The Folk Perception of Japanese Expletive Negation
Abstract

Negative Polar Questions (NPQs) of the form kawai-ku-na-i? ‘isn’t it cute?’ in Japanese optionally take expletive negation, meaning some speakers say kawai-ku-na-ku-na-i? ‘lit. isn’t it not cute?’ to mean ‘isn’t it cute?’. In the media, this NPQ with expletive negation is reported to be characteristic of younger speakers in Japan. The present study aims to verify this general sociolinguistic stereotype. Two perception tasks (perception questionnaire and matched guise task) confirm this general trend; older speakers perceive expletive NPQ-users to be younger than their own age group, and the younger student population believes they sound like their own age group; Japanese speakers truly perceive expletive negation in the NPQ context to be “young people language.” A comprehension task, however, does not suggest that this is actually the dialect of younger speakers. When the negated NPQ (kawai-ku-na-ku-na-i? ‘lit. isn’t it not cute?’) is put in a context in which the interpretation is ambiguous between an expletive one (‘isn’t it cute?’) and a logical one (‘isn’t it not cute?’), younger speakers do not have a preference for the expletive interpretation. In fact, it is the older group of speakers that prefer the expletive interpretation over the logical one. This study highlights how starkly inaccurate sociolinguistic stereotypes can be in speech communities.

Keywords: perception, age, Japanese, negation, matched guise
The folk perception of Japanese expletive negation

1. Introduction

The general public’s stereotypes and perception of sociolinguistic variables are often in line with reality. For example, Dailey-O’Cain (2000) found that American English speakers very strongly associate the quotative *be like* with the speech of young speakers; and in fact, her corpus findings suggest that the younger people use *be like* significantly more often than older speakers at the time of study. Similar findings have been reported for quotatives in British English as well (Buchstaller, 2006a, 2006b). In some sense, this is unsurprising: Simply, people think certain people say certain things because these people say these things. What is puzzling is when there is a mismatch of actual variant preference and perceived variant preference: A folk perception. For instance, Dailey-O’Cain (2000) also found that Americans perceived *be like* to be characteristic of female speech, when in fact, both women and men use this form equally as much. The present paper investigates a case of folk sociolinguistic perception in Japanese, in the domain of negation. In Japanese, negative polar questions (NPQs) hosting a negated predicate can have two interpretations — A logical one where the negation on the predicate is interpreted, and an “expletive” one, where the logical force is essentially ignored:

(1) kore yo-ku -na-ku -na-i
    this good-PRED -NEG-PRED -NEG-is
   a. ‘Isn’t this not good?’ (logical negation)
   b. ‘Isn’t this good?’ (expletive negation)

NPQs under the expletive reading is generally perceived to be characteristic of the speech of young Japanese speakers. However, Taniguchi et al.’s findings suggest that this is a public folk perception: In reality, young people do not prefer this interpretation at all; if anything, it is the older speakers that adopt the expletive reading more frequently. This paper examines the nature
of this sharp disparity between reality and perception.

2. Linguistic Background

2.1. Negative Polar Questions

NPQs in English are syntactically yes/no questions with a preposed negation:

(2) English
   a. Is it cold? (positive polar (yes/no) question)
   b. Isn’t it cold? (negative polar question (NPQ))
   c. Is it not cold? (positive polar question, negative predicate (Neg-Pred))

(3) Japanese
   a. samu-i desu-ka?
      cold-is HON-Q
      ‘Is it cold?’
   b. samu-ku -na-i?
      cold-PRED -NEG-is
      ‘Isn’t it cold?’ OR ‘Is it not cold?’

Crucially, the negation does not operate on the predicate in NPQ’s; (2b) is not identical to (2c), which does not have a preposed negation. Semantically, NPQ’s like (2b) carry a speaker bias (Romero and Han, 2004); that is, (2b) has an implicature that the speaker believes it is cold. The Japanese example in (3b) is translatable as either (2b) or (2c); distinct prosody disambiguates the two (Hara & Kawahara, 2012). The expletive negation only occurs in the former NPQ interpretation, as exemplified in (4c):

(4) [NPQ Context:] Atsuko and Yuuko are standing outside in the snow; they are both shivering. Atsuko says to Yuuko:
   a. kyoo samu-ku -na-i?
      today cold-PRED -NEG-is
      ‘Isn’t it cold today?’ (NPQ)

   b. # kyoo samu-ku -na-i?
      today cold-PRED -NEG-is
      ‘Is it not cold today?’ (Neg-Pred)
(5) [Neg-Pred Context:] It’s winter, but the temperature has been unpredictable: cold only on some days. Atsuko hates cold weather. She hasn’t been outside all day so she asks her roommate Yuuko, who just came home:

a. # kyoo samu-ku -na-ku -na-i?
today cold-PRED -NEG-PRED -NEG-is
‘Isn’t it cold today?’ (NPQ)

b. kyoo samu-ku -na-i?
today cold-PRED -NEG-is
‘Is it not cold today?’ (Neg-Pred)

c. * kyoo samu-ku -na-ku -na-i?
today cold-PRED -NEG-PRED -NEG-is
Intended: ‘Is it not cold today?’ (expletive negation, Neg-Pred)

(5c) must literally mean, ‘Is it not not cold?’ (i.e., ‘Is it cold?’); Neg-Pred questions cannot license expletive negation. The situation that we are interested in is the kind in (4), when the speaker has a bias towards the proposition and is asking for confirmation or agreement of some sort from the addressee; this is when the expletive negation is triggered.

2.2. Negation

Superfluous negation, or hypernegation, comes in two main forms: Negative concord and expletive negation (Horn, 2010). The former is a purely syntactic agreement process and is never ambiguous between a logical and concord reading (e.g., negative concord in Romance and vernacular dialects in English; see references within Horn (2010) for analyses). Given the ambiguity in the present phenomenon, what we have is clearly not negative concord. Expletive negation on the other hand is more semantically conditioned for licensing, and can be ambiguous in meaning. Expletive negation is found in many languages, including English:
(6) I’ll see if I can’t finish this by midnight
   ‘I’ll see if I can finish this by midnight’

(7) I miss not seeing you around
   ‘I miss seeing you around’

One property of expletive negation is that it tends to co-occur with adversative predicates, or other lexical items that are “inherently negative” in some way (Espinal, 1992), e.g., the subordinate if in (6), and the predicate miss in (7). Expletive negation is not a foreign phenomenon in Japanese; Yoon (2013) provides the following example:

(8) John-wa Mary-ga ko-nai -ka(to) sinpaisi-teiru
    John-TOP Mary-ACC come-NEG NF.COMP fear-ASP
   ‘John fears that Mary might come’

Despite the negation on come, (8) can mean that John is worried that Mary is coming. The classic analysis of this expletive negation would be that the “negative” predicate sinpai ‘fear’ is licensing the extra negation. The typical assumption is that this negative lexical item absorbs or deletes the negative force of the negation through some syntactic or semantic operation (Espinal, 1992; Tovena, 1996; Abels, 2005, among others).

