

## Trivialization, Generalization, and Semanticization in the Representation of “Comfort Women”<sup>1</sup> Issues: The Case of Abe Shinzo,<sup>2</sup> the Former Prime Minister of Japan

Yumiko Ohara

University of Hawai‘i at Hilo

Using the theoretical framework of critical discourse analysis, this paper examines a recent discussion concerning “comfort women” between former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and Ogawa Toshio in a Diet session. Close examination of the interaction reveals that linguistic strategies such as trivialization, generalization, as well as semanticization were employed in an attempt to 1) falsify a certain testimony by legitimating others at the same time and 2) negotiate the meaning of the term ‘coerciveness’ from the original Kono Statement of 1993 with the overall effect of downplaying the role played by the Japanese government.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, political discourse, comfort women, trivialization, semanticization

### 1. Introduction

Although 2008 marks the sixty-third year since the end of WWII, it is claimed that there are a number of unresolved issues concerning the war responsibility of the Japanese state. “Comfort women” is one such issue (e.g., Hayashi 2001, 2008, Hein 1999, Schneider 2008, Seaton 2006, Tawara 2001). In fact, it might not be an exaggeration to say that “comfort women” is currently one of the most contested topics in Japan. Given the great potential for words and phrases to take on various meanings due to their “inherent flexibility” (Hasan 2003), it is not surprising that the term “comfort women” itself has been a source of great contestation within this controversy. It has been defined as “one of the most egregious documented cases of sexual slavery” (McDougall 1999), “the worst human trafficking crime of the 20th century” (Honda 2006), a “crime against humanity” (Amnesty International USA 2007), but it also has been referred to as “simply legalized prostitution” (Ogata 2007), a “profitable business” (Nakayama 2007), a “total fabrication” (Reported in Tokyo Newspaper (February 12, 2006) to be said by Yonenaga Kunio), and

---

<sup>1</sup> As indicated by many scholars (e.g., Hayashi 20001, Tanaka 2000), the use of the term comfort women is criticized since it is a euphemism and does not capture the actual severity of the condition. In this paper, I have decided to use the term because it is “the common historical term” (Hayashi 2001) but with double quotation marks to capture the unique semantic circumstances of the term.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the paper, following the Japanese custom, the last name of people is given first followed by the first name.

a part of a "media war that has been set up" (Nishimura 2007).

With the diverse and even polarized viewpoints about "comfort women", it is undeniably difficult, if not impossible, to agree on a 'truth' about this controversial issue. However, by examining the discourse used by certain groups and people to disseminate their views in different domains, it is possible to uncover and subsequently examine critically the discursive methods used to construct specific perspectives. Using the theoretical framework of critical discourse analysis, especially the concern with political discourse on historical events (e.g., Barnard 2003, Wodak 2003, Wodak et al. 1999), this paper examines a recent discussion concerning "comfort women" in the Japanese National Diet. Wodak et al. (1999) assert that critical discourse analysis "assumes a dialectical relationship between particular discursive acts and the situations, institutions and social structures in which they are embedded: the situational, institutional and social contexts shape and affect discourse, and, in turn, discourses influence social and political reality. In other words, discourse constitutes social practice and is at the same time constituted by it". By following the tenets of critical discourse analysis, it will be possible in this study to observe a connection between the linguistic actions of politicians on a particular interactional occasion and the larger sociological and political issue of "comfort women".

The main part of the data was taken from transcribed proceedings of a Diet session that took place on March 5, 2007 and that was constituted by an exchange between Abe Sinzo, the Prime Minister of Japan and a member of the Liberal Democratic Party, and Ogawa Toshio, a member of the Democratic Party. The exchange centers on a public statement by the politician Yosuke Kono in 1993 in which he recognized that the "comfort women" had been coerced into sexual slavery.<sup>3</sup> Close examination of the interaction reveals that linguistic strategies such as trivialization, generalization (Gruber 1997) as well as semanticization were employed in an attempt to 1) legitimate a certain testimony and at the same time falsify others and 2) negotiate the meaning of the term 'coerciveness' from the original Kono Statement of 1993.

## 2. Current situation of "comfort women" issue

Currently, it appears that the issue of "comfort women" has reached a new era of controversy by receiving global media attention. There has been, for instance, a set of resolutions concerning "comfort women" proposed by political entities from various countries. Most recently on March 11, 2008, the Philippines House of Representatives approved a resolution urging Japan to formally apologize for forcing some 200,000

---

<sup>3</sup> Statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono on the result of the study on the issue of "comfort women". The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. <<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/women/fund/state9308.html>>

women to serve as wartime sex slaves. Earlier last year, the United States Congress (July 2007), the Dutch Parliament (November 2007), Canada's Lower House (November 2007), as well as the European Parliament (December 2007) also passed similar motions. In an unprecedented move to support these resolutions, advertisements and open letters were placed in U.S. newspapers critical of Japan's approach to "comfort women" issues. For example, on April 26, 2007 a full-page advertisement sponsored by the Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues and entitled "The Truth about Comfort Women" was placed in the Washington Post. It included editorials from the Washington Post, Asahi Newspaper, and Wall Street Journal and a letter from Amnesty International addressed to President Bush. The advertisement maintained that Prime Minister Abe was "retreating from previous statements of contrition and launching a campaign to deny that the government was directly involved".

