

## Gender Differences in Using Strategies: From the Pragmatic Perspectives

Keiko SATO

### INTRODUCTION

Every culture has, in some degree, different ways in which men and women use language. Sex is indeed one of the factors differentiating language use in some respect from feminist, sociolinguistic, sociopragmatic and pedagogical perspectives.

R. Lakoff (1975), a study based on her hypothesis that women speak in a different way from the way men do (e. . in discriminating color names, and using particles, adjectives, tag questions and polite expressions), accelerated the woman liberation movement in the seventies from the feminist perspective of language use. Some researchers support her basic argument on one hand and many others propose empirical evidence against her hypothesis on the other hand.

Japan is one of the particular societies in which social norms exercise great influence over language use in terms of sexes. No one would reject that there are linguistic differences in use between men and women in Japan. Admitting the existence of sociolinguistic difference in gender, are there also any pragma-linguistic differences between both sexes in Japan? If there are any, to what extent are there differences cross-sexually in the specific speech acts? Are they universal or culture-specific?

This paper is intended as an investigation of pragmatic differences in language use between men and women through the previous studies in this field. Literature review is presented concerning cross-cultural research on pragmatic differences between men's and women's speech in these two decades. The focus is particularly on adjectives, directives, rising intonation, interruption and politeness in the different degree of use by women and men. An attempt to obtain some corroborative evidence from the Japanese society will be made on the next stage.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Lakoff (1975), by her introspection and intuition, offers some examples of speech aspects as characteristics of language used by women. Among them, two groups of adjectives are listed as neutral use and women use only. Wolfson (1984) finds that numerous examples which Lakoff demonstrated were used by women, but which were used by men when addressing or referring to women are used by both sexes. Lakoff also claims that tag questions and rising intonation assertions are for women. However, a number of empirical research has been conducted so far to find definite counter-evidence from sociolinguistic

tic perspective.

# 1) Adjectives

Lakoff (1975) shows the following adjectives differentiated for women only from those for neutral use;

Table 1 Adjectives Differentiated by Sexes

<i>neutral use</i>	<i>women only</i>
great	adorable
terrific	charming
cool	sweet
neat	lovely
	divine

(Lakoff, 1975; 22)

Taking an example from Lakoff, (1a) can be used freely by a male or female, while (1b) is restricted in use to a female speaker.

- (1) (a) What a terrific idea!  
 (b) What a divine idea! (Lakoff, 1975; 22)
- (2) (a) Sugoi kangae da!  
 (b) Sutekina kangae ne!

Free from considering the particles 'da' and 'ne' at the sentence end in (2), a user of (2b) is most possibly a female, otherwise the speaker may be imitating a woman's way of talking or a homosexual, as Lakoff stated 20 years ago.

15 years later from Lakoff's offer of this issues, Wolfson (1984), with the analysis of adjectives in compliment in American English, analyzed whether the sex and status of the addressee had something to do with compliment realization. While a female uses the speech act of compliment to her peer or boss of the same sex, a male frequently uses comments on physical shape or outfit to his female colleagues or subordinates like this:

- (3) I love your skirt and your blouse.  
 (4) I'm impressed with your figure.

With (3) or (4) may be followed by "you should wear them more often" or "you don't have to worry about the calories." Such comments imply the social etiquette that men should make some comments as a form of compliment to women. The conclusion, which is again the counter-evidence to Lakoff's argument on speaking like a lady, is that "the way a woman is spoken to, no matter what her status, is a subtle and powerful way of perpetuating her subordinate role in society" (243).

Homes (1988) examines men's and women's complimenting behavior from the corpus of over 450 samples in New Zealand English in terms of sex of compliment responses. Her study gives further evidence to the basic assumption that "women tend to use and perceive compliments as solidarity signals, while men are more likely to experience them as FTAs" (462; 464). There are some differences in men's perspectives to women and in women's perception when receiving compliments.