Yoon (2013) argues against this analysis on grounds of the following data from Japanese:

(9) John-wa Mary-ga ko-nai -ka(to) kitaisi-teiru
    John-TOP Mary-ACC come-NEG NF.COMP hope-ASP
   ‘John hopes that Mary might come’

An expletive reading of (9) is possible, despite the lack of negativity in kitai ‘hope.’ Yoon convincingly argues that the relevant licensing condition for expletive negation is not negativity, but uncertainty. She highlights the non-factive complementizer -ka-to as direct evidence. She shows that while predicates of uncertainty that license expletive negation take -ka-to, predicates of certainty (like kakusinsi ‘be certain’) take the factive complementizer/nominalizer, -no:
The more crucial and perhaps more convincing data that she does not cite is the negated version of (10), which obligatorily has the logical negation reading:

(11) John-wa Mary-ga ko-nai -no-o kakusinsi-teiru
     John-TOP Mary-ACC come-NEG -F.COMP-ACC certain-ASP
     ‘John is certain that Mary will NOT come’

(11) cannot mean ‘John is certain that Mary will come’; here, the argument in favor of Yoon would be that the factive complementizer with the factive predicate cannot license expletive negation due to the lack of uncertainty.

As such, Yoon claims that “expletive" negation is not so semantically vacuous as the label suggests; it has the function of marking nonveridicality (Giannakidou, 2006), or the uncertainty of the proposition it attaches to. It is thus similar to a subjunctive mood marker, which generally signals the speaker’s avoidance of committing to the truth of a proposition. Conveniently, the subjunctive mood in Romance often triggers expletive negation (Gaatone, 1971; Muller, 1978), supporting Yoon’s case.

If the uncertainty is the relevant licensing condition for expletive negation, then negated NPQs are not so bizarre as they initially seem. After all, their entire purpose is to seek confirmation, which most naturally comes from to the speaker’s uncertainty of the truth value of the proposition at hand. In discourse-theoretic terms, NPQs can perhaps be thought of as an invitation to update the Common Ground (a set of propositions that discourse participants assume to be true). Given that it is completely felicitous for the addressee to disagree with the NPQ (e.g., —A: Isn’t it cold in here? —B: No it’s not), the speaker is uncertain if the proposition in question should be in the Common Ground. While a full semantic analysis will not be pursued here, the uncertainty
approach to expletive negation seems extendable to NPQs. The abridged point here is that expletive negation is systematic.

3. Sociolinguistic background

3.1. Japanese sociolinguistics

Japanese sociolinguistic studies have long focused on gender and register (honorifics) as variables (Shibamoto, 1987; Loveday, 1986). As for speaker age, Japanese grammarians and linguists share the impression that there are generational differences in the Japanese language (cf. references within Endo-Hudson (2010)), with several of these observations experimentally supported in the Labovian framework.

Hibiya (1988)’s dissertation work on Tokyo Japanese revealed that younger speakers realize intervocalic /ɡ/ as [ɡ] more often than older speakers, who prefer the [n] variant in this environment. She also confirms the social stratification of pre-[i] [ç]/[ʃ] variation, with older men being the primary users of the vernacular [ʃ] variant; the younger generation and older women exhibit categorical use of the standard [ç] variant. Hibiya further observes a change in progress in the pitch accent of certain trimoraic words in Japanese from LHH to LHL.

Additionally, Imai (2004) found (among 21 male participants) that the devoicing of accented vowels (a non-standard feature) occurs more often in younger speakers than in older speakers. Elsewhere in a study of 40 Tokyo-Japanese speakers, Lauwereyns (2002) reports younger Japanese speakers using lexical hedges more often than older speakers in sociolinguistic interviews. Expletive negation, while prevalent in prescriptive criticism and social stereotyping in the media, has not received attention in the sociolinguistic literature.

3.2. The perception of negated NPQs in Japanese
The availability of the expletive interpretation in negated NPQs is generally perceived by the public as “young people speech.” This so-called *wakamono-kotoba* (‘young-people language’) is above the level of social awareness, with much discussion of it in the media including television programs explicitly addressing generational differences. Mentions of negated NPQs are found even as far as in satirical songs by artists criticizing the youth dialect. The form itself was apparently popularized in 2005, when Japan’s instant noodle company *Ace Cook* aired a commercial exclaiming *yo-ku-na-ku-na-i?!* (‘Isn’t this (not) good?’) about their latest low-calorie noodle product. The actor featured in the commercial asks, “Is it good or is it bad? Which is it?”—the commercial then concludes, “It means it’s GOOD!”

Ranked number 13 among “Annoying Ways of Speaking” in the October 12th, 2005 issue of *Nikkei Plus 1* (Saturday newspaper), *na-ku-na-i* ‘Isn’t it not...’ has caused endless debates over its interpretation, continuing into the 2010s. Many informal answers have been proposed in response to this issue, ranging from “Two negatives make a positive, so it means the affirmative” to “The last negation is just asking for agreement, so it’s negative” to “It can mean both, depending on context.” The impression that young people are the source of the ambiguity is very real and very widespread.

### 3.3. Pilot study

I, along with my colleagues [Ansley][Ansley], [Munn][Munn], and [Schmitt][Schmitt], investigated the phenomenon under the hypothesis that the expletive negation reading is primarily adopted by younger speakers. To test this, we presented Japanese speakers with cartoons involving negated NPQs. The context of the cartoon was manipulated so that the interpretation of the NPQ was ambiguous: 1. Logical negation reading, or 2. Expletive negation reading. Our prediction was that younger speakers would adopt the expletive reading more than older speakers when presented with an ambiguous context for the
NPQ.

