

Directives Used By Senior Female Police Officers in Lesotho: Exploring the Balance between Culturally Determined and Professional Interactional Styles

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ABSTRACT The recent era of women's empowerment has seen women's gradual role-transition from traditional domestic roles to male-dominated professional spaces. This transition presents a socio-linguistic dilemma for these women, because their interactional styles have to strike a balance between culturally prescribed feminine ways of speaking and communicative demands of their job. This paper explores the use of directives by senior female police officers in the Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS). Through observations, audio recordings and unstructured interviews, data was collected from 16 women who were in senior positions in the LMPS. Four types of directives with varying degrees of face threat and imposition were found. These are: inference based, questions, mitigated and direct imperatives. The choice of form was determined by a set of contextual factors not gender. The paper concludes that these women's interactional style reflects competence in varying directive patterns depending on the context.

INTRODUCTION

The use of language by women in senior positions has attracted research interest as women's participation in traditionally male-dominated spheres increases. The research interest arises from a perceived socio-linguistic dilemma that these women are in, since their interactional styles are shaped by socio-culturally prescribed feminine ways of speaking on the one hand, and communicative demands of their job on the other hand (Takano 2005). The former entails socially constructed restrictions on acceptable language choices for women with specific emphasis on politeness, while the latter entails expression of power and authority. Despite the expectation of politeness in the domestic sphere, when these women assume leadership positions in the workplace, they enter into a sphere that research predominantly associates with masculinity (Hearn and Parkin 1989; Trauth 2002; Barrett and Davidson 2006). Their interactional styles therefore have to reflect power and authority. With these two contradictory styles of speaking, the question that arises is: how do senior female police officers realize directives in interacting with their subordinates? Although there are several studies on language and gender in the workplace, studies that focus exclusively on the use

of directives are limited. In particular, research that sheds light on the interactional styles of female senior police officers in Lesotho is unavailable.

Objectives

The aim of this paper is to explore the use of directives by senior female police officers in Lesotho. Specifically, the paper has the following objectives:

- ♦ to determine the structures of directives used by these women;
- ♦ to establish if senior female police officers are able to strategically employ a variety of directives to suit different contexts, given their sociolinguistic dilemma.

METHODOLOGY

Using a qualitative case study design, the researcher collected data from 16 women who are in senior positions in the Lesotho Mounted Police Services, in seven police stations in Lesotho. The women were selected through convenience sampling by approaching each of them to participate in the study. Data was collected through on-site observations and tape-recording of the women's interaction with their subor-

dinate officers. The researcher visited each of the women on three different occasions for a period of one hour. During the recordings the researcher took field notes and also asked on-the-spot questions of arising phenomena that would be interesting for the analysis. The recordings were later transcribed in preparation for analysis.

Data analysis utilized the scheme originally developed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) which was later adapted in the studies of Takano (2005) and Vine (2009). In this scheme directives are classified in accordance with their surface morpho-syntactic structures, degree of imposition and inference work required from the addressee in order for the directive to achieve its intended illocutionary force.

RESULTS

The directives found in the data were task oriented in that they were all on issues related to work. A variety of sentence forms were found to be used to realise directives, and these directives had varying degrees of level of imposition and directness. Some of them were explicitly direct and had a high degree of face-threat and imposition on the hearer, while others were indirect and had a low degree of face-threat and imposition. The directives found were grouped into four broad categories, namely, inference based, mitigated directives, questions and imperatives.

Inference Based Directives

These were directives in which the intended illocutionary act is implicitly embedded in the structure. The semantic content of these directives does not explicitly show the person responsible for the action, nor direct the action to be performed. In order to interpret it as a directive, the hearer (subordinate officer) relies on making contextual inferences based on shared knowledge about the dynamics of the power relations between subordinates and their seniors.

Due to their indirectness these directives have minimized face-threat, especially because there is no imposition on the hearer to perform the intended action. Three variations of inference based directives were found in the data.

The first variation was hints in which the speaker expresses an opinion about a situation

that needs to change without explicitly saying it should change, nor specifying who should change it. Based on shared understanding of the power relations inherent in their relationship, a subordinate officer who is part of the speech event understands it as a directive. Some of these hints were phrased as statements, for example, *Batho bana ba Mazenod se ba lutse nako e telele haholo kannete* (These people from Mazenod have been sitting here for too long, honestly). In this case the people referred to had come to report a case and had not been attended to. This observation about the length of time prompted the officer attending the case to attend to those people, thereby interpreting the statement as a directive. Other hints were in the form of exclamations, for example: *Ea ska tlala tafole!!* (What a full table!!), thereby prompting the subordinate to clear the table.

