

Ausgehend vom Ansatz des *doing gender* fragen international bekannte Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftler, wie Individuen ihr Geschlecht im Gespräch inszenieren, wie Frauen und Männer in der Kommunikation wahrgenommen werden und wie sprachliche Strukturen dazu beitragen, eine Unterscheidung zwischen den Geschlechtern zu betonen und festzuschreiben. Die teils theoretisch, teils empirisch angelegten Beiträge behandeln die verschiedenen Bereiche der interdisziplinären Geschlechterforschung: Feministische Sprachkritik und sprachliche Gleichstellung, Genus und Geschlecht, Kommunikationsverhalten der Geschlechter, Diskursanalyse, neue Kommunikationsmedien und Stereotypenforschung.

*Kommunikation von Geschlecht - Communication of Gender* ist der vierte Band der vom Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Frauenforschung der Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel herausgegebenen Schriftenreihe *Frauen. Männer. Geschlechterverhältnisse*, in der Monographien und Sammelbände zur Geschlechterforschung erscheinen.

Braun/Pasero (Hg.) Kommunikation von Geschlecht



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Communication of Gender

Centaurus

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(Hg.)

## Kommunikation von Geschlecht

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Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Frauenforschung  
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4



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**Communication of Gender**

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# **Kommunikation von Geschlecht Communication of Gender**



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## Vorwort

Uns allen erscheint Geschlecht als ganz alltägliche und natürliche Kategorie. Daß diese Alltäglichkeit wesentlich erst durch Sprache und Kommunikation hergestellt wird, bleibt bei oberflächlichem Blick meist verborgen. Fragen wir jedoch genauer nach, wie Sprache dazu beiträgt, die Kategorie Geschlecht zu konstruieren, so zeigt sich, daß schon die Strukturen, die Individuen im System ihrer Muttersprache vorfinden, dazu drängen, Geschlechter zu unterscheiden, sei es durch das Genus von Personenbezeichnungen (z.B. Spanisch) oder durch lexikalische Geschlechtsmarkierungen (z.B. Türkisch). Sprachliche Asymmetrien sowie Stereotypisierungen in der Benennung und Beschreibung der Geschlechter vermitteln Wertungen, Rangordnungen und Charakterisierungen von "Weiblichem" und "Männlichem". Auf der Grundlage muttersprachlicher Strukturen wirken aber auch Individuen durch ihr Kommunikationsverhalten an der Konstruktion der Geschlechterdifferenz und der inhaltlichen Ausgestaltung von Weiblichkeit und Männlichkeit mit: Sie inszenieren in der Interaktion ihr Geschlecht und nehmen das Verhalten ihrer GesprächspartnerInnen als weiblich oder männlich wahr. Kommunikatives Verhalten ist somit als "doing gender" im Sinne von West/Zimmerman (1991) oder Cameron (z.B. 1995) zu verstehen.

Trotz der kommunikativen Herstellung und Inszenierung von Geschlecht erscheint es jedoch überzogen, geschlechtstypische Sprach- oder Kommunikationsvarietäten im Sinne der von Deborah Tannen (1991) postulierten "genderlects" anzunehmen. Während Tannen die Kommunikation zwischen Frauen und Männern als interkulturelle Kommunikation sieht, die immer wieder zu Mißverständnissen führen muß, kann die Inszenierung von Geschlecht je nach Erfordernissen und Fokus der jeweiligen Interaktion auch ausgesetzt werden – oder findet möglicherweise überwiegend in der Wahrnehmung statt, wie Karsta Frank (1992) annimmt.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hierzu stehen jedoch empirische Ergebnisse noch aus.

Caja Thimm & Heidi Ehmer

### Strategic interaction at the work-place: How men and women deal with power differences<sup>1</sup>

Verbal communication plays an important role in professional careers. Contrary to other institutional contexts, however, talk at work has only lately received the attention of feminist research (Fine et al. 1987, Woods 1988, Tannen 1995). In particular, asymmetrical interactions between superiors and subordinates are a routine situation for every-day work-place communication. Such asymmetries in work situations are relevant and important to most of the adult population at some time in their lives. These situations, however, seem to be a problem for many women in managerial positions. Such asymmetrical situations demand certain interaction strategies, which sometimes lead to conflicts for the women themselves, or cause conflicts about 'managerial styles between men and women' (cf. Rossi/Todd-Mancillas 1988, Berryman-Fink/Wheelless 1987).