80 native Japanese speakers participated in this study, divided into three age groups: Students (age 12-24, n=24), Younger Adults (age 25-40, n=29), and Older Adults (age 41+, n=27). To test our hypothesis, we used 12 cartoon strips with a forced choice task. Each cartoon consisted of four cells, depicting a conversation between two characters in Japanese. The characters are discussing the property $p$ of a certain object/person $x$, but the context is set up so that this property is ambiguous: $p$, or not $p$. One of the characters exclaims about this property in the last cell of the cartoon, using the negated NPQ form. Following each cartoon, a prompt asked the participants to choose the thing the characters were discussing: $x$ that is $p$, or $x$ that is not $p$. By selecting the affirmative $x$ that is $p$, the participant implies that the negated NPQ is an *expletive* negation reading. Conversely, selecting the negative $x$ that is not $p$ implies that they adopted the *logical* negation reading of the NPQ. See Figure 1 for an example cartoon.
The ambiguous context was always set up with one of the characters claiming "I saw x; it was just as the rumors say!" in the second cell. The ambiguity can be derived from the fact that for all we know, the rumor could have been that $x$ is $p$, or not $p$ (contra expectation, etc.). In addition to the 12 stimuli items, 60 filler items with similar forced choice questions were presented to the
participants. Finally, a social profile questionnaire was used to identify participants’ demographics.

The results of the study are summarized in Figure 2. Overall, all age groups preferred the logical negation reading for negated NPQs in ambiguous contexts. Students, Younger Adults, and Older Adults interpreted 79%, 76%, and 58% of the items as logical negation on average, respectively.

On average, the youngest Student group interpreted 21% of the ambiguous, negated NPQs as expletive negation. The middle Younger Adult group interpreted 24% of the same items as expletive negation. The oldest Older Adult group interpreted 42% of the items as expletive negation, almost twice as much as the two younger groups.

There was no significant effect for age between the Student group and the Younger Adult group in terms of average percentage of items interpreted as expletive negation, t(51) = 0.45, p = .65.
However, there was a significant effect for age between Younger Adults and Older Adults, $t(54) = 2.32, p = .02$, with Older Adults interpreting more items as expletive negation than Younger Adults. There was also a significant effect for age between Students and Older Adults, $t(49) = 2.81, p = .01$, with Older Adults interpreting more items as expletive negation than Students. Contrary to our prediction that younger speakers will adopt the expletive negation reading more than older speakers, it was the oldest group of speakers that had the highest acceptance rate of the expletive negation interpretation. Shortcomings of the pilot study design include a potential bias in the cartoons (i.e., Perhaps the characters appeared young), the lack of a strong ambiguity in the context (i.e., Was the “rumor” context felicitous enough for the logical negation?), and the inclusion of Japanese-speaking U.S. residents (i.e., Does living away from Japan obscure their sense of sociolinguistic stereotypes?). Even with these weaknesses in mind, the results are quite puzzling given the strong social perception that young people are predominant users of this form. The present paper investigates this peculiar pattern through two studies: A comprehension experiment, and a perception experiment.

### 4. Study 1 - Comprehension

The first study is an attempt to replicate Taniguchi et al. (2013)’s results, with modifications to the materials.

#### 4.1. Participants

302 native Japanese speakers participated in this study, recruited on the crowdsourcing service Crowdworks. Because Crowdworks is based in Japan, workers must have a Japanese bank account in order to use the service, meaning that most, if not all, participants are Japanese residents. They were paid 300yen for participation.
4.2. Materials and method

Online surveys were used to test Japanese speakers’ comprehension of negated NPQs. Once the participants accessed the survey URL, a redirect link randomly assigned them to one of the three conditions: Logical (n=74), Expletive (n=92), and Ambiguous (n=136). In all three conditions, participants were asked to read a story about two individuals, each story concluding with a negated NPQ uttered by one of them: “Isn’t it not ADJ?” The names of the individuals were reduced to initials and a gender/age-neutral suffix (e.g., A-san, B-san) so that names do not induce any age bias. The stories were presented by written prose only; no pictures were used. Ten age-neutral adjectives were chosen for testing: ookii ‘big,’ omoshiroi ‘funny,’ mezurashii ‘rare,’ amai ‘sweet,’ chiisai ‘small,’ kakkoi ‘good-looking,’ karai ‘spicy,’ yasui ‘cheap,’ usui ‘thin,’ and kowai ‘scary.’

In the Logical condition, the logical negation reading of the NPQ was invited by means of adding the negative polarity item (NPI), chittomo ‘at all’ to the utterance (“Isn’t it not ADJ at all?”). Because NPIs must license logical negation, the expletive interpretation in this condition is blocked.

In the Expletive condition, the expletive reading was promoted with the addition of the degree modifier kanari ‘considerably’ to the utterance (“Isn’t it considerably not ADJ?”). Because negation renders adjectives ungradable (Consider: Jun is more fun than Satoshi vs. *Jun is more not fun than Satoshi), the degree modifier is more compatible on the expletive interpretation. Note that the logical negation reading is not completely blocked but merely demoted in the case of Japanese:

(12) kanari kowa-ku -na-ku -na-i?
considerably scary-PRED -NEG-PRED -NEG-is

a. * ‘Isn’t it considerably not scary?’
b. ‘Isn’t it considerably unscary’ (i.e., considerably laughable)

The productivity of negation attachment to adjectives in Japanese makes (12) interpretable under
the reading in (12b). However, *kanari kowa-ku -na-i* ‘considerably unscary’ is still quite marked as an interpretation in Japanese; the degree modifier is thus still predicted to promote the expletive negation reading.

Finally, in the Ambiguous condition, the NPQ was presented in its bare form (“Isn’t it not ADJ?”). The context (which were the same for all three conditions) was set up so that both the expletive and the logical interpretation of the negation was possible. To accomplish this, ten age-neutral nouns were paired with the tested adjectives: *ookii (dachoo no) tamago* ‘big (ostrich) egg,’ *omoshiroi owaraikombi* ‘funny comedians,’ *mezurashii (koreskushon) koin* ‘rare (collector’s) coin,’ *amai kyarameru* ‘sweet caramel,’ *chiisai minitomato* ‘small cherry tomato,’ *kakkoii haiyuu* ‘good-looking actor,’ *karai kimuchi* ‘spicy kimchi,’ *yasui seeruhin* ‘cheap sale items,’ *usui (usugata) terebi* ‘thin (HD) TV,’ and *kowai kaidanbanashi* ‘scary ghost story.’ These nouns relate to the adjective in a particular way: the adjective is the standard property of the noun (e.g. Ghost stories are usually scary). The point of pairing nouns with adjectives this way is to make the logical negation interpretation felicitous. While uttering that something is “not ADJ” out of the blue is typically infelicitous, it becomes felicitous when there is an unspoken standard set prior to the utterance. For example, if the ghost story is rather bland, it is completely natural to say “Isn’t it not scary?” (logical) in reaction to the violated expectation. At the same time, the expletive reading is equally felicitous: If the speaker and the addressee hear the same scary ghost story, it is natural for the speaker to ask “Isn’t it (not) scary?” (expletive) in order to confirm that it indeed is scary.

