

Direction-Giving by A Woman at Work:
Context-Based Analysis of Gendered Speech

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Abstract

The present study investigates the speech style of a woman in a supervising position. The data for the study was a collection of natural conversations in which a female supervisor is giving training to a newly hired male reporter at a television station in Tokyo, Japan. This series of interactions is considered to be unique because the traditional hierarchy of man and woman is subverted. The analysis revealed that the speech style of this female supervisor was characterized by two qualities: authoritativeness and gentleness. Authority was expressed by the way she interrupts the trainee and gives quick and sharp directions. Gentleness came from the nurturing quality of her speech which involved the use of questions to guide the trainee. Although used rarely, female-marking particles helped her sound soft-spoken as well.

Key words: gender, discourse, speech style, profession

Introduction

The present study investigates the speech of a Japanese woman who is supervising a male subordinate. Gender marking expressions in the Japanese language have been investigated and their characteristics were reported by various researchers in the past (Ide, 1982; Jugaku, 1979; Shibamoto, 1985; Okamoto, 1994 and 1995; Sunaoshi, 1994; among others). In recent years, the existence of variations among women's speech has started to receive attention. Okamoto (1994 and 1995), for example, reported findings on variation regarding the frequency of the use of gender-marking particles depending on different age groups. Believing the importance of investigation on the variation in speech style among female speakers of Japanese, the speech style of a specific woman will be analyzed in a specific context. As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet

(1992a and 1992b) claim, one cannot see the relationship of gender and language unless one looks at the linguistic practice in a specific activity in a specific context. The data for the present study is a collection of natural conversations appearing in television documentary in which a television crew is conducting interviews in Tokyo. The scenes where the female supervisor is giving training to a newly hired male reporter on how to conduct a television interview were analyzed in particular. This series of interactions is considered to be unique because it is the woman who is in the position of authority, so the usual hierarchy of man and woman is subverted. The research questions that guided the present study are: (1) what are the characteristics of speech style of this woman who is in a supervising position, and (2) how are particles, particularly gender-marking particles, used in her speech?

Method and Analysis

Data used for the analysis is a two-hour television program broadcast in Japan. In the program, several reporters visit cake shops in Tokyo and report on the specials of each shop. The program was video- and audio-tape recorded and conversations were transcribed. In one particular scene, an established announcer of a broadcasting station in Tokyo trains a newly hired announcer. The supervisor is a female and the trainee is a male who makes his first appearance and first report on television. The supervisor goes to the site with him, waits in the van watching his performance on the monitor in the crew car. She has a microphone which is connected to the earphones the trainee is wearing. The supervisor makes comments, gives directions and instructions, whenever necessary, through the earphones he is wearing. The trainee makes a report in front of the camera following the guidance of the supervisor who is watching his performance in the crew van. The entire interactions including the trainee's report and the supervisor's reactions were taped. After his report, the supervisor met the trainee in the van and evaluated his performance. All their interactions were televised.

In analyzing and interpreting the data, four native speakers of Japanese were interviewed regarding their impressions of the interactions between the supervisor and the trainee. They read the transcription and gave initial impressions about the supervisor's speech. Then, they listened to the tape recorded interactions and offered additional impressions. Their comments were tape-recorded and used as an additional source of interpretation when analyzing the data. In the following section, the results and discussion will be reported.

Results and Discussion

The findings will be presented for each research question.

- 6 T: *hai. soshite*
yes. and
[yes. and
- 7 *kyoo-no watashi-no omeate kokoni*
today of I of purpose here
today's my purpose, a lot of cake,
- 8 *takkusan-no keeki-ga narandeimasu*
a lot of cake-SM lined up being
are being lined up here.]
-
- 9 S: *temijikani. motto shurui-ga takusan arukoto*
concisely. more variety-SM a lot exist
[Concisely. Introduce the fact that
- shookai shite.*
introduce
there is more variety.]
- 10 T: (he starts to describe one kind of cake)

In this scene, the trainee starts the report, but does not immediately describe the cakes. The supervisor gets irritated with it and leads him with the specific directions, which is to move quickly to the core topic, cake description. In line 9, she uses the bare adverb *temijikani*, meaning 'concisely', to encourage him to speed up. Immediately after that, she tells him to introduce the variation of cakes. She says '*motto shurui-ga takusan arukoto shookai shite*' meaning 'introduce the fact that there is more variety of cakes.' Here she uses the gerund form of the verb, and uses it as the light form of order. Here the gerund form of the verb *suru* meaning 'do' is used and takes a less imposing form of order. As in line 5 of (2), here again the short utterance *motto akaruku* meaning 'more cheerfully' is used. Then, short utterances with nouns such as '*ano kamera. kamera chuui.*' point out his poor standing position in front of the camera. This interaction shows the crispness of her speech, consisting of a series of bare adverbs and nouns, and gerund forms for giving directions. This series of short utterances makes her sound quite business-like. In another scene, she uses a gerund form of direction-giving which is considered to be less imposing.