Apart from gender roles, the variables of 'power' and 'status' play a decisive part in work-place communication. Ever since Brown/Levinson's (1978) study, status differences have been regarded as one of the central dimensions in asymmetrical interactions. Status asymmetry implies a difference in social power and consequently a different distribution of conversational rights (Erickson et al. 1978). Being in power in a social relationship, however, is different from exhibiting dominant behaviour. Power is mostly defined as a potential for exercising influence over other people's actions, decisions and thoughts, whereas interactional dominance concerns manifest properties of discourse (Thimm 1990).

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the study see Thimm in press. The study was carried out by our partner project in the special research group "Language and situation" in Heidelberg/Mannheim (cf. Funk-Müldner et al. 1991). We thank E. Hicks, I. Hub und A. Wagner for their participation in analysing the data.

The importance of speech style in work-related asymmetrical interactions has been investigated in several studies. Steffen and Eagly (1985), for example, found that high status persons were assumed to use a more direct and impolite style and were also thought more likely to gain compliance by using this style. Lower status individuals were more concerned with face-saving, and also perceived the style of their partner's talk as more direct and less polite. Softening and politeness strategies were directly related to status: the higher the status, the more direct and less polite the style of talk was perceived to be.

A critical point of this type of research is the focus on isolated features of talk, rather than a more integrated view. From our perspective it seems more promising to look at power and power-related talk from the concept of **strategic interaction**. We start from the assumption that communication in asymmetrical situations often involves compliance-gaining moves. What, for example, happens when a boss expects resistance from an employee whom s/he believes to be reluctant to carry out his/her requests, and how does this specific expectation about his/her partner affect the verbalisation of the request? To answer questions like this we will employ a concept of strategic interaction which is based on the analysis of specific strategic moves.

**Social categorisation, stereotypes and language**  
Nowadays many women are more inclined to actively pursue positions of power, but the way to reach such positions causes highly ambivalent feelings for many. Talking about male and female strategies to realise goals and establish positions of power is still almost a taboo topic for many women. Some see power as an unsocial or perhaps even anti-social phenomenon, others feel pressured into 'male' strategies. Not only personal ambivalence, but societal norms influence women's careers. The definition of power is very much dependent on gender roles. If women want to be powerful, they have to do so according to the rules and norms of gender roles. When analysing manifestations of power in interactions by men and women, we have to take into



account that speech is always interpreted with respect to societal norms of how men and women have to be. Typing and stereotyping therefore are key issues to the analysis of male/female speech.

We all know that the force of social categories such as age, gender or ethnicity is determined by norms, values and rules of the respective society. Knowing the sex of an individual can, for example, influence judgements on mental and physical health, judgements on personality, achievements, emotional experience, mathematical competence or power (for an overview on sex stereotypes and performance, see Ussher 1992). It is necessary to consider the impact of sex stereotypes on communication attitudes when looking at power asymmetries and verbal interaction.

Two approaches shall be introduced briefly (for more detail see Thimm 1995a): the "sex-dialect hypothesis" (also called "genderlect"- or "female register" hypothesis) and the "sex stereotype hypothesis". The "genderlect"-hypothesis assumes that the judgement of communication of women and men is based on actual language performance differences. Typical female categories would then be tag-questions, softeners or hedges (Crosby/Nyquist 1977). In contrast, the sex-stereotype hypothesis starts out from the notion that actual language differences are not a necessary precondition for differential judgements, rather judgements are determined by stereotypical expectations. One argument for the "sex stereotype hypothesis" can be found in Burgoon et al. (1991), who analysed the category "verbal intensity" in doctor-patient communication. The authors showed that higher intensity of male speakers (e.g., by intensifiers such as "very" (sehr), "especially" (besonders), directives or verbs of judgement) was perceived as an effective tool for reaching interactive goals, whereas women were judged as more effective when using a less intensive and more neutral style of talk. Whereas men seem to be allowed an openly powerful style, similar behaviour by women does not get the same sort of approval.

The same argument is put forward by Carli (1990). She showed that women used more "tentative language" (hedges, softeners, tag questions) and

were successful with this strategy when talking to men, but not when talking to women. Even more interesting was the result that the use of the tentative style by men was not judged as less successful. These results show a higher tolerance of variety of power-related styles for men than for women, pointing at a more stereotyped expectation toward women's speech style.