Following this, for all three conditions, the context was set up so that the actual quality of the noun was left unspecified in the story leading up to the NPQ: It could be ADJ or not ADJ. After the participants read the NPQ, they were asked if the noun was ADJ or not ADJ. An example of each of the conditions with expected responses is shown below (translated into English; the actual task
was in Japanese):

(13) Logical condition

*T-san and A-san are watching TV. There is a celebrity on some show telling a ghost story. After he finishes telling the story, A-san says to T-san:

“kono kaidanbanashi, chittomo kowaku-naku-nai?”

(‘Isn’t this story not scary at all?’)

→ Q: What is the ghost story like, according to A-san? Pick the most precise answer.

A) kowai kaidanbanashi (‘a scary ghost story’)  
B) totemo kowai kandanbanashi (‘a very scary ghost story’)  
C) kowakunai kaidanbanashi (‘a ghost story that is not scary’)  ⇐ Expected  
D) wakaranai (‘I don’t know’)  

(14) Expletive condition

*T-san and A-san are watching TV. There is a celebrity on some show telling a ghost story. After he finishes telling the story, A-san says to T-san:

“kono kaidanbanashi, kanari kowaku-naku-nai?”

(Literally, ‘Isn’t this story considerably not scary?’)

→ Q: What is the ghost story like, according to A-san? Pick the most precise answer.

A) kowai kaidanbanashi (‘a scary ghost story’)  
B) totemo kowai kandanbanashi (‘a very scary ghost story’)  ⇐ Expected  
C) kowakunai kaidanbanashi (‘a ghost story that is not scary’)  
D) wakaranai (‘I don’t know’)
Ambiguous condition

T-san and A-san are watching TV. There is a celebrity on some show telling a ghost story. After he finishes telling the story, A-san says to T-san:

“kono kaidanbanashi, kowaku-naku-nai?”

(Literally, ‘Isn’t this story not scary?’)

→ Q: What is the ghost story like, according to A-san? Pick the most precise answer.

A) kowai kaidanbanashi (‘a scary ghost story’)  ⇐ Expected (Young > Old)
B) nagai kandanbanashi (‘a long ghost story’)viii
C) kowakunai kaidanbanashi (‘a ghost story that is not scary’)
D) wakaranai (‘I don’t know’)

In the Ambiguous condition, if we still maintain the hypothesis that expletive negation is characteristic of younger speakers’ language, then we expect younger participants to choose A more often than older participants.

There were a total of ten experimental items, and 40 filler items of similar format (context + utterance + comprehension question). 20 of the filler items used standard Japanese in the utterance, and the other 20 used non-standard features. To obscure the intent of the experiment (i.e., testing age stratification), the non-standard filler items employed variables unrelated to speaker age. Half of the non-standard items were in the Kansai dialect spoken in the western region of Japan, presented in a syntax specific to the dialect (e.g., akan for ‘that’s not right’); all sentences were collected from YouTube recordings of native Kansai speakers. The rest were directives/commands of varying politeness (gender variation; women are reported to use more polite directives generally (Takano, 2005; Smith, 1992)). After answering all 50 questions, participants filled out a demographic questionnaire.
4.3. Results

Participants were divided into two groups: Younger and Older. The Younger group consists of Japanese speakers aged 12-39, which includes students and young adults without teenage children. The Older group consists of speakers aged 40 and up, roughly corresponding to adults with teenage children, or older.

While the original intention of the study was to examine six age groups, some groups were collapsed due to the insufficient number of participants per group. The two new groups were created based on the number of participants; that is, the participants were split up into younger age (lower end) and older age (higher end) with roughly an equal number of participants in each group.

The number of participants for each age group is summarized in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Logical</th>
<th>Expletive</th>
<th>Ambiguous</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
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<td>(n=148)</td>
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<td>12-17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>18-25</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>26-39</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>67</td>
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<td>Older</td>
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<td>(n=154)</td>
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<td>40-49</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>69</td>
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Table 1: Participants - Study 1

The results for the Logical condition are summarized in Figure 3. Participants in the Younger
group chose the logical interpretation for 92.2% of the items on average. None of them chose the expletive interpretation in this condition, although they chose “I don’t know (IDK)” for 3.1% of the items on average, and chose the filler for 4.5% of the items on average.

Participants in the Older group chose the logical interpretation for 87.6% of the items on average, and the expletive interpretation for 3.3% of them. “I don’t know” was chosen 6.9% of the time, and the Filler was chosen 2.8% of the time on average.

![Comprehension Responses - Logical](image)

Figure 3: Average percentage of items chosen as logical vs. expletive (Logical condition)

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with average proportion of response choices (Expletive, Logical, “I don’t know,” and Filler) as dependent variables (DV) and participant age group as the independent variable (IV). Findings show a significant interaction between age group and the mean proportion of Expletive interpretations chosen [F(1,72) = 17.02, p < 0.001], with the Older group choosing a larger proportion of expletive responses on average than the Younger group. There was no significant effect of age group on the other DVs.
Results for the Expletive condition are shown in Figure 4. Participants in the Younger group chose the expletive interpretation for 31.5% of the items in this condition. The Logical interpretation was chosen for 60.6% of the items on average, and the mean “I don’t know” and Filler proportions were 1.0% and 6.7%, respectively.

![Comprehension Responses - Expletive](image)

Figure 4: Average percentage of items chosen as logical vs. expletive (Expletive condition)

Participants in the Older group chose the expletive interpretation for 43.9% of the item on average, and chose the logical interpretation for 30.8% of the items. The mean “I don’t know” and Filler proportions were 11.7% and 13.4%, respectively.

A MANOVA with a univariate analysis shows a significant effect of age group on the proportion of Expletive \([F(1,90) = 12.55, p < 0.001]\) and Logical responses \([F(1,90) = 6.88, p = 0.01]\), with the Older group selecting the expletive interpretation more frequently than the Younger group on average, and the Younger group selecting the logical interpretation more frequently than the Older
Finally, the results for the Ambiguous condition are shown in Figure 5. The Younger group chose the expletive interpretation for 24.4% of the items, and the logical interpretation for 68.9% of the items on average. The mean proportions for “I don’t know” and the Filler were 6.5% and 0%.

