sakanaya ni kotteite, michi ni mayotta toki ni mitsuketa kōkyūjūtakuchi no naka ni potsun to atta sakanaya de, totemo iki no ii sakana ga atte, soko no uchi no onīsan wa, uchi no sakana wa takai yo to yū no ga kuchiguse na n dakedo, aoao pikapika no iwashi go-hiki hyaku-en de.

‘I am into seafood stores these days, in the seafood store I found when I got lost in a rich neighborhood, there were really fresh fish, the young guy from that store, he has the habit of saying his fish are expensive, their blue and shining sardines are one hundred yen per five.’

(Sano 1985: 149)

- (33) *wakaru wakaranai janaku, motto betsu no, nan deshō ne, ehon tte, yomu mono to yomareru kodomo no kankeisei ga mazu atte, tsuyoku atte, soko ni, kotoba o tsugitsugi ni kuridashite morau (sore o kiku), ohanashi o katatte morau (sore o kiku), kiku tanoshisa tte yū no wa, hotondo seiriteki na, kongenteki na tanoshisa da to omou n desu ga, sore ga kōsashite, soshite e ga attte.....to ironna yōso ga sakusōshite-masu.*

‘It’s not a matter of understanding or not understanding, it is something different, what is it, [if I were to describe] picture books, first there is a relationship between the reader and the child who is read to, this relationship is strong, on that basis, [the child] receives words after words (**and listens to them**), [the child] has the reader tell stories (**and listens to them**), **the pleasure of listening** is an almost physiological, fundamental pleasure, I think, that intersects, and there are pictures, ... in this way there are various intricate factors [in the act of reading picture books to children].’

(Ito 2004: 124)

- (34) *shikashi perapera to shaberi nagara mo, omoigakenai machigai o shite, sore tte yū no wa, eigo kyōiku o naganen ukete-kita watashi ga, konna machigai wa suru mon janai to omotteru yōna machigai, th o hatsuon shinakattari (dekinai n desu), jisei o mushishitari (kako wa issai gassai yesterday de sumaseteru hito desu kara, jisei ga aruwake mo nai ka), zenchi-shi o yatara furimaitari, eigo o namahanka ni benkyōshite-shimatta watashi toshite wa, ā konna koto mo dekiru n da nā to omou, sono nobiyakasa.*

‘But while speaking fluently, she makes unexpected mistakes, and they are the kinds of mistakes that I, who has been receiving English education for years, would not dream of making, [such as] **not pronouncing th (she cannot pronounce it), ignoring tense (there could not be tense, could there, since she uses ‘yesterday’ to refer to all things past), peppering prepositions everywhere**, [these examples contribute to] the sense of freedom, which I, who has half-heartedly studied English, feel while thinking “Wow, you can do that, too!?”

(Ito 2004: 121)

(31) is an example of “reformulation” discussed in (30b). The writer starts out describing something as *sōtō ochitsuita mono de* ‘are quite calm’ and then changes it to *ochitsukisugite komaru kurai no mono ni natte-ite* ‘have become disturbingly too calm.’ (32) illustrates “interpolation” discussed in (30c). The first word *watashi* ‘I’ seems to start out as a frame for the rest of the sentence, but the middle and later parts of the sentence are more about a particular seafood shop. It is as if two or more sentences co-exist in the sentence. Multiple sentences also seem to co-exist in (33), but (33) also represents a case of “local management” discussed in (30d). Immediately after a side comment in parenthesis, *sore o kiku* ‘and [the child] listens to them’ is interpolated twice, *kiku tanoshisa* ‘the pleasure of listening’ is discussed. This topic is apparently triggered by the side comment.

Lastly, (34) exemplifies “bridging” (discussed in (30e)) in that one element is used by two different parts of the sentence. The part *th o hatsuon shinakattari (dekinai n desu), jisei o mushishitari (kako wa issai gassai yesterday de sumaseteru hito desu kara, jisei ga aruwake mo nai ka), zenchi-shi o yatara furimaitari* ‘not pronouncing th (she cannot pronounce it), ignoring tense (there could not be tense, could there, since she uses ‘yesterday’ to refer to all things past), peppering prepositions everywhere’ is presented first as the list of mistakes the writer’s daughter makes. The part is used as a detailed description of the immediately preceding noun phrase, *eigo kyooiku o naganen ukete-kita watashi ga, konnna machigai wa suru mon janai to omotteru yoono machigai* ‘the kinds of mistakes that I, who has been receiving English education for years, would not dream of making.’ However, the writer “recycles” the list as the list of examples to explain the sense of freedom that the writer feels (*eigo o namahanka ni benkyooshite-shimatta watashi toshite wa, aa konnna koto mo dekiru n da naa to omou, sono nobiyakasa* ‘the sense of freedom, which I, who has half-heartedly studied English, feel while thinking “Wow, you can do that, too!?”).