If we analyse 'powerful' or 'powerless' from the perspective of actual speech behaviour, there are even more aspects of stereotyped expectations and their influence on speech production and perception to be considered. When analysing talk for power aspects, Erickson et al. (1978) could show that without providing information on gender there were certain verbal categories which accounted for a more successful and more powerful talk. In their study the authors read out two types of texts of a defendant in a simulated jury setting. One version was formulated as powerful, the other as powerless. Features of powerless style were low speech rate, lower amount of talk, more pauses (a sign of "non-dynamic delivery"), fewer interruptions and attempts to interrupt, softeners, tag questions, intensifiers, deictical phrases, politeness. Those individuals, men as well as women, who delivered the powerless version were judged as less competent and less convincing. When asked for associations with the sex of the speakers, women were associated with powerless style whereas the typical male style was described as powerful. This study and others (see Mulac et al. 1988) demonstrate how strongly language attitudes and judgement of discourse depend on stereotype-based categorisations of how men and women are expected to be. These studies point out that stereotypical expectations put stricter restrictions on women's activities than on men's. Whereas men are allowed a greater variety of styles, women very often are not.

As all of these studies are American based, the results can only be partly applied to other speech communities. We want to emphasise the point that work place interactions are highly influenced by societal norms, but also largely determined by company rules and therefore very context dependent.



### Communication at the work-place: A role-play study

Central research interest of the study presented is the question of power-related forms of communication in asymmetrical work place situations. To collect verbal data in a work setting confronts communication researchers with the problem of data collection, especially if the aim of the research is a comparative study of men and women in potentially face-threatening situations (Goffman 1972). This is why our study was conducted by method of a role-play. Altogether, 109 role-play texts were analysed, 48 produced by female, 61 by male speakers. To be able to compare the influence of partner information and task in relation to verbal strategies, two types of situations were constructed. One can be described as potentially face-threatening, whereas the other one is not characterised by any specific information. Winterhoff-Spurk and Grabowski-Gellert (1987) call situations in which the speaker feels free to ask for something and in which the listener is prepared to fulfil the request "standard situations" (SS). If the legitimation of the speaker is given, but the partner is not very likely to comply or might even resist, the authors call it a "reactance prone situation" (RPS). The role-plays were conducted in both situational types. The following instructions were given to the participants:

#### Standard situation (SS):

You are participating in a role-play study between the head of a department of a company and her/his secretary.

Please imagine you are the boss of a department in a large company, and you have your own secretary. When you have been seated at your desk for one minute, call in your secretary to take a letter. Dictate her a circular letter addressing all members of staff. Point out that you want everyone to lock their offices after work. Think up an appropriate text for this letter. When you have finished dictating, you also want your secretary to make some coffee. This is one of her duties as a secretary. *You know she will be willing to make coffee.*

(Please phrase your request in one sentence).

#### Reactance prone situation (RPS)

The instructions the participants were given were the same as above, with one modification: *You know that she does not like making coffee and might be unwilling to do so.*

The communicational situation of the role-play is characterised by the expectation of the speaker that the target person (the secretary<sup>2</sup>) likes making coffee and is willing to do so (standard situation), or that she dislikes it, although it is one of her duties (reactance prone situation). The legitimacy of the speaker is high (in both SS and RPS), the willingness of the partner to comply is high at one time (SS), and low at another (RPS).

Altogether 60 students participated in the reactance prone situation (26 women and 34 men), whereas in the standard situation there were 22 women and 27 men, all between 21 and 27 years of age. The participants were students of the department of business administration at the University of Mannheim (Germany).

We are particularly interested in the difference of the strategies used by men and women in the reactance prone situation. This is due to the assumption that this type of situation is more likely to confront the participants with power-related problems. Considering the fact that the "secretary" had to restrict her verbal input as much as possible (this accounts for her minimised responses), the texts cannot be classified as strictly "dialogical". As the participants, however, were not informed about her being a member of the team, but rather assumed that she was also a role-play participant, we started from the hypothesis that partner orientation was a manifest property in our data.

