This study is an analysis of the pragmatization process of "toiuka (rather than)," as observed in three identical questionnaires conducted in 2003, 2008, and 2013. The Japanese expression "toiuka" was originally used as a compound word with the meaning "if I were to say one way" or "I would rather." However, in the past ten years, the phrase has undergone grammaticalization and pragmatization due to causes such as the frequent use on the Internet by young people, and has evolved into a pragmatic marker/discourse marker employed at the beginning of a utterance, often as the variations "teka," "teka," "tsuuka," "tsuka," "chuuka."

The results of the questionnaire surveys distributed to university students in Tokyo and Osaka show that in comparison to 2003, between 2008 and 2013, stylization progressed and regional and gender gaps could be recognized in the use of variants of "toiuka." For example, the students of Kansai Foreign Language University in Osaka, which is located in the western part of Japan, speak their own characteristic dialect. They show the tendency to employ variations of "toiuka" just after "Soyana" or "Soonan," which are words for response and are almost equivalent to "I see" or "Oh, is it?" The students of Japan Women’s University in the eastern part of Japan are clearer in accepting or not the various kinds of usages of the "toiuka" variations as discourse marker asked in the questionnaire than the male informants. This might be due to frequent communication among women.

These changes illustrate how the new usage is conventionalized in the people's speech. As time passes, the new usage is combined into their traditional speech style and becomes strict in its appropriateness.

Keywords: "pragmatization" "discourse marker" "regional dialect"