4. Motivations behind the adoption of spoken style

In the last section we saw that some contemporary writers are adopting various characteristics of spoken discourse in their writing. I would argue that these writers are strategically adopting vernacular style. One of the writers whose work is cited in this paper (examples ((22) and (27)), Osamu Hashimoto, says the following:

watashi wa, fudan jibun ga shabetteru yoo ni kakitai to omotte kaiteru wake ne. son dakara, soo yuu imi de, honsho no buntai wa genbun itchi-tai na no ne.

‘I am writing, as I would like to write in the way I usually chat, you know? So, in that sense, the style of this book is “the unified style of speech and writing,” you know?’ (Hashimoto 1986: 36)

Whether or not he can represent opinions of other writers who also adopt vernacular style, the above quote shows that Hashimoto is keenly aware of the style he is using. Another writer whose work is cited in examples (28) and (31), Minami Aoyama, is a professional translator of American literature. (28) and (31) are taken from a book in which he discusses metalinguistic and metapragmatic issues concerning translation. As mentioned in the introduction, Minako Saito, a literary critic, whose examples of vernacular style I will cite below, discusses *bunshoo no kajuaru-ka* ‘casual-ization of writing’ in her book that critiques prescriptive books on writing styles. It would be reasonable to assume that these writers, who are highly sensitive to stylistic concerns, are conscious of their choice in writing style.

Given that they are aware of their choices, why do they choose to use those features of spoken discourse? Some may argue that these writers are influenced by the style of online communication. In e-mail, electronic bulletin boards, chat-rooms, etc., the boundary between spoken and written discourse is certainly blurred. However, the adoption of vernacular style precedes the popularization of online communication. Ueno (2000) speculates that the first work of *genbun itchi-tai* ‘unified style of speech and writing’ is Osamu Hashimoto’s book *Momojiri Musume* published in 1978. Online communication as we know now was not commonplace back then. In this section I propose that multiple factors contribute to the phenomenon in question.

4.1. Creativity, innovation, and ideology

In their comprehensive paper about the concept of genre, Briggs and Bauman (1992) observe that the fit between a particular text and its generic model (genre) is never perfect. The process of linking particular texts to genres produces an “intertextual gap.” They note that even though this gap is unavoidable in all cases of authentic texts, texts framed in some genres attempt to minimize the distance between texts and genres, while other types of texts foreground the distance. The adoption of spoken style in writing examined in this paper may be considered as an attempt to maximize and highlight the distance between authentic texts and genre (i.e., written, non-fiction discourse). If that is the case, why do these writers make such an attempt? Briggs and Bauman (1992: 149) note that while the approach to minimize intertextual gaps is an attempt to sustain highly conservative, traditionalizing modes of creating textual authority,

maximizing and highlighting these intertextual gaps underlies strategies for building authority through claims of individual creativity and innovation (such as are common in 20th-century Western literature), resistance to the hegemonic structures associated with established genres, and other motives for distancing oneself from textual precedents [emphasis in original].

This explanation may be pertinent to the phenomenon in question. The examples of vernacular writing come across as creative and innovative. By departing from the generic model of writing, these writers seem to suggest that they resist the established conventions.

In this regard, it is interesting to read Ueno Chizuko's metadiscursive commentary. In the postscript to her essay in which she discusses the relationship between *Heisei genbun itchi undō* ('Heisei movement towards unification of spoken and written styles') and gender, she explicitly points out that she employed the conventional writing style in this essay. She observes that the conventional style is considered logical, intellectual, and authoritative and thus possesses social prestige. Switching to the vernacular style in mid-discourse, she states the following (the bold parts are colloquial expressions):

kōyū bunshō kaiteru to, ueno wa yappashi, teikokudaigaku no ken'i shugi taishitsu ni seidoka sare (karametore) ta, tte itai hito nanka mo irukamo. honitto wa sa, konna akademikku rangeeji (kyōyō burikko) nante, kanagurisutete, utsurotteiku buntai no namima ni tadayottemo ii n dakedo.