## **2) Directives**

Differences of directives and assertions are seen between men and women in use. Koike (1986) investigates the directive expressions used by adult middle-class male and female speakers in Carioca Brazilian Portuguese. 45 informants were asked to tell someone not to sit in a chair reserved for their father. There were three different relationships shown between the addresser and addressee: to a higher social ranking stranger, a same sex and social ranking friend, and an acquainted child. The variations in the form of the directive are (1) order, (2) assertions, (3) suggestions, (4) requests, (5) hints, (6) silence by the order from the strongest to the weakest in the ordinary situation. This study suggests that there are differences between men's and women's language in certain types of directives and that men and women use politeness strategies in different ways. The differences reflect social order. Lakoff's claim, which states that men's and women's languages are different in directiveness and assertiveness, can be said, although subtle and context-specific, to be supported by Koike's investigation.

Smith (1992) compares the directives used by women in higher positions with the directives by men in similar positions in terms of linguistic politeness scales. Her data from television cartoons oriented toward boys and toward girls and television shows by a female cooking instructor and a male carpentry instructor support the claim that women are more polite than men. She suggests that there may be new strategies emerging relating to 'power'. She names them the 'Motherese Strategy' and the 'Passive Power Strategy'. She concludes that "women may rather attempt to resolve the [linguistic] conflict [between gender and status] by empowering their own speech...and that they are creating new and powerful strategies on the female power continuum that is distinct from the male power continuum" (79).

## **3) Intonation and Tag Question**

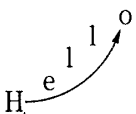
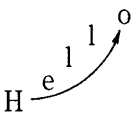
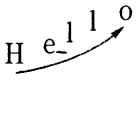
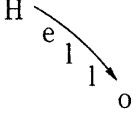
According to Lakoff (1975), tag questions are only one syntactic structure in English used more frequently by women than by men. The syntactic structure is placed between a statement and a yes-no question; that is, the speaker has some knowledge about the subject of the topics but has no or little confidence in the truth. She wants confirmation by the hearer. Lakoff's logic is that women have less confidence in anything than men, then women use more tag questions.

And that women use more tag questions with more rising intonation than men do. Rising intonation implies the request of confirmation by yes or no. Besides women use this in-

tonation pattern not only with tag questions but with wh-questions, which usually require falling intonation because the structure is replied neither by yes nor no, but also with declaratives, which usually are spoken with falling intonation for the same reason as wh-questions. After all, women use rising intonation in all kinds of syntactic structure, while men use less such intonation in the same situation.

Intonation is indeed one of the indicators of a speaker's sex. Brend (1972) states that men are likely to terminate at the lowest level, using rising intonation at final position only for special effects. Pike (1946) suggests that women frequently use intonation with final rise for many sentence patterns. McConnell-Ginet (1983) explains six differences in intonation by using the two different terms, "variation" and "selection". The former refers to 'alternative ways of uttering the "same" linguistic unit,' while the latter term refers to selective ways of uttering the "different" linguistic units. For example, women use the most dynamic rising intonation when they answer the phone by 'Hello', while men may also use rising intonation in the same situation. These are variation. The second kinds are that women more often answer the phone by 'Hello' with rising intonation, whereas men may prefer hello with falling intonation. These are examples of 'selection' (72). Figure 2 shows such sex-difference.

Table 2 Intonation Differentiation of "Hello" by Sexes

	Variation	Selection
female		
male		

Conducted from McConnell-Ginet (1983)

It is clear that there is a distinct difference in intonational preference between both sexes. Why do men and women have different preference in using intonational patterns? What causes women to use rising intonation more often than men? Lakoff (1975) presents the following example in order to maintain that women use rising intonation in the declarative answer to a question:

- (5) (a) When will dinner be ready?  
 (b) Oh, ...around six o'clock...? (Lakoff, 1975; 29)

According to Lakoff, (b) sounds 1) unsure of herself, 2) unwilling to assert an opinion, 3) hesitant to give a definite answer, or 4) of no confidence in making up her mind.

Brend (1975) characterizes the intonation patterns often used by women as "polite and cheerful," "unexpectedness and surprise," "hesitation," and "incomplete and unexpected." There are many interpretations for (5b). It might mean "why do you need to know?" or "are you listening to me?" or "do you want to eat earlier?" as McConnell-Ginet provides as some examples (79). The speaker of (b) might only desire to continue the conversation. It is possible that original intonation pattern started being used only by women for the feministic reasons, but the reason no longer seems to reflect on the sex difference in selecting intonation patterns. It may be "a product of our 'learning' to sound like women and men" (83) and "intonational 'habits' are established without conscious consideration of available options."

