

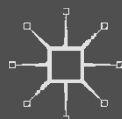
series editor: Jonathan Crichton

Japanese at Work

Politeness, Power, and Personae in Japanese Workplace Discourse

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Edited by Haruko Minegishi Cook and Janet S. Shibamoto-Smith



Communicating in Professions and Organizations

Series Editor

Jonathan Crichton
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Janet S. Shibamoto-Smith
Editors

Japanese at Work

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Japanese Workplace Discourse

palgrave
macmillan

Editors

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1

Introduction

Haruko Minegishi Cook
and Janet S. Shibamoto-Smith

This volume empirically explores how different linguistic resources are used to achieve appropriate workplace role inhabitation and to achieve work-oriented communicative ends in a variety of workplaces in Japan. Appropriate role inhabitation is seen to include considerations of gender and interpersonal familiarity (e.g., time in service), along with speaker orientation to normative structures for marking power and politeness. How linguistic resources are deployed to achieve the “right” workplace persona for specific interactional moments is the underlying focus of all the contributions to this volume.

With a few notable exceptions, including the massive paired studies from the 1990s, *Josee no Kotoba: Shokubahen* ‘Women’s Speech: In the Workplace’ and *Danse no Kotoba: Shokubahen* ‘Men’s Speech: In the Workplace’ (published as a single volume in Gendai Nihongo Kenkyūkai 2011), Japanese workplace discourse based on naturally occurring data

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has not been fully investigated. This is, perhaps, in part because the workplace is “a restricted research site” (Mullany 2007), but this has not impeded recent researchers from beginning to find ways to develop workplace discourse projects cross-culturally, as we delineate below. Some follow-up work to the paired 1990s studies has also begun in Japan. Gaps remain, nonetheless, in the literature on Japanese workplace discourse, and this project aims to fill some of those gaps.

Research on workplace discourse in Western scholarship has investigated a wide variety of topics including identity construction and speech acts in different workplaces (e.g., Angouri and Marra 2012; Baxter 2008; Koester 2006; Holmes et al. 1999; Holmes 2006; Marra 2012; Mullany 2007; Rees and Monrouxe 2010). It has analyzed how leadership identities are constructed in a wide range of professional and institutional settings. Leadership identities are often constructed by performing speech acts, such as setting agenda, summarizing decisions, and closing the meeting (e.g., Holmes et al. 1999). A higher status can be indexed by the initiating and closing of teasing sequences and small talk as well (Holmes and Stubbe 2003; Mullany 2007; Rees and Monrouxe 2010). For example, Rees and Monrouxe (2010), who studied interactions among a student, patient, and doctor in bedside teaching encounters in a medical workplace in the UK, report that it is usually students who are teased and it is doctors who terminate laughter by resuming non-laughing talk. Those in higher positions, however, do not always assert their power and often minimize status asymmetries by various indirect strategies including negative politeness strategies (Brown and Levinson 1987). In addition, collaborative talk makes status difference less obvious and creates a more equal relationship (e.g., Holmes and Stubbe 2003).

Some studies especially investigated how professional identities are constructed through gendered language (e.g., Mullany 2007). One of the questions about gendered language in the workplace is whether male and female workers in managerial positions issue directives differently (Holmes 2006; Mullany 2007). The dominant ideology associated with workplace directives assumes that while male workers’ directives are direct, contestive, and authoritative, female workers’ directives are indirect and less authoritative. Contrary to this assumption, the findings of the studies based on naturally occurring workplace interactions indicate

that male and female workers in managerial positions use a wide range of directives, including ones typically associated with the other gender (Holmes 2006; Mullany 2007). This line of research demonstrates that gender is not a major factor that influences the choice of directives. Rather, choice of directives is generally made according to relative power, status, and role responsibility. However, gender inequality in workplaces still remains, due to male and female professionals' perception of gender ideologies (cf. Mullany 2007).

Other studies examined how disagreement is dealt with in the workplace (Angouri 2012; Holmes and Marra 2004; Marra 2012; McCrae 2009). The research found that direct expression of disagreement in the workplace is generally uncommon. In New Zealand workplaces, disagreements are often expressed implicitly or indirectly among co-workers who are native speakers of English (Holmes and Marra 2004). In intercultural settings, disagreements tend to be reinterpreted as miscommunication or misunderstanding (Marra 2012). In some communities, however, disagreement is considered a "normal" work-related action. In companies in Europe, participants in meetings treat "disagreement" as an inherent part of the problem-solving process and do not perceive disagreement as a face-threatening act or impoliteness (Angouri 2012).