'When I write in this [conventional, academic] style, some people might say that Ueno has been systematized (i.e., caught) in the Imperial University's authority-oriented predisposition. I could actually abandon this academic language (i.e., the pretence to be intellectual) and float in the waves of changing styles.'
(Ueno 2000: 53)

By acknowledging the social and ideological value of the conventional style and then switching to the non-conventional style, Ueno signals to the reader that she could adopt an anti-establishment stance. Similarly, the writers who employ the vernacular style writing may be doing so for creative as well as ideological purposes.¹⁵

4.2. *Involvement with the reader*

In addition to being creative and ideological by being deviant from the norm, do these writers of vernacular writing have motivations specifically related to spoken discourse itself? In discussing the fundamental differences between speech and writing in general, Chafe (1982) says the following:

[...] the speaker is aware of an obligation to communicate what he or she has in mind in a way that reflects the richness of his or her thoughts – not to present a logically coherent but experientially stark skeleton, but to enrich it with the complex details of real experiences – to have less concern for consistency than for experiential involvement. The situation for the writer is fundamentally different. [...] the writer is less concerned with experiential richness, and more concerned with producing something that will be consistent and defensible when read by different people at different times in different places, something that will stand the test of time. (Chafe 1982: 45)

Does this mean that those Japanese writers who adopt various features of spoken language are looking for experiential involvement by enriching their written discourse

¹⁵ Inoue (2006) argues that in the *genbun itchi* movement in the Meiji period, male authors and intellectuals constructed female characters' speech style in their novels to represent their ideals of modern Japanese women. This is another instance where authors manipulate style for ideological purposes.

with the complex details of real experiences? I think they are. When we looked at the first type of non-canonical word order (section 3.1), it was mentioned that such a word order in speech is attributed to the notions of afterthought and repair. As writers have time to plan their writing, the conventional sense of repair and afterthought does not apply when non-canonical word order occurs in writing. On the use of non-canonical word order in spoken Japanese while referring to the quote by Chafe above, Clancy (1982) says:

one aspect of the ‘involvement’ characteristic of spoken discourse is that speakers feel they should try to convey some of the rich, experiential detail which they have in mind, rather than simply communicating a bare outline of events. In Japanese, this kind of detail often is given after the main events have been communicated, in post-verbal position. (Clancy 1982: 68)

The post-predicate elements in (13) and (14) do provide rich, experiential detail to the sentences. The writers of these sentences are using non-canonical word order to enrich their writing.

I would argue that these writers are adopting this and other features of spoken discourse because they want to involve their readers more. In other words, they would like to connect more with their readers. As mentioned earlier, Minako Saito wrote a book that critiques prescriptive writings on writing. In this book she does not use vernacular style exclusively. Most of her paragraphs are actually written in a more conventional written style. However, she strategically uses vernacular style at different points in her discourse. Looking at where she uses speech-like sentences might reveal something about her strategies. One place where Saito uses spoken style is within a parenthesis as in the following examples:

- (35) *Ogiya Shozo to ieba, Oya Soichi to narande jānarisuto no kamisama mitai ni sūhai sarete-ita jinbutsu da ga, jishin no bun o “fubijin” ni tatoeru atari, kenson no hiyu ni mo sasuga ni hineri ga kīte-iru (ima dattara sekuhara hatsugen to hihan sarekanenai kedo ne).*

‘Ogiya Shozo, along with Oya Soichi, is worshiped as if he were a god of journalism, and he is skillful even in his metaphor in humbling himself, comparing his writing to a homely woman (**Although if this were written now, it would be criticized as a sexually harassing comment, you know?**) (Saito 2002: 17)

- (36) *shūshoku-go no junban niyotte, bunshoo no wakariyasusa ya shizensa wa chigatte-kuru – tatta (to ittara okorareru ka na) sore dake no koto o yuu tame ni, honda wa jitsu ni nijūyon shurui mono reibun o hyōji suru.*

‘Depending on the order of modifying words, intelligibility and naturalness of writing vary – only (**if I say so, would I get scolded?**), to make only this statement, Honda presents 24 kinds of example sentences. (Saito 2002: 44)