#### 4) Interruption

Another indicator of a speaker's sex is a degree of frequency in overlapping or interrupting the ongoing speech by the other party of conversation. There are some research supporting the assertion that men freely and frequently interrupt women and not vice versa in cross-sex interactions. West (1979) investigates deep intrusions by male and female college students. Deep intrusion is defined as "more than two syllables away from the terminal boundaries of a possibly complete utterance" (82). Deep intrusions by overlapping a female speaker's current speech may be considered as a male intruder's attempt to control the conversation. In the following example,

(6) Male: Where the hell have you been?

Female: Well I had to find Foster n' { then }

Male: { Do } you realize

What time it is?

(West, 1979; 83)

a man asked a question of a woman. She tried to reply sincerely to the question. Nevertheless he did not listen to her answer as far as the end, but interrupted her ongoing speech by another question unrelated to the current topic. Such examples can be easily found in the real world. West discovered that "males were found to interrupt females three times as often as females interrupted males" (78; Editors' abstract). However, some other observational studies show that a female's reactions to a male interruption are to cede her right to keep the turn to an interrupter, to drop out the rest of her speech, and to wait for a chance to take her turn of speaking. West's results show that there are no different patterns of response to interruption by the other sex. "These results do not generate displays of 'submission' by female" (79).

West and Zimmerman (1983) define interruption as "violations of speakers' turns at talk" (103). They investigate interruption in twenty-minute free talking in the laboratory by five male and five female university students. Subjects were designed to be unacquainted with one another. This study reveals the same finding as their earlier research;

men's initiation of interruption is three times more frequent than women's initiated interruption in the cross-sex exchanges. There have been discussions to find out why men interrupt women. Several suggestions are offered; relationship between interruption and dominance, women's talkativeness, different talking styles, showing interest or disinterest, and others. West and Zimmerman concludes that interruption is "a way of 'doing' power in face-to-face interaction, and to the extent that power is implicated in what it means to be a man vis-a-vis a woman, it is a way of 'doing' gender as well" (111).

It was Tannen (1990) who proposed that mechanical criteria used in studies to identify interruptions are controversial in that the counting method does not take into account contents of topics, speakers' intentions, reactions to interactors, and effects of interruptions. She argues that all overlappings are not always instances caused by the intention of interruption. They might be reinforcement or contradiction or change in topic. Besides, some people may be injured by overlapping, feeling interrupted, and some others may do not. A same person may be harmed in mind by feeling interrupted in a certain time or occasion, and may not in another occasion. She maintains that "interruption is not a mechanical category" but "a matter of individual perceptions of rights and obligations" (192). There are interruption without overlap and overlap without interruption. It is difficult to identify interrupting instances. There are two styles of talking; rapport-talk and report-talk. And there are two types of speakers; of high involvement, who are likely to "show support and participation by enthusiastic involvement", and of high considerateness, who are likely to "give priority to being considerate of others by not imposing" (196). The speakers who have similar talking styles take overlapping as support and participation, while those who do not regard overlapping as interruption and a show of disinterest. However, there is a definite tendency that women are highly considerate of others and have rapport-talk style, while men are highly involved in conversations by controlling them and have report-talk style. If a woman interrupt a man, she intends to show a sign of agreement, but he interprets it as her control of the conversation. If a man interrupts a woman, he intends to compete with her, expecting her opinion, but she yields the floor to him because she is not accustomed to competing for the floor. Tannen does not attribute the greater frequency of interruption of women by men to men's dominance over men.

Another explanation for men's more interruption of women is that men are ruder and women are politer in language use. Is it true that there is a distinct difference in politeness between the ways of talking of men and women? A great many of studies report supporting data.

## 5) Politeness

Ide et al (1986) makes a part modification of Lakoff's hypothesis that women are politer than men in language use. Women's politer speech is attributed to women's lower status in society. They attempt to investigate the correlation of linguistic forms of politeness and factors causing polite attitude in order to find the mechanism of women's politer

speech. A scale of politeness was made in the five point continuum.