In addition, this line of research in Western settings (e.g., Holmes and Stubbe 2003; Vine 2004) often touches upon the correlation between power and politeness in workplace interactions, which offers information about how workers not only work to achieve their institutional goals but also to maintain good social relationships in workplaces. Some studies have analyzed directives in the workplace to see whether professionals mitigate their directives to accommodate their co-workers' face needs (Holmes and Stubbe 2003; Holmes and Woodhams 2013; Koester 2006; Vine 2004). These studies indicate that in issuing directives, professionals carefully manage the balance between getting things done and keeping a good relationship with their subordinates by taking situational factors into consideration (Holmes and Stubbe 2003; Holmes and Woodhams 2013; Koester 2006; Vine 2009). Holmes and Stubbe (2003) show that context and setting, the nature and length of relationships, and/or the nature of the required task affect how managers issue directives to their subordinates. For example, a superior tends to use indirect forms to an

unfamiliar subordinate, but her directives may become more direct once the two become comfortable with one another. Attention to co-workers' feelings is another important consideration in issuing directives (Vine 2009). Directives exchanged between equals are always mitigated, and managers soften their directives to their subordinates. In the workplace, where rapport among co-workers is indispensable (Holmes and Marra 2004), humor and small talk contribute to enhancing rapport and minimizing power differences. Humor can mitigate face-threatening acts such as disagreements and requests. Workers in a subordinate position can deploy humor in order to express resistance or disagreement. In addition, humor works as a "tension release" (Holmes and Stubbe 2003: 71) when participants in a meeting face difficult situations. In sum, research on workplace discourse in Western scholarship has demonstrated that (1) professionals discursively construct their identity in workplace interaction; (2) workplace gender inequality persists due to professionals' perception and evaluation of gender ideologies rather than use of gendered language; and (3) professionals carefully balance between power and politeness by paying attention to face-needs of their co-workers.

A few studies on Japanese workplaces (e.g., Miller 1988, 1994; Murata 2014, 2015; Saito 2011, 2012; [Shibamoto] Smith 1992; Takano 2005; Yamada 1992) suggest that Japanese business discourse differs from that of the West. This assessment, too, needs more focused empirical support, requiring empirical studies such as several of the contributions in this volume, which directly address findings from the corresponding empirical work in Western settings. But beyond focused comparisons to findings of interest in other regions, it is of critical importance to offer detailed empirical studies of aspects of the Japanese workplace that complicate the associations of, for example, politeness to power(lessness); gender to particular workplace role asymmetries; and workplace talk to seriousness and formality. For example, with respect to the relation between politeness and power, Takano (2005) reported that politeness is a display of power. Since Takano's research predominantly focuses on female professionals in managerial positions, however, it is vital to investigate how other Japanese workers manipulate power and politeness. Further, we need to know more about exactly how power and politeness are negotiated and strategically balanced in different Japanese workplaces, differently located

on societal scales of prestige. Several of the contributions to the volume address either issues of politeness and power or of differences between workplaces, or both. Moreover, research on Japanese workplace discourse needs to include foreign corporations in Japan. Although foreign-invested companies in Japan would be insightful research sites, to date, there have been only a few studies (e.g., Miller 2000; Moody 2014) that focus on intercultural communication at work. This volume also includes one contribution dealing with this critical area.

Finally, the workplace is the primary site where recent graduates from high school or college are socialized into the new identity, *shakaijin* (mature, contributing adult in society). Nevertheless, despite its critical role in the transition from childhood to adulthood, the workplace socialization process has not been investigated with the exception of Dunn (2011). Two of the chapters included here (Chap. 2 by Dunn and Chap. 3 by Cook) make significant contributions to this area of research, adding to the largely Western research on language socialization in the workplace that starts from an understanding of the workplace as “a site where everyone at some stage is new to the environment and has to be socialized into its particular linguistic and cultural environment” (Roberts 2010: 214). The chapters by Dunn and Cook span the “three aspects of workplace language socialization – corporate, professional, and social or personal” (Roberts 2010: 216)—as they are presented to new employees for their adoption in the construction of desired workplace *personae*. Chap. 4 by Shibamoto-Smith approaches the mediatized messages about appropriate workplace communication available in televisual representations, another, albeit less direct, source of “information” about how workplace verbal interaction “should” proceed.

The remainder of the chapters bring together empirical research that explores how linguistic resources that serve to construct various role-specific *shakaijin* identities, once acquired, are deployed strategically in concrete interactions, focusing on key topics in Japanese discourse studies while making major contributions to the cross-linguistic/cultural study of workplace discourse in the globalized context of the twenty-first century. The chapters focused on the *performance* of workplace speech illuminate the real-life complexities that always, and perhaps necessarily, exceed the norm-based socialization training and modeling available to new company employees.