- (37) *mottomo kono dankai de ichiichi monku o tsukete-itara (mō tsukete-ru kedo) saki ga tsuzukanai.*

‘Although, if I were making complaints on everything at this stage (**though I am already doing so**), this could not go on.’
(Saito 2002: 70)

The bold parts in the above examples have features of spoken discourse (final particles such as *ne* and *na* and a colloquial connective expression *kedo*). Saito takes advantage of the device of parentheses to provide metalinguistic or metapragmatic commentaries to the discourse. For example, the parenthetical part in (35), *ima dattara sekuhara hatsugen to hihan sarekananai kedo ne* ‘Although if this were written now, it would be criticized as a sexually harassing comment, you know?’, is presented as a side comment on the word *fubijin* ‘a homely woman’ located in the immediately preceding discourse. By using colloquial-sounding expressions, Saito succeeds in involving readers. Her comment sounds as if she were revealing her inner thoughts, bringing her and her readers closer. It is as if she were splitting herself into two halves, one in the main text writing authoritatively and objectively, and another in the parenthetical text revealing her subjective and more intimate voice.

Maynard (2007: 119) discusses instances of genre mixture such as those illustrated in (35) – (37) and calls them “inserted conversation.” She notes that one of the merits of using conversation in the middle of writing is that the writer can address the reader in an ordinary voice using familiar expressions. By using accessible and intimate expressions, the writers “make an immediate and emotional appeal to the reader.”

Another typical location in which Saito uses vernacular style writing is the end of a paragraph. Observe the following examples. Again the bold parts contain features of spoken discourse.

- (38) *nanise aite wa hon dakara, “yomikata” to “kakikata” ga ippen ni shidō dekiru. sarani wa koko no seikatsu to chigatte, kyooshi wa arakajime daizai no naiyō o haakushite-okeru shi, mashite “kadai tosho” to nareba, issatsu de nanjūnin-bun mono sakubun o shidōo dekiru keisan dearu. kyooshi datte isogashī no da. sakubun ni bakari jikan o totte wa irarenai. **tairyō seisan tairyō shōhi jidai no sakubun kyōiku wa kō de nakucha.***

‘As books are concerned, it is possible to teach “how to read” and “how to write” at the same time. Moreover, unlike (the cases in which the subject of the composition is) individual’s lives, teachers can be familiar with the content of the subject ahead of time. Especially when a particular book is assigned by the ministry, it is possible for a teacher to give instructions on the composition to a number of children. Teachers are busy. They cannot spend time only on compositions. **Composition instruction in the age of mass production and mass consumption has to be like this.**

(Saito 2002: 204)

- (39) *bunshō wa doryoku shidai de jōtatsu suru no ka, soreto “sainō” ni sayū sareru no ka. bunshō tokuhon chū, kore wa saidai no tabū dearu. [...]. gimu kyōiku o shūryō shite-ireba, dare demo bunshō wa kakeru no da. shikashi, soredemo kaku no ga tokui na hito to futokui na hito, suki na hito to kirai na hito wa iru. **“sainō” na no ka “kankyō” na no ka, kettei yōin wa sadaka de wa nai mono no, tokui kamoku ni sa ga aru kara yo no naka wa omoshiroi no da yo.***

‘Whether one’s writing gets better with efforts, or it depends on one’s “talent,” this is the biggest taboo question in how-to-write books. [...]. If one finishes the compulsory education, anybody can write. But still there are those who are good at writing, those who are not good, those who like writing, and those who do not. **Even though the determining factor is not clearly known, whether it is “talent” or “environment,” this world is interesting because we all have strengths and weaknesses.**

(Saito 2002: 130-131)

Maynard (1998) observes that the internal structure of *danraku* ‘paragraph’ in Japanese has a significant characteristic. She says the following:

The discourse gradually flows towards the *danraku*-final segment specifying the summary-like statement, or the writer’s view or opinion. Similarly to the tendency for the conclusion to appear towards the end of the entire text, on the *danraku* level the conclusive opinion is likely to appear towards the end. (Maynard 1998: 82)

Both (38) and (39) seem to follow this structural pattern. That is, the writer’s conclusive opinion (although sarcastic in (38)) is appearing at the end of the paragraph. It is noteworthy that the spoken style sentence is used for this purpose. As the last sentence of a paragraph represents the writer’s conclusive opinion, she wants readers to be most engaged at this point. She uses vernacular style to draw their attention and achieves this effect.