The Older group chose the expletive interpretation for 52.0% of the items, and the logical interpretation for 40.2% of the items on average. The mean proportion for “I don’t know” and the Filler were 7.1% and 0.5%.

A MANOVA with a univariate analysis shows a significant effect of age group on the proportion of Expletive \( F(1,134) = 17.32, p < 0.001 \) and Logical \( F(1,134) = 18.31, p < 0.001 \) responses, with the Older group selecting a larger proportion of expletive interpretations and the Younger group selecting a larger proportion of logical interpretations on average. It also shows a marginally
significant interaction between age group and the proportion of Filler responses \([F(1,134) = 4.06, p = 0.045]\), with the Older group selecting the Filler more frequently on average. There was no significant relationship between age group and “I don’t know” responses.

4.4. Interim discussion

The results from the Logical condition are as expected, with the logical interpretation responses percentage roughly around 90% for both groups. In the Expletive condition, the Younger group still shows a preference for the logical interpretation, despite the promotion of the expletive reading in the linguistic context. The Older group shows somewhat of a preference for the expletive interpretation in this condition, although only at 44%. While this makes up the largest fraction of the responses compared to the other three options, they also show a noticeably large proportion of Filler and “I don’t know” responses, which potentially suggests that the older speakers do not have a good command of the expletive form. However, note also that the Filler response in this condition was the non-modified adjective (e.g., the answer “a scary ghost story” for Isn’t it considerably not scary?). Although the wording of the comprehension question (i.e., “Pick the most precise answer”) encourages the expletive response — “Ghost story that is very scary” — the bare filler answer is not truth-conditionally incorrect per se, due to scalar implicature. If the Older speakers picked the Filler response intentionally under the expletive interpretation, then the responses suggest that they have an even more pronounced preference for the expletive interpretation in this condition.

The Ambiguous condition results are a replication of Taniguchi et al. (2013)’s results: In ambiguous NPQ contexts, the Older group adopts the expletive interpretation more frequently than the Younger group. The Older group in fact shows a preference for this interpretation, with 52% expletive responses and 40% logical responses. It is again unlikely that expletive negation is used
predominantly by younger Japanese speakers.

5. Study 2 - Perception

If younger speakers resist expletive negation more than older speakers, then what is to be made of the contrary perception that expletive negation characterizes the dialect of young people? Thus far I have been assuming an informal and impressionistic perception of the phenomenon based on native speaker reports and media coverage. The second part of this study explores the perception of NPQs by experimental means to more rigorously capture the state of affairs.

5.1. Participants

244 native Japanese speakers participated in the perception experiment. They are the same participants from Study 1; after the comprehension portion, all participants were given a perception task. The last 58 informants from Study 1 were excluded from the analysis of the perception experiment so the participant age distribution for each condition was equivalent for the purposes of between-group comparisons.

5.2. Materials and method

To collect attitudinal data regarding NPQs and negation, two perception methods were adopted: a perception questionnaire, and a matched guise task. While a large majority of sociolinguistic perception studies have focused on language attitude/social meaning (Campbell-Kibler, 2006, 2008, 2010a; Loureiro-Rodriguez et al., 2013), speaker ethnicity (Graff et al., 1986; Purnell et al., 1999), and more recently, speaker sexual orientation (Mack and Munson, 2012), the present study applies a similar method to speaker age perception (Dailey-O’Cain, 2000; Drager, 2011, for precedent).

131 of the 254 participants answered the perception questionnaire, while 123 participated in the
matched guise task.

5.2.1 **Perception questionnaire.** A questionnaire is a direct method of addressing the question of the perceived sociolinguistic distribution of a variable — in this case, the association of expletive negation with a certain age group. Each informant was asked to read an example sentence containing either (i) Just the NPQ construction (Control condition), (ii) NPQ with logical negation (Logical condition), or (iii) NPQ with expletive negation (Expletive condition). A context was provided for each condition to make each interpretation unambiguous:

(16) **Control condition**

Context - *A pizza store is advertising “super fast delivery.” K-san and T-san ordered a pizza from said pizza store. The pizza arrives in 10 minutes. K-san says to T-san:*

*“haya-ku-na-i?”* (‘Isn’t that fast?’)

(17) **Logical condition**

Context - *A pizza store is advertising “super fast delivery.” K-san and T-san ordered a pizza from said pizza store. The pizza arrives in 2 hours. K-san says to T-san:*

*“haya-ku-na-ku-na-ku-na-i?”* (‘Isn’t that not fast?’)

(18) **Expletive condition**

Context - *A pizza store is advertising “super fast delivery.” K-san and T-san ordered a pizza from said pizza store. The pizza arrives in 10 minutes. K-san says to T-san:*

*“haya-ku-na-ku-na-ku-na-i?”* (literally ‘Isn’t that not fast?’ = ‘Isn’t that fast?’)

The context in each condition sets up an expectation for fast, and the scenario to follow (actual
delivery time) confirms or refutes this expectation; this makes all three NPQs felicitous and unambiguous.

After reading a NPQ with a particular interpretation, participants were asked which age group they associated the construction in question with. They were provided with 11 age groups to choose from, and they were allowed to choose more than one: 12-14, 15-19, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, 60+. They also had the “No one uses this” option if they felt that the NPQ was ungrammatical.

The design was between-subject; each participant received only one condition. The age distribution of the participants was consistent across the three conditions. The distribution is summarized in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Control (NPQ Only)</th>
<th>Logical</th>
<th>Expletive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Younger</strong> (n=72)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-39</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Older</strong> (n=69)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Participants - Study 2, Perception
5.2.2 Matched Guise. In order to assess specific stereotypes and the more subconscious sociolinguistic associations speakers have with respect to NPQs, a matched guise task was also used. While a questionnaire gives us a good idea of speakers’ attitudes about certain linguistic cues, its results come with the risk of participants consciously manipulating their responses for the fear of social disconformity (Campbell-Kibler, 2010b). That is, participants may refrain from giving truthful attitudes about a linguistic variable because of their hesitation of publicizing negative judgments. An indirect method like the matched guise task gives us a way to get around this problem.