### Strategic interaction

Strategic interaction can be regarded as central to reactance prone situations. If we expect resistance or unwillingness by our interaction partners we will prepare ourselves and plan our own actions in more detail.

We define strategy as a sequence of speech patterns serving the purpose of reaching the interactional goals of the speaker in a situation of actual or perceived reactance. We distinguish type of strategy from types of strategic moves. Strategic moves are those manifestations of language in connection with the strategy in the verbal interaction. The strategy itself is named ac-

<sup>2</sup> The role of the secretary was played by a member (female) of the research team.



ording to the goal desired. The exact speech patterns, i.e. strategic moves, are analysed in relation to the strategy (Thimm 1990, 1995a, 1995b).

To analyse strategic interaction in the context of asymmetrical work-related communication the following strategies and their concomitant strategic moves were taken as the base line:

Goals	Strategies	Strategic moves
avoiding a conflict, preventing a conflict securing one's position	face-saving strategy	delegation, changing the topic, vagueness, mentioning external sources, softeners
maintaining a relationship, securing the interaction	relationship-securing strategy	personal addressing, confirming, reassuring, idiomatic phrasing, metacommunication
getting a person to cooperate	co-operative strategy	compliments, praises, asking further questions, offering compensation, thanking, self-disclosure
establishing or confirming power over others	power strategy	orders, threats, mentioning status or hierarchy, demonstrating competence, direct requests

Table 1: Goals, strategies and strategic moves at the work-place

This article will focus particularly on those strategies which relate to significant gender differences.

### Face-saving strategy

As the possibility of reactance includes the risk of a loss of authority for the superior, we assumed that participants would try to minimise this risk by employing face-saving strategy moves.

The first category for analysis was the **syntactical form of the requests to make coffee**. This was done in two steps. Firstly, the requests for making coffee were evaluated with respect to the degree of directness (direct request, question or command, see below). Secondly, the whole text was analysed for

**syntactical complexity**. Depending on the context, syntactical complexity can be regarded as part of a face saving strategy, by either demonstrating verbal competence (and thereby protecting one's own face) or by using complex constructions in such a way that the propositional content of the utterance is being communicated in a rather vague and unprecise fashion.

The results showed that not the women but the men used such complex constructions significantly more often. The use of complex syntax in the texts was mostly connected to the frequent insertion of other thoughts and lengthy explanations on how to go about writing the letter. We see these strategic moves as a sign of softening and face-saving vagueness.

To follow up this initial result of more vagueness on the part of the male participants, **softening features** were analysed (such as *somehow* 'irgendwie', *somewhere* 'irgendwo', conjunctive phrases, hedges, politeness phrases such as *please* 'bitte', *be so kind* 'bitte, wären Sie so nett', *if you'd be so kind* 'wenn Sie so gut sein würden', softening particles like *just* 'grad noch', *maybe* 'vielleicht' and diminutives like "noch'n Tässchen Kaffee").

Both men and women used softeners significantly more often in the RPS than in the SS. Male participants, however, showed a much more striking difference between the two situations. They used significantly more of these softening features than the women did. As these results seemed rather unexpected and contradicted other findings of powerless talk, a separate analysis for each category was carried out, aiming at a more distinct differentiation between the various types of softeners.

The first category tested was the use of conditional phrases (like *could you* 'könnten Sie', *would you* 'würden Sie', formulations with indicators of vagueness such as *perhaps*, *maybe* 'vielleicht'). Again, men but not women were found to differentiate between the two conditions in their use of the conditional forms. A particularly high number of softeners was found in the introductory phase to the request by male participants.

The distinct differences in the category of softening phrases suggest on the one hand, that reactance prone situations may be modified by means of

different softeners, no matter whether the speaker is male or female. On the other hand, it was obvious that in our role-play women handled this type of situation differently than men did. The male participants employed significantly more softened or overly polite talk. We assume that is due to strategic considerations. If a situation is seen as face-threatening in respect to personal goals and status, men seem entirely capable of employing features of "powerless" or "genderlect" talk.

