

Gendering and powering a speech act:
Complimenting at the intersection of gender and power
amongst young Japanese

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Speech act studies have attracted a number of linguists working on gender and politeness (Holmes 1995; Mills 2003). For instance, the speech act of complimenting has been regarded as highly gendered and one of positive politeness strategies. Taking the culture-specific notion of power: *Senpai-Kohai* (Senior-Junior) relation, this paper investigates how gender and power relation play a key role in understanding the production of Japanese compliments.

While most of speech act studies rely on elicited data such as Discourse Completion Tasks (Jucker 2009), my corpus consists of 40 hours of naturally occurring conversations with 67 Japanese university students. Having conducted semi-structured sociolinguistic interviews and informal lunchtime recordings, my analysis is based on 369 compliments extracted from this corpus.

The results show 1) stylistic differences (casual vs. careful speech) in the production of compliments across gender and 2) it is more likely to exchange compliments from the status Low to High than vice versa. These results contradict previous research (Knapp et al 1984; Wolfson 1983). The paper argues that not solely gender or power relations determine the patterning of compliments production, however, contextual and cultural considerations allow us to better understand complimenting behaviour.

References

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