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## BOOKNOTICE

**Hiroko Itakura**, 2001. *Conversational Dominance and Gender. A Study of Japanese Speakers in First and Second Language Contexts.* [Pragmatics & Beyond New Series 89]. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Reviewed by Kerstin Fischer (University of Bremen)

This well-written, clear and systematic study contributes to three research areas: conversational dominance, gender, and pragmatic transfer in foreign language learning. Most importantly, the author develops an analytical framework for dominance in conversation.

The line of argumentation runs as follows: The author first reviews the relevant literature and discusses several proposals for the investigation of dominance in conversation. On the basis of this review, she develops a model, which serves as the starting point for her subsequent empirical analysis. Dominance is defined as “one speaker’s tendency to control the other speaker’s conversational actions over the course of an interaction” (p. 70), that is, a dominant speaker is one who uses more successful controlling actions (p. 71). The model combines three dimensions:

- “sequential dominance concerns the distribution of initiating moves and responding moves” (p. 73)
- “participatory dominance refers to patterns of asymmetry where one speaker’s holding on to the turn until completion following an interruption or overlap leads to the other speaker’s leaving the turn incomplete and therefore losing the chance to participate in the conversation” (p. 80)
- “quantitative dominance refers to a pattern where one of the speakers makes a greater contribution towards the text of a conversation than the other” (p. 83)

The framework is then put to the test in a quantitative study of dialogues between Japanese undergraduate students with a major in English. The original database was 20 English (L2) and 20 Japanese (L1) interactions between 14 male and 20 female speakers, from which 8 male-female dyads were selected. From each of the transcribed 16 conversations resulting (the speakers conversed for 10 min each in English and in Japanese), the last 100 turns were taken for the quantitative investigation. Each occurrence of successful controlling actions

on the sequential and participatory dimension was marked, and words were counted (p. 91).

The quantitative study produces some surprising results. Unlike what was expected from the literature on gender-related conversational dominance in Japanese society, no clear patterns of conversational dominance could be shown. Thus, it was not the case that in the Japanese dialogues male speakers consistently used more controlling actions on any of the three dimensions investigated (p. 93–95). Furthermore, regarding the three dimensions of dominance, the quantitative study produced inconsistent results. In particular, inconsistency between quantitative dominance and the other two dimensions was found, while sequential and participatory dominance were relatively compatible.

Another surprising finding concerns pragmatic transfer. Contrary to expectations, speakers did not use the same conversational strategies in English (L2). Yet, also in English the hypothesis that male speakers dominate female speakers was not supported (p. 98–100). It was even the case that for several dyads patterns of dominance were reversed in L2 conversation. Moreover, also here quantitative results regarding the three dimensions of dominance were found to be inconsistent, such that if in one dyad the male speaker is sequentially more dominant, the female speaker may be more dominant with respect to the two other dimensions (p.101).

In the following three chapters, the author addresses three questions arising from the quantitative investigation (p. 103):

- What is the relationship among the three dimensions of conversational dominance?
- How can we explain the fact that speakers behave differently in L1 and L2, and that male speakers were less dominant in L2 than in L1?
- Should the validity of the analytical framework be questioned?

Itakura's analysis of the relationship between the three dimensions reveals the importance of qualitative methods to support the quantitative analysis. In particular, the relationship between the different dimensions is crucially dependent on the kinds of moves made by the speakers, such as informatives or elicitations. Correspondingly, the sequential dimension turns out to be the most influential with respect to control over topic development (p. 127). Results from the sequential dimension may be inconsistent with the other two if, for instance, controlling moves are short, yet elicit long contributions from the communication partner.

Using qualitative methods, the author continues by investigating in great detail the conversational behaviours of two dyads whose dominance patterns

differed considerably for L1 and L2. The qualitative analyses result in the identification of two different conversational styles (see also Coates 1996, Maltz & Borker 1982, Tannen 1994): self-oriented versus other-oriented styles of speaking. Thus, different types of initiations between females and males in L1 and L2 are due to different conversational styles (p. 131). There are clear gender patterns with respect to the distribution of dialogue moves. Females employ, both in L1 and in L2, more moves that elicit information from their male interlocutors, i.e. make more other-oriented actions, whereas men use more informatives, self-oriented actions. Thus, both actions are controlling moves, but the females' other-oriented style supports the development of the male partner's topic. The author then argues that a possible reason for the reduction of male conversational dominance in L2 conversations is the grammatical complexity of the necessary strategies in English.

The results lead to a reexamination of the analytical framework. A major problem is constituted by the weighing of the different controlling actions: if other-oriented controlling actions are less of an indicator of conversational dominance than self-oriented controlling actions, then the results with respect to male dominance in L1 and female dominance in L2 would differ considerably (p. 186). The question is left open (p. 190), but it casts doubt on the usability of the quantitative analysis.

Somewhat curious, however, are the author's conclusions regarding gender differences. She argues that if speakers share the same social status and age and if they are not involved in particular hierarchical relationships, no clear evidence for male dominance in Japanese society can be found (p.195). However, her qualitative analyses show quite clearly that the reason why the quantitative analyses revealed no clear dominance patterns for the male speakers is that the female's other-oriented moves were taken to be as dominant as the males' self-oriented moves. This is, however, questionable. Bublitz (1988), for instance, distinguishes even between primary and secondary speaker roles, depending on the contribution's function with respect to topic development. Thus, in fact the topics discussed in the dyads were male topics, though the male topic dominance is clearly interactively construed by both participants.

To conclude, Itakura succeeded in presenting an extremely interesting, highly systematic study of the methodological problems of analysing conversational dominance. It would have been desirable if she had taken the next step and refined her model on the basis of her qualitative analyses, defining the limits and merits of the quantitative study more clearly and refining sequential dominance with respect to the different types of controlling moves. However, the results are all available, and thus the study contributes usefully to

developing an analytical framework for conversational dominance, pragmatic transfer, and the discussion of gender difference in conversation.

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