Another face saving strategy move, which is used quite frequently, is the *delegation of responsibility by referring to external authorities*. In the texts a delegation of responsibility was realised by referring to external authorities (*my boss 'mein Chef'*), *I've been instructed to 'ich wurde beauftragt'*) or by referring to an external force (*due to safety regulations 'im Rahmen der Sicherheitsbestimmungen'*, *due to some complaints 'aufgrund einiger Beschwerden'*). Men and women differed in a highly significant way from one another, independent of the other conditions, with women using delegating moves much more often. Also the male participants did not differentiate between the conditions, whereas female participants used forms of delegation or justification more often in the reactance prone situations. Some examples:

woman participants: "I refer to office regulations" (Ich verweise hiermit nochmals auf die Arbeitsanweisung), "I was told to (...)" (Ich wurde angewiesen (...))

male participants: "In the group of managerial directors, it was decided that (...)" (Im Kreise der Abteilungsleiter wurde entschieden (...)), "I've been told by my supervisor (...)" (Mir wurde von meinem Vorgesetzten mitgeteilt (...))

Those male speakers who used delegating moves, employed a more personal and less general reference to authority and sometimes even managed to ensure their status as a "boss".

### Relationship-securing strategy

Due to the fact that there was little or no possibility to engage in a conversation, there were only a few typical elements of the relationship-securing strategy to be found. One of them was "personal address". Analysis yielded a significant gender difference between the direct form of address with *Mrs. X*

'Frau Maier' and *Miss X 'Fräulein Meier'*. The male participants in RPS addressed their "secretary" more often with a personal name than the women did. Since no specific names had been given in the instruction, participants could choose freely. One interesting result concerning the use of names: *Mai-er* was used in 36 role-plays and seemed to be the symbolic "general other".

Another important category for relationship reference is the personal pronoun *we 'wir'*. By using this pronoun, participants tried to explicitly refer to a mutual perspective and demonstrate co-operation:

"We will have to come up with something for that (...)" (Da müssen wir uns was einfallen lassen (...)) (male speaker)

"OK, we can leave it at that for now" (Ja, das lassen wir erst mal so) (female speaker)

"All right, now we can have a nice cup of coffee, don't you think so? Now that we've finished work (...)" (So, und jetzt können wir mal'n schönen Kaffee trinken, nicht wahr? Nach getaner Arbeit) (female speaker)

Here women and men did not differ from each other. Another relevant category for the analysis of asymmetrical communication is the use of *metacommunication*. Those phrases which communicate the knowledge of the underlying conflict and formulate it by means of explicit metacommunication can also be analysed with respect to the relationship-securing strategy. We defined metacommunication as mentioning the task ("I have a request"), and as mentioning the potential conflict ("I know you don't like to do that").

Comparing conditions, results yielded a highly significant difference concerning more metacommunicative utterances in the reactance prone situation. This is a strong indicator of the effects of metacommunicative interaction in a work setting in general, since both men and women participants used this strategic move often. The exact analysis, however, showed that women did not differentiate as much between SS and RPS as the men did. Once again, male participants employed this strategic move more often.

When looking at the content of metacommunicative messages, the possible resistance of the secretary is frequently mentioned. First some text excerpts from male participants:



"Well, ahm, I know you don't like doing this, but would you please make some coffee for me" (Ja, äh, ich weiß, daß Sie es nicht so gerne tun, aber würden Sie mir bitte 'nen Kaffee machen)

"OK, ahm, and then I have a little request. Could you maybe make some coffee for me. I know that's no pleasure for you, but that would be very nice of you." (Ok, ähm, und dann hätt' ich noch ein kleines Anliegen. Könnten Sie mir eventuell 'nen Kaffee machen. Ich weiß, daß es Ihnen keinen Spaß macht, aber das wär' nett.)

Whereas this type of direct addressing of the secretary was used by the men frequently, it was found only in three instances with female speakers:

"Ahm, Mrs. Mueller, could you make some coffee for me nevertheless anyway?" (Ähm, Frau Müller, könnten Sie mir trotz alledem einen Kaffee machen?)

"Ahm, I'd like some coffee, would you be willing to make some coffee for me, you can make some for yourself, too." (Äh, ich hätt' bitte gern 'nen Kaffee, wären Sie bereit, mir einen Kaffee zu machen, Sie können sich gem eine Tasse mitkochen.)