In the first question, the variations of 'iku' (meaning 'go') were decided to fail on what level of the scale by Japanese subjects aged 40-70, mostly businessmen and housewives. By the second question, the types of addressees to whom the subjects would use each politeness level were investigated. By the third question, the choice of linguistic forms which the subjects would use to the addressees mentioned earlier. Computational multi-analyses were done in terms of politeness levels, interactions, and cross-sex. They conclude that "speakers make linguistic choices not because of their sex, but because of the function ... e. g. the function of keeping distance or the function of creating rapport" (35).

The reason of differences in politeness between male and female might come from the differences in judgement of proper politeness in various situations. Baroni and D'Urso (1984) attempt two experiments in order to make a distinction between subordinate role and female gender. Recordings of a male and a female voice were prepared, for which in the first experiment subjects were asked to answer a written questionnaire on the speaker's social distance, financial status, occupation, appearance, and the forth. Their judgement of male and female voice was analyzed. In the second experiment, two different texts in degree of politeness were prepared. Each of four groups divided was asked to listen to one of the four versions (male basic, female basic, polite male, and polite female) and to answer the same questionnaire as the experiment I. These experiments disprove Lakoff's hypotheses, making a conclusion that "neither sex nor linguistic politeness seems to affect to a great extent the speaker's profiles elicited from the judging subjects" (71).

The difference of politeness in language use between males and females is supposedly influenced by the social way of thinking. There may be some differences between modernized by the social way of thinking. There may be some differences between modernized societies and less modernized ones. Smith-Hefner (1988) attempts to explore the relationship between the status of Javanese woman informants. Their perception to women's status reflects their speech. Smith-Hefner has no desire to recognize that it is a signal of the lower position of Javanese women to offer polite deference to their husbands. This phenomenon is very similar to that of the past Japan in spite of the difference of religions. Polite speech serves "both as an index of politeness and a mechanism of potentially coercive in reactional power" (552).

In the public situation, women tend to fail to use appropriate polite expressions because of their lesser experience (542). Smith-Hefner maintains that although women are required to be more polite toward men within the family setting, "men are publicly more polite, while women, their political subordinates, speak less politely and with less power" (552). Judging from my experience and observation, Javanese phenomenon seems to be due to the difference in formal and public experience between men and women in Java.

Japan, a more modernized society in Asia, still today, demands relatively a great difference in language use between men and women. It appears at sentence-final position. McGloin (1990) classifies Japanese sentence-final particles *zo*, *ze*, *sa*, *yo* (type I), *na*, *ne*, (type II), *na*, *ne*, (type III), and further *wa* and *no*. She investigates their maleness and

femaleness in use, and concludes that “*wa* and *no* are essentially positive politeness strategies,” “a very important aspect of women’s speech in Japanese” (37). She explains that *wa* expresses emotional feeling and *no* adds a feminine tone. The contextualization with these particles differentiates expressions to be used by men and women that the society demands.

Japan looks particularly westernized in the conservative and Confucian Asia. Language use in a society, however, may reveal the remaining concept or changed concept that the people have had. Wetzel (1988) examines the superficial similarities of Japanese communication strategies and Western female communication strategies using the notion of power. She contrasts the statements on female interaction patterns in the West and Japanese (not particularly female) patterns by citing from Maltz and Borker (1982), Lebra (1976, 1984), and others (see Wetzel, 1988). They explain the parallels between Western women’s communication strategies and Japanese people’s communication strategies by ‘powerless language’, Wetzel attempts to suggest the supposedly misleading explanation by pointing out the culturally different concept of ‘power’ between Western and Japanese societies. This attempt of explanation fails to persuade Japanese people why they use ‘powerless language.’ The reason cannot be concluded without further research.

Ide (1990) investigates how and why Japanese women speak more politely based on the data gained in Ide et al. (1986). Her co-researcher work found three reasons of sex differences in the use of linguistic forms, women’s lower assessment or appropriate politeness level, and women’s frequent use of interactional pattern calling for higher linguistic forms. She summarizes the features of women’s politer speech in terms of Brown and Levinson’s positive and negative politeness and Goffman’s deference and demeanor, in which she suggests that sex differences involving politeness are universal and complex.