The various contributors' approaches to their analyses include interactional sociolinguistic, community of practice, and constructionist approaches that link their data and findings closely to work on other, particularly Western, research in this area in compatible ways. This allows the book overall to supplement what we know from the literature on Western business discourse in a way that is essential in contemporary projects of globalization in industry and commerce, effectively nuancing both empirical and theoretical claims about communication styles in workplaces, offering language and workplace research a critical look at new aspects of Japanese workplace discourse in ways that allow for easy comparison with the current trends in Western workplace discourse analysis. It offers as well a contextualized look at culturalist claims about the specificity of Japanese communication styles, language and gender, language and class, and issues of native vs. non-native business communication in ways that add to our understanding of Japanese language practices outside the narrative framing of Japanese exceptionalism.

1 The Structure of the Book

The first three chapters explore ways in which what are considered normative ideals for appropriate workplace behavior are promoted, reproduced, and maintained in the business community in Japan. In [Chap. 2](#), Dunn examines the language ideologies and pedagogical practices promoted in business etiquette training courses offered by five different workforce development companies. Dunn demonstrates that the “technologization of discourse” (Fairclough 1996), a major trend in post-industrial societies, takes Japanese-specific cultural forms in the Japanese business community. For example, business training in Japan aims not only to train for good customer service but also to develop the professional persona called *shakaijin* (mature, contributing adult in society). Manner training courses teach a multi-modal semiotic register, which includes language, voice quality, facial expressions, physical appearance, and bodily movement, that displays deference and demeanor. As the standard of this register is highly aesthetic, what new employees know about everyday behavior through previous implicit socialization may be

rejected as “unrefined” (cf. Giddens 1991). Dunn’s chapter provides an overview of the type of training newly employed white-collar workers experience in the process of acquiring the business register.

In Chap. 3, Cook continues discussions on how new employees are trained to become competent *shakaijin*. From the perspective of language socialization (e.g., Duranti et al. 2011; Ochs 1988; Schieffelin 1990; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986), this chapter qualitatively examines the process of constructing and promoting *shakaijin* in new employee orientation sessions in a small-scale IT company. While Dunn’s chapter is based on data collected by participant-observation in contracted training courses, Cook’s chapter uses data that were video-recorded by participants in a single company over a two-month period. This offers a crucial extension of Chap. 2 by showing how various socialization activities are implemented by trainers in situ (that is, in the actual workplace) and provides crucial data on how new employees react to these activities. A variety of activities, such as training in self-reflection, consciousness raising, and honorific lessons, are given in the sessions. The trainers categorize new employees as *shakaijin* and remind them that they are no longer students. Cook’s chapter suggests how a boundary between formal education and full-time work is still clearly maintained in Japanese society when such a boundary is disappearing in the West (Roberts 2010).

While Chaps. 2 and 3 discuss explicit socialization, Shibamoto-Smith’s work in Chap. 4 concerns implicit socialization. Here, the issue of influences of popular media which disseminate to a mass audience versions of language styles and thus potentially implicitly socialize a mass audience into the normative communication behavior portrayed in the media are addressed. This chapter specifically explores language choices of workplace interaction in two TV business dramas. The language choices examined include naming and address forms, sentence-final particles, addressee honorifics, and directives. By qualitatively analyzing the constructed characters’ use of these linguistic forms and practices in the dramas, Shibamoto-Smith finds that gendered language still permeates workplace dramas. The chapter closes by raising questions of how much (or whether) models of speech presented in media shape workplace expectations of male dominance and female subordination and impact real women’s and men’s work lives.

By qualitatively analyzing naturally occurring data collected from a diverse set of workplaces, small businesses, large corporations, and a school, the next five chapters explore how real workers interact with each other, employing both linguistic and non-linguistic resources in the workplace. In these chapters, we find that the considerations underlying language choices in the workplace continually exceed those normative practices taught (or media-circulated) addressed in Chaps. 2, 3, and 4. While Shibamoto-Smith's chapter demonstrates that in the digitized workplace male workers still use stereotypical male language, for example, Saito's work in Chap. 5 discusses how *sarariiman* 'salarymen' (stereotypical Japanese male personae) construct their masculinity during business meetings in a multinational corporation. She examines the *sarariiman*'s uses of the first person male pronouns (more formal *boku* and vulgar *ore*) and the addressee honorific *desu/masu* form and its non-honorific counterpart, plain form, as well as the content of their talk. Her findings are in part in line with those of Occhi et al. (2010) in that *sarariiman* construct public personae during the on-the-record talk by using addressee honorifics and *boku*. She also finds that *sarariiman* assert their masculinity during the off-the-record talk by problematizing their female colleagues, drawing on a gender ideology of subordinate femininity. As much of the previous research on gendered language in Japanese has studied linguistic forms (e.g., pronouns, sentence-final particles, and honorifics), Saito calls for research on gendered language in Japanese to move beyond the study of only linguistic forms to larger pragmatic and discourse phenomena.

