

Use of Self-Referential Expressions by LGBT Japanese Speakers

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Important Background

- **Self-referential expressions:** words that LGBT people use to refer to/describe themselves and present their gender and sexual orientation to others
- Traditionally, gender and sexuality are intertwined in Japan
 - Gender is typically the dominant identity
 - Stereotypes about sexuality are based on gender norms
- Terminology and beliefs regarding the LGBT community in Japan have changed due to foreign influence

Self-Reference by Gay Males

TERMINOLOGY



- *Okama*: native word meaning 'pot', derogatory but reclaimed by feminine gay men
- *Gei*: loan word, originally negative but now used more neutrally
- Other loan words like *homo* are not widely used
- Native words like *dōseiaisha* can be too medical/formal

PRONOUNS



- Masculine gay men tend to use masculine pronouns
- Feminine gay men use casual feminine pronouns to express non-traditional, almost vulgar femininity
 - Use of *onee kotoba* furthers this
- Struggle with pronouns in childhood

Self-Reference by Lesbians

TERMINOLOGY



- *Rezubian/rezu*: loaned from English, has hypersexualized connotations – sometimes avoided in self-reference
- *Bian*: taken from *rezubian*, positive connotations within the community
- *Daiku*: borrowed from an English slur, positive for Japanese lesbians
- *Onabe*: 'pan', counterpart to *okama* with less widespread use

PRONOUNS



- Feminine lesbians use *watashi/atashi/uchi*
- Masculine lesbians (especially *onabes*) use *boku/jibun*
- Struggle with fitting into a gender binary can affect this
- Usage is based on both gender expression and context and changes over time

Self-Reference by Transgender Individuals

TERMINOLOGY



- *Toransujendā*: loaned from English, usually only used by FtM/MtF individuals
 - *Seidōitsuseishōgai* is very medical
 - Some see themselves as just male or female
- *Nyū hafū*: “new half”, derogatory but reclaimed by some
- *Onabe/onī*: derogatory towards trans men, reclaimed by some (esp. *onī*)

PRONOUNS



- Trans women use *watashi*, *watakushi*, and *uchi* the most
- Trans men use *boku* and *ore* the most
- Usage aligns with traditional gendered first-person pronoun usage
- Struggles with bullying in childhood

Other Identities

GENDER DIVERSITY



- *Toransujendā* usually excludes non-binary identities
 - *X-jendā*: similar to non-binary, recent term unique to Japan
 - Many use MtX/FtX
 - Might be *ryōsei* ('both sexes'), *chūsei* ('middle sex') or *musei* ('no sex') individuals
- Non-binary identities have been invisible, barely any research on *X-jendā*

OTHER SEXUALITIES & INTERSEX



- Bisexuality is barely researched
 - Use of borrowed *baisekushuaru/bai*
- *Zenseiaisha*: native term used for pansexuality ('lover of all sexes')
 - Probably not used – too formal
- Queer, intersex, and other identities are not usually included or studied

Language for LGBT speakers:

is an essential part of identity presentation. The meanings and usage of terms and pronouns are highly specific to the individual and their unique experiences with gender and/or sexuality.



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