As a countermeasure to this advertisement, on June, 14, 2007, over forty Diet members including the Liberal Democratic Party, the Democratic Party, and Independent Party of Japan together with political commentators, professors, and journalists placed a full-page advertisement titled "The Facts on Washington Post" in an attempt to correct information included in "The Truth about Comfort Women" that was based, in their words, on "fallacies, distortion, biases, and factual errors". The advertisement further claimed that the U.S. congressional resolution "gravely and intentionally" distorted facts, and it denied the coercive nature of the "comfort women" system stating that the women were authorized prostitutes who were treated well and often made more money than field officers and even generals. These new developments in the controversy changed the overall dynamics and direction of the dialogue from a bidirectional one with former "comfort women" and their supporters versus the Japanese government to a multidirectional involving politicians as well as political entities from various nations and former "comfort women". It was about the time when these developments were receiving media attention that the Diet session, which constitutes the data for this paper occurred.

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1. Data

The data were taken from the proceedings of a session of the Budget Committee Meeting of the House of Councilors that took place on March 5, 2007 and the exchange centers on a public statement by Kono, the former Chief Cabinet Secretary, in 1993 in which he recognized that the "comfort women" had been coerced into sexual slavery. The timing of this session is that it took place after the media coverage of the U.S. resolution had started but before Abe's visit in late April to the US. First, I will focus on the term coersiveness and the definition given by Prime Minister Abe.

#### 3.2. Semanticization of coercion

The first point focuses on the meaning of the term *kyoousei* 'coercion' that Kono had

used in his statement. The data excerpt below begins as Ogawa questions Abe about his assertion that the "comfort women" had not been coerced.

1. OGAWA: *saikin soori wa kyoosei wa nakatta to iu yoo na*  
 recently PM T coercion T exist-NEG-PAST QT say like  
*shushi no hatsugen o saremashita ka kono ianfu no mondai ni tsuite*  
 meaning LK statement O do-HON-PAST Q this CW LK issue concerning  
 Did the PM make a statement, which meant that there was no coercion concerning the  
 issue of comfort women?

2. ABE: *sono ken ni tsukimashite mo sakunen no iinkai de tooben*  
 that matter concerning also last year LK committee at reply  
*shita toori de gozaimashite kono giron no zentei to naru watakushi*  
 do-PAST as BE-HUM this argument LK premise consist I  
*ga katte hatsugen o shita iwaba kyookasho ni noseru ka dooka*  
 S in past statement O do-PAST so of speak textbook to print Q whether  
*to iu toki no giron ni tsuite watakushi ga tooben o shita*  
 QT say time LK argumenat concerning I S reply O do-PAST  
*wake de gozaimasu soshite sono sai watakushi ga mooshiagemashita*  
 case BE-HUM-PRES then that occation I S say-HUM-PAST  
*no wa iwaba kyooji no imi ni oite no kyooseisei ni tsuite*  
 LK T so of speak narrow sense LK meaning in LK coercion concerning  
*ieba kore wa sore o urazukeru shoogen wa nakatta to iu*  
 say-COND this T that O back up tesnimony T exist-NEG-PAST QT say  
*koto o sakunen no kokkai de mooshiageta tokoro de gozaimasu*  
 matter O last year LK Diet at say-HUM-PAST position BE-HUM-PRES

Also concerning that matter, it is exactly as I replied during the committee last year, I replied as a premise to this argument about whether or not to include (it) in textbooks. What I said on that occasion was that concerning a narrow sense of coercion, there was no testimony which backs that up, this point I stated in the Diet session last year.

3. OGAWA: *kono sangatsu tsuitachi ni kyoosei wa nakatta to iu yoo na*  
 this March First on coercion T exist-NEG-PAST QT say like  
*shushi no hatsugen o sareta n janai desu ka soori*  
 meaning LK statement O do-HON-PAST NOM BE-PRES-NEG Q PM

On March first, didn't you utter a statement, which meant there was no coercion, Prime Minister?

4. ABE: *desukara kono kyooseisei to iu koto ni tsuite nani o motte kyooseisei*  
 therefore this coercion Q say matter concerning what O take coercion  
*to iu koto ni tsuite giron shite iru ka to iu koto*  
 QT say matter concerning argument do-PRES-PROG Q QT say matter  
*de gozaimasu ga iwaba kanken ga ie ni oshiitte itte hito o*  
 BE-HUM- PRES but sort of speak GA S house in break-in go person O

*hitosarai no gotoku tsurete iku to iu soo iu kyooseisei wa nakatta*  
 kidnapper LK like take go QT say so say coercion T exist-NEG-PAST  
*to iu koto de wa nai ka to koo iu koto de gozaimasu*  
 QT say matter exist-PRES-NEG Q QT this say matter BE-HUM-PRES

Therefore, concerning coercion, (we) are arguing that what we take to mean coercion, such as whether or not, for example, a government authority comes into a house and takes someone away like a kidnapper, that sort of coercion, did not occur.