(2) Trainee stands in front of the interviewee.

- 1 T: *kukkiirui deshooka.*
 cookies I wonder
 [I wonder if they are cookies.]
- 2 *takusan no kukkii-ga narande imasu.*
 a log of cookies SM lined up being
 [A lot of cookies are here.]
- 3 S: *motto motto tenpo appu*
 more more tempo up
 [Speed up much more.]
- 4 *shinaito omoshirokunai.*
 if not won't be interesting
 [It won't be interesting if you did not speed up much more!]
- 5 *motto akaruku.*
 more cheerfully
 [More cheerfully!]
- 6 S: *ano kamera kamera cyuui.*
 well, camera camera caution
 [Well, camera, camera, caution]
- 7 *intabyuu shiteiru aitenao kao ga mienai.*
 interviewing person face can't be seen
 [We can't see the face of the person (you are) interviewing.]
- 8 *dokoni tatten no?*
 where standing?
 [Where (are you) standing?]
- 9 T: *hai...*(interview continues)
 yes
 [Yes.]

In line 3 of (3), the supervisor encourages the reporter to be calm and relaxed before she sends him off to the front of the camera.

(3) Before the report

- 1 T: *jaa kobayashi-san hajimeteno ripooto*
 well Ms. Kobayashi first report
 [Well, Ms. Kobayashi, I will go for my first
- 2 *omoikitte itte mairimasu*
 bravely go
 report bravely]
- 3 S: *ochitsuite-ne. rirakkusu shite.*
 be calm P relax
 [Be calm and relax!]
- 4 T: *wakarimashita.*
 understood
 [Certainly]
- 5 S: *hai. itterasshai.*
 yes go
 [Yes, good luck!]

Ochitsuite-ne and *rirakkusushite* are both ending with a gerund form of the verb *suru*. This form is usually considered to be used to make a light order. Here by using the order form, she sounds authoritative, but gentle since this form sounds less imposing than other forms, such as ‘*ochitsukinasai*’ or ‘*ochitsuka nakucha dame*’ which both mean ‘you have to be calm.’ This choice of less imposing forms makes her sound nurturing and even soft.

Ask and Guide

Although the frequency was not as large as with the first strategy, the ‘ask and guide’ strategy was used next often in her speech. ‘Ask and guide’ means that the supervisor asks leading questions to retrieve a specific answer from the trainee and thus guides him to the answer she is thinking of, instead of directly correcting his mistakes.

(4) Review of the report

- 1 S: *iyaa soonee*
 well
 [well. . .]

- 2 T: *kotoba arimasen*
word doesn't exist
[I have no words (to say)]
- 3 S: 40 *ten*
40 points
[40%]
- 4 T: *hai*
yes
[yes]
- 5 S: 40 *ten. shefu ni ohanashi ukagattadesho. demo*
40 points chef to story heard but
[40%. You heard his story, right, and]
- 6 T: *hai*
yes
[yes]
- 7 S: *sono shefu-ga ichiban itainowa nandattano?*
that chef-SM most want to say what was it
[What was the thing the chef wanted to say most?]
- 8 *nani ga ichiban kikitakattano?*
what SM most wanted to ask
[What did you want to ask most?]
- 9 T: *ichiban okiki shitakattano wa*
most wanted to ask TM
[What I wanted to ask most was]
- 10 *naze sonnani keekini taishite*
why that much cake toward
[why he has that much devotion toward]
- 11 *kodawari-o motte irassharunoka soreto*
devotion-OM have and
[cake and]
- 12 S: *oobon byuutan tte naani*
oobon byuutan what
[What is 'oobon byuutan'?]

comment. In line 5 of (1), she urges him to move on to the cake topic and she follows it up with the explanation, *keekiya san desukara-ne*, meaning ‘that is because this is the cake shop after all.’ This use of *ne* gives her speech an authoritative and logical touch, which makes her sound ‘being on the top of things.’

