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Title: (Im)politeness and Gender: The use of male-preferred form *sugee* in complimenting by young Japanese females

Abstract:

The paper explores the relationship between (im)politeness and gender through the speech act of complimenting in Japanese. Complimenting is a speech act that is gendered and also greatly related to politeness issues (Holmes 1988, 1995). As a number of researchers put it, complimenting is a linguistic device that expresses politeness, especially attending positive face wants (Brown and Levinson 1987, Holmes 1995). Also, she found out that women tended to pay and receive more compliments than men did in her New Zealand data.

In Japanese complimenting, a number of compliments are found to be marked with positively evaluated term, *sugoi*, meaning “amazing, something beyond ordinary”. Furthermore, there is a variant that derives from this standard form *sugoi*, namely *sugee*. Drawing on a corpus consisting of approximately 40 hours of recorded conversations that I collected from the Japanese university students in 2008, I show that out of 154 compliment events, 44 compliments were marked with these terms, which accounts for 28.6% of the entire corpus.

The discussion will focus on the frequent use of *sugee* by young Japanese females. This form *sugee* is considered to be less feminine, less formal and more rough, and is usually associated with masculine speech. However, 6 tokens of *sugee* out of a total of 11 were uttered by female students. Considering that this form is originally a male-preferred form (Ide 1992), the fact that half of the tokens were uttered by women is striking.

My analysis of the use of *sugee* among young Japanese females investigates 1) why young females choose such linguistic marker that indicates masculinity and 2) young Japanese females’ attitudes towards the use of this particular form, given that there is an indirect association that the masculine speech is rough and hence rude. The tentative conclusion is that young Japanese females attempt to index social meanings, e.g., intimacy and humour, by the use of *sugee*, and not necessarily their masculinity or impoliteness. This paper is a contribution to the research of politeness and gender adding a new case study of young Japanese.

References:

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