Utterance 1 is a question by Ogawa about Abe's recent statement concerning coercion, and in utterance 2 Abe answers Ogawa by referring to a discussion that occurred in a meeting the year before about whether to include "comfort women" issues in textbooks.<sup>4</sup> He then states that "concerning a narrow sense of coercion, there was no testimony which backs that up". In utterance 3, Ogawa rephrases his earlier question by stating the specific date of Abe's statement, and in utterance 4, Abe further explains his position by giving a definition of coercion. In doing so, Abe seems to suggest that there is more than one meaning of coercion as he states that one meaning would be "a government authority comes into a house and takes someone away like a kidnapper". He next quickly asserts that this kind of coercion did not take place. This (re)defining of the meaning of coercion continued a few utterances later as Abe gives a broader meaning of the term, again after being prompted by Ogawa's question.

7. OGAWA: *ichido kakunin shimasu ga soosuruto ie ni norikonde muriyari*  
 once confirm do-PRES but therefore house in go in by force  
*tsurete kite shimatta yoo na kyoosei wa nakatta to ja doo iu*  
 bring-PAST such coercion T exist-NEG-PAST QT then what kind  
*kyoosei wa atta to soori wa ninshiki sarete iru n desu*  
 coercion T exist-PAST QT PM T understand do-HON-PROG NOM BE-PRES  
*ka*  
 Q

I'd like to confirm once, but then the type of coercion wasn't to the extent of going into a house and bringing (them) in by force. Then, what is the PM's understanding of the coercion that occurred?

8. ABE: *kono kakkai no ba de koo iu giron o enen to suru*  
 this Diet session LK place at this say discussion O endlessly do-PRES  
*no ga watakushi wa amari seisanteki da to wa omoimasen*  
 NOM S I T much productive BE-PRES QT T think-PRES-NEG  
*keredomo aete mooshiagemasu ga iwaba kore wa sakunen no*  
 but reluctantly say-HUM-PRES but sort of speak this T last year LK

<sup>4</sup> This Budget Committee meeting took place on October 6, 2006.

*kokkai de mo mooshiagemashita yoo ni sono toki no keizai jyookyoo to*  
 Diet at also say-HUM-PAST like that time LK economic situation QT  
*iu mono ga atta wake de gozaimasu gohonnin ga susun de soo*  
 say matter S exist-PAST case BE-HUM-PRES HON-self S willingly so  
*iu michi ni susumoo to omotta kata wa osoraku*  
 say path to go forward-VOL QT think-PAST person-HON T probably  
*orarenakatta n daroo to kono yoo ni omoimasu mata*  
 exist-HON-PAST-NEG NOM BE-TENT QT this like think-PRES and  
*aida ni haitta gyoosha ga jijitsujo kyoosei o shite ita to*  
 between in enter-PAST dealer S in reality coercion O do-PROG-PAST QT  
*iu keesu mo atta to iu koto de gozaimasu soo iu imi ni*  
 say case also exist-PAST QT sat matter BE-HUM-PRES so say meaning in  
*oite koogi no kaishaku ni oite no kyooseisei ga atta to*  
 as broad meaning LK interpretation in as LK coercion S exist-PAST QT  
*iu koto de wa nai deshoo ka*  
 say matter BE-NEG-TENT Q

I do not think having a discussion such as this endlessly in this Diet session is very productive, but reluctantly I would say, as I said in the Diet session last year, there was an economic situation at the time. I presume that probably there was no one who wanted to take the path willingly, this is what I think. Also, it was also the case that a dealer who was in between, in reality, performed coercion. In such a way, isn't it the case that there was coercion in a broad sense?

Phrasing his question as an attempt to confirm Abe's previous response, Ogawa in utterance 7 first reiterates that Abe does not think it was the type of coercion in which someone is taken from their house before asking Abe what type of coercion he thinks occurred. After expressing his reluctance to engage in this kind of a discussion in utterance 8, Abe assigns a “broad meaning” to the term. He explains that due to the economic situation at the time in which the coercion occurred, many women were driven to become “comfort women”. He also suggests that there might have been dealers, not members of the government or of the military, working in the middle who coerced women to serve these roles. Basically, then, Abe has taken the term coercion and divided it into two, a “narrow meaning” in which “the government authority breaks into a house and abducts someone” in order to coerce that person into doing something, and a “broad meaning” in which women were forced to become “comfort women” either by the economic situation or by dealers.

Abe's discursive act here is similar to the action of semantic shift described by Gruber (1997) (also see Hasan 2003) in which users of language attempt to shift the meanings of words through discourse. Abe, however, seems to be doing more than shifting the meaning. He is overtly defining the term coercion as the interaction unfolds. Accordingly, I refer to this process as semanticization to highlight a social actor's attempt

to define (or perhaps redefine) a term. And perhaps more important than Abe's engaging in the process of semanticization is the immediate discursive result of this process. By claiming a narrow and broad definition, Abe is able to deny that one of the meanings, the narrow meaning, did not occur. Moreover, by applying this new definition to the earlier statement made by Kono, Abe is able to reinterpret an accepted part of history. Kono, in other words, had accepted the Japanese government's role in coercing the "comfort women", but Abe uses semanticization to create doubt about just how much coercion the Japanese state engaged in. According to Abe, the government did not coerce the "comfort women" in the narrow sense; Japan did not just snatch them from their homes and force them to work.