A matched guise task (Lambert et al., 1960) is a method in which minimal pairs of recorded speech are created by manipulating a single linguistic variable in the recordings. After participants listen to a version of the recording, they are asked to evaluate the recorded speaker on dimensions such as gender and personality traits (e.g., likability or intelligence). For example, Campbell-Kibler (2007) took the recorded speech of an individual with tokens of the verbal suffix -ing and digitally manipulated it to create one version where -ing was produced as [ɪŋ], and another version where it was produced as [ɪn]; everything else in the recording stayed the same. Listeners of these recordings evaluated the recorded speaker based on regional affiliation and sexual orientation. The purpose of the design is to determine whether the manipulated linguistic variable has an effect on the informant’s social judgment about the speaker. If there is an effect, it can be said that there are specific social meanings attached to said variable.

Unlike the canonical recorded matched guise design, written stimuli were used in the present study, due in part to the difficulty of finding recordings of naturally-occurring NPQs. To simulate spoken speech as much as possible, the “guises” were created from a series of microblog posts, or “tweets,” collected from Twitter in October 2014. Two naturally-occurring NPQ (non-negated) tweets were
collected and presented along with three filler tweets. Three guises were created from this tweet collection: NPQ Only, Expletive, and Control (no NPQ). The tweets in the NPQ Only guise were presented as is. The Expletive guise was created by inserting a negation to the NPQ tweets. For measuring the baseline, a control guise was created by converting the NPQ tweets into a declarative with a tag particle. An example of the guises is shown below:

(19) Context: In reference to a picture of a super short pencil

a. mijika-ku -na-i?
   short-PRED -NEG-is
   ‘Isn’t it short?’ (NPQ only)

b. mijika-ku -na-ku -na-i?
   short-PRED -NEG-PRED -NEG-is
   ‘Isn’t it not short?’ (Expletive)

c. mijika-i yone
   short-is TAG
   ‘It’s short, right?’ (Control - No NPQ)

To ensure that the appropriate interpretation of the negation was achieved, context was provided for each tweet either with pictures, prose, or both. Great care was taken to select tweets that were as age-neutral as possible. Furthermore, two sets of tweet collections were used to ensure that the tweet topics were not affecting the informants’ perception. The design was between-subject; each participant received one tweet collection under one guise. Participants were not told that the stimuli were tweets; they were told that they were “real utterances from a real person, transcribed from recordings of actual conversations,” and that “all utterances were made by A-san.”

After reading a tweet collection under a particular guise, the participants were asked to guess the age of A-san and to say how much they agreed with certain statements about personal traits of A-san, on a Likert scale (1 = Disagree, 5 = Agree). They were asked how much they agree that A-san is: (i) gehin-da ‘vulgar,’ (ii) jiritsusei-ga-nasasoo-da ‘dependent (lacks independence),’ (iii) jishin-ga arisoo-da ‘confident,’ (iv) atama-ga warusoo-da ‘stupid,’ and (v) dokudanteki-da
‘assertive,’ plus five other filler traits. The traits were selected based on the social stereotypes associated with NPQs and expletive negation present in the media: Expletive NPQ users are stereotypically vulgar, dependent on peers, lacking confidence, stupid, and lacking assertion.

For consistency, the perception of logical negation was tested as well. In a matched guise study, the only aspect that is changed across guises should be the linguistic variable. Because it is impossible to compare unambiguous expletive negation with unambiguous logical negation without changing the context entirely, these were tested separately. Two naturally occurring NPQs with logical negation was collected from Twitter, and were mixed with three filler tweets. The two guises were Logical and Control (no NPQ); examples are below:

(20) Context: An “amazing” before and after picture, but actually with minimal changes

   a. iu-hodo kawatte-na-ku -na-i?
      say-as.much.as different-NEG-PRED -NEG-is
      ‘Isn’t it not as different as they claim?’ (Logical)

   b. iu-hodo kawatte-na-i -yone?
      say-as.much.as different-NEG-PRED -NEG-is
      ‘It’s not as different as they claim, right?’ (Control - No NPQ)

The set-up of the task (including topic bias precautions) and the perception questions were the same as the expletive condition. For the comparability of responses to guises, the age distribution of participants in each condition was consistent. Participant age information is summarized in the tables below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Control (No NPQ)</th>
<th>NPQ Only</th>
<th>Expletive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Younger (n=27)</td>
<td>12-17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Participants - Study 2, Matched Guise (Expletive)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>26-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
<th>60+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older (n=36)</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Participants - Study 2, Matched Guise (Logical)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>12-17</th>
<th>18-25</th>
<th>26-39</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Younger (n=20)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control (No NPQ)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older (n=20)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control (No NPQ)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3. Results

5.3.1. Perception questionnaire. Responses to the perception questionnaires are summarized below. The numbers on the x-axis correspond to the age groups that the participants selected as typical users of the NPQ form (cf. Table 5). The y-axis represents participant number. Because the responses were categorical (i.e., selection of age group), percentiles will be used for analysis. The (red) vertical dotted lines indicate the age range that 90% of the responses fell within. Results for the Control (NPQ only) condition is illustrate in Figure 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>45-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50-54</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>55-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>60+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“No one says this”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: X-axis age groups
Figure 6: Responses to “How old is the typical user of NPQ (no negation on predicate)?" 

For the Control (NPQ only; e.g., isn’t it fast?) condition, 90% of the responses fell in the 12 to 59 year old range. 95% also fell within the same range. The mode response was 12 to 59 years, 12 to 39 years, and 20-24 years, each making up 10.2% of the responses.

The summary for the Expletive condition and the Logical condition is illustrated in Figure 6 and 7, respectively.
Figure 7: Responses to “How old is the typical user of NPQ (predicate negated, expletive)?”

In the Expletive condition (e.g., *isn’t it fast?* ‘isn’t it fast?’), 90% of the responses fell within the 12 to 24 year range. 95% fell within the 12 to 44 year range. The mode was 12 to 29 years, making up 15.6% of the responses.
Figure 8: Responses to “How old is the typical user of NPQ (predicate negated, logical)?"

In the Logical condition (e.g., *isn’t it not fast?*), 90% of the responses fell in the 12 to 24 year range as well. 95% fell in the 12 to 44 year range. The mode was 12 to 24 years, making up 18.1% of the responses.