The second variation was expressions of needs or wants. This type is composed of directives which are semantically an expression of the speaker's wants or needs. Pragmatically, the speaker's intention is that the hearer should comply and fulfil that need. These are structurally characterized by the use of the verbs: *need* and *want*. For example, *ke batla copy tse tsoang ka finance pele, ke tsebe ho sheba* (I want copies that are from finance first so that I can check). Although this is a statement of need, it was interpreted as a directive. In the same way as in other inference based directives, the person requested to act is not explicitly stated and the action requested is only implied too. Correct interpretation of the illocutionary intent relies on shared assumptions and knowledge.

Question Directives

As their name suggests, this form of directives are interrogative in structure. Their interpretation as orders depends largely on the interlocutors' mutual understanding that the ordered action is the responsibility of the hearer, or the person the question is posed to. The data has three types of question directives depending on the semantic content of the enquiry. Firstly there were questions that semantically probe whether a certain action has been performed or not. The following example, where a senior officer was addressing a junior officer, who is also a driver, exemplifies this:

96 e se hlatsuoe? (Has 96 (number plate of a vehicle) been washed yet?)

In this case, both the speaker and the hearer are aware that: a) the car has not been washed, yet it was supposed to have been washed earlier and b) it is the responsibility of the hearer to wash the car. The question therefore counted as an attempt to get the driver to wash the car, and that is exactly how the driver responded: by explaining why he had not washed it earlier, and then quickly rushing out to wash it.

Secondly, there were questions that probed the hearer's commitment or future intent to perform a certain action. The action intended here is for the benefit of the speaker and not the hearer. The following excerpt exemplifies this:

Speaker: ... u tla lo pota le ofising ea more-na K u b'u so mo joetsa hore moeti eloa o teng? (Will you pass via Mr. K's office and tell her that his visitor is here?)

Hearer: Ok Madam

Although this is a question to which one would expect either a positive or negative response, the junior officer does not give any of those expected responses. Her response and future action signifies a clear understanding that this is not a question but a command.

Thirdly, there were questions whose semantic content was an enquiry about the hearer's ability to perform a particular action, yet in essence they served to direct the hearer to perform that action. This is seen in the following excerpt: *u tla tseba ho eketsa litulo ka mono ha kere, ke bone eka ba bangatanyana?* (Will you be able to increase the number of chairs, I think they are a bit too many). Although semantically this question requires a verbal response, pragmatically it counts as an attempt to get the hearer to bring more chairs. The subordinate, would not answer with "I cannot" because of the power relations between him and the senior female police officer.

Mitigated Directives

These were directives in which the face threat of the directives is mitigated by the use of a particular grammatical structure. Two types of mitigation were found in the data. The first type is the use of the modal verbs whose equivalent in English are 'may' and 'could', thereby rendering the directives as requests. In some cases the speaker also put the politeness marker, 'please'

at the end of the request. As requests, directives are less imposing because they semantically give the hearer an opportunity to either comply or not to comply. However the power relations between senior officers and their juniors, and the acceptable norms of interactional behavior in the police service rules out the possibility of a negative response. For example:

A k'o ntlele docket ea S hle? (Could you bring S's docket, please?).

Inspector H, na nka fumana docket ela (Inspector H, may I get that docket...)

Although these are framed as requests, the power relations would not allow non-compliance from the subordinate. Interpretation is therefore based on that contextual factor of power.

The second type is mitigation through use of the inclusive pronoun 'we or us'. Here the officer expresses intention to participate in performing the intended action. In that way, the degree of face-threat and the imposition on the hearer is minimised because the intended action is collective. The following example, illustrates this:

Ha re potlakeleng ka Central... (Let us rush to Central...)

Although this directive semantically makes the 'rushing' collective, the senior officer did not have an intention of going there herself. Neither did the subordinate officers enquire about her participation as they rushed out. Their awareness of their responsibilities and the verticality of the power relations between them and the senior officer led them to arrive at an interpretation of this as a command.