### 3.3. Generalization and trivialization

Semanticization was a part of two other related processes, generalization and trivialization. The following excerpt of data provides some examples. It is a continuation of Abe's utterance shown in line 4 above. It begins as Abe introduces other aspects of coercion including a testimony by Yoshida Seiji.

- 4.1 Abe: *somosomo kono mondai no hottan toshite kore wa tashika asahi*  
 the first place this matter LK beginning as this T probably Asahi  
*shinbun datta to omoimasu ga yoshida seiji to iu hito ga ianfu*  
 newspaper BE-PAST QT think but Yoshida Seiji named person S CW  
*gari o shita to iu shoogen o shita wake de arimasu ga kono shoogen*  
 hunt O did QT say testimony O did case BE-HUM-PRES but this testimony  
*wa mattaku nochi ni decchiage datta koto ga wakatta wake*  
 T totally later fabrication BE-PAST matter T understand-PAST case  
*de gozaimasu tsumari hottan wa kono hito ga soo iu shoogen o shita*  
 BE-HUM-PRES in short origin T this person S so say testimony O do-PAST  
*wake de gozaimasu ga ima mooshiagemashita yoona tenmatsu*  
 case BE-HUM-PRES but now say-HUM-PAST like circumstances  
*ni natta to iu koto ni tsuite sono go iwaba kono yoo ni*  
 became QT say matter concerning that later sort of speak this like to  
*ianfu gari no yoo na kyooseisei kanken ni yoru kyoosei renkoo teki na mono*  
 CM hunt LK like coercion GA by coerced taking such matter  
*ga atta to iu koto o shoomei suru shoogen wa nai to iu*  
 S BE-PAST QT say matter O prove do testimony T exist-NEG QT say  
*koto de gozimasu*  
 matter BE-HUM-PRES

In the first place, the origin of this problem, I believe it was Asahi Newspaper stated that a person named Yoshida Seiji testified that he was involved in round-ups of comfort women; however, we learned that later it was total fabrication. In short, the origin was with the person who made such testimony but as I said now, concerning that case, it

turned out the way it did, after that, there is no testimony that supports the use of coercion by government authority.

5. OGAWA: *ima shoogen wa nai to iimashita ne shikashi jissai ni*  
 now testimony T do not exist QT say-PAST IP however fact  
*amerika no kain ni oite amerika gasshuukoku no kain ni oite ianfu o*  
 America LK HR at US LK HR at CM O  
*sareteita kata ga soo iu kyoosei ga atta to*  
 do-HON-PAST people-HON S so say coercion S exist-PAST QT  
*iu shoogen o shiteiru dakara kain de ketsugian ga saitaku*  
 say testimony O do-PRES-PROG so HR at resolution S adopt  
*sareru ka dooka to iu koto ni natte iru n*  
 do-PRES-PASS Q whether QT say matter to become-Pres-PROG NOM  
*ja nai desu ka ima shoogen ga nai to osshaimashita ne jissai ni*  
 BE-PRES-NEG Q now testimony S not-exist QT say-HON-PAST IP fact in  
*soo iu taiken o shita to iu fuu ni shoogen shite iru ianfu ga*  
 so say experience O do-PAST QT say like testify do-PRES-PROG CM S  
*gen ni iru wake desu yo soo iu hito tachi no hatsugen wa*  
 actually exist-PRES case BE-PRES IP so say person PL LK statement T  
*shoogen ja nai n desu ka*  
 testimony BE-PRES-NEG NOM BE-PRES Q

You said now that there is no testimony but in fact, in the House of Representatives of America, former comfort women are testifying that that type of coercion occurred; therefore, isn't that the basis of the situation such that the resolution might be passed? You said that testimony does not exist, right? There are comfort women who are testifying that they underwent such experiences. Aren't those people's testimonies such testimonies?

6. ABE: *iwaba urazuke no aru shoogen wa nai to iu koto*  
 so of speak back up LK exist testimony T not-exist QT say matter  
*de gozaimasu shoogen to ieba saki hodo mo mooshiagemashita*  
 BE-HUM-PRES testimony QT say-COND before also say-HUM-PAST  
*yoo ni yoshida seiiji shi no shoogen mo shoogen ja nain desu ka*  
 like Yoshida Seiji mister LK testimony also testimony BE-PRES- NEG Q  
*mattakku kono hito no shoogen wa decchiage datta to iu koto*  
 absolutely this person LK testimony T fabrication BE-PAST QT say matter  
*de gozaimasu*  
 BE-HUM-PRES

It is the case that there is no testimony with evidence, so to speak. If we talk about testimony, then, as I said earlier, the testimony by Mr. Yoshida Seiji, isn't that also testimony? It is the case that this person's testimony was absolute fabrication.