In other words, writers use vernacular style when they want to involve and engage readers. This can be seen in the following example as well, in which an extensive clause combining is used and a final particle *yo* is repeatedly attached at the end of a sentence. Connective expressions that are combining clauses are underlined while the final particle is marked in bold.

- (40) *tomo-bataraki de ryōri tsukutte araimono shite, hotto shita toki ni “momo muite” toka iware, tsukare-teru kara jibun de muite to ittara, “omae tte, yasashiku-nai onna da na” to iwareru n da yo.*

kosodate shite, kami no ke furimidashite paato shite, sono aima ni shūto shūtome ni mo kao dashite ki o tsukatte, soredemo “oshare no hitotsu mo shiro yo. omae ni onna kanjinai n da yo” tte iwareru n da yo.

baribari hataraitte oshare ni ki o tsukatte anta no konomi no onna deiyoo to tsuppatte-ittara, “ofukuro no aji no ryōri ga dekinnee mon na” tte iwareru n da yo.

jaa, anta no yū tōri ie ni iru ne tte bakari ryōsai kenbo shite-itemo, “omae wa seken o shiranai” tte mikudasareu n da yo.

‘[A woman] working full time, cooking, and doing laundry, when she finishes all the chores and relaxes, her husband would say “Peel my peach,” if she says, I am tired, will you peel it yourself?, she would be told “You are an unkind woman,” **you know**.

[A woman] raising children, working part-time with her hair disheveled, visiting her in-laws in between work and children to be nice to them, but she would be told “You never dress nicely. You are not sexy at all,” **you know**.

[A woman] working actively, dressing fashionably, trying hard to be your type of woman, she would be told “You can’t cook like my mom,” **you know**.

Then, if she stays home and is a good wife and wise mother, she would be looked down upon and told “You don’t know anything about the world,” **you know**.

(Haruka 2003: 52-53)

This discourse is quite emotive and powerful. Whether or not one likes the writer’s message, one is likely to be drawn to and engaged with it. This effect seems to be achieved mostly due to the impact of vernacular style writing.¹⁶

Examples from English also support this idea that writers are using conversation-like features to connect with readers. Lakoff (1982) characterizes written discourse as reliable and respectable, whereas spoken discourse is described as heartfelt, warm, and able to convey emotion. Her paper is mostly concerned with more naturalistic representations of conversation in fiction, but she notices that even some non-fiction writers such as Tom Wolfe are using conversation-like features such as ellipses, fragments, expletives, dialectal and colloquial forms in their main (that is, non-dialog) texts. She says that Wolfe is “inviting us to share a particular sort of emotional relationship – with him, as well as with his subject” (Lakoff 1982: 255) by using vernacular style writing.

In her examination of a corpus of 100 promotional sales letters, Frank (1989) notes that in this planned, impersonal marketing communication, speech-like features are used. Her study focuses on the use of questions and how they contribute to the conversationality of direct sales texts. She concludes that questions (and answers) “contribute to the creation of audience involvement by provoking a reader to participate in a recreation of an ordinary dyadic exchange” (Frank 1988: 255). The marketers’ intention is obviously to persuade readers to purchase their products. By simulating the processes, structure and dynamism of an everyday conversation, they attempt to involve readers in order to control and manipulate them.

A similar conclusion is reached by Stoll (1998), who investigates the use of conversation-like features in texts of women’s magazines. She argues that genres containing dialogic features such as sales letters, teenager magazines, opinion articles, and women’s magazines may be grouped under the general label of an involving and persuasive text type. In women’s magazines, using expressions such as ‘yes,’ ‘okay,’ ‘so,’ the structure ‘may [infinitive] but,’ and interrogatives such as ‘Good?’ allows the writer to “construct the intended reader’s discourse in detail, simulate the negotiation of a consensus with her, present her as the beneficiary of their implicit exchange and in this way provide an adequate basis for the writer’s own explicit discourse” (Stoll 1998: 568) In short, it contributes to the creation of reader involvement.

In this way, studies in English concur that writers who use conversation-like linguistic features are motivated by the desire for, and succeed in attaining, (emotional) involvement with readers.