5.3.2. Matched Guise. Results for the matched guise tasks are summarized below for the Expletive condition (Figure 9) and the Logical condition (Figure 10). The dependent variable is the guise type, and the independent variable is the mean perceived age of the speaker. Results are split up by informant age group (Younger vs. Older).
Figure 9: Mean age response to “How old is the speaker?” by informant age group (expletive condition guises)

Figure 10: Mean age response to “How old is the speaker?” by informant age group (logical condition guises)

For the Expletive condition, the Younger informants’ average perceived speaker age was 19.6,
18.5, and 19.4 for the Expletive, NPQ-Only, and the Control guises respectively. There was no statistically significant effect of guise on mean perceived age for Younger informants. The Older informants’ average perceived speaker age was 20.6, 26.75, and 30.0 for the Expletive, NPQ-Only, and the Control guises respectively. For the Older informants, a one-way ANOVA shows that there is a significant effect of guise on perceived speaker age \([F(2,33) = 6.15, p = 0.005]\); post-hoc pairwise comparisons using the Turkey HSD test indicate that the mean perceived age for the Expletive guise is significantly lower than the Control guise \((p = 0.004)\). There was no significant difference between the Expletive guise and the NPQ-Only guise, or between the NPQ-Only guise and the Control guise.

In the Logical condition for the Younger informants, the mean perceived age was 22.6 for the Logical guise, and 24 for the Control guise. There was no statistically significant difference between the average ages of the two guises. For the Older informants, the mean perceived age was 24 for the Logical guise, and 36.4 for the Control guise. A one-way ANOVA shows that there is a significant effect of guise on perceived speaker age \([F(1,18) = 6.21, p = 0.02]\), with the Logical guise having a lower mean than the Control guise.

Results for speaker trait perception in the Expletive condition is summarized below, with Younger informants’ responses in Figure 11 and Older informants’ responses in Figure 12.
Figure 11: Effect of NPQ/expletive negation on perception of personal traits in younger speakers (1 = Disagree, 5 = Agree)

Figure 12: Effect of NPQ/expletive negation on perception of personal traits in older speakers (1 = Disagree, 5 = Agree)
Although there is a general trend for the informants to evaluate the speaker in the expletive guise more negatively than the other guises, neither of the age groups show a statistically significant effect of guise on any of the perceived traits.

The results for the Logical condition are summarized in Figure 13 (Younger informants) and Figure 14 (Older informants).

![Trait Perception - Logical Guise (Younger Informants)](image)

Figure 13: Effect of NPQ/logical negation on perception of personal traits in younger speakers (1 = Disagree, 5 = Agree)
Figure 14: Effect of NPQ/logical negation on perception of personal traits in older speakers (1 = Disagree, 5 = Agree)

For the Younger informants, a one-way ANOVA shows a significant effect of guise on the mean level of perceived “vulgarness” in the Logical condition \( [F(1,18) = 5.65, p = 0.02] \), with the Logical guise perceived to be more vulgar than the Control guise. No other traits showed a significant effect. In the Older group, a one-way ANOVA shows a significant effect of guise on the mean level of perceived “vulgarness” \( [F(1,18) = 9.18, p = 0.007] \), “dependentness” \( [F(1,18) = 10.79, p = 0.004] \), and “stupidness” \( [F(1,18) = 14.37, p = 0.001] \), with the Logical guise perceived to be more vulgar, more dependent, and more stupid than the Control guise. Other traits did not show a statistically significant trend.

5.4. Interim discussion

The results from the attitudinal questionnaire suggest that bare NPQs (no negation, e.g., *isn’t it fast?*) are generally perceived to be used by a wide range of age groups, including speakers in their 50s. As expected, NPQs employing *expletive* negation (e.g., *isn’t it not fast?* ‘isn’t it fast?’) is largely perceived to be characteristic of the speech of students (age 12-24), including middle
school, high school, and college students. What was not as expected was the fact that the perception is the same for *logical* negation (e.g., *isn’t it not fast?*): The majority of the participants associate logical negation NPQs with the young student population as well.

The matched guise task reveals a similar effect. The first pattern to note in the matched guise task is the baseline for each age group, or the perceived age of the speaker in the Control group. For Younger informants, this is 19.4 in the Expletive condition, and 24.0 in the Logical condition. In the Older group, the baseline is 30.0 in the Expletive condition, and 36.4 in the Logical condition. That the perceived Control guise age for the Younger group is younger than the Older group’s Control guise age is unsurprising, considering our expectation for people to generally be more confident in identifying the behavior of people in age groups closer to their own.

For Older speakers, NPQs with expletive negation seems to have an effect of lowering the perceived speaker age by as much as 10 years. Put another way, they are certain that the Expletive guise speaker is in an age group significantly younger than their own. Older speakers believe that the expletive negation user was 20.7 years old on average, which is consistent with the age range elicited in the questionnaire task.

For Younger speakers, the expletive guise does not have an effect on the perceived speaker age. For them, both the Control guise and the Expletive guise sound like the speech of their own age group. The speaker in the Expletive guise was perceived to be 19.6 years old on average, which is also consistent with the findings in the questionnaire.

The pattern in the Logical condition is the same. Older informants identify the speaker in the Logical guise to be younger than themselves (mean perceived age of 24.0), while Younger informants consider this speaker to be in their own age group (mean perceived age of 22.6).

For personal stereotypes in the matched guise task, the presence of expletive negation did not seem
to have an effect; neither of the age groups reported the speaker in the expletive guise to be any less or any more vulgar, confident, or stupid, etc., than the speaker in the control guise. Interestingly, they had more of an opinion for the speaker in the Logical guise. Both the Older participants and the Younger participants agree that the speaker in the Logical guise sounds more vulgar than his Control guise minimal pair. The Older informants further perceive the logical negation user to be more dependent (i.e., childish and lazy) on others, and more unintelligent than the Control guise speaker.

Two things are clear from the perception experiments: 1. Expletive negation is truly perceived to be “young people language,” 2. But so is logical negation. An interesting caricature of logically-negated NPQ users also emerges: A vulgar, immature, and unintelligent student.

### 6. Summary and discussion

**6.1. Logical negation, not expletive negation, as “young people language”**

Comprehension and perception data combined, the peculiar fact is confirmed: Younger Japanese speakers have no particular inclination for the expletive negation interpretation in the NPQ context; they prefer to interpret ambiguous negation as logical negation in this construction. Yet, a large number of people think that teenagers and speakers in their early 20s predominantly use expletive negation.

Even more curious is the new finding: Logical negation in NPQs is associated with the speech of young people as well, with the perceived age range on par with that of expletive negation. If anything, the public perception is right about this part. Indeed, Young speakers prefer the logical negation interpretation not only in ambiguous contexts, but even in contexts that promote expletive negation. Older speakers on the other hand have a preference for expletive negation in both
contexts.