In utterance 4.1 Abe introduces a testimony by Yoshida Seiji in which Yoshida claimed

that he was involved in *ianfugari* ‘rounding-up of “comfort women”’. Abe quickly points out that his testimony turned out to be *decchiage* ‘fabrication’, and Abe further states that there are no other testimonies that Japan engaged in coercion like rounding up of “comfort women”. In response in utterance 5, though, Ogawa refers to the U.S. House of representative resolution and says that former “comfort women” testified that such coercion indeed occurred. In utterance 6, Abe claimed that there is no testimony with proof and refers back to the testimony of Yoshida Seiji which turned out to be *decchiage* ‘fabrication’. In utterance 4.1 and 6 alone, Abe uses the name Yoshida Seiji and the words *ianfugari* and *decchiage* twice each to make his point. I will come back to these later in the discussion section, but it can be noted that Abe’s move in utterance 6 equates the testimonies of former “comfort women” with the testimonies of Seiji Yoshida (Yoshida 1977, 1983), which were said to be either totally fabricated (Hata 1999) or at least partially fictionalized (Uesugi 1996). He is, in short, engaging in the process of generalization; by quickly restating Yoshida Seiji’s case in utterance 6, he is asserting that the “comfort women”’s testimonies referred to by Ogawa in 5 will turn out to be either fabrication or lack supporting evidence.

Furthermore, by engaging in the process of generalization to link the testimonies of “comfort women” to that of Yoshida Seiji, Abe is at the same time working to trivialize the statements of the “comfort women”. Although they have gone through considerable trouble to have their voices heard (e.g., Shin 2003, Yoshimi 2000, Violence Against Women in War - Network Japan 2000), Abe’s use of generalization suggests that their voices are not important, or at least that they should not be paid attention to. They are trivial because they ultimately, according to Abe, tell us nothing; they will turn out to be lies or lacking in proof.

### 3.4. Kono statement

At the center of this exchange between Ogawa and Abe was the Kono Statement of 1993. In the next excerpt, Ogawa and Abe further discuss coercion but this time specifically in relation to the Kono Statement. Examination of Abe’s discussion of the Kono Statement further shows not only how he attempted to define coercion but also how he attempted to trivialize the importance of the original 1993 statement. Utterance 11 is a clarification and further question by Ogawa concerning the type of coercion that occurred, and utterance 12 is the first instance of the comment by Abe ‘it is as written (in the Kono Statement)’ that he repeats on several occasions.

11. OGAWA: *dakara soori watashi wa kiite iru janai desu ka ie*  
 so that PM I T ask-PRES- PROG BE-PRES-NEG Q house  
*ni norikonde tsurete itte shimau yoo na kyoosei wa nakatta to*  
 in get into take go like coercion T exist-PAST-NEG QT  
*ja doo iu kyoosei ga atta n desu ka to*  
 then how say coercion S exist-PAST NOM BE-PRES Q QT case

*kiite iru*                      *wake desu*              *yo*  
ask-PRES- PROG case BE-PRES IP

So, Prime Minister, I am asking, aren't I? (You said) a type of coercion of going into a house and taking (someone) away did not occur. Then I am asking what kind of coercion did occur.

12. ABE: *moo sude ni sore wa kono danwa ni kaite aru toori*  
already              that T    Kono Statement in write-exist exactly  
*de arimasu sore o nankai mo ogawa iin ga doo iu shiwaku ga*  
BE-HUM-PRES that S many times Ogawa member S how say intension S  
*atte koko de sore o toriagete iru ka to iu koto wa watashi wa*  
exist here at that O take up-PRES-PROG Q QT say matter T I T  
*yoku wakaranai wake de arimasu ga ima masa ni amerika de*  
well understand-NEG case BE-HUM-PRES but now certainly America in  
*soo iu ketsugi ga wadai ni natte iru wake de gozaimasu ga soko*  
so say resolution S topic become-PROG case BE-HUM-PRES but there  
*ni wa yahari jijitsu gonin ga aru to iu no ga watakushi*  
at T as expected fact misunderstand S exist QT say LK S I  
*domo no tachiba de gozaimasu*  
PL-HUM LK position BE-HUM-PRES

That is already written exactly in the Kono Statement. I do not understand well for what intention Committee Member Ogawa is bringing it up endlessly, but now certainly such a resolution is becoming a topic in America, but it is our position that there is a mistake in the facts in there.

In utterance 11, Ogawa again refers to Abe's "narrow" definition of coercion of abducting someone from their house to ask a direct question, if that kind of coercion did not occur then what kind of coercion occurred? In response, Abe immediately says that it has already been written in the Kono Statement. He then moves the discussion to the resolution being made in the United States, and states that it "our position that it is based on a mistake in the facts". I did not include it here, but following utterance 11, Ogawa asked Abe if he planned to ignore the resolution since it is based on nonfactual testimonies. Abe's response was that they will not apologize since the resolution is not based on subjective facts. Abe has thus used the question about coercion from Ogawa to invoke the Kono Statement and ultimately trivialize the resolution made in the United States. Like Yoshida Seiji's testimony, the resolution is not based on fact, instead, it is based on a mistake. Accordingly, it is not worthy of an apology.

Shortly after the last exchange between Ogawa and Abe, Ogawa followed up on Abe's invocation of the Kono Statement by attempting to clarify the Kono Statement. He states the position of Kono Statement concerning coercion, namely, that the military was involved in the development and management of comfort stations as well as transfer of "comfort women" and asks Abe "whether he acknowledges that or not". Like Abe's reply

in utterance 12, he begins his utterances in 16 and 18 with “it is as written”.

