# The lowdown on the high-pitched tone adopted by Japanese women

Hiroko Yamazaki studies the impact of sound on the human mind and body, analyzed through the frameworks of cognitive and auditory psychology. (Provided by Hiroko Yamazaki)

No matter the occasion, Japanese women tend to adopt a high-pitched voice in public or when speaking on the telephone. The same can be said of actresses in movies as well as news anchors in Japan.

The difference in their vocal tone compared to that of women in the West is striking.

Most Japanese women possess distinctively high-pitched voices, which experts argue is not merely a matter of personal preference but rather a reflection of societal expectations.

Hiroko Yamazaki, a leading expert in voice cognition, maintains it is a “product of society.”

“Japanese women are among those with the highest-pitched voices globally,” she explains.

“A typical adult woman who is 160 centimeters tall should have a natural pitch of around 220-260 Hertz, but many Japanese women speak at 300-350 Hertz or even higher, which is essentially falsetto,” she said.

As to why women in Japan tend to artificially elevate their voices, Yamazaki asserts that society, and more specifically, men, have implicitly encouraged this behavior.

“High-pitched voices are universally associated with small size and immaturity,” she says. “Children have shorter vocal cords and vocal tracts, resulting in higher-pitched voices. In Japan, women have been subconsciously conditioned to project an image of weakness, cuteness and dependence.”

Yamazaki suggests that the tone of women’s voices reflects gender equality in society.

India, for instance, has a significant gender gap, much like Japan. Indian women are also often noted for their high-pitched voices.

To illustrate her point in her university lectures, Yamazaki often has her students listen to news anchors from other countries.

It never fails to strike students how deep the voices of women from, for example, Nordic countries, can be.

Female news anchors in countries with smaller gender gaps tend to have lower-pitched voices.

Yamazaki noted that even in Japan, there was a brief period when women’s vocal tones noticeably lowered. It was during the country’s asset-inflated economy of the late 1980s when the term “career women” gained popularity.

But even then, the voice tone was noted for being significantly higher-pitched compared to women in Western nations.

Yamazaki contends that a person’s voice reflects not only their physical and emotional state but also their values and life experiences.

“I can often tell when someone is lying by listening to their voice,” she says.

Yamazaki said her research has shown that more than 80 percent of Japanese people dislike their own voices.

“A false voice betrays not only others but also oneself,” she explained.

Yamazaki believes that everyone has a unique and precious voice. She champions a society in which every individual is free to express themselves authentically, with their voices celebrated as a reflection of diversity.

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