4.3. *Sign of the times*

Another factor that contributes to the use of vernacular style writing may be the age we are in. These writers may be reflecting as well as consciously expressing the feelings

¹⁶ The other factors are the content itself and the repetitive pattern of the presentation.

and attitudes of their contemporaries. Lakoff (1982) proclaims that there has been a shift in our society from a literacy-based model of ideal human communication to one based on the oral mode of discourse. As one piece of evidence, she notes that political speakers who seem to be holding a conversation (with hesitations, reformulations, and vocalized pauses) are preferred in contemporary society to those who deliver a polished speech. She says, “as a culture we are contemplating – if we have not taken already – a leap from being written-oriented to being oral-oriented” (Lakoff 1982: 256). Although the “society” and “culture” she mentions refer to North American or Western society and culture, the same may be said about the Japanese society and culture.

As mentioned earlier, Saito (2002) says that *bunshō no kajuraru-ka* (‘casualization of writing’) is in progress in Japan. She conjectures that the history of writing is similar to the history of clothing. One of the similarities between writing and clothing, she observes, is that they both become more common, more simplified, and more casual as time goes on. Just as dressing has become more casual, so has the style of writing. Ueno (2000) attributes this “casualization of writing” to the influence of visual medium such as television and comic books. It would make sense to look at it as the reflection of the view in society in which orality is preferred to literacy.¹⁷

5. Concluding remarks

This paper has shown that some Japanese non-fiction writers are using various structural characteristics of spoken discourse in their writing. Specifically, they place elements after the predicate of a sentence, string together clauses or even shorter units to produce an extremely long sentence, do not mark noun phrases with post-positional particles, but do use final particles associated with interactional functions. Moreover, these writers reformulate their sentences after a false start, change the structure of a sentence in the middle of it, react to side comments given in parentheses, and use part of one sentence as part of another. In other words, their written discourse looks as if it were constructed dynamically, fluidly, and spontaneously.

I propose that there are multiple reasons why these writers are creating discourse in this manner. First, as vernacular style writing is overtly deviant from the norm of non-fiction writing, these writers may be exhibiting their creativity and innovation as well as their anti-establishment ideology. Second, vernacular style writing may be an attempt to engage, involve, and connect with their readers. Specific places where they use vernacular style writing (in the parenthesis as if revealing their inner thoughts, at the end of a paragraph stating their conclusive opinions, and in emotional pleas) indicate that the use of the style is not accidental but manipulative. Third, they may be reflecting as well as expressing contemporary society in which orality is viewed favorably and as a result, writing in general has become increasingly more casual than before.

¹⁷ In referring to the *genbun itchi* movement in the Meiji period, Inoue (2006) states that it signaled an epistemological break in the discourse on language toward phonocentrism. She writes, “Speech became privileged as the repository of truth and reality, and speech and writing became hierarchically linked, with the latter being reduced to a mere supplement to – and derivative of – speech” (Inoue 2006: 85). One could say that vernacular style writing of contemporary writers represents an even more explicit form of phonocentrism.

Thinking about this third factor is an interesting endeavor for the field of linguistics. Genres, as we know them, may need to be reexamined. As Briggs and Bauman (1992) observe, the fit between authentic texts and genres (i.e., generic models) have never been perfect in the first place. However, if the overall tendency has been shifted towards orality, then generic models themselves, which have been based on traditional norms, need to be scrutinized. Boundaries between different genres may have been shifted and/or eroded. The phenomenon discussed in this paper may be viewed as an example of such a shift. Whether and how these erosions or shifting have occurred in various languages are questions that would deserve further study.

The pace of erosion and shifting of boundaries between genres may be accelerated by proliferation of online communication. Writing in online media (e.g., e-mail, instant messaging, chat, and postings in electronic bulletin board) seems to be distinct from writing examined in this paper. For example, one of the subjects cited by Katsuno and Yano's (2002) study on emoticons in Japanese online communication states the following:

In chat rooms, you really need to be able to type fast, because typing is the basis of your conversation. Therefore, I type directly what I think in my mind. As a result, I cannot write whole sentences, but just some words, quickly.
(Katsuno and Yano 2002: 217)

This is an example from Japanese, but I expect that similar phenomena can easily be found in online communication in other languages. The above quote suggests that even the basic associations of orality with spontaneity on the one hand and written communication with forethought and planning on the other have now been broken. The field of linguistics may need to be vigilant and adjust to the new order of contemporary communication.

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