## CONCLUSION

The differences of language use by different genders are recognized cross-culturally from the pragmatic perspective as well as from the socio-linguistic perspective. In this literature survey, there were differences in directive and assertive expressions (Koike, Smith), compliment realization (Wolfson, Holmes), intonation (McConnell-Ginet, Brend), interruption (West, West and Zimmerman, Tannen), degree of polite expressions used (Ide et al., Ide, Smith-Hefner), conversational control (Singh and Lele), and contextualization of particles (McGloin). There were no differences in judgement of politeness (Baroni and D’Urso) and use of adjectives (Wolson). The existence of gender differences in language use is proved in many aspects. However, more research is needed for a definite conclusion.

## REFERENCES

- Baroni, M. R. and D’Urso, V. 1984. Some experimental findings about the questions of politeness and women’s speech. *Language in Society* 13, 67-72.



- Brend, R. M. 1972. Male-female intonation patterns on American English. In B. Thorne and N. Henley (Eds.), *Language and sex: Difference and dominance*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1975.
- Brown, P. 1990. Gender, Politeness, and Confrontation in Tenjapa. *Discourse Processes* 13, 123-41.
- Brown, P. and Levinson, S. 1987. *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holms, J. 1988. Paying Compliments: A Sex Preferential Politeness Strategy. *Journal of Pragmatics* 12, 445-465.
- Ide, S., Hori, M., Kawasaki, A., Ikuta, S., and Haga, H. 1986. Sex difference and Politeness in Japanese. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 58, 25-36.
- Ide, S. 1990. How and Why Do Women Speak More Politely in Japanese? In S. Ide and N. H. McGloin (Eds.), *Aspects of Japanese Women's Language*. Tokyo: Kuroshio.
- Koike, D. A. 1986. Differences and Similarities in Men's and Woman's Directives in Carioca Brazilian Portuguese. *Hispania* 69, 387-94.
- Lakoff, R. 1975. *Language and Woman's Place*. New York: Octagon Books.
- Lebra, T. S. 1976. *Japanese patterns of behavior*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- McConnell-Ginet, S. 1983. Intonation in a Man's World. In B. Thorne, C. Kramarae, and N. Henley (Eds.), *Language, Gender and Society*. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House.
- Maltz, D. N. and Borker, R. A. 1982. A cultural approach to male-female miscommunication. In J. J. Gumperz (Ed.), *Language and social identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 196-216.
- McGloin, N. H. 1990. Sex Difference and Sentence-Final Particles. In S. Ide and N. H. McGloin (Eds.), *Aspects of Japanese Women's Language*. Tokyo: Kuroshio.
- Poynton, C. 1989. Speaking as woman/man. In *Language and gender: making the difference*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, J. S. 1992. Women in charge: Politeness and directives in the speech of Japanese women. *Language in Society* 21, 59-82.
- Smith-Hefner, N. J. 1988. Women and politeness: The Javanese example. *Language in Society* 17, 535-54.
- Tannen, D. 1990. Who's Interrupting?: Issues of Dominance and Control. In D. Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Tannen, D. 1994. Interpreting Interruption in Conversation. In D. Tanne, *Gender and Discourse*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- West, C. 1979. Against Our Will: Male Interruptions of Females in Cross-Sex Conversation. In J. Orasnu, M. K. Slater, and L. L. Adler (Eds.), *Language, Sex and Gender. Does "La Difference" Make a Difference?* The New York Academy of Sciences.
- West, C. and Zimmerman, D. H. 1983. Small Insults: A Study of interruptions in Cross-sex Conversations between Unacquainted Persons. In B. Thorne, C. Kramarae and N. Henley (Eds.), *Language, Gender and Society*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.
- Wetzel, P. J. 1988. Are "powerless" communication strategies the Japanese norm? *Language in Society* 17, 555-64.
- Wolfson, N. 1984. Pretty Is As Pretty Does: A Speech Act View of Sex Roles. *Applied Linguistics* 5, 236-244.