The first woman's message used a reference to the underlying conflict just like the men's did. The second one did so more implicitly, but additionally offered compensation ("you can make some for yourself, too"). Offering compensation sometimes takes on a ritual character, especially in institutional talk. The following excerpt, however, shows that some of the female participants went out of their way to offer compensation:

"Ahm, Mrs. Maier, would you please make some coffee for me; I know that you don't really like doing that, but tomorrow I'll do it again myself, OK?" (Äh, Frau Maier, würden Sie mir bitte noch'n Kaffee kochen, ich weiß, daß Sie's nicht so gerne machen, aber ich mach's dann morgen wieder selbst, OK?)

This formulation takes on the character of an apology for the request and demonstrates a more symmetrical approach to a subordinate.

### Co-operative strategy

Co-operative management depends to a great extent on the way a superior shares information with his/her subordinates. An even higher degree of co-operation is necessary to get someone to do something he or she might be unwilling to do without threatening the face of the partner or risking one's own authority. The participants of the role-play dealt with this problem in different ways. Sometimes the explanations the participants gave to their secretary

concerning the letter that had to be written were rather lengthy and detailed. These explanatory introductions were counted as a move of *co-operative informing*. When looking at gender differences, we found that male participants formulated this informational part in more detail than did the women. One example:

"Good morning Mrs., Maier. Please come in and have a seat, please. I'd like you to take a dictation. This is to be a circular letter to our colleagues, which includes some important information. Let's start with(...)" (Guten Morgen, Frau Maier. Kommen Sie rein und nehmen Sie Platz, bitte. Ich hab' etwas zu diktieren, ein Rundschreiben an unsere Mitarbeiter mit ein paar wichtigen Informationen. Wir fangen an mit (...))

Studies have shown that the act of informing someone about something is usually performed by a person in a higher position and has to be seen in relation to the hierarchical structure of the relationship. When looking at the results of the co-operative informing moves, it became obvious that the male participants regarded this type of communication with their secretary as an important part of their task. They took time to explain the circumstances of the task in nearly every role-play of the RPS.

The *positive assessment of the work* of the secretary is another move of the co-operative strategy. Men and women showed differences when the positive assessment of writing the letter was analysed. Women thanked their secretary much more often after the taking of the letter ("OK, that's about it, thanks"). As far as co-operation is concerned, both men and women seemed concerned about this issue, but verbalised it differently, as mentioned above.

One example for the strategic choices that show differences between women and men in the context of co-operation concerns *self-disclosure moves*, that is the voluntary passing on of rather intimate information by the participants. Self-disclosure is recognised as an important and well-researched phenomenon in interpersonal interaction (Pearce/Sharp 1973). The role-plays show evidence of the fact that personal messages are used in the RPS to avoid face-threatening situations. Indicators of such self-disclosure phrases were words like *we* which suggests mutuality, asking further questions, the sharing of information with the secretary, or requesting the advice



from her like "And now? Sincerely? Can we leave it that way?" (Und dann? Hochachtungsvoll? Können wir das so lassen?). The most direct way to formulate self disclosures are personal formulations such as: *I'm so overworked* (Ich bin so überlastet). This category showed a highly significant difference concerning male and female participants, again with men being more outspoken about personal issues. The differences were of a qualitative as well as a quantitative nature, particularly when comparing the structure of arguments. In some cases the female participants referred to how they felt on a very personal level:

"And then I want to ask you a big favour: I am so overloaded, could you please make some coffee for me?" (Und dann hät' ich noch eine ganz große Bitte: Ich bin so überlastet zur Zeit, könnten Sie mir bitte 'n Kaffee kochen?)

"Then I would like to ask you to make some coffee for me, I have such a headache. Thank you." (Dann würde ich Sie bitte noch bitten, mir einen Kaffee zu kochen, ich hab solche Kopfschmerzen)

For male participants, on the other hand, self disclosure serves the function of demonstrating competence and status:

"Well, so much for this, and now for the other thing, ahm, I would ask you to, by way of exception, I do know that you don't like to do it, but today I still have so much work to do, so today I have to be fit a little bit longer, to make some coffee for me." (Äh, das war das eine und zum anderen, äh, würde ich Sie bitten, ausnahmsweise heute ich weiß ja daß Sie es nicht gern tun, aber ich hab heut noch sehr viel zu arbeiten und da muß ich also fit sein etwas länger, mir 'ne Tasse Kaffee zu kochen.)