Direct Imperatives

In this type of directives the action to be performed is explicitly stated. While in some cases the person responsible to act is specified too, in other cases it is not. In these cases there is no attempt to minimize the face threat or degree of imposition. Due to their directness, these directives are considered impolite.

The extracts below exemplify these imperatives: *sajene K, bitsetsa batho bano ba ha Mohalenyana koano.* (Sergeant K, call those people of ha Mohalenyana in here). In this case, the sergeant identified by name is tasked with the responsibility of performing the intended action.

In other imperatives, however, the person responsible for the action was not mentioned, thereby leaving interpretation of that responsibility to contextual inferences. For example: *ntlisetse docket eno ea hae eke bone na o na itseng* (give me that docket so that I can check what he had said)

In this case there were three subordinate officers. The addressee was not singled out, therefore correct interpretation of the actor responsible depended on the physical proximity of the subordinate to the required object

Factors that Influence the Use of Indirect Directives

Further probing into the factors that influence the use of indirectness, yielded several factors, with the age of the addressee as the most commonly cited factor. When a subordinate officer is older than the senior officer, the tendency is to use indirect directives. This stems from the socio-cultural determinant in the Sesotho culture, that the young are expected to talk politely to the elderly. Having been socialized in this culture, the senior officers opt for indirectness as a strategy to achieve politeness in their giving of orders.

Another factor that seemed to affect the directness of the command is the rank gap between the interlocutors. In cases where the rank gap was not wide (for instance, where the speaker was a Senior Inspector and the addressee was an Inspector) there was a tendency to be indirect. However, in those cases where the rank gap was wide, for example, where a Senior Inspector addressed a Trooper, the tendency was to use direct commands.

The presence of outsiders or clients was another factor cited to affect directness. When an order has to be given in the presence of clients, senior officers say they opt for indirectness due to its polite nature. This was also seen in some of the data transcripts. For example, in one police station, the speaker used an imperative command, then looked at the researcher and switched to a more indirect one.

h)...*Thisa mandate pele ho tsona!*...(Bring that mandate before them!). (*Looks at the researcher*) *Ke hloka mandate pele* (I need the mandate first). What happened in this example is that the initial part of the command was direct and said in a very harsh tone while the part that

came after the speaker had looked at the researcher was more indirect and said in a softer tone than the initial one, thus being polite.

DISCUSSION

As the findings of this suggest, the senior female officers in this study use a combination of direct and indirect directives. Out of these two broad categories, the data shows that direct imperatives are the most commonly used in interacting with subordinates. It should be noted that imperatives are associated with assertiveness and power. This finding is consistent with those of Abdolresapour (2012) and Leopold (2015) and contradicts some of the earlier perceptions of women's interactional styles as powerless, less assertive and characterized by the use of more standard forms than that of men (Takano 2005; Fandrych 2012; Thetela-Hanong 2013). In interviews probing factors that determine the choice of directives, the senior officers attribute their choice of frequent imperatives to the clarity with which imperatives convey messages. This clarity minimizes the danger of misunderstandings that could result in the hearer performing an action that was not ordered, or performing it insufficiently. The finding is therefore consistent with Leopold (2015) assertion that imperatives are most preferable where an action is requested. The data also shows that context plays an important role in making choices about directness level and politeness markers as noted in Flock and Geluykens (2015). The most common contextual factors that participants attribute to their choices are the demographic characteristics of participants and the participant composition of the speech event. Gender was not cited as a factor in these cases and it did not inhibit the participants to give commands to their subordinates.

CONCLUSION

This paper concludes that gender is not a determining factor in the use of directives by these officers. It neither inhibits them from effectively giving order to subordinates, nor renders them incompetent to hold managerial positions. Their use of directives demonstrate communicative competence evidenced by appropriate choices of how and when to use direct and indirect commands. This ability to make appro-

prate language choices, and to consider the context in such choices is a communicative strength essential for a senior officer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides the basis for further large-scale research into women's workplace interactional styles in order to inform employers about women's competence in management positions. It is recommended that women's language be studied in depth at the workplace in order to build a database of evidence that can be used to inform policies on women's deployment into senior positions at work. Their potential as senior officers should be evaluated by other professionally designed criteria not by a perception of femininity as a disabling factor.

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