15. OGAWA: *kono danwa wa tan ni gyoosha ga kyoosei shita dake de nakute*  
 Kono Statement T simply dealer S coercion do-Past only Be-NEG  
*ianjo no secchi ya kanri ianfu no isoo ni taisuru*  
 confort station LK set up and management CW LK transfer at concerning  
*gun no kanyo o nintai shita to itte oru wake*  
 military LK involvement O confirm do-PAST QT say-PRES-PROG case  
*desu kono koto ni tuite soori wa mitomeru n desu ka*  
 BE-PRES this matter about PM T acknowledge NOM BE-PRES Q  
*mitomenai n desu ka*  
 acknowledge-PRES-NEG NOM BE-PRES Q

It is the case that Kono Statement says that it acknowledges not only that dealers coerced but the military was involved in setting up and managing comfort stations and the transfer of comfort women. Do you acknowledge or do you not acknowledge this point?

16. ABE: *desu kara saki hodo rai mooshiagetedorimasu yoo ni*  
 BE-PRES because before say-HUM-PRES-PROG like  
*kaite aru toori de arimasu*  
 write-exist exactly BE-HUM-PRES

Therefore, as I have been saying for a while, it is exactly as it is written.

17. OGAWA: *kaite aru toori wa kaite aru no wa jujitsu desu yo*  
 write-exist exactly T write-exist LK T fact Be-PRES IP  
*kaite aru no wa soori ga sore o soo iu fuu ni omotteimasu ka to*  
 write-exist NOM T PM S that O so say like think-PRES-PROG Q QT  
*kiite iru n desu*  
 ask-PRES-PROG NOM BE-PRES

What is written is what is written. What is written is true, what is written. (I) am asking if the PM thinks that way.

18. ABE: *desu kara kaite aru toori de arimashite sore o*  
 BE-PRES because write-exist-PRES exactly BE-HUM that O  
*yondeitadakereba sore ga seifu no ima no tachiba de arimasu*  
 read-HON-COND that T government LK now LK position BE-HON-PRES

Therefore, it is as written. If you were to read it then that is the position of the government now.

Abe's responses in 16 and 18 are seen as elusive because they follow his previous actions of redefining 'coercion' and of generalizing and trivializing the testimonies of the "comfort women" and the resolution made in the United States. If Abe had made these responses in utterances 16 and 18 without having first engaged in the processes of semanticization, generalization, and trivialization, then we might understand him to be agreeing with the Kono Statement that Japanese government had been guilty of involvement in the "comfort women" issues. Yet, because Abe has already discursively defined 'coercion',

generalized the false testimony of one person to the entire set of “comfort women”, and trivialized the testimonies of “comfort women” and the US resolution, his position has already emerged through the discourse. Instead of agreeing with the Kono Statement, Abe appears in this last exchange as avoiding or eluding the question. Undoubtedly, this is responsible for the increased frustration in the tone of Ogawa’s voice as he tried several times to get Abe to clarify his position.

#### 4. Discussion

Using processes such as semanticization, generalization, and trivialization, Abe, despite his elusiveness in some parts, puts forth a certain view of “comfort women” in this exchange with Ogawa. Before further commenting on his view, it is worthwhile and necessary to situate this exchange in the surrounding discourse concerning “comfort women”. First, let’s consider a comment made by Nakayama Nariaki, chair of the Subcommittee on the Comfort Women Problem of the Diet Representatives’ Association for the Consideration of Japan’s Future and History Education of the House of Representatives who was also a former Education Minister. At a meeting of the Special Committee for Educational Reform in the House of Representatives on April 20, 2007, he argues about the problem of including issues concerning “comfort women” in history textbooks by stating that the testimony by Yoshida Seiji concerning *ianufugari* ‘rounding-up of comfort women’ and a ‘large scale campaign by a certain newspaper’ in relation to Yoshida’s testimony turned out to be a lie. Nakayama stated that there are three points to his argument for not including the issues; first, most of those women were Japanese, second, prostitution was legal at the time, and third, he felt sorry for their situation but on the other hand “as expected, it is a fact that it (the “comfort women” system) was a profitable business” since “their monthly salary was one hundred times more than a regular soldier”.

Similar arguments can be found in the writing of Ogata Yoshiaki (2007), a member of the Society for the Dissemination of Historical Facts. He blames the testimony of Yoshida Seiji, Asahi Newspaper, information manipulated by left-leaning forces, and the posture of the Japanese government as “The main source of the myth that comfort women were forcibly taken”. He stated that “comfort women” were “licensed prostitutes” and “these women were making per month between 100 to 250 times what soldiers were”. Concerning the Kono Statement, Ogata claimed that no evidence was ever found showing that anyone was taken by force. Similarly, Fujioka Nobukatsu (2007), chair of the *Jiyuushugi Shikan Kenkyukai* [Association for Advancement of Unbiased View of History (previously Association for Advancement of a Liberal View of History)] and professor of Takushoku University, talks about “swindler Yoshida Seiji” and his “fake book” about his testimonies concerning *ianfugari* ‘roundng up of comfort women’. Another statement of a similar vein came from Yonenaga Kunio, a member of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Board of Education, when he delivered a lecture at the inau-

gural convention of the Teachers Federation of Tokyo Metropolitan Government on February 11, 2006. He stated that “Military comfort women as well as the nanking massacre are *decchiage* ‘fabrication’” (Tokyo Newspaper, February 12, 2006).

