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Attitudes toward Gender-Inclusive Language among EFL Speakers in Japan

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the attitudes of Japanese speakers of English as a foreign language toward gender-inclusive language in English, addressing a gap in research that had primarily focused on native and English as a second language speakers. Data were collected from 816 students attending English classes at a university in Japan. The participants were administered the Japanese version of the Inventory of Attitudes toward Sexist/Nonsexist Language-General, and their demographic variables and egalitarian sex role attitudes were measured. Results indicated that while gender and sexist attitudes significantly influence one's acceptance of sexist language, factors such as age and academic field do not. Additionally, the study revealed that men who strongly opposed egalitarian sex role attitudes were significantly more likely to hold negative attitudes toward gender-inclusive language compared to women who held similar views. This may be due to women's expectations of gender-inclusive language and Japan's cultural context. Although there are limitations, such as imbalances in certain variables and the narrow age range among participants, this study revealed the previously unexamined neutral attitudes of Japanese EFL speakers and identified the factors influencing these attitudes using a generalized linear mixed model. Furthermore, at this stage, where learners hold neutral attitudes, exposing them to gender-inclusive language through English education—a language where changes are less likely to cause discomfort compared to one's native language—could not only prevent misunderstandings in communication during study abroad experiences but also lead to a reassessment of the ingrained gender stereotypes and attitudes within Japanese language and society.

Keywords: cross-cultural comparison; English as a foreign language learners; gender gap; nonsexist language; sexist attitude