(7) Correcting a mistake

- 1 T: *soshite chotto kochira-o goran kudasai.*
and a little this one look please
[and please take a look at this one]
- 2 *kochira-niwa futsuu no furansugashi niwa*
here normal french sweets
[here, I think that (we can't find) this among normal]
- 3 *zettaini naito omoundesuga*
absolutely not exist think but
[french confectionary, and]
- 4 *piza-ga narande imasu.*
pizza-SM line up being
[pizzas are being lined up]
- 5 S: *hontooni piza? sore piza?*
really pizza that pizza
[Is that really a pizza? Is that a pizza?]
- 6 *pizani mienaikedo.*
pizza look not
[It doesn't look like a pizza.]
- 7 *namae chigaunjanai?*
name different isn't it
[Isn't the name wrong?]
- 8 T: *sumimasen. kochira-wa nandeshooka.*
excuse me this one-TM what will be
[Excuse me. I wonder what this is.]
- 9 Store clerk: *pai desu.*
pai is
[This is a pie.]

- 10 T: *pai desuka.*
pie is
[This is a pie.]
- 11 S: *namae machigaenai yooni-ne.*
name make a mistake try-P
[(Make sure) you won't make mistakes with the name.]
- 12 T: *hai. kore-wa tomatono taruto desu.*
yes. this-TM tomato of tart is.
[Yes. This is a tomato tart.]

Line 11 of (7) also shows that she is using *ne* after *namae machigaenaiyooni* meaning 'make sure you try not to mix up the names.' Here again, she uses *ne* to make sure and this makes her sound authoritative, and even slightly pushy and controlling. The use of this particle, *ne*, with so-called gender-marking particles *no* and *noyo* is shown in (8) and (4).

(8) Going to the basement

- 1 T: *...soredewa keeki no tsukurarete iru chika*
then cake of made being basement
[then, I am going to the basement where cake is
- 2 *no hoo ni chotto itte mitai to omoimasu.*
of direction to a little go and try think
[being made, I think]
- 3 *kitsui kaidan ni natte masu.*
steep stairs are
[(this is) the steep stairway]
- 4 S: *'keeki no tsukurarete iru' janakute 'keeki-o*
cake made being is not cake OM
[Don't say, '(the place where) the cake is being made.']
- 5 *tsukutte iru' de ii noyo-ne*
make being is good GMP-P
[It's good enough to say, '(the place where they) are making cake.']
- 6 T: *hai.*
yes
[yes]

In lines 4 and 5 of (8), the supervisor makes corrections of the phrase used by the trainee. She refers to an inappropriate expression first and then gives a correct one by saying '*keeki no tsukurareteiru*' *janakute* '*keeki o tsukutteiru*' *deinoyone* meaning "it's not 'the place where the cake is made,' but 'the place they are making cake' is good enough, you know." Error-correction is face-threatening, and she does it in a straightforward and business like manner. She might have tried to soften the impact of the error-correction by using a gender-marking particle. She does the same thing in line 16 of (4). Here, she reviews and evaluates the trainee's performance. She is trying to guide him to his shortcomings. Responding to the answer by the trainee, she says '*sooyone*' meaning '*that's the case, you know.*' The use of '*sooyone*' which is with the gender-marking particle seemed to help her sound soft and nurturing.

Comments from Native Speakers

Finally, the comments made by the native speakers who read the transcription and listened to the recorded interactions are introduced here. They generally thought the supervisor's speech sounds authoritative, controlling, pushy, and capable. Although her speech gives a rather 'man-like image,' she also gives an impression of '*gobi ga yawarakai*' which literally means 'the speech with a soft ending,' actually meaning 'soft-spoken.' One native speaker was a female supervisor in her professional life, and felt the supervisor on television was a good teacher. She thought she would probably use more forceful expressions if she were giving directions, such as *kikanakya damejanai* meaning 'you have to ask' instead of *kiita hooga iinja nai?* meaning 'isn't it better to ask?'

Conclusion

The present study has shown that the speech of one woman in a supervising position was a mixture of mainly two qualities: authoritativeness and gentleness. Authority was expressed by the way she interrupts the trainee and gives quick and sharp directions. Use of *ne*, which is the touch of confirmation, also helped her to sound authoritative. Gentleness came from the nurturing nature of her speech which involved the use of questions to guide the trainee. Although used rarely, female-marking particles were used to help her sound soft-spoken as well.

The speech style of the supervisor here might have been more or less affected by the fact that she was conscious of being broadcast on television. If she had been giving training behind the camera, her authoritativeness and gentleness might have been expressed in a different degree or in different ways. More investigation on the language use of female speakers in professional situations is needed to determine how gender qualities are expressed in specific contexts.

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