In examining the discourse concerning “comfort women”, it becomes clear that the terms used by Prime Minister Abe such as Asahi Newspaper, Yoshida Seiji, *ianfugari* ‘rounding-up of comfort women’, and *decchiage* ‘fabrication’ are in fact keywords in the revisionist view (e.g., Barnard 2003) of “comfort women” issues. Abe, thus, by invoking these terms, is connecting his claims to the larger discourse of the revisionists and further disseminating the view to an even larger audience. When we consider the discussion between Abe and Ogawa in light of the greater competing discourses regarding not only war responsibilities but also the national identity of Japan, we can begin to see the relationship of Abe’s discourse to the role of the Japanese government. Abe’s attempts to manipulate the meaning of ‘coercion’, to generalize the false testimony of Yoshida Seiji, and to trivialize the testimonies of the “comfort women” all work to downplay the role played by the Japanese government in what some claim to be war atrocities. Put a different way, these linguistic strategies are a part of a larger discourse that constructs a specific meaning concerning WWII, which in turn contributes to the competing discourses surrounding a unique national identity for the Japanese. The representations of historical events are not merely the results of a recounting of ‘naturalized facts’ (e.g., Fairclough 1998) but are sites for negotiation and contestation of different versions of ‘facts’ to be ‘naturalized’ and disseminated into the conscious of the public.

To be sure, this occasion was not the first time for Abe or others to engage in semanticization of the term “coercion”. As Abe stated in utterance 2 above in response to one of Ogawa’s questions, he performed the same semanticization in the Budget Committee session in October 2, 2006. Further, the semanticization can be traced back to the writing of Yutaka Sakamoto (2001: 29–32), a Japanese political scientist who held post of the chairman of the board of directors of *Atarashii Kyookasho o Tsukurukai* [Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform]. As has been illustrated, Abe’s arguments are renditions of some of the repeated formulations of the past events by revisionists such as *Jiyuushugi Shikan Kenkyukai* [Association for Advancement of Unbiased View of History (previously Association for Advancement of Liberal View of History)] and *Atarashii Kyookasho o Tsukurukai* [Japanese Society for History Textbook Reforms], and the Society for the Dissemination of Historical Facts. The collective effect of the processes employed by Abe in the discourse shown in this study is a construction of a Japanese World War II history in which Japan is not liable for an issue some claim to be “one of the most egregious documented cases of sexual slavery” (McDougall 1999) and a “crime against humanity” (Amnesty International USA 2007). This study emphasizes that a specific way of thinking about Japan’s history is not just a ‘natural’ depiction of the events but rather a constructed history that will and should continued to be the object of more contestation in the future.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has examined the details of an exchange in the Japanese Diet between Ogawa and Abe in order to investigate a discursive connection between the interaction and the larger competing discourses that surround the "comfort women" issue in Japan and throughout the world. The analysis focused on three processes employed by Abe in the discourse, semanticization, generalization, and trivialization to put forth a certain view of the issue. Semanticization occurred as Abe worked to divide the term 'coercion' into "narrow" and "broad" meanings so that Abe could claim that coercion of a narrow definition was not engaged in by the Japanese government and military. Generalization was employed by Abe as he attempted to generalize the possibly partial fabrications of one person, Yoshida Seiji, to the testimonies of others, especially "comfort women" themselves. Trivialization was closely connected to generalization as Abe suggested that the testimonies of "comfort women" and the resolution in the US which is based on such testimonies were not worthy of serious consideration by the Japanese government because they were not based on trustworthy evidence. These processes at the discursive level thus allowed Abe to construct a view of the "comfort woman" issue that downplayed the role of the Japanese government, thereby contributing to a revisionist view of Japanese history and Japanese identity that continues to be contested in Japan and on a global level.

This study sought to contribute to the larger project of critical discourse analysis in which researchers have attempted to uncover the processes at the level of discourse that serve as the basis for various ideologies. By focusing on the level of interactional discourse, this study was able to elucidate some of the processes used by one of the leaders of a world power to reinforce a view of a controversial issue, namely "comfort women", that takes responsibility away from Japan for an occurrence referred to as a great atrocity.

## Abbreviations

|                                     |                                   |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| BE (various forms of the verb 'be') | CM ("comfort women")              |
| COM (command form)                  | COND (conditional expression)     |
| HON (honorific form)                | HR (the House of Representatives) |
| HUM (humble form)                   | IP (interactional particle)       |
| GA (government authorities)         | LK (particle linking nominals)    |
| NEG (negative form)                 | NOM (nominalizer)                 |
| O (direct object)                   | PASS (passive form)               |
| PAST (past form)                    | PL (plural marker)                |
| PM (Prime Minister)                 | PRES (present form)               |
| PROG (progressive form)             | Q (questions marker)              |
| QT (quotative marker)               | S (subject marker)                |
| T (theme marker)                    | TENT (tentative form)             |
| VOL (volitional form)               |                                   |