What this seems to suggest is that the true youth dialect is perhaps NPQs that employ *logical* negation, not expletive negation. That Older speakers consistently have negative stereotypes (vulgar, childish, and unintelligent) associated with logical NPQs supports this claim; note that they have no strong opinion about personal stereotypes for expletive NPQs.

How is logical negation related at all to the tendencies of young speakers? One aspect of negated adjectives is *mitigation*, or the implication that a negated adjective is a weakened version of its antonym (Jespersen, 1924). Various accounts and empirical support for mitigation are present in the literature (Horn, 1989; Giora et al., 2004; Paradis and Willners, 2006; Krifka, 2007; Fraenkel and Schul, 2008; Sassoon, 2013). The underlying intuition is that *not happy* is not exactly synonymous with *sad*. This is easily shown with the co-occurrence of the two in a sentence:

\[(21) \quad \text{He isn’t sad, just not happy}\]

If *sad* and *not happy* were equivalent, (21) should be tautological; it is clear that that is not the case. This suggests that negation is more an attenuating degree modifier than a literal logical operator that entails an absolute opposite (Paradis and Willners, 2006). There have been speculations as to why speakers may choose to mitigate using negation. Horn (1989) suggests politeness, meaning that the negation helps save face for the speaker: It is intuitively more polite to call someone *not pretty* rather than *ugly*. Jespersen (1924) sees it as the speaker’s “hesitation” of some sort, which is presumably similar to Horn’s intuition.

If (logical) negation is an attenuator, then semantically and pragmatically it has the effect of hedges, or proposition weakeners (Lakoff, 1973). Hedges are common in Japanese (Itani, 1995), and in the sociolinguistic domain, Lauwereyns (2002) found that young Japanese speakers use lexical hedges (e.g., *toka* ‘or something,’ *kana* ‘I wonder,’ *nanka* ‘like,’ and *tabun* ‘probably’).
twice as much as older speakers in sociolinguistic interviews. In fact, hedges—or *bokashi-kotoba* ‘blurring language’—is widely recognized by the public as a salient feature of Japanese youth language (Satake, 1995; Sonomoto, 2012), and often is the target of prescriptive criticism. It could be, then, that the younger participants in the present study favored logical negation because adjectival negation is a subclass of hedges. If negation is *wakamono-kotoba*, then we should expect to see young speakers’ preference for it outside of NPQ as well; e.g., In regular declarative constructions, they should prefer *not happy* over *sad*. I leave this for future research.

6.2. Speculations on the source of the folk perception, and future directions

A final question lingers: why is expletive negation falsely perceived to be “young people language” in the first place? Although the experimental results at hand cannot answer this question, one speculation rests with the evaluative nature of expletive negation as discussed in §2.2. If expletive negation, like subjunctive mood markers, marks uncertainty of a proposition, then it too can be thought of as hedging. It could be that Japanese speakers know that young speakers hedge with negation in NPQs—they just don’t know with *which* negation.

However, personal trait stereotyping results from the matched guise task show that the speaker in the expletive guise do not sound any more “confident” or less “assertive” than the speaker in the control guise, which is a surprising result if expletive negation is a hedge. But then again, there is an independent issue of the function of hedges; namely, that there are multiple (Lakoff, 1975). Lakoff (1975) identifies at least two ways of hedging: actual uncertainty of facts, and mitigation or politeness. Given that in NPQs the speaker is actually quite certain of the presupposed proposition—just uncertain whether the addressee will agree—perhaps the more relevant characterization is that NPQs are mitigating hedges, that is, a way to assert an opinion in an indirect manner. I am unable to conclude this from the experiment results, but examining the perception of
different hedges in the Lakoffian sense may prove to be an interesting pursuit in the future. Another possible explanation for the result is that younger speaker *do* actually prefer expletive negation in the ambiguous context, but the stories in the comprehension task were perhaps not salient enough to trigger uncertainty or politeness. It would be interesting to see if expletive negation is more preferred in contexts where it is clearly uncertain whether the addressee will agree with the speaker or not, e.g., By using adjectives of opinion, like *fun, tasty, cute*, or in contexts where the speaker is clearly trying to be polite (e.g., Used in conjunction with honorifics). The context used in this study was perhaps overly more salient for the logical negation interpretation; after all, the point of using the nouns and adjectives that were used was to make the attenuating interpretation (e.g., “Not big for an ostrich’s egg (but not necessarily small)” ) possible. A future investigation into the actual uses (production data) and evaluative components associated with both logical and expletive negation may prove worthwhile for teasing the social and semantic function of the two variants apart.

Another interesting finding is that the Younger group does not perceive either negation to be uncharacteristic of their own age group, even though their comprehension results for expletive negation do not suggest this as a whole. It is still unclear whether a certain subgroup of younger speakers are actual expletive negation enthusiasts; if so, what would this subgroup be? While Older speakers have a slight preference for the expletive interpretation in ambiguous contexts, I cannot conclude from this that expletive negation is an “Older speaker dialect” without actual usage data. An interesting turn of events from a production or corpus study would be if no one actually uses expletive negation in NPQs. A potential next step might be to examine whether older speakers actually use this or merely misinterpret the younger speakers’ logical negation as expletive negation.
7. Conclusion

In this paper I investigated the sociolinguistic reality of negation in Japanese negated polar questions (NPQ). The comprehension study suggests that when the negation is ambiguous between an expletive and logical negation, young speakers have a preference for the logical interpretation, while older speakers have a slight preference of the expletive interpretation. This partially clashes with the perception data, collected through an attitudinal questionnaire and a matched guise task, which shows that the majority of informants believe expletive negation and logical negation to be characteristic of the speech of young Japanese speakers, particularly students. The young speakers’ actual preference for logical negation reflects the perception, but why expletive negation has such a strong false perception remains a mystery. This study of linguistic performance versus perception brings forth an interesting case of how starkly inaccurate sociolinguistic stereotypes can be.

References


Lauwereyns, S. (2002). Hedges in japanese conversation: The influence of age, sex, and


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i These were Dailey-O’Cain and Buchstaller’s findings at the time their studies were published. More recently, it is increasingly true that older speakers use *be like* too.

ii Unfortunately the actual commercial has been replaced by another version and taken down by Ace Cook on their website; this description is based on reports by viewers in 2005 (via blogs).


vii This option was included in the answers since having just two choices between *very scary* and *not scary* seemed odd; this answer is there simply to complete the scale. The “very scary” option is present in the Logical condition for consistency.

viii Filler answer; “very scary” as the third option was avoided to focus on the ambiguity.