The women mentioned stress and headaches, the male speaker emphasises the necessity of working over-time and his fitness. Disclosure of how one feels personally is obviously being accomplished in different ways by women and men. Looking at the arguments also reveals a difference in attitude. Describing yourself as "overloaded" (überlastet) does not refer to competence, but rather gives the impression of being overly burdened. And having a headache comes across as a "classical" stereotype of women's incapacities.

### Power strategy

Starting from the fact that many situations of interaction at the work place are determined by differences of hierarchy, the linguistic manifestations of this

influence of hierarchy are very portentous. One indicator of dominance interactions and powerful talk are the types of speech acts used. Following the hypothesis that syntactical phrasing and speech act type can be part of power strategy, we analysed the texts for different types of requests: direct request, questions and commands. Orders were utterances like "And then make some coffee for me" (Und dann machen Sie mir einen Kaffee). Questions were those phrases which were marked by word order and intonation, like "Make some coffee for the two of us now, will you?" (Dann machen Sie noch einen Kaffee für uns zwei, ja?). All other ways of asking for coffee were seen as direct requests like "All right, and now you could make some coffee for me, please" (Gut, jetzt können Sie mir noch einen Kaffee machen, bitte). Taking into account all the available texts, the following results were obtained:

Type:	women (48)		men (61)	
	SS	RPS	SS	RPS
	(22)	(26)	(27)	(34)
Direct Requests	6	11	9	18
Questions	13	21	19	18
Orders/commands	3	0	4	2
Total	22	32	32	38

Table 2: Linguistic manifestations of the power strategy

In the potentially face-threatening situation women asked significantly more questions and completely avoided orders or commands. Since questions are an indirect form of request, this preference can be seen as a way of politeness and vagueness. Men on the other hand showed a greater preference for direct requests in both conditions. Looking at this result from the perspective of powerful talk, the first impression is that of the confirmation of the stereotype: men are more direct in their request, some of them even employ typical power oriented strategy moves like commands, whereas women are more careful, more polite and less direct. The combination of more powerful syntactic forms with softening features can be described as a "typical" male style in the these texts. Apart from syntactical considerations, there are semantic features which are relevant for a power strategy. One of the most explicit features is the use of the title or position of the speaker. When finishing up



the dictation titles or positions were added, hereby referring to oneself as "the head of the department" (Der Abteilungsleiter), "the management" (Die Geschäftsleitung) or "Sincerely – Your board of directors" (Mit freundlichen Grüßen – die Firmenleitung). These titles refer to official positions and therefore enhance the superior position. Interestingly this was done by male speakers only!

Another semantic feature is the use of special language, which we termed "office talk". Office talk includes phrases used in business settings, such as typical verbs and lexicalised phrases like "mail it out" (verschicken), "distribute the copies" (die Kopien verteilen), "xerox the letter" (den Brief kopieren), etc. The use of "office talk" reflects not only a higher identification with the job (or rather, with the role-play situation), it is also very much a part of powerful talk at work. Once again, male participants used such terminology significantly more than the female participants did.

### Conclusion

Looking at the variety of strategic elements analysed, the data gives way to some important perspectives on language and gender. On the one hand the results reflect the greater variety of strategies used by the male participants. They used features of a "powerless style" and related strategies in order to pursue their interaction goals more frequently than female participants did. Women participants on the other hand, did not rely as much on verbal references to status or personal position, but were brief and highly structured.

As an unexpected result, the male speakers showed more elements of a "female" register than the women themselves did. We regard this as a confirmation of the notion of situated talk: The "female register" is accessible to men and women and must be regarded as highly context dependent. A strategic use of elements of powerless talk may in some circumstances be of advantage to male interlocutors, too.

When looking at the data from a more general point of view, the larger variety in strategic choices by the male participants seems to point to a more

flexible image of what a "boss" is supposed to be like. This confirms our impression that it looks as if a positive and open attitude towards their own abilities and their position as the "boss" is more problematic for women than it is for male participants.

Such far-reaching conclusions should probably be taken up carefully and should be tested in many more studies. From our perspective, this points to the greatest challenge for feminist linguistics at this point in time: more empirical research. We are still heavily relying on studies that go back as far as the sixties. But the life of women all over the world has changed dramatically, just as societal demands and images have (and in some respects have not). We feel that there is a dire need for more empirical studies which reflect the diversity of women in their different speech communities.

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