## References

- Amnesty International USA. 2007. Public Statement. The homepage of Amnesty International USA. <<http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?id=ENGASA220172007>>
- Barnard, C. 2003. *Language, Ideology, and Japanese History Textbooks*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. *Language and Power*. London: Longman.
- Fujioka, N. 2007. "Beikain · Eianfu Tainichi Hinan Ketsugi no Shinsoo" [The US House of Representative · The Deep Structure of the Resolution that is Critical of Japan Concerning Comfort Women]. The homepage of Association for Advancement of Unbiased View of History (previously Association for Advancement of Liberal View of History). <<http://www.jiyuu-shikan.org/rekishih144.html>>
- Gruber, H. 1997. "The Rhetoric of Trivialization: The Coverage of Right Wing Extremism and Neonazism in Austria's Most Read Tabloid." *Political Discourse* 11, 129-156.
- Hayashi, H. 2001. "The Japanese Movement to Protest Wartime Sexual Violence: A Survey of Japanese and International Literature." *Critical Asian Studies* 33:4, 572-580.
- Hayashi, H. 2008. "Disputes in Japan over the Japanese Military "Comfort Women" System and Its Perception in History." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 617, 123-132.
- Hasan, R. 2003. "Globalization, Literacy and Ideology." *World Englishes* 22:4, 433-448.
- Hata, I. 2007. "No Organized or Forced Recruitment: Misconceptions About Comfort Women and the Japanese Military." (First published in Shokun May, 2007 issue in Japanese. Translated by the Society for the Dissemination of Historical Facts) The homepage of the Society for the Dissemination of Historical Facts. <<http://www.sdh-fact.com/index.html>>
- Hein, L. 1999. "Savege Irony: The Imaginative Power of the 'Military Comfort Women' in the 1990s." *Gender & Hisoty* 11:2, 336-372.
- Honda, M. 2006. United States House of Representatives House Resolution 121. McDougall, G. 1998. "Contemporary Forms of Slavery—Systematic Rape, Sexual Slavery armed Slaver-like Practive during Armed Conflict." The homepage of United Nations. <<http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/0/3d25270b5fa3ea998025665f0032f220?OpenDocument>>
- Nakayama, N. Session of the Special Committee for Educational Reform in the House of Representatives on April 20, 2007.
- Nishimura, Y. (ed.). 2007. *'Ianfu · Nankin' no Shinjitsu: Shikakerareta Joohoosensoo ni Katsu Hoho* (The Truth About 'Comfort Women and Nanking': Methods for Winning the Media War that Has Neen Set Up). Tokyo: Okura Shuppan.
- Ogata, Y. 2007. "The Truth about the Question of 'Comfort Women'." The homepage of the Society for the Dissemination of Historical Facts. <<http://www.sdh-fact.com/index.html>>
- Sakamoto, T. 2001. *Towareru Nihonjin no Rekishikankaku* [The Questionable Historical Understanding of Japanese]. Tokyo: Keisoshobo.
- Schneider, C. 2008. "The Japanese History Textbook Controversy in East Asia Perspective." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 617, 107-122.
- Seaton, P. 2006. "Reporting the 'Comfort Women' Issue, 1991-1992: Japan's Contested War Memories in the National Press." *Japanese Studies* 26:1, 99-112.
- Shin, S. 2003. "Justice Delayed: Accountability in the 'Comfort Women' Case." In: J. Stromseth (ed.) *Accountability for Atrocities: National and International Responses*, 413-448. New

York: Transnational Publishers.

- Tanaka, Y. 2002. *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution During World War II and the US Occupation*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Tawara, Y. 2001. *Kyookasho Koogeki no Shinsoo—'Ianfu Mondai' to 'Jiyuuchugishikan' no Sajutsu* [The Deep Structure of Textbook Attacks: The Tricks of 'Comfort Women' Issues and the 'Liberal View Toward History']. Tokyo: Gakushuu no Tomo Sha.
- Tokyo News Paper article. February 12, 2006. [http://www.tokyo-np.co.jp/00/tko/20060212/lcl\\_tko\\_003.shtml](http://www.tokyo-np.co.jp/00/tko/20060212/lcl_tko_003.shtml)
- Uesugi, S. 1996. 'Ianfu' wa Shookooi ka—'Ianfu' Mondai no Shinjitsu—Ianfu wa Shokoi ka [The truth about 'comfort women' issues—Are 'Comfort Women' Business Endeavors?] The homepage of the Center for Research and Documentation on Japan's War Responsibility. <<http://space.geocities.jp/japanwarres/center/library/uesugi01.htm>>
- Yoshida, S. 1977. *Chosenjin Ianfu to Nihonjin* [Korean Comfort Women and Japanese People]. Tokyo: Shin Jinbutsu Oraisha.
- Yoshida, S. 1983. *Watashi no Sensoo Hanzai—Chosenjin Kyoosei Renkoo* [My War Crimes—The Forced Transport of Koreans]. Tokyo: Sanichi Shobo.
- Yoshimi, Y. 2000. *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Violence Against Women in War—Network Japan (ed.). 2000. *Josei Kokusai Senhan Hotei no Zenkiroku* [The Complete Record of the International Women's Tribunal for War Crimes]. I and II. Tokyo: Ryokufu Shuppan.
- Wodak, R. 2006. “History in the Making/The Making of History: The ‘German Wehrmacht’ in Collective and Individual Memories in Austria.” *Journal of Language and Politics* 5:1, 125–154.
- Wodak, R., R. de Cillia, M. Reisigl and K. Liebhart. 1999. *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.