In Chap. 6, Barke takes up another under-researched issue: use of a regional dialect in the workplace. To date, only a few studies have discussed how standard and regional Japanese are actually used in contemporary Japanese society (e.g., Okamoto 2008a, b; Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith 2016), and to our knowledge, no study has examined the use of dialect in the workplace. In this chapter, Barke specifically investigates the nature of the relationship between dialect/standard-style shifts and honorific/non-honorific (*desu/masu/plain*) form style shifts by analyzing video-recorded data from the morning meetings of a small metalwork manufacturing company located in the Kansai area of Japan. He finds that while the workers use standard forms (non-dialectal forms)

including *desu/masu* and naked-plain forms to display on-stage performance when they engage in the opening and closing of the meeting, they sometimes mix dialectal and non-naked plain forms to talk about matters related to their families and express their intense emotions.¹ His findings provide further support to the previous work highlighting the fluid and nuanced ways in which regional dialect speakers—here employees in the workplace—use dialectal forms to construct or in response to shifts toward more informal or expressive contexts while choosing more standard forms to construct or respond to formal contexts, or even beyond that, dynamically to express a particular, perhaps momentary, socially appropriate “meaning” from the linguistic resources available to them as simultaneously dialect *and* Standard Japanese speakers (Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith 2016: 119–122; see also Woolard (1998: 3) for an extended discussion of the import of “speakers’ simultaneous claims to more than one social identity”). Clearly, there are many understudied resources relevant to the performance of appropriate and effective workplace discourse.

Laughter is another feature of verbal interactions that does not appear in the training courses or other socialization practices for new recruits to the workplace. But the role of humor in the workplace should not be ignored, for it enhances rapport among co-workers, which is central to efficient transactions of work (e.g., Holmes and Stubbe 2003). Murata’s work in Chap. 7 looks at humor and laughter in business meetings, based on the data collected from three different companies in the Kansai area. She finds that the right to initiate humor is not evenly distributed among the members of a meeting, at least during the on-stage talk of a meeting. Those in power instigate humor whereas those in lower position do not do so. This practice contrasts with that of New Zealand companies, in which any participant is free to initiate humor any time during meetings (cf. Murata 2015). Murata’s chapter suggests that in Japanese companies, different norms apply during on-stage talk and off-stage talk in meetings. As for laughter, Murata reports that many occurrences of laughter are linked to mitigation of face-threatening acts (FTA).

In Chap. 8, Geyer investigates directives occurring in faculty meetings at secondary schools and shows that the teachers skillfully negotiate their positions and views by selecting a particular directive form. Geyer focuses

on three directive forms (*-te kudasai*, directives with non-imperative donatory verbs, and *to iu koto de*). Qualitative analysis of the data reveals different contextual factors associated with these three linguistic forms. The *-te kudasai* format is frequently used when the requested content is already agreed upon, a routine activity, or the request is issued by an outside person or authority. On the other hand, directives with non-imperative donatory verbs are often used when issuers frame their request as their own. The quotative formation *to iu koto de* is often used independently from other directive elements. This chapter supplements the more static (and more systematically gendered and status-marked) media representations of directives addressed in Chap. 4, nicely demonstrating how real, on-the-ground interactional complexities exceed the capacity of social norms to capture actual practice. And, just as research on directives in New Zealand workplaces indicate that direct imperatives are typically used when the imposition level is low and more mitigated indirect directives are preferred when there is a higher level of imposition (e.g., Holmes and Stubbe 2003, Vine 2004, 2009), Geyer's findings indicate that the *-te kudasai* format, which is a prototypical request form in Japanese, has a function similar to that of an English direct imperative in workplace discourse.

The final chapter turns to intercultural communication and some of the attendant complications raised for adherence to the normative patterns of business discourse. Chap. 9 by Moody discusses address terms exchanged between Japanese workers and American interns in Japanese companies based on approximately 50 hours of audio-recording data, interviews, and participant observations. One of the obvious ways to discursively construct one's identity is the use of address and referent terms. How one is addressed constructs one's identity at that moment. Moody finds that address terms are non-reciprocally exchanged: Japanese workers address American interns by first name (FN) and that American interns call Japanese workers by their last name (LN)+*san*. This non-reciprocity could be interpreted as marginalization of American interns. However, given that the unmarked default address term for Japanese workers is LN+*san* and for American workers is FN in their respective workplaces, he argues that the uses of address terms in his data are instances of accommodation. Both Japanese and Americans are trying to conform to what is

expected in each other's respective native language and culture (cf. Okamura 2009). Moody also discusses how address terms can serve as resources for doing identity work in intercultural workplace interaction.

Notes

1. Naked-plain forms are plain forms without an affect key such as a sentence-final particle (e.g., *wakaru* 'understand'), and non-naked-plain forms are those with an affect key (e.g., *wakaru ne* 'understand + *ne*').

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